

Italy: Communist efforts in the coronavirus outbreak

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Joint declaration of the Popular Front, Italian Communist Party and “La Città Futura” collective

Italy, like many other countries, is facing a severe health emergency in these weeks. Many people are in deadly danger and suffering from coronavirus infection. Others are in isolation in their homes, waiting for a complete recovery. There have been hundreds of deaths so far. We wish to express our warmth and closeness to the families and communities affected.

We address our sincerest thanks to all those who work in health care facilities as elsewhere. Every day, they expose themselves and commit themselves to protect public health and the functioning of services to the citizens. We extend our sincere solidarity to the many who continue to work in the current challenging conditions.

Our National Health System, our economy and our society face unprecedented pressure from the post-war period to the present. We shall not underestimate the commitment by the whole country to cope with the emergency: it is indeed a proof of the vitality of Italian society that we shall be proud of.

As communists, we carry now more than ever the responsibility to play a leading role, which means primarily to participate in the collective effort to face the emergency and overcome it.

Our militant community is at the forefront in helping to spread awareness of individual responsibility; in making the containment measures ordered by the authorities effective; and in carefully following the hygienic instructions necessary to avoid the further spread of the contagion. Each one of us feels the responsibility of participating in the prevention, and we must discourage any irrational behaviour. Noncompliance with the measures opens the way to dangerous mass psychosis that multiplies the infection.

In recent decades, communists have been among the very few to fight against cutbacks in public health care. We have called to fight against the model of “differentiated autonomy,” which promotes a de facto privatization by fostering “subsidiarity” with local and regional authorities. The events of these days dramatically show the validity of our concerns. Two dramatic examples are the institutional disorder created by regions-state overlapping competences, and the rush to mobilize the best energies of the country to recover the lost ground in the medical garrison of the territory.

Bringing back these questions today is an integral part of the responsibility we must assume in contributing to the management of the emergency. We must build the broadest awareness over the political and historical responsibilities of the ruling and élité classes. We must be vigilant, at the political and at the union level, on what is going on in these hours to fight the virus, resolutely supporting every measure that strengthens the operational capacity of the health and health-related structures.

We also strongly call for measures to be taken to protect health in prisons, which have been condemned to overcrowding by the well-established repressive logic of recent years. We call for alternative sentences for prisoners with minor sentences and a low level of social danger.

For us, these considerations must be framed in the broader perspective of restoring and strengthening the democratic model, the formal equality among citizens, the pursuit of substantive equality and the exercise of popular sovereignty. All this has been repeatedly undermined in recent decades by reactionary constitutional reforms and the neoliberal influence of the European Union. For this reason, in the same spirit that led us to take a stand against reduction of the number of members of Parliament, we radically oppose the proposal to appoint an extraordinary commissioner to manage the coronavirus emergency. The democratic institutions are perfectly capable of working to protect public health with the legal instruments

at their disposal. We must therefore firmly reject any instrumental attempt to take advantage of the situation to endorse an authoritarian and dangerous logic.

In situations of crisis, it is always clear which social forces are able to take responsibility for not surrendering to adversity and making progress in the interests of all. This role today, once again, belongs to the workers. As communists, we are at their side in facing the dangers of the moment, with the perspective to open the way to the progress that Italy urgently needs.

Milan, March 12, 2020

