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Covid-19 pandemic in Italy

Phase 2 and first mobilizations

- IV Online magazine - 2020 - IV545 - June 2020 -

Publication date: Friday 5 June 2020

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While restaurants, bars and pizzerias reopen, and the Confindustria employers' organization and the leaders of the FCA (formerly Fiat) claim, even more cynically than usual and despite the harshness of the times, the right to reap profits counted in billions and tax gifts, a new wind - even if it is a light one - seems to be blowing among the workers.

It has often been said that this global health and economic crisis has brought to light all the structural problems that the societies of advanced capitalism have already encountered in recent years: drastic restructuring of the public sectors, with a sharp decline in resources (beds, jobs, care quality and so on), increased precariousness of working conditions and also rights, tightening of security and immigration laws. It is precisely on these themes - and in these first days of "reopening" of the country - that the will to fight of some of the sectors most affected, even symbolically, by the crisis caused by the coronavirus, seems to have been awakened.

Mobilization of agricultural workers

The first of these sectors, the most clandestine and the most desperate, is that of the agricultural labour force of the South, where thousands of men and women from outside the EU work in inhuman conditions, underpaid and at constant risk of being expelled from Italy, especially after Salvini's immigration decrees (which the current government has never thought of withdrawing or modifying). In these months of Covid-19, it has become clear that Italian agriculture, intensive and industrialized, was only maintained thanks to these exploited workers and that without them the situation would become very problematic.

The government, to solve the problem, issued a decree which in reality does not solve anything, and agricultural workers went on strike on 21 May demanding, among other things, the final regularization of their presence in Italy and wages reflecting this. In Foggia (one of the most important agricultural centres of the South), they mobilized against the "temporary" regularization desired by the government, for the recognition in full of their rights and dignity. Simultaneously, in around twenty other cities (including Turin, Brescia, Cremona, Piacenza, Rimini, Livorno, Rome, Caserta, Reggio Calabria), rallies were held during which crates of vegetables were placed in front of the prefectures, as symbols of invisible work.

Mobilised health and education

A few days later, the health workers took to the streets and decided on a day of national struggle for 27 May: despite the media chatter about the "heroes" of the coronavirus, all the problems of the Italian public health service are still there and the government - after the rhetoric and the promises of a few weeks ago - has no intention of changing its policies of cuts in spending nor creating the large number of jobs needed.

And on Saturday, 23 May, in almost twenty cities, teachers, families and students moved into action, at the initiative of the "Priority to School" platform. A day which, although reduced by the newspapers to a mobilization to reopen schools "in complete safety" in September and against distance education, was in reality around much broader demands: from the immediate regularization of the precarious to the quality of public education, which has been hit for years by budgetary restrictions, disguised privatizations, precarious work and low wages. In short, we are starting to settle accounts.

Phase 2 and first mobilizations

Although mobilizing "for real", after all that has happened and after the bans, is not easy, these first struggles were quite significant and had a considerable media response. But another fact is worth pointing to: these are mobilizations called by rank and file trade union organizations, Cobas and USB, with the participation of the most critical sectors of the CGIL federation. The big union confederations are absent from them.

27 May 2020

PS:

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