

# The Italian situation and the tasks of the revolutionary proletarians

## The result of the March 2018 election

The votes counted and the growing abstention (27.15%) that occurred in the elections of March 4 2018 have made clear there is a large popular protest. Tens of millions of workers, oppressed laboring people, the unemployed and women of the people have refused their support to the parties that have led the governments in the last decades, enforcing the EU programs and neo-liberal policies.

This has been a meaningful political break with the past by large social sectors impoverished by the crisis, crushed by the EU diktats and the monopoly policies adopted by previous governments, and disappointed by the bourgeois left and the traditional right.

These social sectors, in which the urban petty bourgeoisie is playing the main role, have given their electoral support to two Italian populist parties, the Five-Star Movement (M5S, an eclectic populist party in which Keynesianism, neo-liberalism, ecologist positions, those against corruption, etc., coexist) and the League (an extreme xenophobic right-wing party, a champion of the independence of “Padania,”<sup>1</sup> in the government with Berlusconi), under the illusion that in this way they will succeed in safeguarding their interests.

The political success of the populist parties is undoubtedly the result both of the political, moral and electoral decadence of the liberal and social-democratic parties that over the last years have approved anti-popular counter-reforms, and of the crisis of legitimacy and authority of the corrupt bourgeois institutions.

In the absence of an independent and revolutionary workers’ movement and in an ebb in the class struggle, the populist parties as M5S and the League have filled the existent political void with their social demagogy, getting a high percentages of support from voters (32.6 % for M5S and 17.3 % for the League).

The Democratic Party (DP) run by Renzi, a pivot of the past governments, collapsed in the elections after the defeat suffered in the constitutional referendum of December 2017, entering into a deep crisis that is still continuing.

The new political phase poses a serious problem for the bourgeoisie, because it no longer has a totally reliable party, and no political force won an absolute majority in Parliament.

But it also poses a major problems for the proletariat, because the field is open for the activity of reactionary forces represented by dangerous demagogues.

## The pressure of the oligarchy, the compromise and the “government agreement”

In spite of the defeat of its traditional political parties, Italian and international big capital did not give up forming a “government of broad agreement” that is anti-popular and in favour of the EU, in order to continue dismantling the gains and rights of the workers, and to continue the policy of war.

So it has persisted with the “Italian political instability” as a risk factor in an economic context tending again to the recession.

From the elections to now, the alarms over the rise of the “spread”<sup>2</sup> went along with the pressures for the formation of a strong, stable, “market friendly” executive. But the defeat of the DP and the weakening of Berlusconi’s party have blocked the road to this project.

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<sup>1</sup> Padania is a geographical region corresponding to the plain that includes the Italian regions north of the River Po, in addition to Emilia-Romagna and Liguria. There is no Padania nationality.

<sup>2</sup> Spread means the gap between Italy’s 10-year bond yields and Germany’s.

The Italian crisis is so deep, the cohesion among the ruling classes so weak, that it has been impossible to form a “bourgeois class government” with a homogenous program capable of strengthening the ruling bloc and directing the subordinate classes with an openly neoliberal policy.

The ruling groups, having seen the impracticability of this road and considering that a new election would further reinforce the populist parties, have chosen another option: to affect—through the vetoes of President Mattarella – the formation of the government, adding men of their confidence in key places (Economy Ministry, Foreign Ministry, Defense Ministry).

In this way, after two months of political stalemate and covert maneuvers, an unstable compromise was achieved among the representatives of the Italian and international oligarchy, of small and medium-sized industry of Northern Italy, of some sectors of Southern Italian middle class: this compromise has enabled the formation of the coalition government of the M5S-League, with the puppet Conte as Prime Minister.

The class character of this government is evident: representatives of the Confederation of Industry (Confindustria), neoliberal professors, lawyers of the régime, military men and populist charlatans. No single minister has a relation, not even superficial, with the workers’ movement, with its traditions of struggle and its demands.

The compromise achieved in order to form a government “manageable” for the oligarchy was founded on a political agreement between the two winning parties, named a “government contract”, containing a series of measures to be approved in the five years of the legislature.

This “contract” foresees benefits for the capitalists and the rich, pardon for tax evaders, a general reduction of wages and destruction of the national collective agreement, dismantling of the rights of the workers (rights that are utterly absent from the program), elimination of State bonuses for the poor, bailout of the banks with public funds, militarization of the society, reinforcement of the military-industrial complex, a policy of blockade of immigration and a war policy closer to the “national interest” (the interest of the Italian monopolies).

It is an agreement seeking to settle the contradictory programs of the League and of M5S, expressing the interests of heterogeneous sectors of the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie that have a different economic weight and are split between Northern and Southern Italy.

