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Italy

A setback for Renzi

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The second round of Italy's municipal elections on June 19, 2016 represented a heavy defeat for the governing party, the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party - PD), and its leader Matteo Renzi. The Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) won in two of the country's biggest cities, Rome, the capital, and Turin, Italy's largest industrial city. The M5S candidate in Rome, Virginia Raggi, obtained an overwhelming victory, gaining 300,000 votes more than she had in the first round by capitalizing on opposition to the PD candidate, Roberto Giachetti and his sponsor Renzi, realizing very high scores in the popular districts.

In Turin, despite the support of all the influential forces of the city (from Fiat to the Banca Intesa San Paolo) for the PD candidate, outgoing mayor Piero Fassino, Chiara Appendino of M5S polarized the enormous social discontent of a city with very high rates of unemployment among workers and an increasingly impoverished petty bourgeoisie, almost doubling her vote with a clear success in the popular suburbs.

The good results for the PD candidates in Bologna and Milan do not lessen the overall defeat for the party, because they only reconfirmed the vote in the first round and were obtained against a right which is itself in difficulty; also, in many cities of average size it was centre-right coalitions or the M5S which were victorious.

The success of M5S is based on winning support on the theme of honesty and opposition to the political class, but also in advancing from time to time objectives which are more social and "left", or more ambiguous, or more to the right in order to cover the major part of the political space; this approach corresponds to its inter-class nature.

Its victory combines with the heavy failures in the first round of the elections of the forces of the left who are paying the price for their choices in the recent past and who question their programs. The case of Naples is a particular one, where the big victory for the outgoing mayor De Magistris over the candidate of the right, with the PD excluded from the ballot, is the expression of a coalition clearly to the left and represents a clear defeat for the political camps who have been in the government of the country over the last 25 years. This coalition and mayor are based on a radical opposition to austerity policies, strong links with the movements and social struggles and on unity respecting diversity. De Magistris stressed that his victory had been obtained against the PD, against the right and against the M5S.

Finally, these elections show to the dominant classes the fragility of an institutional framework designed to manage a bipartisan austerity (between centre-left and centre-right), now in crisis and the risk that this framework, far from preventing surprises and political incidents, could facilitate them. The electoral law of the Italicum [1], although much vaunted, could boomerang against institutional stability. And the referendum on the anti-democratic counter-institutional reform that Renzi hoped to easily win in autumn now becomes a little more difficult for the Prime Minister.

[1] Introduced in 2015, this provides for a two-round system based on party-list proportional representation, corrected by a majority bonus and a 3% election threshold