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Italy

# Eleven points to face the crisis of the Italian Left

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**The entire left is speaking about the defeat, often in disarray, opportunistically or with “newist” or liquidationist hypotheses. For our part, we want to attempt to provide a reflection on the matter at hand, indicating the ideas we see as more fundamental than containers or formulas, to undertake rebuilding a new left, starting from scratch and on truly original bases.**

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1. The loss of parliamentary representation is the culmination of the failure of the Italian left, after the end of the old Italian Communist Party (PCI). Swept away was the illusion of being able to live on electoral annuities, without actual roots, without a project, with an old party model no longer able to maintain its position in the social body. We can't rule out the left regaining a part of their lost votes, in other electoral contests. But this would not cancel the defeat, the product of a heritage of votes without roots and without support in subaltern labour and in the society. A new left will rebuild itself first of all by sweeping away the old leadership groups, responsible for the defeat, but above all by starting to understand why, despite how obvious the problem to solve is, not only is nothing done to solve it, but it becomes more and more serious with every turn in Italian political life.

2. Rather than reconstruction, we think that nowadays one must speak of building an anticapitalist, class left on new bases. It has been impossible to put down roots because – in the context of globalisation and the disintegration of the 20th century workers' movement – the emphasis on the institutional prospects alone and the bureaucratic legacy have made all these efforts vain. Taking root in a society involves long-term, tedious and invisible work that does not necessarily pay off in the short term in electoral terms. For political layers, driven by personal demands for perks and power, the easiest route has remained holding on to positions of power in institutions and the processes needed to attain these, completely different from those needed to take root.

This is also why we are not interested in re-jigging worn-out leadership groups, deaf to reality. Nor in identity-based forms or opportunistic manoeuvres to gain a few seats in Parliament. We are interested in a “new beginning”, starting out from another history, freed of the lingering effects of 20th Century bureaucracy to have an impact on the present and regain the imagination and motivations needed to build another left.

3. A new class left will be anticapitalist or cannot be. Women, men and the planet can no longer bear up under the weight of the absolute rule of private interests, the drive towards re-armament and wars, the regressive hallucinations that this state of affairs is producing. In simple terms, this means opposing capitalism. In less simple terms, it means governing with capitalism's representatives or guardians is preventing the rebirth of a left that actually wants to transform the world. It is not merely a revolutionary perspective to suggest an adequate distance from governments. Even an authentic commitment to reforms must recognise that governing within the current relation of forces is no longer possible.

4. We propose to start anew from a eulogy to the opposition. Not because we have a minority vocation, but simply because the only way to react to this social system is evoking and organising political and social opposition through movements, struggles and diffuse self-organisation. The 20th century workers' movement won important victories in opposition. Nowadays it is possible to organise a diffuse resistance in the opposition and succeed in pulling off victories and winning rights to provide substance to an alternative hypothesis. For this reason it is not possible to govern with the PD on a national or local level, in the sense that it is not possible to govern with those who in the best case defend the existing state of affairs, have an administrative and authoritarian political outlook and thereby open the road for rightwing forces. The case of Rome speaks clearly of this.

5. The victory of Berlusconi and the Northern League completed the progressive rightwards shift in Italy and the

twenty-year long deterioration in already-deteriorated social forces. Berlusconi's "People of Freedom" party (PDL) will attempt to build a "serious and responsible" government right but also try to gain social roots, with its reference social block that has not abandoned its populist and reactionary nature, as Fini's behaviour has shown. At the same time it attempts to be useful for the Confindustria (Italian industrialists' confederation) that wants to launch a full-fledged attack on labour's achievements. It aims to start with the national contract. It will seek PD support against the contract, as the latter takes a similar stand. For this reason the attempt to stabilise the "bipartisanation" of Italian politics will go forward.

The response to this situation does not involve political alchemy, instead identifying a reference social block, elements to involve in a unitary framework of struggles and common alternative hypothesis. In this sense the refoundation of class-struggle unions – starting from a clear, strong opposition within the CGIL and a progressive unity in action of rank-and-file trade unionism – represents a decisive wedge. It is the main horizon for any new anticapitalist left project: unity among struggles and movements is indispensable today to resist the rightwing forces and make progress towards building a class-struggle left.

6. The new left cannot have a single identity. There are legacies of the past that are no longer sufficient to give meaning to political representation and that must encounter each other dialectically. We would posit an anticapitalist, ecologist, communist and feminist left, not to assemble a range of subjectivities haphazardly, but to find together a unitary frame of reference and a common work project. However, this multiple identity cannot simply be proclaimed. It must be practised: a feminist left is one that accepts women as protagonists and thus also their struggles.

