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Italy

A dangerous situation for Rifondazione

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The Unione (Union) of Romano Prodi won the elections on 9-10 April by a short head [1].

The alternative Left, which was part of this centre-left coalition, is now faced with a challenge: how to block the road to social-liberalism, without, however, in any way helping Berlusconi to get back into power.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/prodi_declares_victory.jpg]

Prodi declares victory

The elections of 9-10 April illustrate a very complicated panorama of the Italian political situation; The Union, Romano Prodi's centre-left coalition, only just won a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, and got only two senators more than the Centre-Right. Although the Union won more votes than Silvio Berlusconi's House of Liberties [2] and gained support among young people, it failed in its objective of winning over right-wing electors. As a result, the victory had a bitter taste.

Prodi, by conducting a moderate electoral campaign, without denouncing the evils of neo-liberal policies, lost a whole sector of his own electorate. The good result of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) in the Senate (7.5 per cent), even though it was partly offset by a less brilliant score in the Chamber (5.8 per cent), demonstrates that there was a broad space for a radical critique of the neo-liberal model. This space was not occupied by the larger and more moderate forces of the alliance (the Left Democrats and Margarita): their disappointing results weakened the alliance.

In this context, the situation is looking very difficult for the PRC. The building of an alternative and anti-capitalist Left in Italy is now at a decisive stage. Locking itself into the government, as a majority of the party proposes, could turn out to be a very dangerous perspective. The PRC's appeal to a sense of responsibility and respect for the discipline of the coalition will exercise a formidable pressure on the party to submit to the decisions of the Union, since Berlusconi's return to power will weigh heavily in the balance. The election of PRC Secretary Fausto Bertinotti to the presidency of the national assembly is likely to increase this pressure.

As the Critical Left current, we put forward an alternative hypothesis to the majority's at the last central committee meeting on 22-23 April. The other opposition currents seemed to be avoiding the need for a battle in the party. So we stressed that the conditions for the PRC to participate in the government didn't exist. But we did not conceal the fact that our votes were necessary for the Prodi government to come into existence, and especially to ensure the departure of Berlusconi from the Palazzo Chigi (the centre of government), a departure which is demanded by a big majority of the electorate.

This support "from the outside" would set Prodi on the only road that could give him a broad social base of support: the road of a clean break from the neo-liberal and warlike policies of preceding governments. What would be the signs of such a break? The immediate withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq and Afghanistan; the repeal of Law 30, which reforms working conditions, and also the repeal of the education reform and of the Bossi-Fini law on immigration; addressing seriously the question of wages; the refusal of any new privatizations; a real policy of disarmament.

The possibility of defeating the right-wing parties on a social level, and no longer simply on the political and institutional levels, lies in the building of a social alternative that goes beyond the schema of governments changing without anything really changing. Prodi, on the other hand, wants to situate his government in the direct line of the old neo-liberal policies which characterized his presidency of the European Union. The participation of the PRC in this government will only delay the perspective of a strong anti-capitalist Left in Italy.

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[1] The Unione encompasses among other forces the Left Democrats (DS) (ex-Communists who have now been converted to social liberalism and are members of the Socialist International), Margarita (a centrist grouping), and the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), a party of the anti-liberal Left. Within the PRC there is the Critical Left current, in which the members of the Fourth International participate

[2] The principal forces in the House of Liberties are Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, the post-fascist National Alliance and the populist Northern League