

## **What was a workers' referendum for? Research notes on industrial democracy in Italy.**

## **Para o que serviu um referendo dos trabalhadores? Notas de pesquisa sobre a democracia industrial na Itália**

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**Abstract:** In July 2007, the Prodi government and representatives of the three main Italian trade union confederations signed a landmark agreement on welfare and economic development. In October, in order to ratify or reject the agreement, the Italian labour movement organised a referendum, i.e. the Workers' Referendum of 2007, inviting workers, pensioners and the unemployed to assess the agreement. Based on a comprehensive sampling these research notes provide an analysis of the Workers' Referendum with regard to both key societal voting features and attitudes toward unions. The results signalized the profound changes in the forms of civic engagement and political culture that will take place in Italy ten years later.

**Keywords:** Industrial democracy; Italy; Trade unionism, Referendum.

### **¿Para qué sirvió un referéndum de los trabajadores? Notas de investigación sobre la democracia industrial en Italia**

**Resumen:** En julio de 2007, el gobierno Prodi y representantes de las tres principales confederaciones sindicales italianas firmaron un acuerdo histórico sobre bienestar social y desarrollo económico. En octubre, para ratificar o rechazar el acuerdo, el movimiento laboral italiano organizó un referéndum (el Referéndum de los Trabajadores de 2007) invitando trabajadores, jubilados y desempleados a evaluar el acuerdo. Con base en una amplia muestra, estas notas de investigación proporcionan un análisis del Referendo en cuanto a las principales características de la votación y actitudes en relación al movimiento sindical. Los resultados indican cambios profundos en las formas de compromiso cívico y cultura política que tendrán lugar en Italia diez años después.

**Palabras clave:** Democracia industrial; Italia; movimiento sindical; referéndum.

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**Resumo:** Em julho de 2007, o governo Prodi e representantes das três principais confederações sindicais italianas assinaram um acordo histórico sobre bem-estar e desenvolvimento econômico. Em outubro, para ratificar ou rejeitar o acordo, o movimento trabalhista italiano organizou um referendo (o Referendo dos Trabalhadores de 2007) convidando trabalhadores, aposentados e desempregados a avaliar o acordo. Com base em uma abrangente amostragem, essas notas de pesquisa fornecem uma análise do Referendo quanto às principais características da votação e atitudes em relação ao movimento sindical. Os resultados indicavam mudanças profundas nas formas de engajamento cívico e cultura política que terão lugar na Itália dez anos depois.

**Palavras-chave:** Democracia industrial; Itália; movimento sindical; referendum.

## **Introduction**

On 23 July 2007, the Prodi government and representatives of Italy's three main trade union confederations – CGIL, CISL and UIL – signed a landmark 'social protocol'

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agreement on welfare, labour and competitiveness, for equity and sustainable growth (*Protocollo supervidenza, lavoro e competitività, per l'equità e la crescita sostenibili*). In October, in order to ratify or reject the agreement, CGIL, CISL and UIL organised a referendum (the so-called *Referendum dei lavoratori*) and called workers, retirees and the unemployed to assess the agreement.

Beyond the percentage of voters – about 80 per cent – in favour of the agreement struck by the government and the unions, what drew researchers' attention was the high turnout: more than five million workers, retirees and job-seekers voted (CARRIERI, 2008, p. 10). As suggested by Accornero (2007), the very complexity of the issues covered by the *Protocollo* – social protection, economic development, labour policy, government spending and taxation – were likely to have had a negative effect on turnout rates. Nonetheless, the referendum drew a large turnout and was a milestone in terms of union democracy.

As a vast majority of voters approved the agreement, we may say that the *Protocollo* agreed upon by the Prodi government and the trade union confederations achieved a clear political result. Albeit with some notable exceptions (overall, metalworkers affiliated with FIOM-CGIL), we can say that the agreement was accepted. Indeed, turnout rates were in stark contrast to the idea that an extremely segmented labour market, as is the Italian, with its multiple levels (gender, age, types of employment contracts, economic sectors and geographical specificities) and a Gini index above EU average, would lead to a different result in terms of participation and voting (CARBONAI, PEDACI, 2009).