An ecologist left means not accepting any compromises in terms of safeguarding the environment. A communist left means continuing to fight to break from the existing social system and building a real movement to abolish the existing state of affairs. It also means an internationalist left capable of building an international project based on theoretical and practical work in common. For this reason we look attentively at the European anticapitalist left experience.

7. Absolute democracy will be the decisive means of building a new beginning. We can no longer accept, or build, any left based on charismatic leaders, infallible leaderships, immobile bureaucracies, scandalous careerism, or institutional drifts. We want a left based on participation and democratic rules. Regular congresses and transparent statutes are not sufficient. It will require precise measures: rigorous rotation of responsibilities on all levels, pay levels patterned on average Italian salaries, gender parity, respect for sexual orientations and self-financed political activity. Instead of leaders and immobile leaderships, activist collectives will be needed on all levels: regional, topical and national.

8. The left will build itself in the living world of contradictions and social conflict, not in the halls of power or worse, in salons. It is a "hand to hand" work that must be built upon, made of mutual aid, social usefulness, and responsiveness to needs, organisation of struggles and victories. This means putting social roots that are not generic or abstract. These roots must grow from new realities and in particular the new proletariat, the new makeup of the contemporary working class, starting from migrants. It means discussions about forms of social self-organisation and the type of political insediamento subaltern classes can develop. It can't be achieved through bureaucratic, crystallised apparatus, but depends on the contribution of activists who refuse to give up. This is the task awaiting us. Radicality, above all class radicality, is the keyword to make left politics credible and participatory today.

9. Rebuilding the left also requires in-depth discussions. These must be rigorous and not ritualistic, about the society we want and major horizons. We posit a democratic, socialist society, self-governed, centred on needs and not private interests. It would be founded on social property of the major means of production, ecological, sexualised and liberating. This is not an abstract model from above but a movement that transforms reality that gains legitimacy and strength in the living heart of struggles and change. It means rethinking and building a political organisation that can

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work and struggle for this objective without seeing itself as the single holder of a presumed truth, without aping past experiences, without replicating power roles or relations. It means an organisation able to read reality and take part in transforming it. But we don't want to proclaim ourselves this subject, we want to actually build it. This is why we are a political movement. This does not mean giving up on organising ourselves or developing a collective project – building the Critical Left also means that.

10. A new left will be built in the here and now, in the urgency of a situation dominated by Berlusconi's regime and the Democratic Party's pragmatic adaptation. The priority is organising a social opposition, not merely in words but modelled on real needs. The issues for this opposition remain, in our view: the struggle against precarity, continuing to demand the abrogation of Law 30, the Treu package and the welfare package, the struggle for a 1300 â,- minimum salary and a 1000 â,- social salary, defence of the national contract. They include struggle against war and military missions, whether in Afghanistan or Lebanon, against military bases, starting with Vicenza, and military spending. They also include struggles for environmental defence in the regions against useless or harmful large-scale projects and privatisation; the defence of women's self-determination, of Law 194 for a moratorium on conscientious objections (to abortion and contraception); full freedom of sexual orientation through recognition of civil unions, the struggle against racism, security hysteria and the new anti-Roma xenophobia. This struggle must also aim for the abrogation of the Bossi-Fini and Turco-Napolitano laws, class unity between migrant and Italian workers, new citizenship rights, permanent resident status, closing the CPT s, and freedom of movement. This will also be the main testing ground for opposition to the rightwing forces, the terrain on which all political forces must measure themselves, and on which movements must quickly provide themselves adequate instruments for reflection and mobilisation.

11. Building the anticapitalist left requires a new political generation's commitment. This new generation bears no responsibility for the ruins. A new political generation does not necessarily mean the youth cult that figured in the last elections but must represent the most genuine expression of new social movements and struggles continuing to develop across Italy, from the "rebel citizens" in Vicenza and Val di Susa to workers resisting in bitter class struggles, neofeminists who want to live in freedom and not be bossed around, LGBTQ activists who refuse the second-class life the Vatican imposes on them, migrants fighting for new rights. A new political generation, which has grown up without models to copy but which does not resign itself to thinking that this is the best of all possible worlds and is prepared to fight so another world, another society can still be possible.

Critical Left National Coordination, 10 May 2008

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