

Italy: The old and new enemies of the working class

Tuesday 11 October 2022, by [Sinistra Anticapitalista](#) (Date first published: 26 September 2022).

The gloomy predictions of the pre-election polls of recent weeks were fully confirmed by the 25 September vote. The right-wing coalition will have a strong majority in both houses of Parliament. The far-right Fratelli d'Italia (FdI -Brothers of Italy), led by Giorgia Meloni is the hegemonic party within the coalition. She will become Prime minister.

We are facing a political and social situation that poses serious questions for the workers' movement as a whole, both for the trade unions and for all its political and social currents.

Indeed, we are in the presence of a historic turning point for our country from several points of view.

First of all, the degree of abstention cannot be overlooked. It has grown by almost 10 points compared to the already negative record of four years ago and now exceeds 35 percent, with peaks even approaching 50 percent in some southern regions.

This number expresses the depth of the social crisis, the despair and anger of mass sectors and the accentuated fragmentation of society. It shows not only disillusionment in the face of the policies conducted by successive governments, but also the fading of hope, of being able to change one's social condition.

Secondly, the deepening of the crisis, neo-liberal austerity policies, the chopping and changing of governments and the lack of response of the labour movement have pushed millions of people to end up voting for an extreme right-wing force such as FdI. Fratelli d'Italia is the more or less openly declared heir to a political movement responsible for the most negative historical page of our country's history. Its reactionary and fascist ideas and deeply hostile attitude to the workers' movement and its organisations, constitute a serious danger that cannot be underestimated. It will profoundly alter the life of the country. All forces opposed to it must step up a gear in their response. The arrival of this party in government comes a 100 years after the March on Rome and Mussolini's seizure of power.

Despite an overall increase in the size of the electorate all the other major political parties, lost hundreds of thousands or even millions of votes compared to the elections 4 years ago. Meloni's party went from just under 1.5 million votes (4 percent) to over 7 million votes (26 percent).

FdI built this success mainly during Draghi's government of national unity, presenting itself as the only opposition force, albeit one that was more of a facade than of any substance. It was proof that the Draghi agenda was not at all popular and that millions of citizens were induced to abstain or were pushed even further to the right by this experience. Indeed, Meloni's rise caused a haemorrhage in support for Salvini's Lega (League), which was overtaken by the FdI even in some northern regions, his traditional political and electoral fiefdom. Berlusconi's Forza di Italia also suffered a significant loss of votes compared to 2018, although it managed to maintain a significant electoral presence.

The votes (more than 12,200,000) for the right wing coalition in 2022 are indeed slightly higher than those of 2018, but the political difference, the historical change lies in the total hegemony of the FdL, heirs to the Italian Social Movement (MSI - the post war continuity current to Mussolini's fascists). It upsets the entire political framework that emerged after World War II.

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There is a third element to the historical significance of the current Italian events. The victory of the far right is part of an international framework characterized by a number of solid political and electoral advances of more or less openly fascist and far-right forces in several European countries. These forces draw strength from the deep crisis of the capitalist system and their democratic and institutional systems.

The distortions of the Rosatellum electoral system (an undemocratic and unconstitutional disgrace) designed by the Democratic Party (PD) and Forza Italia (Go Italy, led by Berlusconi) and also voted for by the League, allows a coalition that does not have an absolute majority (it got 44 percent of the vote), to obtain a very large majority of seats in the two chambers. The parliamentary representation is thus greatly skewed in relation to the actual vote.

However, the fact remains that right-wing and reactionary ideologies and policies are also expressed by other political forces and today they are widely present in Italian society. They will be carried forward with greater force and resources by the new government. This does not mean that quite other ideals, of democracy, social progress and justice, do not also live on in Italian society. It will be necessary to start with the movements that support them to counter the reactionary offensive of the various right-wing forces.

The M5S (Five Star Movement) was given up for dead just 3 months ago, after 4 years of government in which it was responsible for too many anti-popular measures, including war spending, laws against migrants and opposing social struggles, not to mention the gifts made to corporations. Thanks to its partial break with Draghi and Conte's dynamic and centralizing role that built an independent profile and "progressive" image, it managed to relaunch itself and is now the third political force with over 15% of the vote.

Letta's Pd has done practically everything wrong, starting with its policies of alliances, including the one rejected with the M5S. This is partly because it has tried in vain to combine its nature and image as a party managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie with holding on to its traditional popular base, which is a legacy of its past role as the Italian Communist party. A failed operation, its result came in at under the fateful 20 percent and repeats the failure of 2018, despite having reinserted in its lists Art. 1, (Articolo Uno - reference to Italian constitution) that is, Bersani's split that in 2018 had won, as an independent list, a percentage of more than 3 percent. It is also difficult to think that the politics of the warmonger could have attracted him much support, because this is the terrain on which the right-wing is most comfortable and more convincing.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the coalition of the turbo-liberals, Azione, i.e., Calenda and Renzi, although it failed to break through and remains far from the hoped-for 10 percent, rivals the PD in representing the bourgeoisie to the extent that in some constituencies in Northern Italy it did better.

