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Italy

Change the PRC's orientation!

- IV Online magazine - 2004 - IV362 - December 2004 -

Publication date: Thursday 9 December 2004

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Flavia d'Angeli is a leader of the Bandiera Rossa current that organises comrades identifying with the Fourth International within Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC). She is also a member of the national leadership of the PRC and made the following contribution in the opening session of the discussion for the PRC congress scheduled for March 2005, in which the Bandiera Rossa current is waging a fight for a political alternative to that presented by the Fausto Bertinotti leadership.

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PRC - poster

The theses presented by the Secretariat have the merit of basing the preparatory discussion for the congress on an overall analysis of the economic, political and social period, on the basis of which we should develop our political line. This breaks, at least in the pages of "Liberazione", with a debate centred on the need for the "lesser evil" to defeat the right and "save the party" a debate which often seems to dominate the discussion in the circles and federations.

1. Divergence in the analysis

It is on the basis of these elements of analysis that we can measure the scope of our first difference, which is significant. While it is certainly true - and this should be underlined - that the social movements in the last few years have scored points in stopping the spiralling crisis of credibility and self-confidence of any alternative proposal to capitalist globalization, it is false - and therefore dangerous for the movements themselves - to overestimate their structural capacity to overturn the existing social relationship of forces that they could have developed in such a short time. These movements are the result of a defeat, that which closed the 20th century in the rubble of the Berlin Wall: a historic defeat. It is only by demanding the "right to patience" that new movements really make possible an alternative system to neoliberal fragmentation and war.

Although we should not underestimate the historical significance of the upturn in social confrontation and involvement which we have seen over the last few years, we should also note - this is where the proposed analysis is incomplete - that this renewal of commitment has not yet acquired a strength capable of fundamentally challenging the processes against which it is fighting, whether international dynamics such as the war, or those locally which are eliminating or barbarically "reforming" jobs.

The movement, which has been and must remain central for our initiatives, draws its resources from itself, not by imposing on itself a political leap forward which would run the risk of cutting it off from its indispensable social base and thus weakening it.

How can we otherwise explain the fact that, faced with the enormous mobilizations which have marked the political diary over the last few years, "Politics" with a capital "P" does not seem to have changed, either in its programmes or even, symbolically, in its public representatives or leading circles?

That the centre left, which barely two years ago was challenged by the "girotondi" [1] is once again solidly in the saddle and not in the least inclined to either make a self-criticism or a change in orientation, as is continually evident from the positions that they take, from the defence of the Stability Pact to the laws on small and medium-size businesses. Even as far as the war is concerned - a question on which you cannot have a balancing act (you are

either for or against) the Great Democratic Alliance (GAD) has succeeded in formulating a position that is objectively a retreat in relations to the positions of the movement. Thus we are in the paradoxical situation of a movement (and ourselves) which next Saturday will demonstrate for the withdrawal of the troops and an opposition, which we say should now be receptive to the demands on the movement, which is going to take to the streets in the coming weeks with an ambiguous position and which cannot even agree on the calendar for the votes in parliament.

2. Another political line is necessary

In this framework, which I have simply sketched out for obvious reasons, there is the need for another political line which, by centring on the development of the social movements and our place within them, would be able to challenge the opposition at the level of programme and efficacy, starting from the need for a frontal opposition to the Berlusconi government. The strategy followed by the party in the last few months - of which I was never convinced - turns out to have been dangerously imprecise.

To state from the start that we are ready to make a governmental agreement, which accepting to postpone a clear programmatic discussion, while a good part of the centre left forces are turning away from serious opposition to the government runs the risk of leading us into a dead end. Rather than breaking the trap of the centre left we are going to rush into it. The first steps of the Great Democratic Alliance are not leading in a good direction. We are building a framework that is not in the least innovative, without even starting a serious programmatic confrontation and we accept the idea of "primaries", which we are told will make it possible for the movement's demands to be expressed, taking place on the leadership question.

We cannot build a new critical social actor without having an idea of its programme, that is to say of an alternative society. The concern with programme should be separated from the governmental question: it should come first, that is a condition in and of itself. It should serve in particular to harass and challenge the centre left on its capacity (or more probably incapacity) to represent the demands that emerge from the movements and the still unsatisfied social needs of the majority of the population.

We were wrong to leave aside the question of programme from our discussions with the opposition forces, because it is on the programmatic questions that we would at least be able to really measure the credibility of a real alternative to the rightwing government.

We cannot accept a "static" conception of the programme, split between a minimum and maximum. The idea of a "minimal" agreement, on the basis of which it would be possible to prepare a "maximum" programme, refers to a mechanism that has already led the workers' movement to submission and defeat. On the other hand an acceptable programme would be that which today contains even partial elements of rupture sketching out a desirable perspective: reduction in working time, sliding scale of wages, nationalization of certain sectors of production, reduction in the army and military spending, turning around the policy of privatizations, that is to say clear signals of a change of direction. The fact that we all know now that with this centre left such a programme could not be proposed shows nothing other than the impossibility of a governmental agreement and the need for a radical change in our political line.

3. Another refoundation is possible

This party, in order to carry out the mission it gave itself, has changed several times since it was created. These were

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founding or refounding moments. The last congress seemed to have really decided a correct orientation, a renewed affirmation of the communist subject that led us to a break with the first Prodi government and to involve ourselves completely in the new movements, in some way since the Genoa events.

The new political turn proposed today is likely to lead to a reversal of this orientation, of this "new departure", by putting into question the very identity of the party and what is more important its "social identity". We cannot not be concerned, whatever our position, by the signals of disorientation of the party, which could lead us into a congress of disinterest, where we measure bitterness and fear rather than enthusiasm.

I think it is the very essence of the political proposals put forward by the secretariat that is at the origin of this situation. This is a strong statement but I cannot imagine the life of a collective body like a party, its state of health and capacity to react, without linking them to the political line. Otherwise we would be adhering to a monolithic conception of the party and its members, who move forward like robots, leaving it up to the leading group to interpret the line. I think, on the contrary, that this party has learnt a lot more than we think from the movements and that it will react to the difficulties and lack of conviction.

I think that to lead the communist refoundation to a globalization government, however moderate, completely changes the nature of this party to the point of putting in danger its very existence and a living community able to interact with society.

And I am sufficiently convinced on the other hand that there is still a space for our collective work to think that in returning to our previous inventiveness and thoroughgoing radicalism that marked the last years we can take another road. This conviction leads me to believe that that it is possible to have a congress discussion that would make possible collective elaboration along the lines indicated by the comrades who signed the contribution "refoundation, refoundation, refoundation". By doing this I commit myself to working for the development of a broad and pluralist grouping of the critical left in the next congress.

[1] The movement of the "Girotondi" (rounds) opposed the changes in the law made by the Silvio Berlusconi government in order to protect him from legal condemnation.