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## *Tens of thousands protest in Rome against fascist anti-vaccine riot*

Tens of thousands of people took part in a protest in Rome last Saturday to oppose the fascist riot last week that saw the attempted invasion of parliament and the trashing of a national trade union office by bands of far-right thugs.

The trade unions, which called Saturday's protest, estimated that 100,000 people protested in Rome in opposition to the far right. Other estimates put the number at 50,000 to 60,000. Demonstrators carried signs including, "We stopped talking with fascists on April 25, 1945," and "si, vax!" The latter slogan is a response to the campaign against mandatory vaccination by the far right.



St. John Lateran square in Rome, Italy on Saturday, October 16, 2021 (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

On October 9, several thousand people took part in a right-wing protest against the introduction of the expanded “Green card” in Italy. The “Green card” consists of a proof of complete coronavirus vaccination, a negative COVID test within the last 48 hours, or proof of having recently recovered from the virus. Beginning last Friday, workers in both the public and private sector are obliged to scan a QR code of their Green card in order to enter their workplace. The requirement had already been enforced in bars, cafes and other public places.

In the course of the demonstration, a smaller group of several hundred people, led by two top members the small fascist Forza Nuova party, broke away and went to the parliament, where they tried to break in. After this attempt was repelled by police, the rioters went to the headquarters of the CGIL, the oldest trade union federation in the country’s history.

The assault on the parliament and trade union building were a premeditated plan, modelled on the January 6 assault on the US capitol building instigated by Donald Trump as part of his attempted coup d’état.

Seventy-five minutes before the siege of the General Confederation of Italian Labor (CGIL) headquarters, Forza Nuova leader Giuliano Castellino shouted from the stage of the protest in the People’s Square, “We’re all off to CGIL,” inciting the crowd. “Do you know who allowed the Green pass to become law and the fact that millions of our compatriots are living under blackmail and at risk of unemployment? They have specific names: CGIL, CISL and UIL. Do you know what free citizens do? They go to besiege the CGIL... Let’s go and get everything that is ours.”

Live videos taken on mobile phones by the rioters and posted to social media showed them trashing the union offices and chanting “liberty.” Only after a long delay did police intervene to force them out of the building, though the assault had been publicly announced at a rally of thousands of people more than an hour earlier by a leading fascist. Only 12 people were subsequently arrested, including Forza Nuova leaders Castellino and Roberto Fiore.

The targeting of the CGIL offices is a conscious political decision aimed at invoking the history of Italian fascism. Mussolini’s fascist gangs carried out such attacks on trade unions a century ago, in the early 1920s. While the trade unions today are very different

organisations than in that period, lacking a broad working class base and collaborating with employers and the state against the workers, the real target of the fascist mob's attack nevertheless is the working class.

Other small far-right protests have also taken place nationally over the past weeks. On Monday, police deployed water cannon to disperse a sit-in at a port in Trieste that had closed the port. The protest has involved local far-right activists in the region including Stefano Puzzer, a former member of the Christian-Democratic Italian Confederation of Workers Unions (CISL) who votes for the far-right Lega party.

The demonstration last Saturday against the fascists, which outnumbered the rioters from a week earlier by a factor of well more than ten to one, shows that the far right is a small minority that does not enjoy mass support in the working class or the youth.

The Italian working class is likewise overwhelmingly in favour of mass vaccination and opposed to the fascists' claim that mandatory vaccines are an infringement on their personal freedoms. Italy has one of the highest vaccination rates in Europe. Around 80 percent of the eligible adult population is fully vaccinated. The Teneo research company estimated that somewhere between 20.5 and 20.8 million of Italy's 23 million workers are vaccinated, varying by region and industry.

To the extent that the fascists are able to win support, it is a result of the bankruptcy of the official "left" parties and trade unions, and the fact that the far-right is backed and promoted from above by the corporate media and the capitalist political establishment.

Moreover, the fascists' campaign against even the most limited mitigation measures against the virus has been strengthened by the policy of the entire Italian political establishment. It has declared that there would be "no more lockdowns" as part of its drive to reopen the economy and ensure that corporate profits would continue, regardless on the spread of the virus and ensuing deaths.

The proclamations by representatives of these same parties that they are outraged at the fascist assault on October 9 are hypocritical and empty. President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Mario Draghi sent formal statements of support to the head of the CGIL, Maurizio Landini.

Democratic Party deputy Emanuele Fiano announced that his party would present an “urgent” parliamentary motion to call for “the dissolution of Forza Nuova and the other openly fascist movements.” Former Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte, the leader the Five Star movement, also visited the CGIL offices and declared that the “conditions are in place for the disbanding of Forza Nuova.”

No one should place the slightest faith in any of these parties to fight against the danger of fascism. Their declarations are particularly absurd, given that all of them are now ruling together in a united coalition government together with the Northern League, led by the fascistic Matteo Salvini. As interior minister, Salvini gave speeches on Mussolini’s favourite balcony and continuously issued proclamations against immigrants and refugees aimed at whipping up fascistic sentiment. Salvini also issued a pro forma statement condemning the recent attack on the CGIL.

The formation of a coalition government also elevated the Fratelli d’Italia, a neo-fascist party, as the official parliamentary opposition. Fratelli d’Italia leader Giorgia Meloni criticised the October 9 protest, which she refused to characterise as fascist, claiming she “opposes all violence.” Meloni has previously stated that she has an ‘easygoing relationship with fascism.” (See: “ Neo-fascist Meloni under discussion as Italian head of government ”)

The events of the past two weeks demonstrate that the tasks of fighting against the threat of fascist dictatorship and of ending the coronavirus pandemic fall to the working class. A policy of mass vaccination combined with lockdown and social distancing measures, with full wages paid to affected workers and small businesses, must be implemented with the aim of eliminating the virus internationally and putting an end to the pandemic.

It was the spontaneous strike action of workers in Italy which forced governments to temporarily implement lockdown measures in March 2020. The eradication of the pandemic is intimately connected with the mobilisation of the working class for workers’ governments and the reorganisation of social life on the basis of social need and the protection of human life, not the profit interests of the financial elite.

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