

Italian local elections see defeat of Renzi's Democratic Party

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The Democratic Party (PD) of Matteo Renzi suffered a damaging defeat in the second round of the Italian local elections on Sunday, June 25. An electoral alliance of Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Forward Italy), Matteo Salvini's Lega Nord (Northern League) and the fascists of the Fratelli d'Italia (Italian Brothers) profited from Renzi's setback.

Turnout was extremely low, reaching only 46 percent in the second round, with not even one in two voters going to the polls. The election result is a huge vote of no confidence in the governing Democratic Party and the entire so-called centre-left camp.

The term "centre-left," which is found everywhere in the media, has long since lost all political meaning. In the past 25 years, it was primarily the successor organisations of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) that carried out the attacks on the working class, most recently with Renzi's so-called Jobs Act. They have moved further and further to the right. The PD is the result of this process.

In total, more than a thousand cities and municipalities participated in the two election rounds. A run-off election took place on Sunday in 111 municipalities. The local elections are the last important test before national parliamentary elections, which must take place no later than May 2018.

In the 25 regional capitals and large cities where elections were held this year, the government camp lost 9 out of 15 cities to right-wing parties. These include Genoa, La Spezia, Pistoia, Como, L'Aquila, Asti and Rieti. In Rome, Turin, Milan and Naples, elections were held last year.

In the port city of Genoa, where the mayor's office was traditionally held by the PCI, the Socialist Party and, most recently, the PD, the non-party manager Marco Bucci won, standing on the list of the Lega

Nord. The same was true of La Spezia, a town traditionally regarded as "left-wing." Here, a former functionary of the Christian Democratic trade union federation CISL won, also with the support of the Lega Nord.

In the Milanese suburb of Sesto San Giovanni, a traditional industrial and working class city, the 39-year-old journalist Roberto di Stefano won. For the first time since 1945, i.e., for 72 years, a candidate supported by an alliance of right-wing parties has become mayor.

The election results evince a veritable collapse of the government camp. Dissatisfaction with the PD government and the numerous supposedly "left-wing" mayors has reached a huge scale. The country is a social powder keg. Millions of Italians stayed away from the polls on the 11th and again on the 25th of June because they no longer see the possibility of influencing political developments via the ballot box.

This is especially true for the younger generation. Young people increasingly reject all parties equally. This was shown by a survey of 2,000 young people aged 20-34 years. When asked which party they preferred, 34.6 percent answered, "None at all." The "Generation What" survey by the European Broadcasting Agency (EBU) found that 65 percent of 18-34-year-olds were prepared to participate in a major uprising. Italy came second (67 percent), after Greece.

Five years ago, Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) benefited from the general dissatisfaction. Hurling loud insults against the "corruption of the politicians," Grillo appeared as a kind of popular tribune against the establishment parties. In reality, he sought to incite angry layers of the petty-bourgeoisie against foreigners by means of a nationalist policy.

Just a year ago, the Five Star Movement captured the cities of Rome and Turin. In the event, this sealed the

fate of M5S, after Rome Mayor Virginia Raggi became embroiled in corruption and was accused of links to the Mafia.

As a result, Beppe Grillo's candidates for the first time suffered enormous losses in the municipal elections. M5S was able to win only a few municipalities in the first round. Of a total of 158 municipalities with over 15,000 inhabitants, M5S now holds the mayor's office in only 8. In Parma, the city of its first great victory five years ago, Federico Pizzarotti, following his expulsion from M5S, won the election against Grillo.

It was above all the Lega Nord, Forza Italia and the fascists who were able to benefit from the poor results for the M5S, especially as they relied on largely unknown, non-partisan candidates in many places.

But the most important feature of these elections is the crisis of Matteo Renzi's governing party. The overwhelming dissatisfaction with the right-wing policies of the PD was already expressed on December 4, 2016 in the defeat of Renzi's constitutional referendum. As a result, Renzi had to resign. In the spring, his party broke into several parts when a wing of former PCI officials split off and founded the Movement of Democrats and Progressives (DP).

Since then, Renzi's successor, Paolo Gentiloni, has continued the right-wing course in the interest of the banks and corporations. This was demonstrated by the bankruptcy of national airline Alitalia, the imposition of Renzi's Jobs Act and the recent bank rescue.

The same Sunday on which the runoff election took place, the Gentiloni government tabled an emergency decree providing support for the ailing banks. Once again, the state has intervened to save the banks at the expense of the population. It is paying over €5 billion to the Intesa Sanpaolo bank, which is to take over the "healthy" parts of the Veneto Banca and Banca Popolare di Vicenza. A "bad bank," which will take over the bad loans, is being secured by a further €12 billion in taxpayers' money. Six hundred bank branches will be closed and 4,000 jobs destroyed.

The interchangeability of the establishment parties also manifested itself in the alliance of the four largest parties, recently agreed by the old and new PD party chairman Renzi. Together with Silvio Berlusconi, Matteo Salvini and Beppe Grillo, he agreed to a new electoral law and early elections. However, the election

reform, which was supposed to raise the hurdle for election into parliament from 3 to 5 percent, failed shortly before the vote in the House of Representatives.

A section of the Italian and European bourgeoisie would rather do without elections altogether and carry through planned cost-cutting measures against the working class in silence. Italy's debt is almost €2.3 trillion, or 133 percent of gross domestic product, the second highest debt rate in Europe after Greece. The European Union is demanding that Rome impose cuts of up to €30 billion in government spending.

The working class is willing to fight against these attacks. Strikes against job cuts, privatisation and wage dumping are increasing. For example, a national 24-hour strike of railway workers, bus drivers, airport workers and transport drivers took place between the two polls.

But the perspective of the so-called rank-and-file trade unions that lead most strikes is just as nationalist and bankrupt as that of the mainstream CGIL, CISL and UIL trade unions. Like Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation), Sinistra Italiana (Italian Left) and other pseudo-left parties, they also advocate a "new political project" within the framework of capitalism, essentially based on the model of Syriza in Greece.



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