According to the union's official summary report, the vote was unanimous and evenly distributed across regions, social groups and economic sectors (all professional groups with the exception of the steel industry workers). Most importantly, the 2007 workers' referendum was a clear case of unity between Italy's three main labour confederations: CGIL, CISL and UIL. However, after the May 2008 crisis of the Prodi government, the Italian labour movement once again split, especially during the last Berlusconi government (May 2008 through November 2011). Indeed, in Italy, periods of closer union cooperation have always been followed by periods of greater coldness, if not outright hostility (ACCORNERO, 1992). After the referendum, relations between the

confederations were once again marked by differences, and the prospect of organizational unity seemed distant until the union agreement of June 2013 on representation rules, which led to renewed pledges of trade union unity (LEONARDI, 2010).

Loyalty to the union and activism are expected to result from effective mobilisation. Unions adopting a mobilising strategy expect to develop collectivism in their membership so that, in the future, loyal, active members will encourage other workers to take part in the struggle. So, what were the outcomes of a referendum that drew over five million people and represented an extraordinary moment of trade union unity, participation and democracy? Surely, demand for political participation had been rising in Italy over the previous years (VENTURINO, 2007). Besides arguably having partially met this demand for social participation, the referendum was also a response to an internal trade union demand of leveraging an external, democratic and participatory mechanism in order to legitimate the trade union as a collective actor and to reconfigure trade union divisions. Ultimately, however, the referendum was only partly successful both because the pro-labour Romano Prodi government remained in office for just about two years (May 2006–May 2008) and because the trade unions remained divided, thus fragmenting trade union representation (BACCARO, HOWELL, 2012).

The purpose of this survey-based research is to establish a solid base of data from which to draw conclusions and make interpretations of current critical evidence of trade union and industrial democracy in Italy. In line with other general trends (GAHAN, 2012), the data analysed provides critical elements concerning institutional trust in labour, i.e., its capacity to represent certain professional categories and simultaneously accomplish inclusion that may reach beyond unionized workers. First, this article presents a brief introduction to the workers' referendum in Italy and to recent changes in the industrial relations system; second, based on a comprehensive sample of 1.574 respondents, the study focuses on who did or not vote in 2007 in order to explore key societal voting features and attitudes toward unions.

### **Workers' referendums in Italy**

With regard to comparative cases in Europe, the use of referendums is rare in Germany, Austria and Belgium, where unions are formed by representative bodies of all

workers. In the Netherlands, conversely, referendums are increasingly popular (BACCARO, CARRIERI, 2011). Generally speaking, this practice is used to legitimise the outcome of collective deals, especially those involving political issues. The Italian case falls in this category.

On 20 May 1970, the Italian Parliament enacted Law no. 300, the so-called *Statuto dei Lavoratori* [Workers Statute], introducing the “trade union referendum” in Article 21. According to the provision, unions can call a referendum on trade union issues affecting the workforce of a single enterprise, an economic sector or even the entire labour force. Additionally, a referendum can be called to assess agreements entered into by the government and the labour movement; for example, after a period of *concertazione* (concerted effort) between the government and a social partner aiming to shape public policy and/or push for a socially fairer economy.

Union democracy gained momentum in 1988, when the three Italian metalworkers’ unions submitted a joint bargaining agenda regarding a threshold agreement and a national referendum. Or in 1995, when the main trade union confederations launched a national “trade union referendum” through which Italian workers approved a critical reform of the pension system as proposed by the Dini government. Still, the referendum of October 2007 showed a higher turnout rate in comparison with the 1995 referendum, with 5.128.507 votes cast in 2007 against 3,786,586 in the 1995 referendum.

