

# TRADE UNIONS AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN EUROPE

## Country Study Italy

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### THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

#### ITALIAN TRADE UNION ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEM IN ITALY

In Italy, worker representation in unions is almost entirely covered by three major confederations, which together have a total membership of over 11 million: In 2021, the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL; Italian General Confederation of Labour) had five million members, the *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori* (CISL; Italian Confederation of Trade Unions) had four million members, and the *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (UIL; Italian Labour Union) had over 2.3 million members.<sup>1</sup> Alongside these major organisations, there are also several less representative sectoral and grassroots unions, including the traditionally left-wing radical *Confederazione dei Comitati di Base* (COBAS; Confederation of the Council of the Base) and *Unione Sindacale di Base* (USB; Syndicate Union of the Base) and the right-wing aligned *Unione Generale del Lavoro* (UGL; General Labour Union). At the beginning of the 1990s, a profound transformation radically changed the Italian political system, leading to the disappearance of numerous political parties to which the three major trade union confederations (CGIL, CISL,

and UIL) were ideologically linked.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the cleft between the political parties and the trade unions widened.

The Italian system of industrial relations was long characterised by low institutionalisation accompanied by a lot of grey area and peculiarities (Primo Cella / Treu 2009). Therefore, it corresponded more to a pluralistic-competitive model characterised by a diverse range of collective bargaining demands than to a participatory-cooperative model, which is characterised by an intent to build and strengthen institutions while promoting the cooperation of social partners.

The *Protocollo sulla politica dei redditi e dell'inflazione programmata* (Protocol on Income Policy and Planned Inflation) was the central guiding pillar of Italy's industrial relations system from 1993 until 2009. This protocol was signed by the three trade union confederations (CGIL, CISL, and UIL) as well as by *Confindustria*, the largest confederation of employers, and introduced the

<sup>1</sup> For CGIL membership statistics, see [www.cgil.it](http://www.cgil.it); for CISL membership statistics, see: <http://www.cisl.it/notizie/in-evidenza/sindacato-cisl-nel-2021-crescono-gli-iscritti-con-un-incremento-di-quasi-11-tra-i-lavoratori-attivi/#:~:text=Sono%204.076.033%20i%20tesserati,%20rispetto%20all'anno%20precedente>; for UIL membership statistics, see [https://www.uil.it/tesseramento\\_reg.asp](https://www.uil.it/tesseramento_reg.asp).

<sup>2</sup> The CGIL was first connected to the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI; Italian Communist Party) and later to the PCI's successor parties *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS; Democratic Party of the Left) and *Democratici di Sinistra* (DS; Democratic Party of the Left). Meanwhile, the CISL was tied to the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC; Christian Democratic Party) and the UIL had links to the *Partito Repubblicano Italiano* (PRI; Italian Republican Party).

tripartite model (Carrieri / Pirro 2019). The tripartite model is an agreement between social partners and the government on collective bargaining and industrial relations for making joint decisions on income policy measures to control inflation (Carrieri / Pirro 2019). Among other items, the protocol introduced unified trade union representation, officially termed *rappresentanze sindacali unitarie* (RSU), in companies with more than 15 employees. This replaced factory councils or works councils that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. A recent international comparative study on right-wing extremism in the workplace (Kim et al. 2022) highlighted some of the grey areas in Italy's representation structures that have allowed the right to gain a foothold within the industrial relations system. One example can be found in the fact that labour lawyers close to the right-wing populist party *Lega per Salvini Premier* (Lega; League for Salvini Premier) and employers offer their services to companies with fewer than 15 employees (i. e., companies who do not have RSUs) to implement labour policies that favour employers and are not influenced by trade unions or employers' organisations.

The rules for collective bargaining prescribed in the 1993 protocol were redefined in 2009 by the Berlusconi IV cabinet in a highly controversial framework agreement (*Accordo Quadro*). As Carrieri and Pirro (2019) point out, it breaks with the 1993 protocol in two ways: First, the agreement was not signed by the CGIL, and second, it is essentially a bipartite agreement (between trade unions and workers' associations), with the government only playing an indirect role, a break from the previous trifold model. This framework agreement, which emerged during a major economic crisis and its accompanying social conflicts, was controversial primarily because it opened up the vaguely defined possibility that decentralised and company agreements could deviate from national agreements. The goal was to develop and promote the former in order to support the potential dynamics of the production factors or the tendency for change at the organisational level.