It is significant that all the measures that concerned the financial oligarchy and the Brussels Commission have been already eliminated or mitigated in this document, approved before the formation of the government.

## **A xenophobic and racist migratory policy**

At the center of the political-media offensive of the government in its first months in office was the systematic persecution of migrants, of their helpers and defenders.

The continuing closing of the harbors was the principal commitment of this government, which has characterized and politically marked it at the national and international level.

Minister of the Interior Salvini, the secretary of the League, the shameless interpreter of its reactionary and provocative policy, has some obvious political aims. With his demagogy, he declares an non-existent migratory emergency (the number of migrants who have disembarked is diminished 76% in the last year), while the real emergency is the emigration of the young Italian unemployed; he speaks of an “invasion” and he creates fears in order to divert attention from the serious economical problems, from the growing poverty, in order to make people forget the numerous electoral promises, to mobilize the petty bourgeoisie in a reactionary manner and reinforce his party in the coming European elections.

The State racism promoted and carried out by Salvini with the complicity of the whole populist government has materialized in a series of monstrous crimes, such as the increase in number of those who died in the sea, the refusal of help and medical care for shipwrecked people, the refusal to allow the ships saving people in the Mediterranean from docking, the kidnapping of migrants on board ships, the collective rejection of the migrants in Libya with the criminal complicity of the Libyan coast guard, the

threats, denigration and sabotage of the rescuers, the doubling of the number of migrants detained in Libyan camps, the establishment of a régime of racist persecution and a program of massive expulsion of migrants.

The climate of racist and chauvinist hatred instigated by the populist government has caused continual attacks by the fascists against the immigrant workers and the Roma people, and in general a threefold increase in racially motivated hate crimes.

So the Italian government has placed itself in the first line of the world-wide xenophobia and racist reaction, isolating our country in its international relations and giving rise to strong friction with the African countries.

But the target of the racist policy is not only the migrants escaping from hunger and wars caused by imperialism. This policy strikes all proletarians, as was demonstrated by the “Security Decree”, strongly desired by Salvini and approved with repeated strokes of parliamentary confidence in November 2018.

On the one hand, this decree eliminates humanitarian protection and makes tens of thousands of migrants illegal and more easily blackmailed, forcing them to accept starvation wages, lack of rights, abuse of power and harassment by employers and labor union bosses.

On the other hand, it criminalizes the struggles of the workers against the capitalists, introducing heavy punishment for blockading roads and railways, occupying vacant houses, for “suspicious persons” in urban areas and public demonstrations, and authorizing the use of deadly weapons, such as “tasers”, against protesting people.

The results of Salvini's “law and order” policy (that has no cost but a positive electoral feedback), of his repressive measures against the workers and his continual propaganda-scenerio, using fascist phrases and gestures, has been the growth of support for the League among the possessing classes and the backward strata of the proletariat, with a change in the balance of force between the League and the M5S (which, in order to save the government, avoided a trial for Salvini's crimes).

In this sordid struggle for power, the League aims to become the new political point of reference for the Italian bourgeoisie, which is itself adapting to the new masters of Italian policy, pushing them more and more against the working class.

A rupture in the government coalition is possible, with early elections and the candidature of the League for the leadership of an extreme-right government together with Berlusconi's party and the fascists.

## **The “people's maneuvers” and the negotiation with the European Commission**

After many resounding proclamations, in October 2018 the populist government began an economic maneuver, called the “people's maneuver”, that frustrated many of the promises made in the electoral campaign, allowing gifts and tax relief to the small and large employers, clearing out the State treasuries without adopting measures against the rich and the tax-evaders.

But this maneuver created a problem for the European Commission: the growth of the deficit to 2.4%. So the Commission rejected the proposed budget, because it failed to respect the obligation of a fast reduction of the ratio of the deficit to the GDP.

It is not a question of decimals, but of respect for the annual reduction of the public debt, basis of the Fiscal Compact. The non-observance of this financial rule jeopardizes the integrity of the EU structure, eroded by the absolute law of the inequality of its economical and political development.

So the European Commission immediately rejected the maneuver and asked for its revision. But it did not confine itself to that rejection: it dictated some measures and increased its supervision over Italy due to its “excessive deficit procedure”. The Commission acted as a real staff of the imperialist system in Europe, which has to concentrate at the financial, political and military level in order to resist international competition.

In this process of subjection to the EU, the Italian bourgeoisie has heavy responsibilities: the increased exploitation of and competition among the workers, the plunder of the oppressed peoples and

the freedom of movement of capital and commodities have pushed our country into the always more stifling and anti-democratic cage of the EU.

