

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4761>



Italy

For a united front saying No this autumn

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV502 - November 2016 -

Publication date: Tuesday 8 November 2016

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

This autumn's political and social battle with its various protagonists is becoming clearer

Squaring the circle

The Renzi [1] government has a serious problem – it has to square a circle. In other words it has to find the correct formula for a budget that:

- does not appear too much against working people;
- throws them some more or less fake crumbs;
- avoids a VAT increase which would have negative effects on the economic situation;
- but at the same time significantly reduces the taxes paid by business while gutting national labour contracts.

The political objective is absolutely clear – to win back support in order to win the referendum contest. [2]

Renzi has a difficult job. Even though the European Commission has been and continues to be ready to allow some margin of flexibility on its budgetary rules – permitting a budget deficit as a percentage of GDP above 2% - Renzi cannot extend this concession too much, as Juncker, EU Commission President, has reminded him recently. There has been no turn by the European governments – the fiscal compact remains the alpha and omega of their policy. They might accept some partial modifications if a very critical situation arose in Italy. Our country is a vital chain in this Union. In these manoeuvres among allies it is almost a positive thing for Renzi to be excluded from the Merkel/Hollande summit because it allows him to present himself as the 'alternative', someone who is â€˜criticising' austerity.

What is really happening is that government specialists are working to find additional resources by further cutting public spending, the health service and money sent to the Regions. As if the heavy cutbacks of the last ten years have not produced enough tragic consequences for people's daily lives – the biggest of which has been the ever nearing collapse of the public health system.

Money for the new and irresponsible war in Libya is however always ready and waiting.

The bosses and the trade union bureaucracies

The extent of the class battles and the degree of violence available to the capitalists and their system is shown by :

- the assassination of the Egyptian worker, Ahmed Eldanf, a member of the USB (rank and file trade union) at

Piacenza while on a picket;

– the continuing scourge of deaths from industrial accidents;

– the ludicrous affair of the Nola FCA workers of the SI Cobas current who have been sacked by Marchionne and up to now the local courts have only imposed the bosses' class justice. [3]

The autumn showdown would be a lot more difficult for the government and the Confindustria (the organisation of Italian bosses cf. CBI) if the biggest trade union organisations were inclined to do the job which they are supposed to – to organise and mobilise the working class in defence of their rights, jobs and working conditions. The bureaucracy's passivity and submission to the demands of the bosses and the government are a decisive prop for the ruling class.

This has been confirmed by the recent agreement between the CGIL, the CISL and the UIL **and** the Confindustria on restructuring and redundancies. The leaderships of the three unions, instead of opposing and trying to prevent such measures detrimental to the working people being implemented, are more concerned with managing them alongside the bosses so that they do not lead to big industrial and community struggles...!

As for the leadership of the FIOM, particularly since the agreement with Camusso, it also has not wanted to become a protagonist in direct industrial struggle, even though the Federmeccanica (cf. Engineering employers' organisation) wants to basically tear up the existing national contract. [4] Although of course Landini plays the 'left' protagonist in the TV studios. Then there are the public sector workers, who have had their salaries frozen for 6 years. The government is allocating ridiculously inadequate resources to this sector without any reaction from the trade unions in terms of mobilising their membership.

There is not going to much progress if we give up a resolute fight against austerity and refuse to reject the dogma and blackmail of the capitalist markets.

This is also why we insist on the need to closely link the democratic battle for a No vote in the referendum about the Boschi counter reform with industrial and other struggles.

It will be difficult to win the constitutional battle if we cannot launch a movement of workers and community struggles capable of building political hegemony in the country. It will be difficult to resist the projects the bourgeoisie are undertaking both before and after the vote.

We need a united and pluralist mobilisation

From the beginning of the summer we have been arguing the need for a united and pluralist mobilisation to say No in the referendum, to push back Renzi's budget and to defend jobs and contracts organised by all those affected: the referendum committees, the left forces, those trade unions willing to fight and the social movements.

