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Italy

Municipal elections: Berlusconi's defeat

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During the last two weeks of May 2011 municipal elections took place in 1,300 Italian communes, including 13 big cities. Participation was 68.58% in the first round and 60.12% in the second. In relation to the regional elections of 2010, the right lost 6% of its vote at the national level, but 13 to 16% in the North, and Berlusconi's Popolo Della Libert  (PdL, People of Liberty) lost more votes than Bossi's Lega Nord (Northern League). The coalitions formed around the centre left Partito Democratico (Democratic Party) won votes, but above all thanks to the "radical" candidates of Sinistra e Libert  (SEL, a split from Rifondazione). The anti-party "5 stelle" (5 stars) movement, led by the comedian Beppe Grillo, obtained 93,000 votes. The left in various forms won the four biggest cities (Milan, Naples, Turin and Bologna), as well as significant towns.

The defeat of the right

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/silvio-berlusconi-1-22-11.jpg>]

These elections represented a defeat for the right and in particular for Berlusconi and his communications strategy. Even his traditional electorate abandoned him, in particular in the big towns. He will find it difficult to stabilise his government without changing the current political equilibria: the tensions both within the PdL and with its ally, the Lega Nord are obvious. The centre-left is once more an electoral "alternative" to the right and has regained a little credibility.

The radical candidacies

The most striking results were those in Milan and Naples. In Milan, the candidate of the left coalition (of which the PD is the biggest party) was Giuliano Pisapia, a member of SEL, and a former far left activist, who won the primaries [1]. and was then elected mayor thanks to a popular campaign, based on activist support committees. To invest all this hope in an alliance with the PD is certainly not the best thing SEL has done, but it is clear that the atmosphere of the city has changed and that the sentiment of "liberation", of being free of the right is very clear. Not to mention the fact that Berlusconi considered Milan as "his city": he campaigned there for three weeks, giving each election date a quasi national importance, and it was in Milan that the Lega Nord waged an unrestrainedly racist campaign, centred on Pisapia being allegedly the candidate of immigrants, gypsies and squatters. Another striking victory was that of Luigi De Magistris in Naples with a coalition opposed both to the right and the PD [2] and supported by the far left, even if without the popular participation that characterised the Milan campaign. These two victories show that the "people of the left" are regaining confidence and hope from any candidate or coalition that represents something new in relation to the traditional centre left.

The campaign continues

The hope revived by these elections was mixed with growing enthusiasm around the successful campaign to halt the privatisation of water management and prevent the construction of nuclear power stations at the referendums of June 12-13, 2011. These campaigns mobilised the energy and creativity of thousands of local committees across the country, restoring a sense of direct participation to tens of thousands of activists, disappointed and disillusioned by

the left. For the first time in a very long time, a movement can win a clear victory. And the committees created could, with the workers in the affected sectors (the law also concerns waste collection and public transport, even if the committees started from the water question) be a basis for rebuilding the left that Italy needs. [3]

A light breeze

It is too soon to say that the winds have changed in Italy but the weeks of municipal election campaigning and the referendums have revived hope in the possibility of beating Berlusconi and the right. This hope has however not led to permanent mobilisation; the indignation which is so strong in the other countries of the Mediterranean has not for the moment in Italy found any other tool or space to express itself than the elections. Sinistra Critica ran only where a viable candidacy based on mobilization could be set up, with some pleasant surprises but limited results. It is clear that the main work that awaits us is alongside the thousands of workers, students, women, and peoples affected by environmentally catastrophic measures who have struggled in recent years, in the campaigns around the referendums, so that this mobilisation becomes political and social and can put Berlusconi and the right on the back foot while posing the question of the necessity of a social transformation.

Berlusconi still has many resources at his disposal, but his time is over. And the symbol of this defeat is Naples, the town where he had invented his image as a man of action, accusing the centre left of being alone responsible for the waste disposal catastrophes in recent years. And yet it is there that the voters have turned their backs on him, worse – they have just not listened to him, preferring to put their confidence in Magistris, who represents novelty, legality, moral propriety and social change.

It remains to be seen what these new mayors can do. But the message is clear; there is a desire for change, to throw off a politics in a state of putrefaction. The professional politicians already debate how to organise for the post-Berlusconi period. The PD is trying already to build a “grand alliance” open to the centre, and will thus represent a brake on the spirit of change, above all if it proposes an “emergency government”. It is then obvious that what is needed is above all another left, a different left. But that is another debate. Whatever happens, a phase in this country is over, and we need to go to work to build the next.

[1] Several candidates of the “radical” left have recently won the centre-left primaries, against candidates supported by the PD apparatus. Nichi Vendola opened the road, subsequently becoming governor of Puglia. In Cagliari (Sardinia), Massimo Fedda'i, aged 34, of SEL, won the primaries against the PD candidate, and was elected mayor with 59.42% of the vote

[2] The recent history of the Naples region (from 1993 to 2010) was marked by the corrupt regime of Antonio Bassolino, of the PD, mayor of Naples then president of the region, whose management of waste collection, trading economic favours in return for political ones, is not unrelated to the disastrous situation with respect to waste in the region. Luigi De Magistris of the party l'Italia dei valori (“Italy of Values”, founded by Antonio Di Pietro, a judge, who advocated transparency and legality) was supported by a part of the radical left and won the elections with 65.37% of the votes. As a result, on the municipal council the PD will have four seats and Rifondazione six.

[3] This article was written before the referendum was won, see [“We defeated Berlusconi politically through a radical mobilisation”](#).