

Italy: To our friends all over the world from the eye of Covid-19 storm

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We are living in difficult times, but we are also organizing so as not to surrender and prepare our next attack. Reflections, scenarios and claims in the middle of the Coronavirus outbreak.

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Eleven days ago schools and universities were shut down. Eight days ago the region of Lombardia became one large red zone. Seven days ago 30 prisons were torched. Six days ago we called off the demonstrations that were supposed to take place on the occasion of the women's strike. That night all of Italy was declared a red zone. Four days ago the majority of shops and economic activities were shut down.

We write from the eye of the storm. We are living in difficult times. But we are also organizing so as not to surrender and prepare our next attack.

COVID-19 AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In a few days scheduled demonstrations and assemblies were suspended, meetings started to be held only online and currently we are confined to our houses. This virus has a specific trait compared to other risks that we consciously, individually or collectively, take in our political activity. This virus can turn everyone into a risk for others and for society at large. As many are saying during these days, the main risk of Covid-19 is that it can lead to the collapse of the national healthcare system.

This can happen mainly for two reasons: the virus spreads very fast and also asymptomatic sick people are contagious; a percentage of the cases needs to be treated in intensive care. Health systems are not the same all over the world, or in different countries of Europe. Nor is the relation between beds in intensive care and population the same. The most recent data we found says that France has 12 beds every 100 thousand inhabitants, Italy has 11 and the UK has 7. Only Germany is a partial exception with 30 beds. But Greece has 5.

Lombardia is among the richest region in Europe and has one of the best healthcare systems. However, it was also the first site of the outbreak of the infection. Despite the increase in beds in intensive care, what doctors and nurses are forced to do in these days is to apply the so called "medicine of disaster" criteria. This means that not everybody can be treated, and the choice has to

be made considering criteria based on the chance of survival.

What might happen in countries without a public healthcare system? What might happen in Africa where colonial plundering has impoverished societies? And in South America? What might happen in the United States, where access to healthcare depends on the money you have in your pocket? Nobody knows, but we have asked ourselves all these questions during these last days. Up to now, the avoidance of normal individual and political behaviours seemed to us more of a matter of social consciousness, and less a matter of social control or a state of exception imposed from above.

THE END OF POLITICS?

Clearly we did not enter the reign of “Holy Science” in just a couple of days, where politics suddenly no longer matters. The epidemic is not the same for everybody. It is not the same for prisoners, who started a huge uprising – according to the numbers provided by the Minister of Justice it has involved around 6 thousand people (10% of them jailed) and 30 prisons in 3 days. Tens of police officers have been wounded, around 500 million worth of damage has been caused, tens of inmates have escaped (although only 6 are still free) and 13 of them (mostly Africans) have died. The authority says that all of them died because of drug overdose – the drugs were stolen from the infirmaries of the jails. We will see.

Prisons and detention centres for migrants are not a safe place to be, in particular during an epidemic. But neither are houses safe places for many women. The epidemic in China resulted in an increase in domestic violence and everywhere in the world houses and family relation are the main places where feminicides and abuses take place. For this reason, the feminist movement is discussing how to organize the self defence of women who during the quarantine are exposed to a much higher risk of domestic violence. Of course, another big problem is that of homeless people, who are around 40 or 50 thousands in Italy, and have no place to stay and cannot find shelter. They too are coping with huge problems due to the closing of many social and care services.

While social networks, the media and politicians were inviting the population to stay home with hashtags, statements and decrees, the union of entrepreneurs and owners of industries and companies has been pushing for workers to continue to work. This is what Confidustria (General Confederation of Italian Industry) called for until the day before the last decree of the Prime Minister came into force and it is what is still happening in many workplaces. Here the traditional working class of factories and the new working class employed in the logistics immediately revolted with spontaneous strikes stopping production and distribution of goods. «Why must everybody stay at home while we have to work?», «What guarantees against contagion do we have?», «Which means to avoid infection and respect medical orders will you provide us?», these are among the main questions workers are asking in these hours to owners and government.

Until now, it seems that the epidemic and the exception we are living in is far from removing politics from social life. It is not the reign of science or cops. It is, in fact, also the space in which very radical proposition can become part of common sense. It is not possible to know what the next step will be and how the emergency will transform the standards of the social and political order. But we are sure this change will take place and that there is a large space for politics, also in conditions in which is not still possible to take to the streets, gather and protest.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

As precarious, autonomous and freelance workers, students, unemployed, migrants and all the social composition who cannot benefit from traditional social safety nets, we have an only clear claim: quarantine basic income for everybody. We are organizing a campaign to strength this claim at a national level. While we are not working or we are not been paid, we still have to pay for rents, bills, loans and goods. We think that this claim should unite the different figures in the fragmented labour market and class composition and should be the first step to set up a universal social measure that must be kept also after the end of the epidemic.

We think that this should be claimed at a European level, that the 1% must pay for it and in general pay the cost of the epidemic. Let's tax web giants, the super rich, the owners, and make them pay. We need taxes on financial transactions and on big incomes. We are also claiming: immediate requisition of all private clinics and hospitals; free distribution of basic commodities; halt to the payments of bills, rent and loans. Poor and weak people should not pay for the epidemic.

We have to use the emergency situation to remember who brought our healthcare system to this point with cuts and privations. We must struggle for a better future by laying the foundations for newer and stronger forms and nets of political organization even during this present of quarantine. At least at a European level and against European financial institutions that during these years have impoverished our societies with neoliberalism and austerity.

di DINAMOpres, 14 marzo 2020

P.S.

<https://www.dinamopress.it/news/to-our-friends-all-over-the-world-from-the-eye-of-covid-19-storm/>