The geography of the 2007 vote highlights some departures from the 1995 referendum. In 2007 the total number of voters in the southern regions of Italy increased (e.g. in Sicily, voters increased by 462.598 and in Campania by more than 300.000 in comparison with 1995). On the whole, the vote appeared more homogeneous in 2007, as compared with 1995, among regions and economic sectors, with one exception: among the metal workers, the levels of approval were below average, though slightly over 50% of them were in favour of the agreement.

A referendum on the collective bargaining system was once again held in 2009, yet this time only by trade union confederation CGIL. More specifically, in Italy collective bargaining in the private sector primarily takes place at two levels – industry level and company level (i.e. after the national agreement of July 1993, which reformed

the Italian industrial relations system). In 2009, employers' association Confindustria called for bargaining to be more decentralised and for company level bargaining to be assigned more importance. These issues were discussed by the three confederations in an attempt to reach a compromise, but to no avail. Hence, CISL and UIL decided to act without CGIL and, in January 2009, with the support of UGL, signed a framework agreement with the employers and the government on a new system of collective bargaining, the *Accordo Quadro governo-sindacati di riforma degli assetti contrattuali*, followed by a more detailed agreement specifying the rules for the new system in the industrial sector. CGIL refused to sign either agreement and did not recognize the new system. In March 2009, CGIL organised a referendum on the new arrangements of the government-labour framework agreement, with 3,4 million out of the 3,6 million workers and retirees constituency voting against it (FULTON, 2013).

### **Decommodified (but inclusive) bargaining**

Because of worker participation, referendums and similar forms represent an attempt – especially in the case of the Workers' Referendum of 2007 – at inclusive bargaining. In 2007, Italian unions were in need of a mechanism promoting industrial democracy. So, whereas in 1995 the role of the trade unions was limited to “calling-to-vote”, in 2007 they held thousands of meetings and debates in which the *Protocollo* was thoroughly explained to and discussed with the workers. In this sense, the referendum should not be viewed as a mere tactic used to settle internal disputes, but as a means to encouraging debate, discussion, and consideration of the long-term consequences of the decision, as well as equating to a “school of democracy” (COHEN, ROGERS, 1992).

Because of direct participation, referendums tip the balance in favour of internal democracy, thus affecting the relationship with and between union members. According to Baccaro (2007), the adoption of these procedures may strengthen the capacity of unions to engage and influence governmental policies, through aggregative (referendum) and deliberative mechanisms (assessment of social protocol). Moreover, the mutated character of the political negotiation – in particular the decline of the amount of resources for political exchange (*decommodifying*) – prompts unions to invest much more in inclusive mechanisms, such as workers' referendums, whereby union leaders' decisions

are discussed and expressly authorized by the workers, the rank-and-file. Unlike hierarchical control, union democracy promotes inclusive bargaining and assures political legitimacy –even in the absence of material incentives, union members accept collective choice (BACCARO, 2008, p. 63). In this sense, a referendum can be even more important, especially when the general levels of confidence expressed to the union are low, as our data suggest.

Since the 1990s collective bargaining has steadily become less acquisitive in Italy. Over the last twenty years, labour’s political agenda in Italy has been challenged by wage containment policies, restricted access to welfare benefits, the introduction of various forms of flexible work, the lowering of social protection standards. In this sense, a referendum supports union leadership, albeit indirectly, since it guarantees a form of mobilization aimed at discussing, approving or rejecting a public policy. In this case, when bargaining is acquisitive, legitimacy is generally based on the resources acquired. In contrast, especially with the decline of the amount of resources available for political exchange, legitimacy is based on “discursive democracy”: a form of democracy in which deliberation is central to decision making (BACCARO, 2011).

In 2007, the electorate body was not limited only to union members in keeping with the spirit of the *Protocollo*. Most importantly, the constituency of the referendum and the audience, i.e. those who are affected by the agreement, matched one another. Pensioners were included in the electorate; however, none of the agreements on pension reform over the last 15 years has changed the actual conditions of Italian retirees. Because they were not part of the affected interests, their right to participate in the decision-making process did not seem to be fully justified. In contrast, students and young people were unable to vote in July 2007 but the agreement would, albeit not immediately, be applicable to them. It is likely that this would have had an effect on the results of the vote.

