

Twenty thousand demonstrate against fascist rampage in Macerata, Italy

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Some 20,000 protesters, many of them young people, took part in an anti-fascist march through Macerata, Italy on Saturday afternoon. One week earlier, on February 3, a local fascist, Luca Traini, had wounded six residents in a racist shooting.

Demonstrations against fascism were also held in Bologna, Milan, Piacenza and other cities. Young people from all over Italy, however, insisted on traveling to Macerata to demonstrate their solidarity with those affected and their readiness to fight against the resurgence of the fascist threat. On Thursday, the ruling Democratic Party (PD) officially cancelled the demonstration.

One banner read: “Jennifer, Mahamadou, Gideon, Wilson, Festus, Omar”—these are the names of the six hit by the indiscriminate shooting on dark-skinned people the week before. The site of the opening rally, a small park, was quickly overcrowded, and a happy, relaxed mood spread as the demonstration promised to be a success. Many sang and chanted slogans against fascism and war.

Asked by a reporter what they thought about the absence of PD politicians, one participant replied, “That surprised me too.” One woman said, “There is no longer any difference between the left and the right”, and another, “We are also fighting for our right to demonstrate.”

On Thursday, Interior Minister Marco Minniti (PD) tried to ban the demonstration. He was supported by PD leader Matteo Renzi, who called on “all sides” to “moderate the tone”. Beforehand, Macerata Mayor Romano Carancini, who also belongs to the PD, warned of violent conflicts and advised against any rally.

Carancini based this warning on the brazen appearance of fascist organisations such as Forza

Nuova and CasaPound, who had also called for demonstrations. The leader of Forza Nuova, Roberto Fiore, had publicly expressed his solidarity with the assassin Luca Traini and called for donations for his legal fees, and on Thursday night, about 30 fascists paraded loudly and virtually unmolested through Macerata.

All the organisations under whose name the demonstration and rally had been originally announced, including the National Association of Italian Partisans (Anpi) and the Cgil union, quickly caved in. They cancelled the demonstration. The electoral alliance “Free and Equal” (LeU, Liberi e Uguali), which claims to be to the left of the PD, did the same.

LeU’s lead candidate, Pietro Grasso, spoke on Thursday during a visit to Macerata and supported the decision to cancel the demonstration. Grasso said he accepted the decision of the mayor. Sententiously, he declared that the “values of the constitution” were inviolable and that one should not equate fascist and anti-fascist rallies, but added, “The decision whether or not to demonstrate must be made by those responsible for security.”

All this meant more and more pro-refugee campaigns, solidarity groups, NGOs and even individual Macerata residents declared publicly that they would take to the streets on Saturday as planned, to defend immigrants against fascism and racism.

On Saturday, the mayor closed schools and the university and stopped public transport at 1:30 p.m. He positioned an intimidating police force in the city centre. Many frightened shopkeepers shut their shops and locked their doors and shop windows.

The demonstration, however, was a success. It passed peacefully and made clear that there is a deep gulf between the majority of the Italian population and the

party bigwigs. It showed that a large part of the youth and working class disagree with xenophobic programmes and right-wing government policies.

The campaigns of all the parties for the March 4 parliamentary election are largely marked by nationalism and xenophobia, an atmosphere that favours right-wing and fascist forces. The Lega, Forza Italia and the Five Star Movement seek to outstrip each other's anti-immigrant demands, while the PD government is readying troops for North Africa and making common cause with the Libyan Coast Guard against migrants. The political elite has created a climate in which for weeks there has been a "black wave" of right-wing extremist attacks.

Resistance to this is now growing, but it finds no expression in the existing party spectrum. The electoral alliances to the "left" of the PD also offer no alternative. Rather, they have sprung up to capture any independent movement in the working class and divert it back into the old channels of bourgeois politics.

This applies in particular to the LeU electoral alliance and its lead candidate, Pietro Grasso. This alliance consists mainly of politicians who came from the Italian Communist Party, which was dissolved in 1991. Most of them have already held responsible positions in government, state or the trade unions. These include veteran party cadres such as Massimo D'Alema, Pier Luigi Bersani and Guglielmo Epifani. Bersani was for years chairman of the Partito Democratico (PD), Epifani was head of the Cgil union, and D'Alema was even prime minister and foreign minister under Romano Prodi.

In the current election campaign, they are focusing their fire on the person of Matteo Renzi, who marginalised them when he took over the leadership of the PD and the government four years ago. Renzi comes from the Christian Democrat faction "Margherita," with which the Left Democrats (DS) merged in October 2007 to become the Democratic Party (PD). Since then, this wing has increasingly determined the party line.

In December 2016, when Renzi's defeat in the constitutional referendum revealed the dwindling influence of the PD, some old Stalinists concluded that it was necessary to found a party outside the PD to shore up bourgeois rule. On this basis, the Democratic and Progressive Movement (MDP), a PD split-off, and

"*Possibile*" joined together with the Italian Left (Sinistra Italiana, SI) to form LeU in December 2017. As the LeU leaders have stated several times, they would tolerate a PD government as long as it was without Renzi.

Lead candidate Pietro Grasso is a former Senate president and anti-Mafia prosecutor. He continually makes it abundantly clear that he sees the political situation through the eyes of a public prosecutor, subordinates everything to the state, and accords it the power to immediately prohibit any independently developing movement. This was also evidenced by his call to cancel the demonstration in Macerata.

The right-wing and fascist forces are closely linked to the Italian state. The police and military often sympathise with the fascists, while at the same time hunting down undocumented immigrants and socialists and sealing the borders against people fleeing imperialist wars.



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