

Italy's "Black Wave" of neo-fascist attacks

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Around 10,000 demonstrators protested last Saturday in the northern Italian city of Como against the "Black Wave", the increase in neo-fascist attacks throughout the country.

The motive for the demonstration was an attack by the "Veneto Fronte Skinheads" on the meeting room of a refugee relief organization in Como, which was captured on video. It shows 15 neo-Nazis in black bomber jackets, standing around the support workers with their legs wide apart and arms crossed while their leader reads a proclamation. The confused text about "turbo-capitalism", globalization and the immigration of foreign peoples ends with the words, "One loves one's own people, one does not destroy it". Then the leader calls out, "Now you can continue discussing how you are ruining our country".

The newspaper *La Repubblica* placed the video on its web site, and it then spread rapidly throughout the country. This is just one of many incidents in which fascist gangs are terrorizing refugee workers, left-wing groups or even members of the press.

In northern Italy, such intimidation takes place on a regular basis. In Como, it is directed against the local organization "Como without borders", and also the charity Caritas, Save the Children and other humanitarian organizations. The "Veneto Fronte Skinheads" are the most active in this regard. The group, which advocates an ethnically and culturally homogeneous society, is recruited mainly from the *Ultras* (hard core fans) among the followers of the football teams of Milan and Verona.

But other fascist groups are also active. For example, on December 6, the editors of *Repubblica* received a visit from Forza Nuova. Ten masked, black-clad supporters of the right-wing extremist group screamed slogans in front of the editorial office building, firing off flares and firecrackers at passing journalists and unrolling a banner calling for a boycott of the

newspaper. This was "only the first act" of a systematic and militant boycott of supporters of immigration, the group said on Facebook. Forza Nuova is a far-right party, with which Alessandra Mussolini, the granddaughter of the dictator, was involved for a time.

On November 9 in Ostia, a member of the local mafia clan broke the nose of a reporter from state television RAI on camera when asked about support for the CasaPound neo-fascist organization. CasaPound won nine percent of the vote in the local seaside resort just outside Rome with the help of the mafia. Three mafia clans control drug trafficking, beach operations, and social housing in completely neglected tenements for the homeless constructed in the 1970s by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) administration. One mafia boss had openly called for the election of fascists.

The brutal actions of the right-wing extremists evoke memories of the beginnings of Mussolini's fascist movement one hundred years ago. At the end of the First World War, small, armed gangs of 20 or 30 Blackshirts spread terror and attacked workers' rallies and demonstrations, where "they managed to disrupt the disorderly gatherings of tens of thousands without much effort," as Ignazio Silone writes in his book *Fascism*.

Today this right-wing pack dares to act so openly and outrageously because it senses a tailwind from official politics. It is now seen as possible that a right-wing alliance of Forza Italia, the racist Lega Nord and the fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Italian Brothers) will win the parliamentary elections in March. It had its first successes in municipal elections in June and the Sicilian regional election on 5 November.

Silvio Berlusconi, who is pulling the strings in the background, is experiencing a political comeback, even though the billionaire media entrepreneur and four-time former head of government is now over eighty years old and cannot take political office until 2019 because

he is convicted of tax fraud, accounting fraud and judicial corruption.

The members of the alliance all refuse to condemn the neo-fascist terror. Forza Italia has not even commented. The head of the Lega Nord, Matteo Salvini, said he does not understand the excitement “over a few guys” reading a tract. The problem of Italy was not fascism, but immigration without control, he said. Although the Fratelli d’Italia disapproved of the intimidation, they stressed that the men had not used force, as left-wing extremists did.

The rise of the right and neo-fascists can only be understood against the background of the policies of the centre-left parties and their pseudo-left appendages. Since 1991, when the traditional Italian party system sank into a huge corruption scandal, so-called centre-left governments were responsible for the attacks on the working class. While Berlusconi and his followers lined their pockets using public funds and formed pacts with ultra-right and criminal elements, they restructured the state finances at the expense of social spending and in meeting the requirements of the European Union and NATO.

Whenever the various centre-left governments faced a crisis, they could always rely on the support of Rifondazione Comunista and other pseudo-left organizations. This has completely discredited them all. Since voters rejected Matteo Renzi’s constitutional referendum a year ago, the democratic and pseudo-left camp has broken apart into ever-changing parties. It now faces a crushing defeat in the coming election.

For a while, comedian Beppe Grillo’s Five Star protest movement had been able to fill the vacuum left by the Democratic Party (PD) and its allies. But as the right-wing, bourgeois character of this movement became clear, it stopped growing and has now long since passed its zenith.

The Five Star Movement now also agitates against refugees, but does this more ambiguously than the right wing. For example, it rejected supporting the demonstration in Como because it agreed with the spirit of the action, but was against the “political instrumentalization” of the incident.

The PD and pseudo-left parties, who through their anti-working-class policies had paved the way for the fascists, used the demonstration in Como to cover their tracks and close ranks under the banner of “anti-

fascism”.

The Democratic Party had called for the demonstration, with party leader Renzi coming in person and talking about it being a “wonderful day”. At Renzi’s side, other PD figures, trade union representatives, Rifondazione Comunista, Sinistra Italiana, and the recently formed Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal Party) marched under red, green, and rainbow colours. They swore allegiance to the Italian constitution, warned that “democracy is in danger” and called for a stop to the “Black Wave”.

These words are hollow and empty. In reality, it is precisely the PD that bears the greatest responsibility for the revival of fascist tendencies. Its predecessor, the Stalinist PCI, had prevented a settling of scores with Mussolini fascism at the end of the Second World War. In 1946, PCI chief Palmiro Togliatti, as Minister of Justice, signed a general amnesty for convicted fascists.

Over the last five years, PD leaders Enrico Letta, Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni have organized the worst social cutbacks. With the “Jobs Act”, pension and school “reforms” and other laws, they have destroyed the livelihoods of the working class.

Leading trade union figures like Guglielmo Epifani and Susanna Camusso are closely linked to the PD. For years, they have ensured that all the struggles of the working class have been paralyzed and sold out. At the same time, PD politicians such as Marco Minniti (Interior Minister), Roberta Pinotti (Defence) and Federica Mogherini (EU foreign policy chief) have sealed off the Mediterranean against refugees and upgraded the Italian military for new wars in Africa.

Resistance to the “Black Wave”, like the fight against war, unemployment and social cuts, requires the development of an independent movement of the working class based on an international socialist programme.



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