### **Data on and Statistical Analysis of the Workers’ Referendum of 2007**

The most interesting features of the Workers’ Referendum are not related to who won but to issues such as why people voted the way they did or the implications of the results. These questions are not always easily answered. Surely, just looking at campaign events and incidents will not suffice.

The survey was conducted in April 2008 and included 1,574 randomly selected voters and non-voters, in a constituency of workers, jobless people and retirees. The sample data was commissioned by CGIL and collected by the SWG institute. The sample is made up of quotas extracted from lists of names provided by the phone book of the entire national network. A random probability sampling method is used, stratified into four levels: 1. sex; 2. geographical area; 3. demographic size of the town; 4. professional status.

**Table 1 – Sample population**

N=1,574	%	Gender		Regions		
		Male	Female	North	Centre	South
Workers	58,7%	59,7%	57,8%	57,9%	60,4%	58,9%
Retirees	39,5%	38,8%	40,8%	40,7%	37,9%	38,2%
Jobless	1,9%	1,5%	2,4%	1,4%	1,7%	2,9%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Among those who declared they were informed about the content of the social compact (54% were “informed” or “very informed”), 33,9% of the respondents decided to vote. Among workers, propensity to vote is generally higher than for retirees: 40,6% of the workers decided to vote, while only 22.52% of the retirees voted (Table 2).

**Table 2 – Vote and employment status (percentages and standard residuals)**

N	Did you vote at the Workers' Referendum of 2007?		Total	
	Yes	No		
Active workers	983	40,69%*	59,31%**	100%
Retired workers	564	22,52%**	77,48%*	100%
Unemployed	27	25,93%	74,07%	100%
Total	1.574	33,93%	66,07%	100%

\* Standard residual over 2 (strong positive association between categories)

\*\* Standard residual less than -2 (strong negative association between categories)

Pearson Chi-Square = 53,59

Union membership is an important factor in understanding turnout statistics (Table 3). Clear differences can be seen across “union members” (or, otherwise, “anyone who is considering becoming a member”) and those who, in contrast, assume an attitude

of “rejection/opposition” to unions (“No, I do not wish to become a member”). About half of the members chose to vote (48% among those who were not members but were “considering becoming a member”). This percentage decreases to 23,97% among non-member workers who had no intention of becoming members in the future (Table 3).

**Table 3 – Membership and voting attitude (percentages of vote and standard residuals)**

	N	Did you vote at the Workers' Referendum of 2007?		Total	
		Yes	No		
Are you currently a union member?	Yes	448	50,22%*	49,78%**	100%
	No, but I was in the past	372	27,96%**	72,04%	100%
	No, but thinking of joining	96	48,96%*	51,04%	100%
	No, and do not wish to be	609	23,97%**	76,03%*	100%
	I prefer not to answer	49	24,49%	75,51%	100%
	Total	1.574	33,93%	66,07%	100%

\* Standard residual over 2 (strong positive association)

\*\* Standard residual less than -2 (strong negative association)

Pearson Chi-Square = 97.52

Typically, there are no significant differences between public employees and private sector workers. But private sector workers' turnout is above average. The percentage of voters among teachers (30%), however, is significantly lower than the mean values (41.48%).

If we take into consideration just the voters (534 respondents), 54,3% of them voted in favour of the agreement; 26,4% voted against the deal; 4.9% voted blank; and the others (14,4%) preferred not to answer. This is a population that had already developed strong convictions regarding voting choices: only 11% of those who claim to have voted in favour of the agreement changed their minds within the period between the signing of the agreement and the referendum in October. This “rigidity” of opinion can be observed for both votes in favour and against the agreement. Union membership is a determinant of the vote (Table 4). Considering only the subset of voters, 68,89% of union members voted in favour of the agreement. Among those who would like to join a union (“No, but I’m thinking of joining”) the propensity to vote in favour is higher than the



sample's average (and equal to 57,45%). Among those who had been members in the past, propensity drops to 48,08%.

