

Italian ex-leftists and the new austerity measures

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Less than a month after the passage of a €79 billion measure that will destroy historic gains of the Italian working class, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, urged on by the European Central Bank, has devised an additional so-called *manovra* that adds €45.5 billion worth of cuts and regressive taxes. These will disproportionately hurt working class families and contribute to creating intolerable living conditions for wide layers of the population.

According to *Il Corriere della Sera*, the total of the cuts and new taxes for the next three years amounts to a whopping €195 billion. This is an approximate and conservative estimate, which doesn't take into account the final impact of the measure on the public balance sheet, let alone a subsequent measure currently under discussion that further extends the retirement age.

Despite the gargantuan size of the package, Nomura International economists, for example, assert that “the plan is not ambitious enough given the scale of Italy's structural challenges.” They anticipate that credit-rating agencies Moody's and Standard & Poor's will find this “further grounds to downgrade” the nation's credit rating in September. Suffice it to say, the *manovra* is not likely to be the last of its kind.

Berlusconi's new measure is a frontal attack on public sector workers. In addition to direct budget cuts to the tune of an additional €17 billion, a total of 54,000 jobs will be eliminated in central administration, while 87,000 jobs are to be lost at the local government level (regions, provinces and municipalities). All levels of government will step up the privatization of public services.

The attack on the rights of older workers will continue. The retirement age for women, for example, will be increased to 65 starting in 2016, to be fully implemented by 2027. Deeper attacks are being discussed.

Public employees in many cases will lose year-end bonuses, such as the traditional *tredicesima* (a bonus of a month's pay), and can be geographically transferred with ease. The indemnity paid at the time of retirement will be delayed up to two years. A series of changes in labor relations will increase workers' insecurity and vulnerability, leading to more temporary and contingent employment.

A plethora of regressive taxes, from those on cigarette sales

to fuel and games, is aimed at penalizing the working population, while other taxes imposed on energy companies will translate into rising utility costs.

The political establishment, from right to “left,” agrees and insists on a “balanced budget.” In particular, the response of the Pabloites in Sinistra Critica (Critical Left—SC) is worth considering. This unprincipled group is affiliated with the United Secretariat, which split from the Trotskyist movement under the leadership of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel in 1953.

In their statement, the Italian Pabloites complain that: “The government's decision to anticipate the *manovra*, responding to the diktat of the ECB [European Central Bank] and world markets, exposes last month's hypocrisy and litanies.” For them, “capitalism can no longer guarantee welfare and a dignified future.”

The rhetoric employed by SC has a specific purpose: to conceal their support for the cuts.

Sinistra Critica was born in 2005 as a tendency inside and, later, a splinter from Rifondazione Comunista [Communist Refoundation], which in turn is a political permutation of the Stalinist Communist Party, whose record of betrayal in the postwar period goes a long way toward explaining the current predicament of the Italian working class.

Like its ally in France, the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), Sinistra Critica is a party of bourgeois order, oriented toward the nationalist center-left. Its leaders Franco Turigliatto, Salvatore Cannavò and Luigi Malabarba all have long and deplorable histories in the Pabloite movement and were elected officials during the Prodi government of 2006-08, providing crucial support and “left” credibility to the imperialist and anti-working class policies of that administration.

In 2007, Sinistra Critica was operating inside Rifondazione, one of nine parties supporting the Prodi II government. The latter's right-wing policies were opposed by a large portion of the Italian population.

The SC's Turigliatto, a senator at the time, played an especially foul role. At the end of February 2007, he voted against Prodi's foreign policy, but a week later he helped secure the victory of a confidence motion that allowed the government to survive temporarily.

That vote specifically approved Prodi's 12-point ultimatum, which included, among other items, unconditional approval for his imperialist policies in Afghanistan and Lebanon, the "reform" of the pension system and the building of the TAV, a high-speed railway that faced broad opposition in the working class.

This is SC's modus operandi. It preaches a diffuse and safe "leftism," including criticism of the official bourgeois left, while it works might and main to make sure that workers do not act independently of the Stalinist, social democratic and union bureaucracies.

