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Italy

A new wave of mobilizations?

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The days of action on October 18 and 19, 2013 (a day of mobilization by the "rank-and-file unions", with total abstention by the big confederations, and the demonstration on the following day of various social movements) have clearly shown a new social effervescence and a new willingness to fight in Italian society. Indeed, this autumn of 2013 may be the occasion of a greater mobilization against austerity policies and against the broad coalition government (between the Democratic Party of Prime Minister Enrico Letta and the Freedom Party, represented by the Deputy Prime Minister Angelino Alfano) guided unconstitutionally by the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, a "veteran" of the late Italian Communist Party (PCI).

The situation is moving. The successful demonstration by the rank-and-file unions and the strike on October 18, although it was limited to a few services sectors, and the demonstrations by social movements on October 19 are revealing. One thing that emerged from them was the reasons for the regional resistance against the policies of territorial dismantling. Also, they were the expression of the rage, the determination and the will of the sections of the working class that are most affected by the crisis and subjected to desperate living conditions, especially because of the crisis of the availability of housing. It is surprising that the study by Coldiretti [\[1\]](#), which reveals that millions of people need food aid, is so little mentioned by the press. Furthermore, the media treat this information as strict sociological data, without giving it the dimension of an indictment against the policies of the ruling class and its servants on the centre-right and centre-left.

Against the division of the working class

The violence of the employers' attack against jobs and wages is pushing millions of people towards a state of social insecurity. Unemployment and low wages lead immediately to lack of access to basic living conditions: having housing and food in order to live. Migrants and some popular sectors, who are deprived of everything and have nothing to lose but their chains, are the most affected by this brutal impoverishment.

Among the most politicized sectors, those who played an important role in the demonstration on October 19, an old theory has surfaced, which distinguishes between workers who are said to be "secure" and others who are "insecure", between those who have an employment contract of indefinite duration and those in precarious work. Of course, one of the characteristics of the crisis and of bourgeois policies is to increase divisions among the working masses, creating barriers and hierarchies, including opposition between groups of workers. This enables the bourgeoisie to build better defensive dykes against workers' rage and their determination to react to austerity policies. However, the peculiarity of the crisis determines permanent changes in the social condition of people's lives. Thus, a family living with the "guarantee" of two salaries may be precipitated into poverty when one of them loses their job and becomes unemployed. And if the family also has a mortgage on its house, the abyss of poverty is near. The workers of a once prosperous city like Turin, with a significant number of "guaranteed" jobs, know something about it. This is exactly what is happening throughout society. The structure of the Italian family, which still often plays the role of "reception centre" and means of support, and also household savings, have so far hindered this process of impoverishment. But the room for manoeuvre for families is becoming smaller, and the increasing precariousness and poverty are spreading like wildfire, even for those who are still living in more secure conditions (including sectors of the petty bourgeoisie) and who thought they could get by refusing to take part in mobilizations: "I don't move and I hope I'll manage to get by on my own". But their number will inevitably decrease.

Historical experience shows that rage and radicalization can also work to the advantage of the fascist Right and of xenophobic and racist reaction. The signals that are coming from certain European countries today are examples of this. These examples should motivate us to step up efforts to create a social and political movement against neoliberal policies, with demands that can meet the needs of different strata of the working class and lay the groundwork for a credible anti-capitalist alternative.

The trade-union and political forces - among others, our organization Sinistra Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left) - which were at the origin of or which supported the day of action on October 18 and who participated in the demonstration on October 19, worked and continue to work in a conscious manner to unify the participants in the two days, to deepen and develop these forms of resistance and social mobilization by building synergies and contributing for them to adopt a perspective of common struggle.

Many people have posed the following question: "And what about the workers who mobilized on October 12 to defend the Constitution?" On this question we have already insisted that the demonstration on October 12 and those on October 18 and 19 were characterized by different kinds of political radicalism. The first was based on the positions of SEL (Left-Ecology-Freedom), positions that are subordinated to the Democratic Party (PD). SEL (whose leader is Nichi Vendola) proposes once again the old idea of using the position of force that has been conquered (by SEL) to exert "left" pressure on the PD, as though recent political history had not demonstrated the inconsistency of this project. The confirmation of this judgment came immediately: the polite request addressed to PD parliamentarians not to swallow the "undemocratic monster", namely the amendment to Article 138 of the Constitution, [2] received a clearly negative response from the vast majority of PD senators. This "undemocratic monster" is supposed to have been demolished (paradox of paradoxes!) only by the vote against of the People of Liberty (PDL) which wanted to save its leader, Silvio Berlusconi, and perhaps bring down the government.

We are waiting for explanations from SEL, from Stefano Rodotà and from the FIOM (the Metalworkers' Federation of the CGIL) of Maurizio Landini about their strategic course ... But we already know where they are and where they are going.

What really interests us is to have a dialogue with the workers who were present on October 12 and who can free themselves from the relative hegemony of these leading groups and thereby escape from the impasse they are in.

Unite those whom the employers divide

The tasks of an anti-capitalist and revolutionary force - and this is true for all working class activists - are extremely simple and at the same time terribly difficult: to try to unify the forces that the bourgeoisie is trying to divide, in other words to work for a united mobilization of the proletariat. I am using this classic term on purpose to emphasize that we are talking about all the social sectors of the working class, including the unemployed and migrants. The dynamic set in motion by the mobilizations of October 18 and 19 offer a positive potential.