**Table 4 – Vote and union membership**

	N	Did you vote in favour or against the agreement?				Total
		In favour	Against	Blank ( null) vote	I prefer not to answer	
Yes	225	68,89%*	22,67%	1,33%**	7,11%**	100%
No, but I was in the past	104	48,08%	35,58%*	2,88%	13,46%	100%
No, but I'm thinking of becoming a member	47	57,45%	19,15%	6,38%	17,02%	100%
No, and I don't wish to become a member	146	36,99%**	29,45%	10,96%	22,60%	100%
I prefer not to answer	12	33,33%	8,33%	8,33%	50,00%	100%
Total	534	54,31%	26,40%	4,87%	14,42%	100%

\* Standard residuals over 2 (strong positive association)

\*\* Standard residuals less than -2 (strong negative association)

Pearson Chi-Square = 70,30

It is possible to categorize the sampled population according to a criterion of general “attitude towards the agreement of July 2007”, into four kinds of attitude (Table 5). This typology looks “quite” exhaustive, but is not exactly so, since it leaves out non-voters (103 people, included in the sample, not in this typology) who would have nullified their votes in case they voted.

**Table 5 – A typology of vote and attitudes towards the Workers' Referendum**

Typology	N	%	Type Characteristics
1. In favour	290	19,72%	Turned out for the Referendum and voted in favour
2. Free-riders	318	21,62%	Did not participate in the vote but declared to be in favour of the agreement
3. Against the referendum	377	25,63%	Against (a): turned out for the Referendum and voted against the agreement (141 votes against the agreement); Against (b): did not turn out for the Referendum but declared their opposition to the agreement (236 against who did not vote)
4. Indifferent	486	33,03%	Neither voted nor have an opinion on the agreement

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Total	1.471	100%
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The propensity of men to free-ride is substantially higher than that of women (27% of men versus 12% of women). While among men the proportion of those who are “indifferent” to the agreement is 24,64%, among women this percentage grows to 46,32%. Those who are most “indifferent” towards the agreement are those employed (42% of employees versus an average of 33%), mainly working in small firms.

The typology proposed here is also associated with union membership (Table 6). Union members’ propensity to be in favour of the agreement is substantially higher than the sample’s average (36,3% versus 20,25%). Conversely, former union members showed a higher propensity to become “free-riders” or vote “against” the agreement.

**Table 6 – Cross tabulation: “Union membership” by “attitudes toward the agreement”**

		N	In favour	Free riders	Against (voters and non- voters)	Indifferent	Total
Are you currently a union member?	Yes	427	36,3%*	20,1%	26,5%	17,1%**	100%
	No, but I was in the past	351	14,2%**	29,3%*	32,8%	23,6%**	100%
	No, but I’m thinking of becoming a member	85	31,8%*	10,6%**	21,2%	36,5%	100%
	No, and I don’t wish to become a member	550	9,8%**	20,4%	27,8%	42,0%*	100%
Total		1.413	20,25%	21,93%	28,24%	29,58%	100%

\* Standard residuals over 2 (strong positive association)

\*\* Standard residuals less than -2 (strong negative association)

Pearson Chi-Square = 181,29

What is worth stressing is that the level of confidence in Italian trade unions overall is low, both among those in favour and those against the referendum. 40.4% of the respondents believe unions have become self-serving; if these respondents are added to the 23,9% who think trade unions ought to reorganize themselves, nearly two out of every three respondents are, indeed, criticising labour. This critical area for Italian unions does not include only those against the Workers’ Referendum. For example, 17% of those in favour of the referendum (Table 7) believe Italian unions have become self-serving.

