

Fascist ideas on the rise in Italy

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In this piece by Dave Kellaway we conclude our look at fascist currents in France, Spain and Italy.

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Two recent events in Italy show fascist groups are on the rise. In the photo above you see the funeral of a fascist woman called Alessia Augello on 10 January 2022. Her coffin is draped with a Nazi flag and the assembled fascists roared out their customary ‘presente’ when her name was called out as well as making the raised arm salute. Such open manifestations of fascism are illegal in Italy. The 1948 Italian Constitution bans any reconstitution of fascist parties, following the demise of Benito Mussolini’s fascist dictatorship. Of course, the fascist groups call themselves by other names to avoid prosecution.

Forza Nuova attack trade union HQ

On 11 October 2021, the fascist group Forza Nuova led hundreds of people from an anti-vax demonstration to attack the Rome headquarters of the largest trade union confederation in Italy. For older Italians or those who know their history, this evoked the way Mussolini’s gangs (squadristi) attacked left activists and trade union halls back in the twenties or thirties. It also reminded people of the fascist violence, including bombings and shootings, against the successful left-led struggles following the ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1969. After the attack in October, there was a national response with demonstrations in a number of cities. The government has since closed down their website and their leaders were questioned by the police.

The historic leaders of this party are Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello. They had connections with the violent right-wing terror group NAR (Armed Revolutionary Nuclei) and after the Bologna station massacre in 1980, they both fled to London. They stayed there for 20 years, gaining the status of political refugees by the Thatcher government. There are strong rumours that the British secret services maintained contact with them. On their return to Italy, they were welcomed at the airport by MPs from Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and the National Alliance (AN – the mainstream neo-fascist ‘continuity’ party) who were in a government coalition. Both received jail sentences but the party was launched and by 2001 it had forty branches and 2500 members. It got around 0.25% of votes in elections but Fiore took over from Alexandra Mussolini when she resigned as an MEP.

CasaPound - punk neo-fascists

CasaPound is a fascist group that began to establish itself in 2003 by occupying empty buildings and using them as 'community' cultural and political bases. Over the following 15 years, it opened another 106 centres and became established on a national scale with regular media coverage. Its key leader is Gianluca Iannone and he called these centres 'territorial reconquests that would serve the people'. This was a new media-savvy fascist current that distinguished itself from the more traditional fascist parties like Forza Nuova. The new centres opened gyms, pubs, football clubs, bookshops - even barbershops and tattoo parlours. It tried to present itself as the fascist equivalent of the left and progressive centri sociali (social centres) set up often in occupied buildings.

The punk rock band ZetaZetaAlfa (a take on ZeeZeeTop) was a factor in its growing popularity. CasaPound took up housing, student issues, unemployment and welfare policies. When Beppe Grillo's populist centrist Five Star Movement erupted onto a national level CasaPound managed to beguile some of its leaders and activists in engaging with it. CasaPound also collaborated with Salvini's Lega Nord to set up **Sovereignty** groups in localities where asylum centres have been set up. Their function was to whip up local animosity to the migrants coming to live there. Despite putting up posters of Che Guevara its fascist core remained intact and its militants are as violent as other fascist groups. For more detailed background on CasaPound there is a long read article by Tobias Jones here [\[1\]](#).

The ECN antifascist group publishes an interactive map [\[2\]](#) showing all the hundreds of violent fascist attacks against the left, gays and migrants since 2014. It is updated regularly to show the violence taking place on a weekly basis. Certainly, these fascist currents are of a different scale to what exists in Britain.

Fascism creeps into the mainstream

Italian fascism collapsed under the assault of the Allied forces and the partisans in 1943. Imperialist interests represented by the US and Britain were very concerned that there should be no dangerous vacuum that might facilitate a further radicalisation of a people that were partly armed and led by the left. Togliatti and the Communist Party leadership implemented Stalin's line of national unity and reconstruction of the bourgeois state. Nevertheless, the Allies wanted to minimise the disruption to the state and its institutions so the purge of fascists was extremely limited. So most fascist sympathisers maintained key positions, including in the repressive apparatuses which continues right up to today. It is no surprise that fascist support is particularly strong in the Lazio region and the capital which is the administrative centre of the Italian state.

Berlusconi has played a central role in normalising the fascist past. He stated that Mussolini did not kill people and that Italians needed to overcome the outdated fascist/antifascist dichotomy. Unlike other prime ministers, he did not really participate in the traditional April celebrations of the Liberation from fascism. A lot of the mainstream mass media has echoed this rewriting of the past, for example, there has been an excessive focus on violence committed by partisans against fascists at the end of the war. His first government in 1994 included the neo-fascist MSI (Italian Social Movement), later renamed itself as the AN (National Alliance). The MSI and AN won around 9% of the votes.

Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli D'Italia (Brothers of Italy) has come out of the MSI/AN current. As Marine Le Pen in France, she has worked hard to deepen this normalisation and modernisation of neo-fascism. Today her party is a point ahead of Salvini's Lega (League) in the polls on 20% and her

personal standings are higher than Salvini's. She could even make a claim to be prime minister if her party wins the most votes in the right-wing coalition. This score is double what the MSI was achieving 25 years ago. Unlike Salvini, Meloni has refused to participate in the national coalition led by unelected banker, Draghi. It allows her to pick up any discontent or opposition to the government. She has already done this with the obligatory vax pass.

Today the right-wing coalition is dominated by the neo-fascists and Salvini's right-wing 'Italians first' party. Mainstream conservatism in the shape of the Christian Democrats collapsed in the wake of corruption of the 80s Tangentopoli (Bribesville). Initially, the Trumpian politics of Berlusconi filled the space on the right. Today he has been eclipsed by his more extreme allies. Forza Italia has around only 8% in the polls compared to his partners' 40%. Salvini and Meloni feed on anti-migrant, pro-traditional family and fear of crime sentiments. The Lega leader is on trial for breaking maritime and human rights laws when closing Italian ports to a ship full of desperate, ailing migrants. He has also questioned the importance of anti-fascism as the traditional 'glue' of Italian institutions.

The fascist groups and the Lega/neo-fascist Fratelli help to 'normalise' fascism and are in a symbiotic relationship. For instance, Forza Nuova security teams help police the rallies of the two big parties. Activists go back and forth so we find that an ex fascist joins the Lega, becomes a councillor and then is involved in some violent attack on a migrant. Fascists come off and on the electoral lists of the more mainstream parties. In turn, the open fascists are in the leadership of the big football supporter gangs (the tifosi) which help bring in funds and muscle. Even here the lines are muddled since Salvini has a notorious connection with one of the Milanese tifosi groups.

Years of defeat and retreat of the labour movement and the decline of an anti-capitalist left has left an opening for fascist ideas among angry and demoralised people, particularly the young. With the implosion and institutionalisation of the Five Star movement, the terrain is even more favourable for reactionary ideas to take hold. A big increase in poverty and the Covid pandemic has increased the audience for right-wing and racist populism. Anti-vax sentiment has been stronger in Italy than elsewhere and the fascists and hard right are also riding that tiger. A victory for the right-wing coalition in the next general election could further embolden them.

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P.S.

- Anti*capitalist Resistance. 25 Jan 2022. : <https://anticapitalistresistance.org/fascist-ideas-on-the-rise-in-italy/>
- Dave Kellaway is on the Editorial Board of Anti*Capitalist Resistance, a member of Socialist Resistance, and Hackney and Stoke Newington Labour Party, a contributor to International Viewpoint and Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres.

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/22/casapound-italy-mussolini-fascism-mainstream>

[2] <http://www.ecn.org/antifa/>