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Italy

A new feminist movement in Italy is on the move

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“We are likely witnessing the birth of a new feminist movement on an international level. Of course, this doesn’t mean that we have a feminist movement everywhere. The International Women’s Strike was joined by fifty countries, but participation in the strike was uneven among the various countries: Poland, Argentina, Italy, Spain, Ireland, and Turkey had among the largest demonstrations. In other countries the strike had great media visibility and we may be witnessing the first steps in the reconstruction of a strong and large anti-capitalist feminist current and mobilization...”. (Cinzia Arruzza in [“Feminists are currently leading the way”](#).)

This article – written before March 8th for the bimonthly newspaper of the Belgian LCR, *La Gauche* – details the development in Italy of this new movement. [\[1\]](#)

For more than three months now a new feminist movement, surprising in its breadth, composition and radical character, has burst onto the Italian scene. The first signs of the maturation of a new feminist generation, with its own codes of expression and its own political sensitivity, were already visible in the last two years in the initiatives in Italy, particularly in Rome, for the full exercise of the right to abortion - provided for by Law 194 but not guaranteed in practice in hospitals because of the growing presence of "conscientious objectors" - and in solidarity with the struggles of Spanish women against the anti-abortion bill of the minister Gallardon.

This time too, the inspiration came from international feminist mobilizations against macho violence in many Latin American countries, for equal pay in Iceland and for abortion in Poland, which encouraged the desire to react to a situation of structural violence against women that characterizes this country, where the murder of a woman by a fiancé, husband or ex is only the tip of the iceberg.

Thus, from the confluence of the practices of young feminist collectives and the experience of anti-violence centres, managed by women, there emerged a call for a national mobilization on the occasion of the day of November 25th, conceived as the beginning of a process of reflection and action that attacks all forms of structural violence against women. The appeal, drawn up in Rome under the name Non Una di Meno (“Not one woman fewer”), was welcomed with enthusiasm and in several cities local assemblies sprang up to prepare for the demonstration. [\[2\]](#) Unlike in the past, these meetings, sometimes initiated by new collectives of young feminists or informal groups, often linked to occupied spaces, addressed everyone through the social media, and were very successful.

150,000 women in the streets of Rome

On Saturday, November 26, at least 150,000 women, LGBTIQ and a number of solidarity-minded (young) men took to the streets, forming a colourful, joyful and irrepressible tide that invaded central Rome. This demonstration, full of energy and the will to change the world, self-organized, without the support of the traditional structures of the left, took place in a unitary, inclusive spirit of the anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and LGBTIQ organizations.

It is a movement that is certainly hostile to the Democratic Party governments (Renzi first and subsequently Gentiloni) because of their attacks on public health, the living conditions of working women and those in precarious employment, the self-determination of women as regards reproductive health (see the promotion of "Fertility Day" by the Minister of Health, Beatrice Lorenzin). And also because of the suspension of funding for anti-violence centres

and a migratory policy which, in practice, is punitive and forbids new arrivals from leading a dignified life on our territory. But at the same time, it does not identify itself with any other established political or trade union force.

This demonstration, whose success exceeded all expectations, was followed by a day of working out the content of the protest, with a national assembly, organized in eight round tables (each of about 200 people from all over the country), which examined the different aspects of (hetero) patriarchal violence: from the judicial-legal framework to economic violence, at work and in the sphere of social protection; from sexist education at school to the media; from feminist support to escape from violence to the plan for sexual and reproductive health; from the double or triple violence that immigrant women experience to sexism in social movements. This process of reflection will lead to the writing of a feminist anti-violence plan, starting from below, in contrast to the one that is being prepared by the government and will be presented in June.

Refusing imposed gender behaviour

Meanwhile, "Non Una di Meno" endorsed the appeal of the Argentinian "Ni Una Menos" for an international women's strike on March 8th. A day in which we will proclaim: "if our lives are worth nothing, we stop." We do not produce, we do not provide care, we do not consume, we "strike" by refusing gender-imposed kinds of behaviour.

Galvanized by the gigantic demonstration in which thousands of young women - and men - took to the streets for the first time, the movement became even bigger by expressing itself in assemblies in many cities which were working either to deepen the themes of the national round tables or to prepare concretely the women's strike on March 8, each in its own area.

A second national assembly, which just concluded in Bologna last weekend, defined the platform - the result of in-depth discussions in the round tables - and the modalities of the strike: the choice of symbolic places to carry out flash mob actions; support for women workers in precarious employment or who are subjected to blackmail by the employer through "disturbance actions" (which disturb the functioning of the service or of production); choosing a unique symbol - black and fuchsia colours and Russian dolls - to be displayed in windows or to be worn to signal support for the strike by those who are not able to leave their work; all this in addition to assemblies in workplace and also in schools, in order to block courses and discuss violence and the oppression of women.

Then, in late afternoon, we will meet up in the central squares of all the cities, where we will create national and international connections between the demonstrators, and conclude in some cities in the evening with demonstrations of the "Reclaim the Night" kind or those around the slogan: "safe streets are guaranteed by the women who walk through them" (and not by the "forces of order").

Self-management, mutual aid and education

While carefully maintaining the autonomy of the movement, Non Una di Meno launched an invitation and a challenge to all the unions, the big official confederations and the grassroots organizations, to join its action by calling for a 24-hour general strike, which is the only means by which workers can strike legally. So far, only a few grassroots unions have responded positively to this call, without committing fully to its success, while the CGIL [\[3\]](#) decided not to join the movement, merely inviting its rank-and-file members to hold meetings on the subject in the workplaces.

This new feminist movement, which expresses a radical refusal of what exists, derives its strength from the

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combination of massive actions of protest and direct actions with experiences of self-management and mutual assistance, in anti-violence centres, in the collectives and in the occupied spaces, which have as their reference the construction of a society freed from machismo, racism, homo-lesbo-transphobia, a society that goes beyond the capitalist market.

It feels itself to be part of a tide - will this be the famous third wave? – of women fighting for themselves, a tide that sweeps across the world and challenges the misogynist and exclusionary policies of an establishment that has lost all credibility.

It is the first mass movement that has shaken the sense of helplessness and passivity that seems to have struck Italy since the centre-left of Renzi came to power, promising to modernize the country and restart the economy, while rejuvenating its political class and aligning its functioning with European standards of efficiency.

Let us hope that this movement, which is unique in the strength of its self-organization, led by a new generation of women – and to which we are fully committed – will be able to consolidate and give new impetus to the relaunching of social movements as a whole.

PS:

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[1] La Gauche N° 81, March-April, "[En Italie. un mouvement féministe de masse est en marche](#)".

[2] This is modelled on the Argentinian and Latin American slogan "Ni Una Menos", see [Argentina's Life-or-Death Women's Movement](#).

[3] The Italian General Confederation of Labour, the biggest union confederation, which was for many years linked to the former Communist Party, which has now disappeared, and has in particular given rise to the formation of the Democratic Party.