When, last month, Berlusconi reached out to the so-called "social partners" (trade unions, big business and bankers), the unions provided the necessary support needed to implement these measures (see: "Italy prepares new cuts after stock market panic"). SC is fully aware of this. Similar to the role they played inside the Prodi government, the Pabloites' conscious undertaking is to encourage illusions in the ability of the unions to oppose the austerity measures and other attacks.

This is why SC dishonestly declares that "unsettling signals are coming from the trade unions," as they subordinate themselves to Confindustria [the employers' federation] and "national responsibility." The Pabloites rhetorically ask, "How will the CGIL [Stalinist-influenced Italian General Confederation of Labour] be able to justify its opposition" to the "will of the markets"?

The answer is quite simple: there is no opposition to this "will," not from the unions, or from SC. The unions unconditionally accept capitalist relations and function as the vehicle for subordinating workers' interests to the needs of capital. Any organization, such as SC, which presents the unions as opposed to free market policies is explicitly seeking to deceive workers.

That is precisely what SC is doing by supporting the "Dobbiamo fermarli" ("We must stop them") initiative, a stunt organized by the unions, especially the CGIL, to give themselves a little credibility and disorient workers.

This phony operation, including the organization of a demonstration October 15, is intended to allow the government time to begin the full implementation of all its measures and demoralize the population.

Turigliatto's political partner Salvatore Cannavò is a leading member of the Pabloite Unified Secretariat. During the Prodi government, Cannavò was a member of the Chamber of Deputies. He also supported Prodi and then left Rifondazione—which he had belonged to from its founding in 1991—with Turigliatto to create Sinistra Critica, after the former party had been thoroughly discredited.

Cannavò's writings exhibit a diverse variety of political opportunism. Spontaneism is glorified; the international working class is nonexistent. What exists for this veteran political operative is the bourgeois political establishment and the opportunity to navigate it through ill-conceived alliances

with parties of the so-called "left" and center-left.

In a recent column titled "Municipal elections: Berlusconi's defeat," he celebrates the "defeat for the right" and the gains of the center-left, which he characterizes not as the enemy of workers but as an "alternative to the right" that "has regained a little credibility."

Cannavò is preparing the way for a new coalition with the same bourgeois forces he allied with in the 2006 government. He is prepared to go as far to the right as his bourgeois "left" partners will go. In the case of the Democratic Party (PD), one of the descendants of the former Communist Party, this would include allying with Gianfranco Fini's neo-fascists (see: "Government crisis in Italy: Democrat leader supports the post-fascist Fini")

Another leading figure in SC, Luigi Malabarba, also deserves attention. Malabarba is a worker at Alfa Romeo. He has a long history as an official of the FIOM-CGIL metalworkers' union, as well as SinCobas (Intersectoral Union of Rank-and-File Committees, now USB [Rank and File Union], a nationalist organization). Like that of Turigliatto and Cannavò, Malabarba's political development has been shaped by Pabloism and its most prominent Italian personality, the arch-opportunist Livio Maitan.

A senator during both the Berlusconi II and III governments (2001-06), as well as part of the Prodi II government until October 2006, Malabarba was a member of the Congress Control Committee of Secret Services.

The ex-Stalinist and former Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema best characterized this state agency when he took the post of president of the Committee in 2010: "I intend to work in the spirit that has guided the Committee so far: institutional collaboration and sense of the State." The role of this congressional body is precisely to cover for the crimes of the Italian state.

This ex-left element remains true to its heritage of class collaboration and defense of national interests by supporting the capitalist state and the trade unions. Their role in the present situation in Italy is to encourage the dead-end policy of isolated, one-day strikes and protest politics, ensuring defeat after defeat.

The struggle against the cuts and austerity measures begins precisely with a break with and a struggle against the trade unions and ex-left parties such as Sinistra Critica, whose sole purpose is to ensure the subordination of workers to the needs of big business and the increasing attacks by the state.



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