**Table 7 – Cross tabulation “In your opinion do trade unions in Italy play a role [...]” by “typology of voter”**

	N	“Indispensable” + “important”	“Unions are self- serving”	“Don’t know”	Total
In favour	290	82,06%*	17,24%**	0,60%	100%
Free riders	318	70,75*	27,04%**	2,2%	100%
Against	403	41,68%**	56,82%*	1,48%	100%
Undecided	435	44,59%**	50,57*	4,82*	100%
Total	1.446	57,05%	40,45%	2,48%	100%

\* Standard residuals over 2 (strong positive association)

\*\* Standard residuals less than -2 (strong negative association)

Pearson Chi-Square = 176,29

This area also includes unionized workers. For instance, one in every four union members believes unions are self-serving (Table 8).

**Table 8 – Cross tabulation: “Union membership” by “In your opinion, do Italian trade unions fulfil the role [...]”**

		N	«Indispensable» + «Important»	«Unions are self- serving»	«Don’t know»	Total
Are you currently a union member?	Yes	448	72,8%*	26,1%**	1,1%	100%
	No, but I was a union member in the past	372	57,5%	41,1%	1,3%	100%
	No, but I am going to become a union member	96	82,3%*	12,5%**	5,2%	100%
	No, I won’t become a union member	609	39,6%**	56,5%*	3,9%	100%
	I prefer not to answer	49	49%	30,6%	20,4%*	100%
Total		1,574	56,2%	40,7%	3,1%	100%

\* Standard residuals over 2 (strong positive association)

\*\* Standard residuals less than -2 (strong negative association)

Pearson Chi-Square=203.98

Trade unions are not the only institutions suffering from a crisis of confidence. Table 9 shows quite clearly that, in a scale of 1 (lowest confidence) to 5 (highest confidence), the mean level of confidence for each institution is quite low: just over two. The problem of institutional trust is then generalized and not specifically linked to the sole case of trade unions. Furthermore, Table 9 shows that there are no significant

differences between voters and non-voters (except for “labour unions” and “political parties”).

**Table 9 – Institutional confidence and vote in Workers’ Referendum**

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Parliament	Yes	521	2,62	1,16	2,05	0,15
	No	1001	2,54	1,12		
	Total	1522	2,57	1,13		
Government	Yes	518	2,32	1,17	0,01	0,91
	No	998	2,32	1,13		
	Total	1516	2,32	1,14		
Political Parties	Yes	525	2,23	1,09	26,43	0,00
	No	1008	1,96	0,94		
	Total	1533	2,05	1,00		
Employers’ association	Yes	522	2,23	1,05	0,00	0,97
	No	1002	2,24	1,04		
	Total	1524	2,23	1,05		
Labour Unions	Yes	522	2,68	1,13	92,01	0,00
	No	1013	2,14	1,00		
	Total	1535	2,32	1,07		

### **The short-term effect of the Workers’ Referendum**

From 2005 to 2011 in Italy, the demand for social participation generally follows an upward trend, especially that of workers and the left-leaning electorate. In 2005, the primary election of the centre-left electoral alliance – *Unione* – exceeded expectations: total number of voters was over 4.3 million (VENTURINO, 2007). Two years later, in October 2007, voters of the Democratic Party were called to choose their party’s leader from among their representatives at the Constituent Assembly: more than 3,5 million voters. Similarly to the Workers’ Referendum of October 2007, a new referendum in March 2009 organised by CGIL on the new arrangements of the government-labour framework agreement had a turnout of about 3,6 million voters. Also worthy of note was the case of *Popolo Viola* [Purple People], a protest movement that appeared in 2009 operating as a network on social media Facebook. Finally, from 2010 to 2011, students

protested frequently and intensely, as on the Global Day of Action in October 2011 in Rome, against what they considered attacks against public education, such as budget cuts and increased levels of tuition fees. The Workers' Referendum of 2007 is not an isolated incident but part of a process of social demand and institutional confidence crisis.