We must use the driving force of these days to target other "moments" of struggle. The demonstration on 16 November in the Val de Susa against the high speed train line (TGV) is a first occasion, which concerns us all. It is necessary to define objectives and contents - including in relation to specific conflicts - in order to maintain the continuity of the struggle, with the stages that help to develop the consciousness of the need for a comprehensive movement against the employers and the government. Organizing also means encouraging the broadest and most massive level of participation and democracy among those who are involved, in order to decide together the content, the forms of struggle and the direction of our common work. In a word, promoting the democratic self-organization of social movements and of the working class.

In order to change the relationship of forces and to put the bourgeois political and economic forces in difficulty it is necessary for broader and broader sectors of metalworkers, of employees in the retail sector, in the service sector, in banks, of those in precarious jobs (temporary work, etc.) to take once again the path of direct action, to take strike action, breaking free from a certain "passivity" and to rediscover the taste for and the value of collective action. If the migrant workers of the logistics industry were in the forefront, as was the case during the struggles and demonstrations in Milan on October 18, other sectors can also understand that it is the only way to defend themselves.

It is for this reason that we must use all available space to expand the mobilization, including the strikes of a few hours that the leaderships of the main trade unions have just announced. We must use these days so that workers go beyond the limits set by the union apparatus. The rank-and-file unions must know how to speak to all workers and therefore also to members of the CGIL. It is necessary to denounce the leadership of the CGIL as well as to make constant proposals for unity of action addressed to its militants, in order to break down the walls built by the union apparatus.

A particular task awaits the comrades of the CGIL who are engaged in a battle of the left ([3]) which can exist and grow only through the renewal of the project of building a united front in action against neoliberal policies. A strong group of class-struggle militants in the CGIL, capable of addressing themselves to the workers and to the rank-and-file unions is not a secondary or marginal question. It is a decisive element in building a class-struggle trade unionism.

The political dimension

Along with this, there is the political dimension. What purpose and what political outcome can we indicate for the fighting movement that is developing in the present phase? Some of the forces that took part in the mobilization on October 19 do not pose this kind of question. The "reformist" participants do, but with a perspective that does not correspond to the needs of the workers. We must be capable of posing this kind of problem in the context of an overall project for the rejection of neoliberal policies and in the framework of an anti-capitalist battle that is conducted in a coherent fashion.

The perspective that is really needed - an alternative government of the "real Left", based on the mobilization of the masses - is not possible at the moment. But it remains indispensable to establish the preconditions for it, to illustrate the political and organizational perspectives that it entails. The growth of the mass movement needs this alternative political perspective.

Today it would be a grave mistake not to propose the building of a broad revolutionary organization. We cannot hold our ground in the face of the global offensive (including in ideological terms) of the bourgeoisie without a constant effort to create a group of men and women capable of discussing, working and in terms of training our own activists. And to do this without any arrogance, but taking into account the urgency of encouraging elements of reconquest and reconstruction of a global class consciousness. Without creating this solid background, we do will not help real mass movements to be successful.

To put this question to one side, as has often been the case in history, could prove fatal. Today, this type of construction can only be open, public, democratic, verified by everyone; a political organization that defends and puts forward its political perspectives, even partial, for discussion with those who mobilize and struggle. An organization that knows how to put forward a certain number of demands at the appropriate time and in a form that makes them accessible.

A new wave of mobilizations?

The Anticapitalist Left (Sinistra Anticapitalista) is working on these fundamental axes. That is why it shares and participates in attempts to regroup together in a front and in a unitary movement those who pursue an anti-capitalist project, plural and libertarian. In this regard, we are part of the Ross@ project [4], which will be faced with critical challenges in the coming years.

Turin, 28 October 2013

[1] The food crisis in Italy is one of the facets of the social crisis affecting the country. The analysis of Coldiretti (a farmers' organization which has more than one and a half million members in Italy) is based on the report of the "Plan for distribution of food to the needy 2013" produced by the Agency for Agricultural Distribution (AGEA). The conclusion is the following: in 2012, in Italy, more than 4 million people requested aid in the form of a supply of basic food products. This represents an increase of 10 per cent compared to the previous year and of 47 per cent compared to 2010. This means that in the last three years, there were an additional 1,304,871 people who requested food aid! Children (under 5) and the elderly (over 65) remain among the most affected categories. In the first quarter of 2013, 428,587 children received food aid. This represents a growth of 13 per cent compared to the same period of 2012. Food aid was also granted to almost 579,000 senior citizens, representing a 14 per cent increase compared to 2012.

Another important indication should be noted: changes in the eating habits of a large part of the population. The Coldiretti study on the risks associated with the use of low cost meals (conducted on May 30, 2013 in the framework of the International Forum "More Europe, more agricultural policy") illustrates another very alarming aspect. Since 2008, the consumption of food by households has declined by 6.3 per cent, reaching a level of 117 billion euros in 2012. This data must be seen in relation to the explosion of the consumption of low cost food products, which are mainly imported from countries outside the EU. Today, 62.3 per cent of households consume these products. The use of low cost meals creates significant health problems. In the first quarter of 2013, the number of food warnings recorded in Italy increased by 26 per cent. The report draws a very clear correlation between the food crisis and the deepening economic crisis.

[2] Article 138 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic establishes the procedures for revising the Constitution and other constitutional laws. It provides for a degree of popular participation through parliamentary instruments and for the possibility of a popular referendum. There is a constitutional bill under discussion that threatens these elements, as it provides, inter alia, for an acceleration of the time taken in discussion between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate - who have the same prerogatives - and for the formation of a committee of 40 members whose decision-making power will be greater than that of parliamentary committees.

[3] See the appeal of the CGIL left in this issue of IVP.

[4] On May 11, 2013 in Bologna, more than 300 activists from all over Italy decided to work together to build Ross@ - Anticapitalist and Libertarian Movement. They adopted a statement whose first sentence is significant: "This is not an appeal, but a proposal to fight."