

Italy: Transforming popular anger into political change

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Six months after the formation of the Monti government, the popularity the professor-ministers had enjoyed through the discredit which had accompanied the end of the Berlusconi era has begun to wane, even if the horizon does not present any credible political alternative.

The “technocratic government”, strengthened by bipartisan support from the two parliamentary fronts and in the absence of a real trade union opposition, has succeeded, in having a whole series of clearly anti-popular economic measures passed which even Berlusconi would not have been able to impose so clearly.

Thus, in a few months the government has imposed: a pensions reform which increases the age of retirement to 67 and cuts pensions; a labour code reform which weakens the right to reinstatement for those who are unjustly dismissed (specified since 1969 by the labour code) and a cut in unemployment and social benefits; new reductions in public expenditure, notably on health and education; an increase in regressive taxes like VAT, the tax on fuel, electricity, water and gas, or housing tax, and so on.

This “miracle” has only been possible thanks to the climate of national unity built by the right and by the Democratic Party, and in particular by the president of the Republic, which has terrified the population with the “Greek danger”. This climate has led to the moderate left supporting the governmental recipes as the only way to avoid state default.

The Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) has encountered many difficulties in hiding the tragic effects of government policies on the working and living conditions of workers, but it has neither the strength nor the will to free itself from the deadly embrace of “national responsibility”, contenting itself with proposing amendments to the reforms.

However the convergent effects of the economic crisis, the policies of sacrifice imposed by the government, and the enormous discredit of a political system submerged by a series of corruption scandals (in a few weeks there have been accusations of theft of public funds against the Democratic Party, the Northern League and of course, Berlusconi’s party) begin to weaken the popular confidence in the government.

This is shown by the spontaneous demonstrations by workers to defend article 18 of the Labour Code on conditions of dismissal, and by the success in the cantonal elections of the “citizen” lists like those promoted by the comedian Grillo, based on an anti-political sentiment. Thus, the polls begin to show the popularity of the government falling.

However all this has happened in the dramatic absence of a credible class based left, capable of responding to the popular discontent and above all transforming it into social struggle, and accompanying and promoting new forms of self-organisation and participation by the rank and file. The vertical crisis of the Italian radical left can only get worse as it remains without the real capacity to galvanise a broad social and political dynamic which can harvest the social anger, in particular

that of youth, by abandoning the old political rituals and practices.

In such a complex situation the only chance of résistance and reconstruction of a new anti-capitalist left in the coming period is to build the whole social movement, helping every form of radicalisation and popular participation, starting from existing struggles.

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P.S.

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