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Italy

Public sector strike in Italy is a strike for everyone

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Do you remember last spring? The "first wave", flags, songs on balconies, "everything will be fine"? Someone even thought - and said - that something good should come out of this story, that nothing could ever be the same again. A kind of promise of change was in the air. Rubbish!

No, they hadn't implied that anything had to change: we were the ones who had misunderstood. Heroes, the health workers? In fact, they are part of the civil service... and, as we know, they work less than others, and are better paid, and are not technically unemployed, and they are lazy: in short, privileged.

It might be time to change something

These public sector workers still had the courage to call for a strike on 9 December to renew their national labour agreement. [1] Why? Because in Italy there are about 20% fewer public employees than in the rest of Europe, because they are not the best paid in Europe and because their collective agreements have been out of date for years. And, they also say, because this health crisis has hit and is still hitting public services hardest, because many of them are precarious and work in unfit conditions, because they have faced the Covid emergency situation with almost bare hands, Given that (a lot of) money and (a lot of) staff are lacking, and given that health, transport, schools and local authorities have been put to the test by Covid when they were already destroyed and dismantled by years of privatization and budgetary austerity, it may be time for a change. Perhaps to deliver on some of the promises that had been made to keep them quiet a few months ago.

A convenient scapegoat

The only response from the top - a bit hysterical and a bit too predictable to be credible, so to speak, among ourselves - has been the opposite, that public employees are lazy and cowards, because while poor self-employed home delivery workers are killing themselves at work and the technically unemployed workers are hungry, they work little and are very well paid. It is a pity that those who say this are elegant, quiet gentlemen who know little about work, the real life, for example of teachers or nurses. Ministers, two-bit philosophers, serial killers of journalism, experts in bizarre statistics, entrepreneurs, politicians from the centre-left and centre-right, who are becoming more and more alike... are carrying out a furious campaign that in fact serves as a prelude to a division of the world of work and to the appointment of a convenient scapegoat for all the evils of Italian society.

In fact, the strike came late and remained limited. It took place in the midst of many difficulties - in particular that of "smartworking", which does not at all favour traditional forms of struggle. The response to the serious shortcomings of the Italian State in the way it faced the health crisis after the first months of Covid (little or no euros to strengthen health, schools left to their own devices, no hiring in the services, market rules in all aspects of the struggle against the health emergency) should have been organized before, better, and by trying to involve all workers, not just the public sector. In fact, one of the slogans of this mobilization was that on 9 December we went on strike for everyone, being aware that public employment is in the front line in the defence of health, in the guarantee of essential services for the whole of society and for the social rights of citizens. Nothing to do with slackers!

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PS:

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[1] The strike was called by unions to demand the renewal of the civil servants' collective contract, which expired late in 2018, and call for a large-scale recruitment drive and improved workplace safety. "[Public-sector workers stage one-day strike](#)".