After two months of “arm wrestling” (at a cost 4 thousand million € in interest, which will be paid by the workers), the Italian populist government, in order to avoid the infringement of the “excessive deficit procedure”, has decided to respect the parameters and decisions of the Commission and to reduce the deficit to 2.04%.

The national-populists of the government, isolated in the EU and under the threat of its Commission, surrendered without a fight, not even mobilizing the masses, whom they fear more than the EU. So they have accepted the diktat of the Junkers and their allies in order to prevent the outbreak of a new financial crisis and remain in the government, build a new oligarchy and continue their attacks against the working class and the popular masses.

The agreement with the EU – accomplished by downgrading the rights of the Italian Parliament – has involved further billions of cuts in expenses and public investments, and has dealt a further blow to the electoral promises of “basic income” and pensions. Social services are reduced, the public employments are frozen, new increases to the anti-popular taxes are in preparation, together with other forms of privatization, etc. There are many elements of continuity with the “austerity” governments.

In spite of the march backwards, Salvini and Di Maio say that the culprit is the EU, if the promised measures cannot be fully maintained. Their chauvinist demagoguery is aimed to extinguish the class consciousness of the workers and to prepare themselves for the next European elections.

As a matter of fact, their promises are not fulfilled due to the policy of the populists, who do not want to touch the enormous riches of the capitalists and the billionaires, or to cut the military expenses but increase them by acquiring F-15 war airplanes (following Trump's directives); they do not even want to collect the billions in real estate taxes evaded by the Vatican, in order to defend the privileges of the capitalists, the rich and the parasites.

They said there were no resources to eliminate the infamous “Fornero law” on pensions, but they bailed out the Carige Bank with millions in public money, just as the previous governments did.

Our principal enemies are in our country, not outside it. They are the forces which, with their economic and political power, exploit and oppress the workers, enrich themselves by starving the popular masses, forcing the young people into unemployment, into precarious jobs or to emigrate; they are the leaders of the new and old parties that are protecting their interests.

The agreement between the EU and the populist government shows that whoever is in the government and administers the State funds have as their fundamental criterion of action the defense of profits, the defense of private ownership and the international organs of monopoly finance capital; they can only promote anti-workers and anti-popular measures, also in the name of “change”. The Italian case shows that the line on which the populists in power orientate themselves is the line of the decisive forces of the bourgeoisie.

## **Big capital and petty bourgeois populism**

Populism is an international phenomenon, which assumes specific national forms in the different countries, often in competition with each other. As an instrument of the ruling class, its aim is to divert the popular masses, first of all the proletariat, from the conscious and organized struggle against capitalism and imperialism, in order to channel the indignation and rage of the victims of capitalism towards political purposes useful to the survival of this system.

Capitalism and populism, in spite of the apparent conflict between them, are profoundly linked. Capitalism uses populism, prepares the road for it, makes it appear “popular”, because it has difficulty in maintaining its dictatorship and applying its policies with the old methods, old parties, old men.

The financial oligarchy, above all its more reactionary sectors, needs right-wing populism in order to prevent the social protests from turning against the bases of its exploiting system, and to assail the native-born and immigrant working class.

But the oligarchy does not let itself be led by the populists, it does not surrender power to them. It clashes with the petty-bourgeois populist leaders when they want to take control of economic life and push measures that go beyond the established financial compatibility.

As for the leaders of populism, they are ready to compromise and ally themselves, on reactionary positions, with the class of owners of the means of production, of capital and of solid international relations. These demagogues represent the interests of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata that want to renegotiate their position, to obtain economic and political advantages at all costs.

But, in spite of their efforts, the populists can not provide the measures needed to obtain a stabilization of capitalism, as they are unable to resolve the essential problems gripping our society. They do not completely satisfy the interests of the monopolies, and do not satisfy the demands of the middle class and the proletariat. In a few words, they cannot eliminate the class antagonisms, which become always more acute, and they cannot at the same time satisfy the interests of the bourgeoisie and of the working class.

This is the root of their impotence and their difficulties, which will become sharper as soon as a new crisis arises, when the old relations will be disrupted and the class differences will increase.

### **Strike and defeat populism in the field of class struggle**

As we have seen, the government of M5S and League is not a “government of change”, but a reactionary and anti-worker government that is carrying out the same policies of the bourgeois center-right and center-left governments, with some variations.

The decline of Italian imperialism does not stop with the populists in power, but it deepens and accelerates, trampling on bourgeois-democratic liberties and the principle of equality of mankind.

What to do in these circumstances? How can one strike at and defeat this government, which, with its social demagogy, has a high level of support of the masses?

The hope of beating populism without a real struggle is in vain, as the idea of a return to a past of "alternating democracy" between two bourgeois blocs is deceptive.