The Greens and Sinistra Italia (Italian Left) slate that operated within the PD coalition list, was happy with winning parliamentary representation. In the final week they had hoped for a higher score. However, they cannot help but be uneasy about the relationship that the PD has imposed on them. The upcoming PD congress called to redefine its political project may force them to redefine their political perspective.

The Unione Popolare (People's Union) did not reach the 3% threshold to get into parliament despite the great commitment and self-sacrifice of many comrades from the different political forces that formed it and a dynamic campaign in the few weeks in which it was able to develop. The result (1.43 percent, just over 400,000 votes) is in fact slightly higher than that of Potere del Popolo (Power to the People) four years ago. This demonstrates the gap that inevitably exists between the militant activism that made it possible to collect the necessary signatures for the list in two weeks and the mass dimension of the vote. The latter requires quite a different political credibility and above all policies, given the dramatic economic and social situation. A much longer intervention in a unified and coherent political framework was needed.

One cannot ignore the fact that years have gone by where the radical left has not had the ability and the will to build a social and political project that was credible in the eyes of the working class. We needed to practice real convergence, that could rebuild a class and alternative left. Instead for years we were too often focused on competition and self-construction, mistakes that are not remedied in an election campaign.

This means that the forces that have gathered around the Unione Popolare slate must seek more meaningful forms of unity and enlargement as well as joint action. It is decisive to engage with those forces who are interested in reconstructing the class movement, starting in the neighbourhoods and working-class sectors battered by the crisis and the cost of living. But also within the workplaces and in the unions, which more than ever will be decisive in being able to make life hard for the Meloni-led right-wing government.

The policy of the new right-wing government can only be a continuation of the Draghi agenda, that is, of the neo-liberal policies of the bourgeoisie. The FdI number 2 has already said that the next financial statement will have to be worked out by 4 hands, that is, also with Draghi.

The Italian bourgeois class will have no difficulty in cooperating with and conditioning the Meloni government. It is already clear that it will watch above all, including through the President of the Republic, that it does not deviate from the dominant economic policies, and that it stays within the Atlantic Alliance and the given European framework. Democratic and civil rights will take a back seat.

There will be tensions within the government, given the power relations that emerged from the elections, and the three parties will seek to protect and secure the various bourgeois sectors (small, medium and large) that they most represent. To do so, they will:

- further focus on the division among workers and precarious labour,
- call into question the Reddito di Cittadinanza (Citizen's Income),
- penalize the weak and marginal sectors even more,

- wage war on migrants,
- jettison civil and women's rights,
- continue to participate in the war.

In the first place all of this calls into question the role of the labour movement. If the situation is so awful, if social sectors look to Meloni and the heirs of fascism for a solution to their problems, responsibility also lies with those who have not built the collective defence of workers against the bosses and their governments. The union leaders bear a heavy responsibility in the social political debacle we have ended up in.

Hard to imagine that they can change course, beyond taking purely demonstrative actions, which even the CGIL is obliged to do given also the particular attention that fascist forces devote to union headquarters (the Forza Nuova fascists attacked the Rome HQ of the CGIL last year).

Last Saturday thousands and thousands of young people took to the streets. They expressed another vision of the world than those of the right-wing and ruling classes, the will to fight against the destruction of the planet, against the logic of the exploitation of nature and labour. In a difficult and dark conjuncture they are a sign of hope together with so many other social movements and campaigns, and already in the coming weeks we need to build unity and stronger links between them.

Our organization must be present and in the forefront of this work of reconstructing resistance and struggles at the time of the right-wing victory. After the electoral round, comes the second round of social movements and industrial struggles. It presupposes the rejection of any philosophy of passivity and "contemplation" of disasters. Instead we rebuild all fronts of mobilization with a belief that we could turn things around.

We will be in Rome at the upcoming CGIL (main trade union confederation) demonstration, but we want to go there not with the empty words of leaders, but with the watchwords of struggle and opposition to the bosses.

More than ever it is the time for insurgency and resistance; we will be in Rome on Oct. 1, at the 'convergence' assemblies and all the more at the Bologna demonstration on Oct. 22.

We follow with attention and participation the discussion in the grassroots unions which are discussing a general initiative in the Autumn and who also need to develop an operational and political maturity in step with the times.

The CGIL congress is opening about now. It is a concrete moment to talk to thousands of workers about what to do and how to fight against the government of the enemy and para fascist right-wingers and against capitalists, who are more intent than ever on defending profits and super-profits.

Today Lagarde, EU president, heralded a long period of high inflation, that is, an attack on wages and pensions, that is, on the elementary living conditions of the working classes.

The autumn will be characterized by strong contradictions, by millions of people in our country experiencing poverty, hardship and difficulty in meeting basic expenses. There will be very strong tensions, even possible riots or uprisings.

In order not to leave people alone, in order to build a real movement capable of opposing the

government policies, a social campaign on the cost of living crisis is under construction,.

Such a campaign has already launched in England and has taken the name “we don’t pay” and today it is growing in many parts of our country. In the coming weeks it aims to expand and take root; our organization fully supports it and our circles are committed to supporting it.

26 September 2022

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P.S.

• IVP. TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2022:

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7845>

• Translated by *International Viewpoint* from *Sinistra Anticapitalista*:

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