Everyone can develop their own proposals but we must all take to the streets together without any sectarianism or arrogance. This is the only way to change the relationship of forces and build up a credible reference point not only for all workers but also for so many other citizens, facilitating the growth in consciousness and confidence in themselves as protagonists in the mobilisation.

For a united front saying No this autumn

There have been discussions in recent weeks between the rank and file trade unions and the class struggle political currents to prepare an autumn of struggle against the policies of the government and the bosses. It would include a general strike and a big national demonstration in Rome.

We know how difficult this will be given the relationship of forces so it is indispensable to work hard to develop a united way forward for all the participants.

We are a long way from achieving this objective, at the time of writing we have a general 8 hour strike set by the USB, Unicobas and the USI for the 21st October – with demands we would all share and a national demonstration for the 22nd October – the No Renzi day - promoted by a broad coalition of forces under the banner of the ‘Coordinating Committee for a social No to the Institutional Counter Reform’.

Sinistra Anticapitalista (the Anti-capitalist left) is part of this coalition, having striven to make it as open and broad as possible.

In the meantime the CUB and other rank and file trade union currents have set a date for a general strike of 8 hours on a different date, the 4th November on a very similar platform that we would support. So the problems are very clear.

As an organisation we have written and also said publicly that we will support all the strike actions and mobilisations but we cannot avoid pointing out a simple problem – it is very difficult today for workers to join a strike and also hard for trade union currents to develop the conditions for its success. If you are a worker who is convinced of the need to take action which day would you choose?

We sincerely believe that the workers of our country deserve another scenario and we do not believe every effort has been made to bring about some convergence among the rank and file trade unions. They seem to have given up on even the partial unity of action of recent years.

More than ever we need a unitary preparation of the strike with common mass meetings, unitary struggle committees in the workplaces – structures that are not set up to champion a particular trade union slate or policies but to develop a broad based dynamic which favours the involvement of many workers – including those who identify with the three big confederations, particularly the CGIL. In this way we can put the bureaucratic leaderships on the spot.

Perhaps working people deserve something better from the rank and file trade unions than the compulsion to repeat divisions. Why cannot we achieve the unity shown by the French trade unions in their struggles in the last few months?

Although we fear that the strike proposals will remain divided we would still ask the leaderships to make an effort to unblock the situation. We ask those activists who work in the different trade union to fight for a unitary approach. In this way the strikes become more credible and the relationship of forces in the workplaces could be modified. The stakes involved in the autumn battles are very high and we must believe in the possibility of helping working people to raise their heads and stand up to be counted.

[1] Matteo Renzi is an Italian politician who has been the Prime Minister of Italy since 22 February 2014 and Secretary of the Democratic Party since 15 December 2013. [Wikipedia](#).

For a united front saying No this autumn

[2] The 4 December referendum is a proposed constitutional reform which involves a two-thirds reduction in members of the Senate and a significant limiting of its legislative powers. It will no longer be able to hold votes of confidence in the government and its members will be not be elected but coopted. The Lower Chamber (Camera dei Deputati) will be able to pass laws more quickly with simplified voting procedures and without having to go through the Senate. Connected to this proposed reform is the recent electoral reform bill which gives the largest party – emerging after two rounds if necessary – a guaranteed bonus of a 55% of the MPs. Renzi is totally committed to the referendum, promising to retire from politics if he loses – he has in effect turned the referendum into a plebiscite on his leadership.

[3] They were ‘guilty’ of hanging an effigy of Marchionne, the hardline boss of Fiat, outside the factory gates. However since this was written the Naples appeal court has ordered that they should get their jobs back.

[4] Previously the ‘left’ leader of the FIOM, Landini, had refused to go along with an earlier agreement the three big unions had made with the government and the bosses that made it very difficult for minorities or oppositions inside trade unions to have any impact on negotiations. Now Landini appears to have swallowed these new rules, once he had himself marginalised or removed any internal opposition cadres in his metalworkers union.