The latest measure in the reshaping of Italian industrial relations was made in 2018, when a bi-fold agreement (*Accordo interconfederale*; National Intersectoral Agreement), commonly known as the Pact for the Factory, was introduced.

This is a perfect bipartite agreement, with all involved parties as signatories (including the CGIL) and the government playing no active role, participating only as an indirect interlocutor in agreement development. Moreover, the agreement addresses three core elements of industrial relations: Representativeness,

participation, and principles and processes for regulating collective agreements at the national and the decentralised level (Carrieri / Pirro 2019).

## THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The June 6, 1946, referendum – for which universal suffrage in Italy was applied for the first time – led to the proclamation of a parliamentary republic and, subsequently, in 1948, the implementation of the constitutional framework that introduced a separation of powers between the legislative branch (parliament), an executive branch (government), and a judiciary (judges). The parliament is comprised of two chambers, the *Camera dei deputati* (Chamber; Chamber of Deputies) and the *Senato della Repubblica* (Senate; Senate of the Republic); the members of both are re-elected every five years. A referendum in September 2020 reaffirmed an October 2019 constitutional amendment reducing the size of both chambers by 35.6 per cent, from 630 to 400 seats in the Chamber and from 315 to 200 in the Senate).

The Italian political party system has gone through many changes during the republic's more than 75-year history, which cannot be discussed here.<sup>3</sup> Underscoring the implications of these transformations, it should be noted that none of the major parties represented in the Italian Parliament in 2023 existed prior to 2007, when the *Partito Democratico* (PD; Democratic Party) was founded.<sup>4</sup>

Two parties represent the radical right<sup>5</sup> in parliament: *Lega per Salvini Premier* and *Fratelli d'Italia* (Fdi; Brothers of Italy). *Lega per Salvini Premier*, which is a sister party to *Lega Nord* (LN; Northern League), was founded in December 2017 with the aim of uniting party mem-

<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the Italian political party system, see Farneti (1983) and Ignazi (2018).

<sup>4</sup> The party that has been in parliament the longest is the *Partito dei Radicali Italiani* (RI; Party of the Italian Radicals), which was founded in 2001 from the ashes of the *Partito Radicale*. It has a single Member of Parliament. Silvio Berlusconi's one-man party *Forza Italia* (FI) was re-founded in 2013 after the demise of *Popolo della Libertà*, taking over another party name and symbol, which had been founded and led by Berlusconi from 1994 until 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Following political scientist Cas Mudde (2019), this study employs specific definitions when referring to sovereignist right-identified parties and organisations. When speaking of the 'radical right', we refer to parties and organisations that, generally speaking, accept democracy, though they may oppose some core elements of liberal democracy, such as civil rights or the rule of law. In contrast, all organisations (and usually, though not always, movements) that reject democracy outright, such as the principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule, are described as 'extreme right-wing'. The adjective 'populist' can be attributed to all organisations, not only on the right, that divide social reality into two opposing, hostile, and homogenous groups, with the corrupt elites on one side and the "pure" people for whom the party wants to speak, on the other.

bers from central and southern Italy. The two parties, *Lega Nord* and *Lega per Salvini Premier*, ran in the 2018 parliamentary elections together as *Lega*, with *Nord* disappearing from the party's name. In so doing, the party definitively abandoned a feature that had characterised it since its founding – the demand for northern Italy's succession.<sup>6</sup> Since Salvini was elected to be the federal party secretary in 2013, the party has seen a fundamental change in its politics toward the far-right and has become increasingly right-wing populist (Pasarelli / Tuorlo 2018): The party opposes illegal immigration, is nationalist (since 2018, *Lega*'s slogan has been "Italians first"), and anti-European (Toscano 2020). Moreover, the party favours a single-rate income tax, i. e., a flat tax, opposes the extension of civil rights to same-sex couples, and is overall against the recognition of gender diversity.<sup>7</sup> *Lega*'s share of the vote grew tremendously under Matteo Salvini's leadership from just over four per cent in the 2013 general election and 6.1 per cent in the EU Parliament election to over 17 per cent in the 2018 general election and, importantly, 34.2 per cent in the 2019 European election. This made *Lega* the third strongest party in the Italian government. However, as described in the subsequent section, *Lega* suffered a significant drop in votes in the 2022 general election.

