

Italy's "Forconi" movement

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The Forconi ("Pitchfork") movement has been making headlines in Italy for the past two weeks. On Monday, December 9, the movement called for action across the country, in the course of which town halls were surrounded, roadways blocked and train stations occupied in Milan, Turin, Venice, Bari and in Palermo in southern Italy. There were repeated clashes with police.

The protests were directed against the government led by Enrico Letta and its austerity policies, corrupt politicians, the finance ministry, rising fuel prices, the banks, the euro and the European Union (EU). They generally took place with a sea of red, white and green flags and the singing of the national anthem. The main slogan, aimed at politicians, was "Sack all of them!"

The main source of support for the movement came from agricultural workers, traders, long-distance drivers and small businessmen. For several days, the unemployed, pensioners, workers employed under precarious conditions, students and workers also followed the movement's call for a "rebellion." The leadership of the movement is not unified, but it is dominated by right-wing forces.

The Forconi was founded two years ago in Sicily to represent the regional interests of small businessmen and farmers in the south. They went as far as to call for the establishment of a Sicilian currency and the use of the label "made in Sicily" to protect domestic produce.

Their leader, Mariano Ferro, an agricultural businessman from Avola (Syracuse) was formerly a member of the MPA (Movement for Autonomy), a party which supported Sicilian autonomy. The MPA's programme is comparable with the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), with whom they have run joint election campaigns, with the exception that the MPA calls for Sicilian autonomy, rather than independence for the north of Italy.

The MPA is a split-off from the Christian democratic UDC. It was founded in 2005 by Raffaele Lombardo, Sicily's regional president, who had to resign his post last year due to mafia ties. The MPA, as well as its predecessor UDC, which also counted Ferro among its members, ensured a stable majority in Sicily for years for Silvio Berlusconi. Berlusconi's decline has been accompanied by the rise of

the Forconi.

Recently the Forconi has concluded alliances with associations for haulage workers, long-distance drivers, construction companies and milk producers, who mostly came from the periphery of the Liga Nord. They formed a "December 9" committee, which other groups joined, including anti-globalisation organisations, environmental protection initiatives and citizens' associations.

On 4 December, lorry drivers blockaded the Brenner pass to prevent the import of goods from the rest of Europe to Italy. They called their protest "Christmas struggle, make your decision to support Italy!" and demanded more respect for "Made in Italy." The protests across the country then began on December 9.

Various people have emerged as leaders of the "December 9" movement. Alongside Ferro in the south, the other main figures are Danilo Calvani in the Rome region and Andrea Zunino in Turin.

Calvani is a vegetable farmer from the Latium region, where he leads a farmers' association. He told the newspaper *Il Messaggero* that he had voted for the Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party of Bettino Craxi, then later Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the Greens or no one at all. Although he disputed the many reports that he had called for a military dictatorship, he confirmed that he "only supports the forces of law and order."

Calvani called for a "march on Rome" on December 18, a clear reference to Mussolini's takeover of power in October 1922. Ferro and other Forconi representatives distanced themselves from this rally, which ended up only attracting 3,000 people instead of the "thousands and thousands" which Calvani had announced.

Zunino, a farmer from northern Italy, has made headlines with anti-Semitic statements. On broadcaster Radio-tre, he justified his call for the resignation of the government with the words, "We are striving for the sovereignty of Italy, which is today a slave of banks like Rothschild. Isn't it odd that the richest five or six people in the world are Jews?"

In other interviews, Zunino showed his mystical and esoteric inclinations. He said he had converted to Islam in order to practice Sufism and was now a master of controlled

breathing.

Openly fascist tendencies have also joined in the movement. Roberto Fiore appeared under the banner of the “pitchforks.” The leader of the right-wing extremist Forza Nuova was convicted of terrorism in the 1980s and now sits in the European parliament.

Last Saturday, members of the extreme right-wing youth organisation Casa Pound, dressed in green, white and red-striped Guy Fawkes masks, blockaded the EU headquarters in Rome. They climbed onto the balcony with a ladder to tear down the European flag. The group’s secretary, Simone di Stefano, was consequently sentenced to three months imprisonment.

Beppe Grillo, the leader of the Five Star Movement (M5S), supported the protests. He called them legitimate and justified, because they took place in a period when politics and its institutions had lost all legitimacy. The December 9 protests were, according to Grillo, “The beginning of a fire or the heralding of future revolts which could become uncontrollable.”

With similar slogans (“Sack them all!”), Grillo won 25 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections in February, but recently has lost influence. He is now hoping for a revival.

Grillo directed an “open letter to the forces of law and order.” He called upon them not to protect politicians anymore, “to take off your helmets and fraternise with your fellow citizens.” At the same time, Grillo rejected an offer of cooperation from the new Democratic Party leader, Matteo Renzi.

Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia also solidarised itself with the protesters and offered them advice and support. Matteo Salvani from the Liga Nord gave his backing to the protests, welcoming in particular the Brenner pass blockade.

The protests have been caused by the spending cuts, tax rises and social attacks imposed by the governments of Romano Prodi, Silvio Berlusconi, Mario Monti and Enrico Letta over many years. They have not only affected workers and driven youth unemployment to record levels, but also ruined small businessmen, the self-employed and farmers.

It is the responsibility of the successor organisations to the Communist Party, the trade unions and their pseudo-left defenders that the rebellion of these layers is dominated by explicitly right-wing forces, which can even attract some workers and young people.

Since the Christian Democratic Party collapsed 20 years ago, the Democratic Party has repeatedly supported or led governments which have destroyed the social gains won by the working class. Even the multi-billionaire Berlusconi, with his connections to the criminal milieu, could portray himself as the more “socially concerned” politician under

these conditions.

As a consequence, right-wing and extreme right forces are in a position to lead the protests of layers of the middle class. This is even more the case since representatives of the government and the pseudo-left have denounced the protests.

Nichi Vendola, a co-founder of Rifondazione Comunista and today leader of Sinistra, Ecologia, Liberta (Freedom, Ecology, Liberty—SEL), stated that the protests were an acute danger for democracy. SEL deputy Laura Bolgrini, chairwoman of parliament, agreed with interior minister Angelino Alfano (New Centre Right), who warned of “a spiral of violence” and urged politicians “not to pour more fuel on the fire.”

The newly elected mayor of Rome, Ignazio Marino of the Democrats, used Forconi’s call for a protest in the capital to organise a commando-style police operation. He put 2,000 police on stand-by and closed the city to all lorries in the morning apart from those transporting fresh goods.

The Letta government is in the process of preparing a new stability law, which will be connected with massive spending cuts.

An independent offensive by the working class against the austerity policies of the government and the European Union would drastically alter the political situation in Italy. It would win support among many of the self-employed and farmers, whose anger is currently being manipulated by right-wing forces and channeled in nationalist and racist directions.

However, a precondition for such a movement of the working class is a complete political break from the trade unions and pseudo-left organisations, which support the Letta government. What is missing in Italy is a revolutionary party in the working class to give the growing opposition a clear socialist and internationalist orientation.

Such a party can only be a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which unites Italian workers with their colleagues in Greece, Spain, throughout Europe and across the world. Only in this way can an effective struggle be led against the EU, which must have as its goal the United Socialist States of Europe.



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