In 2012, the number of protests and social demands for political participation falls when compared with the 2005/2011 period. Nevertheless, in order to grow, protests and social demands need political opportunities. The creation of potential allies – e.g. leftist parties and unions – becomes a necessity, both strategic and fundamental: such allies are important to broaden the mobilization, for the logistic resources they can offer, and, more importantly, to increase the political influence of the protest. However the Monti government's grand coalition (from November 2011 to April 2013) drastically reduced this opportunity. In this period, political parties – and indirectly unions, because of the historical linkage with the party system<sup>3</sup> – support the neoliberal government in the Italian parliament.

The Italian general election of February 2013 saw the rise of Beppe Grillo and the success of M5S (*Movimento 5 Stelle* or Five Star Movement). Grillo's constituency is of a very heterogeneous social composition. M5S was particularly successful with the middle and upper middle classes, large portions of the working class, typically identified with the "left", and the youth (TRONCONI, 2013). In Beppe Grillo's language and rhetoric there is also very strong criticism against the Italian unions. For example, during the so called *Tsunami Tour* for the 2013 electoral campaign, Grillo went so far as to propose the elimination of the unions because of a structure that was «as old as the political parties». With one exception: Fiom-CGIL, Italy's metalworkers' trade union. His blog ([beppegrillo.it](http://beppegrillo.it)) shows great sympathy for Fiom-CGIL, the only trade union organization that supported the "No" at the Workers' Referendum of 2007. For example, on 11 January 2011 Grillo's blog posted: «the Fiom is not just defending the Mirafiori workers. It is defending the Constitution, democracy, and freedom of choice. It is basically defending the possibility of giving a future to our country that seems to us to be getting ever more distant». Fiom-CGIL's General Secretary, Maurizio Landini, also appeared in

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<sup>3</sup>For the sake of illustration, Guglielmo Epifani, CGIL's General Secretary from 2002 to 2010, was appointed Secretary of the Democratic Party (PD) in 2013.

a video message on the blog (on 29 March 2012). Although a clearly defined proposal regarding industrial relations in Italy has never been submitted by the M5S, Beppe Grillo's discourse and rhetoric points out the critical juncture of the union system in Italy.

Yet, for labour the main problem today is the *concertazione* method, which will only work if the national trade union confederations are united, representative and capable of mobilising and aggregating social consensus, which is more likely in the context of a pro labour government. The referendum had an aggregating function. For example, five years earlier the employers and the unions, excluding CGIL, had signed the Pact for Italy (a national collective bargaining agreement on sensitive labour, tax and South-related matters). In 2007, the *concertazione* starts working again; yet in 2008, a centre-right coalition wins the elections. Thus, in January 2009 a new tripartite agreement is signed that reshapes the collective bargaining structure and system, once again without the support and against the CGIL. The deal sets limits to the right to strike and introduces three-year national collective bargaining agreements.

In June 2011, a deal agreed upon by the confederations establishes a new framework of general representation and bargaining rules. Among other rules, union self-certification is banned, while the task of certifying data on the representativeness of labour organizations to conduct collective bargaining agreements for a given industry is assigned to third parties. But, in November 2012, in the presence of the government, labour confederations CISL and UIL (but not CGIL) signed a new agreement for the purpose of increasing productivity.

In short, labour relations in Italy, and the *concertazione* in particular, have gone through a long, tormented and regressive transition. Controversy abounds. For one, as discussed earlier, several attempts have been made over the last years to reshape the representation system and the bargaining structure, at times with union unity (2007, 2011) yet at other times, without CGIL (2002, 2009, 2012). Among other reasons for this state of affairs are the divisions between trade union confederations CGIL, CISL and UIL and within them (for example, FIOM-CGIL), the Italian social but, mainly, institutional context, divisions inside the electorate of the main centre-left Italian party, the Democratic Party (PD, from the Italian *Partito Democratico*), and more importantly, a societal crisis of confidence in institutions, namely in trade unions, purportedly the mass

organizations. Therefore, the 2007 referendum did mobilise and help build consensus in response to a social demand for participation led by labour, yet was ineffective in the long term.

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