Salvini participated in the Conte I Cabinet (2018–2019) as Minister of Interior before switching over to the opposition during the Conte II Cabinet (2019–2021). *Lega* then supported the Draghi Cabinet in office from February 2021 to September 2022. Despite experiencing a dramatic decrease in voter support in the 2022 elections, the party is well-positioned in the current government alongside *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Forza Italia* with five ministers, including Salvini himself, who holds the post of Minister of Infrastructure and Transport and the post of Deputy Prime Minister.

*Fratelli d'Italia* was founded on December 21, 2012, as a spin-off of Silvio Berlusconi's *Popolo della Libertà*, which was supported in 2009 by the *Alleanza Nazionale*, a post-fascist party on the right. The party's symbolism of a three-coloured flame emphasises ideologi-

cal continuity with the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI; Italian Social Movement). The MSI abbreviation was included in the *Fratelli d'Italia* logo until 2017. Since 2014, *Fratelli d'Italia* has been led by Giorgia Meloni, who is Italy's only female party leader, and has explicitly placed itself in the radical right, representing nationalist, traditionalist, post-fascist, reactionary, and sovereigntist positions. The party opposes registered civil unions for same-sex couples as well as all suggestions of multiculturalism or welcome culture. It promotes, instead, a traditionalist-conservative model of society (its oft-repeated slogan is "God, Fatherland, and Family") as well as a "Made in Italy" policy to protect national economic interests.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, the party has made significant gains: Its vote share in the general election increased from 1.9 to 4.3 from 2013 to 2018. In the 2019 European parliamentary elections, its voter share was 6.5 per cent. In the September 2022 general elections, the FdI was the strongest party and won with 26 per cent of the vote. The *Fratelli d'Italia* electorate has many commonalities with *Lega* voters (IPSOS 2018). Most are male and middle-aged. They tend to be located in central and southern Italy and are socio-culturally diverse, including many entrepreneurs, executives, and freelancers with a high level of education as well as pensioners, civil servants, and blue-collar workers. Prior to its overwhelming victory in 2022, the party had only ever been in the opposition, first during the centre-left governments (2013–2018), during the two Conte governments, and again under the Draghi government.

In addition to these two radical right parties (*Lega* and *Fratelli d'Italia*), at least two additional extreme right parties should be mentioned: *CasaPound Italia* and *Forza Nova*. While they do not uphold democratic principles or the constitution, their publicity has grown in recent years for a range of reasons, and they have played a significant role in the revival of the extreme right in Italy. Since the turn of the millennium, *CasaPound Italia* has recalibrated Italian neofascism, updating its symbols, language, and cultural references, as well as attracting younger generations, including through its activism (Di Nunzio / Toscano 2011).

The neo-fascist and extreme right party *Forza Italia* was founded in 1997 by Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello; its public image grew during the pandemic as it tried to capitalise on and stoke the momentum of the opposition to the pandemic mitigation measures (most notably the proof of vaccination policies, known in Italy as the 'green pass') and virus deniers.

<sup>6</sup> The full name of the party is *Lega Nord per L'Indipendenza della Padania* (LN; Northern League for the Independence of Padania). The party was originally founded in 1991 by Umberto Bossi, who was the party leader for over 20 years. *Lega Nord* was born out of the alliance of several regional autonomy movements in different parts of northern Italy.

<sup>7</sup> In 2016, *Lega* voted against the bill introduced by Monica Cirinnà which introduced civil unions into Italian law, including for same-sex couples. In 2021, *Lega* and *Fratelli d'Italia* opposed the EU Parliament's resolution declaring the EU an "LGBTIQ Freedom Zone". That same year, the two parties voted against the ddl Zan bill, which subsequently failed. This bill would have introduced to Italian law tougher penalties for crimes against and discrimination of homosexual and transgender people, women, and people with disabilities.

<sup>8</sup> Giorgia Meloni's ruling party introduced a new ministry, the Ministry of Businesses and Made in Italy.

