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Italy

Reflection on the “sardines” movement

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The Italian political situation is marked by a new and particular movement, that of the “sardines”, which saw several hundred thousand people, many of them young people, take to the streets, culminating in the great demonstration in Rome on 14 December.

In order to understand what is happening, two elements must be taken into account: on the one hand, the importance and the positive side of these social demonstrations against fascism and racism despite the general nature of the demands, and on the other hand, the aims of the initiators of this movement, linked to the Democratic Party and supported by a newspaper such as the Repubblica, and the way in which they manage it.

Low degree of politicization

It is not by chance that this movement was born in Bologna, in Emilia-Romagna, a region governed since the post-war period by the ICP and then by the various centre-left political combinations. In this region, on 26 January, there will be a vote for the election of the Regional Council and its president and, for the first time, the right-wing parties, led by the Salvini League, may win, which would mean the defeat of the Democratic Party and probably the fall of the Conte 2 government, led by the Democratic Party and the 5-Star Movement. It is clear why the Democratic Party is so interested in the sardine movement.

But the fact remains that in Rome, as in other sardine occupations, we have seen a massive positive reaction against the rise of racism, reactionary poison and sovereignist nationalism by Salvini and the right, in society and institutions, and young people have been in the front line.

The degree of politicization of this movement is still low, and its organizers deliberately seek to keep it at a level of general and superficial criticism of the hateful and inhuman accents of the reactionary right, of defence of the constitutional democratic framework, that is to say a battle fought at the level of public opinion alone (it is not by chance that these are not marches but only rallies lasting a few hours in the squares, with music and general speeches from stages).

No clear objectives are put forward, nor are they proposed - and even less so - places for discussion and deepening of a platform of demands that could put in difficulty the Conte bis government, which on most issues remains in continuity with the policies of the first Conte government, supported by the Salvini League.

Radicalizing the demands

In fact, the Democratic Party fears a radicalization of the slogans and a criticism of the neo-liberal austerity policies that it has itself pursued and which have caused the social malaise that has allowed the various right-wing movements to develop. The group of Bolognese organizers is acting consistently in relation to this demand. Its extreme verticality is therefore not an anecdotal element; it responds to a logic and a precise choice: to prevent public, open and democratic places of discussion and debate from favouring confrontation between different ideas and political positions, which also correspond to different social interests.

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During those same weeks, the class and anti-capitalist left (Sinistra Anticapitalista played an important role) sought to open a new path to unity of action, starting with a national assembly held on 7 December in Rome (about 400 people) in which seven or eight national organizations and about twenty local collectives participated. It defined a common platform of social struggle, as a working basis for the coming months: against military spending and policies, for employment (reduction of working hours without wage cuts, nationalisation of large companies and factories that lay off and restructure, abolition of security decrees, repeal of the Fornero counter-reform on pensions).

This class-conscious left will have to try to lead both the battle for social and democratic objectives, seeking to relaunch a mobilisation of the working classes while putting itself in symbiosis with the democratic feelings that massively animated the squares during the sardine rallies; it is a question of trying to radicalise their demands by favouring the construction of a great social struggle against the rights but also against the liberal policies of austerity and against all the political forces that, yesterday as today, make themselves the bearers of these demands.

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