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Italy

The key question is the self-determination of the movements

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Different approaches and criteria can be used to take a position regarding what happened on the 15th October. We are not really interested in a debate about whether people were 'violent' or whether there was a conspiracy or counter-posing the 'good guys' to the 'bad' ones. Our approach and overall perspective is to place ourselves totally within the movement that we want to build and to take seriously its potential, its development, its effectiveness and above all its capacity to take decisions democratically – to self-organise. This is the central aspect to our thoughts on these events. The potential development of the movement suffered a significant defeat on the 15th October.

1. The potential impact of the 15th October was clear from the size of the turnout which was largely self-organised but was also built through many political and social organisations. However the contribution of the latter was not as big politically as in the past and therefore the number of those who marched in Rome – 200,000 seems the most credible estimate – represents a powerful force that we need to recognise and value. Opposition to the policies of both centre-left and centre-right governments in this country continues to be significant even if it finds diverse political forms and expression or to some degree does not come together at all. The anomaly of the Italian situation is that there is a critical mass of people who are resisting – it shows a country that has not been domesticated despite 17 years of Berlusconi and, let's not forget, feeble anti-Berlusconi governments. We have to start from this resistance.

2. How do we build on this potential, what could we have done if the 15th October had turned out differently? How do we transform the willingness to struggle into a permanent mobilisation? This is the question we have to ask straightaway because it helps us avoid an impressionistic judgment on the October 15th events. A large part of the demonstration, including with our full support, had proposed ending the demonstration with a big occupation camp – a political tactic that goes beyond the ritual demonstration and does not follow a facile vanguardism. What was the point of an occupation? It would have been a symbolic act in opposition to the existing regime – whether we are talking about the government, the Bank of Italy or even the Quirinale (Prime minister's official residence). It would set up a public space for debate and self-organisation and thereby set up the first steps for the birth of a real movement – organised from below, self-determined and equipped with an advanced political programme. Today in practice none of those ingredients exist. We have a general mood, widespread anger and the willingness to come to demonstrate in Rome but back in the localities, in the workplaces, schools, colleges, among the unemployed and immigrants we do not yet have the specific influence that defines a mass movement. For us the 15th October was a day when this sort of process could have been set off.

3. The 15th also provided a space for the real actions of all those who should be the true protagonists of a long lasting and effective mass movement – workers, students, temporary and part time workers, women, migrants, committees for the common good and so on. Even here, while today there are important steps in this direction, their protagonist role is too often represented, delegated to the usual organisations such as trade unions, official community bodies or partly to political parties. Ordinary working people are not yet protagonists and this remains a priority in this period so that they can challenge the movement's usual 'parliamentary' leadership style with meetings of all the various groups. While this sort of organisation may have been alright ten years ago at Genova today it fails to meet the demands of the political period. This is a result of the different backgrounds and experiences of the forces involved (which are sometimes counterposed), of the repetition of ineffective actions and of a political framework which aimed to bring everyone together but which no longer represented all the activists. The 15th was also a defeat for this political framework and we must reflect on this.

4. The actions of those who were involved in the clashes expressed a very clear political perspective and also for this reason attracted a sector of youth who were mostly without permanent work, unemployed or in short term, temporary

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or casual work. We should not underestimate the significance of this group. Often many young people joined the clashes only to express a frustration bred by the crisis. But the political perspective expressed in these actions is to a large extent the following: to provide a stage to give vent to frustration. Setting up confrontations and a conflict for the TV cameras so that a thousand 'furious' youth can occupy the political stage does not seem to us a perspective that can be maintained without leading to an unforeseen as well as a counter-productive escalation. An escalation that we have already seen which, apart from other deleterious consequences, has brought about the stifling of the mass movements.

5. The decision to force events contradicted what seemed to us to be the fundamental priority – building a movement that is effective and self-organised. The movement was not able to emerge on the streets on Saturday. It will not have a better opportunity. Above all it was constrained by forces that were not accountable to anyone.

6. In reality what we saw was the tired re-running of a film too often seen in recent decades. The birth of a movement is tarnished by this gesture politics, the task of patient and complex self-organisation is sabotaged by short-cuts that can only be taken by a small minority. The difficulty of bringing the dynamic developed on a central national scale to the local level, in the workplace, school or college or elsewhere is absolutely marginalised and underestimated. The democratic process which needs time and extensive local work is bypassed by an elitist, vanguardist, top down (and we should note a basically 'macho') approach.

7. Consequently we think that the events of the 15th October, in which the police bear some serious responsibility for the irresponsible way in which they intervened in San Giovanni square, damage the movement and force it backwards, on to the defensive and more susceptible to the moderate and electoralist political forces. The latter are involved inside the movement and are ready to take advantage of the 15th October. In this context they can win back some support and play a more central role.

8. We do not identify with those moderate left forces but only with the political dynamic expressed by the maturity and understanding of a self-determined mass movement. The means and the ends need to be agreed and the only way of doing this, the only 'morality' that we recognise for political action is that which derives from the democracy of the movement, its self-determination and therefore its self-organisation.

9. This is the key point we wish to put forward in the discussion. It is the only way to get out of this dead end and the frustration we are seeing everywhere. The movement must be able to deal with its own mobilisations, deciding what it is going to do on the streets and in the squares and how to politically, socially and materially defend those choices. To do this we need mechanisms that we rarely see in Italy given that the structure of the movements have largely been dominated by an underestimation of their value and by the bureaucratic methods of the institutional left with its substitutionist methodology of 'antagonistic' forces. It appears that this bankrupt formula is still be offered by those forces.

10. Therefore we propose to start from the indignation of the mass movement – of the students, workers, unemployed, temporary/casual workers, migrants and women. We are committed to build the real movement with these forces. Only in this way can we all make a difference.

11. We should relaunch the idea of occupying an area with a camp although this proposal has to be re-modelled – it cannot just be proclaimed or decided from on high but has to emerge as an expression of real struggle.

12. We think that the struggle against the crisis and its political consequences has to be carried out by:

Strengthening self-organisation, the mass movement and its readiness to fight by developing a real class struggle

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programme which says we will not pay the debt. We propose another agenda:

- a unilateral moratorium on the public debt;
- establishing a national public bank;
- a highly progressive taxation on income and property;
- a minimum wage;
- citizen's income for young people and those without permanent work;
- reducing the working week;
- drastic cutting of the military budget;
- defend communal resources/property against the big public works like the TAV;
- abolish the link between visas and labour contracts for migrants;
- extend direct democracy.

We went onto the streets with the slogan 'we are not going home'. This slogan is even more relevant after the 15th of October.

National Executive of Sinistra Critica – organisation for the anti-capitalist left.

17th October 2011