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Italy

The Italian Left and Parliamentary Elections of March 4th

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On March 4th, the Italian people will vote in parliamentary elections, with a new electoral law that provides for one third of MPs to be elected under a first-past-the-post electoral system, and the balance of members under a proportional system, with a threshold of 3% for political forces to be represented in Parliament.

by Francesco Locantore (activist of Sinistra Anticapitalista, member of the Potere al Popolo National Committee)

There have been three governments since the 2013 election, all headed by members of the Democratic Party (Enrico Letta until February 2014, Matteo Renzi until December 2016 and Paolo Gentiloni from 2017 up to now) and supported by a sort of grand coalition including the New Center-Right headed by Angelino Alfano (formerly allied with Silvio Berlusconi). The season of broad agreements between the PD and the centre-right was born during the preceding legislature (as of November 2011) with the joint support of the technocratic government led by Mario Monti.

Over last six years the Democratic Party has managed all austerity policies and cuts to public services in Italy, resulting in an increase in social inequality and poverty, job insecurity and massive unemployment, the latter of which, despite the relative economic recovery, remains at much higher levels than that relative to the period before the 2008 crisis.

In recent years structural reforms have been carried out that have eradicated the main achievements of the labor movement in past decades of struggle. The Fornero pension reform will increase the age of retirement to 70 years. The so called Jobs Act removed the right for workers to see unjust individual layoffs withdrawn by ordinary court, which was guaranteed under the Workers' Rights Bill passed in 1970. The reform called "Good School" let school managers hold overwhelming sway over teaching staff, by means of merit assessments and the fact that they rather than education boards directly hire teachers. By giving school institutions the right to compel students to work some hours a week for particular companies so that once an agreement is in place, school becomes the place where free labor is provided to the latter and young people are shaped into helpless and flexible labor power for the needs of market and business profits as it were a law of nature.

Today there are 10 million poor people in Italy; 7.5 million people who are unemployed or underemployed; 10 million who gave up healthcare because of lack of proper funding and the resulting poor service. In 2017, the richest 20% of the Italian population held over 66% of national net wealth, while another 60% held just 14.8%. A slice of the hyper-privileged few (1% of whom are the big bourgeoisie) have wealth 240 times higher than that held by the whole poorest 20% of the population. The income of the poorest 10% of Italians has declined by 28% in the last decade, while almost half of the income increase recorded in the same period was grabbed by just 20% of the population.

The disrupted social fabric and the weakness of the labor movement at this time which were also the result of the backing of the major Italian union, namely the CGIL, for the austerity policies carried out by the "friendly" DP governments, have led to the re-emergence of xenophobic and racist sentiments among large parts of the population, and some breakthrough of Far right and even openly fascist political forces. The debate of the electoral campaign is dominated by issues of public security and the fight against immigration, where the three main political forces (the center-right coalition, the Five Star Movement and the DP) are holding the ground with political proposals based on 'law and order' and anti-immigrant prejudice. In this regard, the DP has the lion's share thanks to the job of Minister Minniti, whose law curtailed civil rights for refugees and gave extraordinary powers for mayors to prevent the "undesirable" ones (homeless people, immigrants, etc.) access to city centres. He even tried to ban the antifascist

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demonstration on February 18th, which, however, regularly took place in the town of Macerata thanks to the resolve of the antifascists!

Two coalitions will run for office to the left of the DP: Liberi e Uguali and Potere al Popolo .

After the attack on democratic rights and liberties by Renzi's Democratic Party, with an attempt to reform the constitution (including the proposal to end the Senate as a legislative chamber and reduce the numbers of MPs), which was eventually rejected by the vote in the referendum of December 4th 2016, a fraction of this party decided to break away and founded the Democratic and Progressive Movement, which then merged with Sinistra Italiana in the coalition called Liberi e Uguali, led by the former president of the Senate Pietro Grasso. The leaders of the DPM (Pierluigi Bersani and Massimo D'Alema in the first place), however, are jointly and severally responsible for the policy of war and austerity carried out by the DP and its predecessors over the last twenty years. The MPs of the DPM supported the Gentiloni government until almost the end of legislature, and the coalition Liberi e Uguali is preemptively making itself available for any alliance with Renzi's DP.

Potere al Popolo was initially born from a call by a Naples grassroots organization, called Clash City Workers, leader of a network of grassroots organizations and political structures in several Italian cities, which was immediately met with a positive response from Sinistra Anticapitalista, Rifondazione Comunista, the Eurostop network and the Italian Communist Party. This coalition immediately brought about a reactivation of many political and social activists, pulled together by the desire to build a radical alternative to the center-left and the DP. The political programme and the electoral list were discussed in two national assemblies, whose turnout was about one thousand people each, and in over one hundred local assemblies throughout the country.

The electoral program of Potere al Popolo was made up not only by the demands coming out of the assemblies, which were in turn the expression of a number of different struggles all over the country, but also of the experiences of last years of struggle against the Jobs Act and the Fornero law, the "Good school" reform, the Renzi constitutional reform, the racism of the Minniti-Orlando law and against male violence against women. This political program is not revolutionary, but includes a string of radical proposals that are objectively in contradiction with capitalism and its institutions (the European Union in the first place), trying to meet the needs of the mass of workers, the exploited and the oppressed.

To name just a few: the reduction of 32-hour working time without loss of pay, the reestablishment of the sliding scale of wages, the right to retirement at 60 or after 35 years of work, the establishment of a guaranteed income for the unemployed, the making of public investments as well as jobs, the provision of one million new houses through a social housing program, an end to privatizations and the reestablishment of full public ownership of water supplies and public services, a stop to big useless and harmful infrastructure projects and participatory planning in the environmental field as an alternative to the Green economy of business, the introduction of a property tax, the nationalization of the Italian Central Bank and the creation of a public financial hub, the restructuring of public debt.