To fall into this error means to leave the leadership of the struggle to groups, parties or institutional representatives of the bourgeoisie, to put the working class at its service, which will be crushed when it escapes from its passivity and again assumes its independent initiative.

The Italian bourgeoisie cannot return to the “constitutional” period, to the “centrality of Parliament”, to reforms and concessions. Its profound crisis, the sharpening of the objective contradictions of the imperialist system, prevent all that.

Ahead of us there is no period of progressive and peaceful development of monopoly capitalism, which cannot maintain itself without resorting to the reactionary transformation of all bourgeois institutions, to the destruction of the rights and liberties of the workers, to predatory war.

Populism and fascism are not defeated, and it is impossible to defeat them effectively with social-democratic and reformist policies.

The only force that can develop the struggle against the financial oligarchy and its national and international institutions is the social class that is most interested in beginning and leading to the end a revolutionary struggle against the entire capitalist system, for its replacement with a new and superior social order.

This fundamental force is the modern proletariat which, vigorously fighting against the capitalist offensive, political reaction and the danger of war, can and must realize its hegemony for the liberation of the country from all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois governments, exploiting their contradictions at home and abroad.

The proletariat has the task of assembling around itself and organizing on a larger basis, mobilizing and unifying into a single torrent of struggle all the strata of the population that capitalism leads to ruin, separating them from the reformist, liberal and populist influence, to bring them under their revolutionary political leadership.

In this sense, we have to highlight two important aspects:

first, it is true that the populists have a broad acceptance among the popular masses, but they do not yet have an organized mass base; they do not control mass organizations like the trade unions and they do not have a strong ideological basis; they are only based on demagoguery and promises;

second, today even the most modest demands of the working class are an integral part of the process of unity and re-organization of the class and must be linked to the struggle for the revolutionary destruction of capitalism. This connection is facilitated by the fact that the bourgeoisie in all its forms, including populism, is not capable of satisfying the economic, political, cultural, environmental, and other demands of the laboring classes.

## **The workers' movement and its present tasks**

As the alternative to populism is the revolutionary and class alternative, the tactic of the united front of the workers' struggle against capitalism is the keystone to promote the struggle against populism and its cross-class, racist and chauvinist policy.

The present situation of the workers' and popular movement is still characterized by passivity and the division imposed by old and new trade union bureaucracies. Nevertheless, while the populist promises are vanishing and the economic cycle is going through a new downturn, we observe signals of awakening in the trade union movement.

Moreover, there are some fighting sectors that have never stopped striking and going out into the streets, first of all the workers of the logistic industrial sector and those of the factories under threat of layoffs. These sectors are the ones most struck by the repressive measures of the bourgeois State.

Other important movements are developing: the anti-fascist and anti-racist movement, the NO "TAV" (high speed train) movement against the "big works" that are useless and devastating to the environment, the women's movement, the student movement, the mobilizations against the "Security Decree", against the blockade of the harbors, the struggles of the unemployed, of the homeless, of the petty farmers, and so on.

It is a question of channeling these different popular responses to the populist government into a united front of struggle led by the working class.

On the agenda is the realization of unity of action, the mobilization of the masses against capitalism and class collaboration, based on the urgent and vital demands of the workers, even the smallest ones, on the basis of the existing discontent, of the defense of democratic freedoms, of the struggle against the consequences of the policy of war.

The way forward is the single front of all the forces of the proletariat – including those duped and deluded by the populists, but who suffer from the same anti-worker policies – to carry out new experiences of common struggle and to build united front organizations.

On this basis it is necessary to form the broadest popular unity against the capitalist offensive, political reaction and the threats of war, in order to make the rich and the parasites pay, to break once and for all with neoliberalism and the system that produces it.

The essential condition for breaking the power of the monopolies and the rich is the formation of a broad coalition of all sectors of the laboring classes, based on the working class as its leading force.

A coalition determined to put an end to capitalism through the mobilization and the formation of mass organisms (factory councils, enterprise councils, workers' assemblies, workers' committees, popular committees, etc.), in order to open the way to a revolutionary government of workers and other exploited laborers founded on these organs and led by the Communist Party. Only such a government can save our country from disaster, guaranteeing the material and cultural well-being of the workers.

To advance along this revolutionary perspective, the communists and the vanguard elements of the proletariat must radically and definitively separate themselves from the opportunists of every kind, and to unite in a revolutionary political party of the proletariat, opposed to all political parties and formations of the exploiting classes.

A Party that has an ideology, Marxism-Leninism, a program and a policy completely independent from those of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, in order to become the leading force of the exploited and oppressed masses in the proletarian revolution.

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