

Covid-19 Pandemic: Italy in confinement, working classes suffering

Monday 16 March 2020, by [DE MOND Nadia](#) (Date first published: 13 March 2020).

The development of the Covid-19 epidemic has been strongest in Italy, the first country to be put completely into severe quarantine. Anti-capitalists are beginning to develop demands and actions. For a broad range of articles on the topic consult ESSF (Europe Solidaires Sans Frontières) under the keyword [coronavirus](#).

International Viewpoint

Contents

- [The health crisis](#)
 - [Consequences for the populatio](#)
 - [Workers' demands](#)
-

The scale of the epidemic is changing from day to day. Contamination has exceeded 15,000 cases in Italy. This includes those who are sick, those who have recovered - around 1,250 - and those who have died, who are now more than a thousand. Among those who are sick, half are at home in isolation and half in hospital, including more than 1,000 in intensive care. Hospital beds, particularly in Lombardy, and in particular in intensive care, are almost full. This is due to the fact that, over the past ten years, the public health system has been dismantled for the benefit of private hospitals. There have been budget cuts of around 35 billion euros since then. This has resulted in a clear decrease in the number of hospital beds in the public sector, from around 9 to 3 beds per 1,000 people. So, we have a much lower average than in other western European countries.

The health crisis

What we fear most at the moment is the collapse of the health system, which is reaching its limits in hospitals in the North. In the South, the situation is much more precarious in general, therefore also very dangerous. The government has taken drastic measures, which evolve from day to day and which are creating a situation, perhaps not of panic, but in any case of uncertainty for the population.

Two weeks ago, the government decided to close the schools and this will last at least until 3 April. The first steps were to isolate what have been called the foci of infection, a dozen small towns south of Milan, in Lombardy. These communes were isolated with prohibition of entry and exit, under the surveillance of the police on the roads. It was complete isolation.

The isolation measures were extended to all of Lombardy and, since 11 March, to all of Italy. Restrictions on the right to travel are in force, except for emergency reasons. The big problem is that they tell people to stay at home but, at the same time, that they have to keep going to work. The government wants to avoid stopping production.

Consequences for the population

You can only go out to do your shopping or for medical reasons. Bars, restaurants, everything is closed, except pharmacies, food stores and tobacconists. All gatherings are prohibited, indoors and outdoors, with fines for failing to comply with these measures and even prison sentences for serious offences.

Precarious workers and the “self-employed, who have practically no social security and must stay at home, have no income. So there are great difficulties. The government is going to finally release 25 billion euros to respond to this situation and finance measures to deal with temporary unemployment. We do not yet know how it will be distributed, but there will be assistance measures for parents who need babysitters for their children, because there is a contradiction between closing schools and the fact that businesses and the public sector are not closed. Measures will also allow more leave to be taken.

Supermarkets, post offices and banks are open, but you should always keep a distance of one to two metres from other people, so entrances are limited. It's the same thing when you walk: you have to keep your distance and not get too far from your home.

These measures are essential to avoid a complete collapse of the health system.

Workers' demands

There are spontaneous strikes in certain cities of Lombardy, such as Brescia, Mantua and Bergamo, on the part of workers who want production to stop because in factories one cannot guarantee the safety distances. These demands are supported by the metalworkers' unions, which insistently demand that the government block production, at least until the factories have been made safe.

We demand the cessation of all economic activities except essential sectors, while guaranteeing 100% income for all workers who are forced to stay at home. We demand the return of hospitals to the public sector and reinvestment in the public health sector, as well as the extension of all measures of income maintenance to all the workers in the informal sector, as well as additional support for parents. We are also demanding a net reduction in military spending in order to transfer money to hospitals and health centres.

Fuori Mercato (Outside the market), the network in which we campaign in ten cities, organizes solidarity activities, mutual aid for people in difficulty, for babysitting, help for schoolchildren, as well as help to bring food to people in difficulty, linked to organic and self-managed production. We receive a lot of phone calls from people who need help, but also from people who want to volunteer to organize solidarity. We also provide advice on labour law and union rights because many workers do not know how to defend themselves both in terms of health and on the economic level. The Ri Make space in Milan, which belongs to the *Fuori Mercato* network, for example, has launched the campaign “*Non sei solo/a*” (“you are not alone”) to move from forced isolation to collective action.

What is clear is that this crisis is exacerbating the inequalities and injustices “normally” existing in

our society and at the geopolitical level by making them practically unbearable. What does “staying at home” mean for families living together in 50 square metres? For women who are victims of domestic violence? For undocumented migrants and refugees? For the homeless? At the same time, initiatives of spontaneous solidarity and rejection of this deadly system are emerging, on which we hope to count in the medium term.

Even though we can only accept, for reasons put forward by all the scientists, the draconian health measures that the government has taken so far, we are aware of the danger of the introduction - through the urgency of the situation - of regulations that limit freedom, which could introduce a new form of authoritarianism. Once the emergency is over, we will have to rise to this new challenge.

Friday, 13 March 2020

Nadia De Mond

P.S.

• Translation IVP. Monday 16 March 2020:
<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6453>