## THE RADICAL RIGHT IN THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT

The most recent general election was a victory for the Italian right, whose strong coalition consisting of *Fratelli d'Italia*, *Lega*, and *Forza Italia* won 44 per cent<sup>9</sup> of the vote and a broad majority in Parliament. This sweeping success was made possible in part by the centre-left parties, who, unlike the centre-right, joined the election separately. The voter share for the centre-left coalition, which is comprised of the PD, the *Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra* (AVS; Greens and Left Alliance), +*Europa* (+Eu; More Europe) was just over 26 per cent; moreover, they did not manage to form an electoral alliance with either the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S; Five Star Movement) who received 15.4 per cent of the vote or the moderate centrist coalition comprised of *Azione* (Az; Action) and *Italia Viva* (IV; Italy Alive), which received 7.8 per cent of the vote.

Within the course of a single legislative term, Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* went from four to 26 per cent and thus became the strongest party in the country. The impressive election result in the September 2022 elections is due to several reasons, including voter drift from *Lega* and M5S: Many voters who supported these two parties in the 2018 general election and the 2019 European election voted for the current prime minister's party. Studies conducted by the Cattaneo Institute<sup>10</sup> after the election showed that almost four

out of 10 voters who voted for *Lega* in the 2019 European election went on to vote for *Fratelli d'Italia* in the snap election; the same is true for one out of six M5S voters. Table 1 depicts the votes for the five largest Italian parties in absolute figures and shows the astonishing result for *Fratelli d'Italia* (+406 per cent) in the 2022 election.

Geographically speaking – and, in a country like Italy, geography has always been an important component of voting behaviour – *Fratelli d'Italia* experienced a surge in voters in central Italy. This surge can be observed not only in Lazio, the region where the extreme right, first through the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* and then the *Alleanza Nazionale*, has always had a solid voter base, but also in the regions of Marche and Umbria. Unlike the *Alleanza Nazionale*, whose votes mostly came from the south, *Fratelli d'Italia* won over voters in areas traditionally close to *Lega*, such as in the northeast and northwest. *Lega*, in contrast, suffered significant vote loss after the positive results in the 2018 General Election and the 2019 European Election: It received 8.9 per cent of the vote. The loss of votes had an impact beyond central and southern Italy, with *Lega*'s traditional voter base in the northeast and northwest of the country shifting in favour of *Fratelli d'Italia*.

With regard to socio-demographic characteristics, *Fratelli d'Italia* increased its voter share among women in the 2022 election compared to previous elections, possibly also because it had a female party leader. The party was not particularly successful among 18–34 year-olds, who instead preferred the centre-left coalition and the *Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra* in particular, or with pensioners. However, the *Fratelli d'Italia* was

<sup>9</sup> A record low of 63.9 per cent of eligible voters cast ballots in the September 25, 2022, general election.

<sup>10</sup> See Cattaneo (2022).

Table 1  
Votes in absolute figures for the top 5 parties in Italy (2018–2022)

	2018	2022	Change
<b>Fratelli d'Italia</b>	1,429,550	7,233,735	+406 %
<b>Lega</b>	5,698,687	2,442,679	-57.2 %
<b>Forza Italia</b>	4,596,956	2,248,851	-51.1 %
<b>PD</b>	6,161,896	5,305,566	-13.9 %
<b>M5S</b>	10,732,066	4,282,920	-60.1 %

Source: Own interpretation of data from the Ministry of the Interior.

quite successful with 35–64 year-olds, and especially among the self-employed in this age group.

According to the post-election analysis by IPSOS (2022), a large portion of blue-collar workers (over a third) voted for *Fratelli d'Italia* while just over 13 per cent voted for *Lega*. Among this group, the centre-left coalition was severely punished: Overall, the PD, *Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra*, and *Azione/Italia Viva* received under 18 per cent.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1 shows vote distribution for the working class. *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Lega* continued to demonstrate their ability to attract voters from the social strata most impacted by the consequences of the economic and socio-cultural crises that have prevailed in Italy for years. Both parties were able to distinguish themselves as the political voice for these groups and were able to gain social capital and win votes from the social milieu made up of “losers of modernization” (Betz 1994), i. e., those impacted by growing inequalities, economic difficulties, and precarious working conditions. After

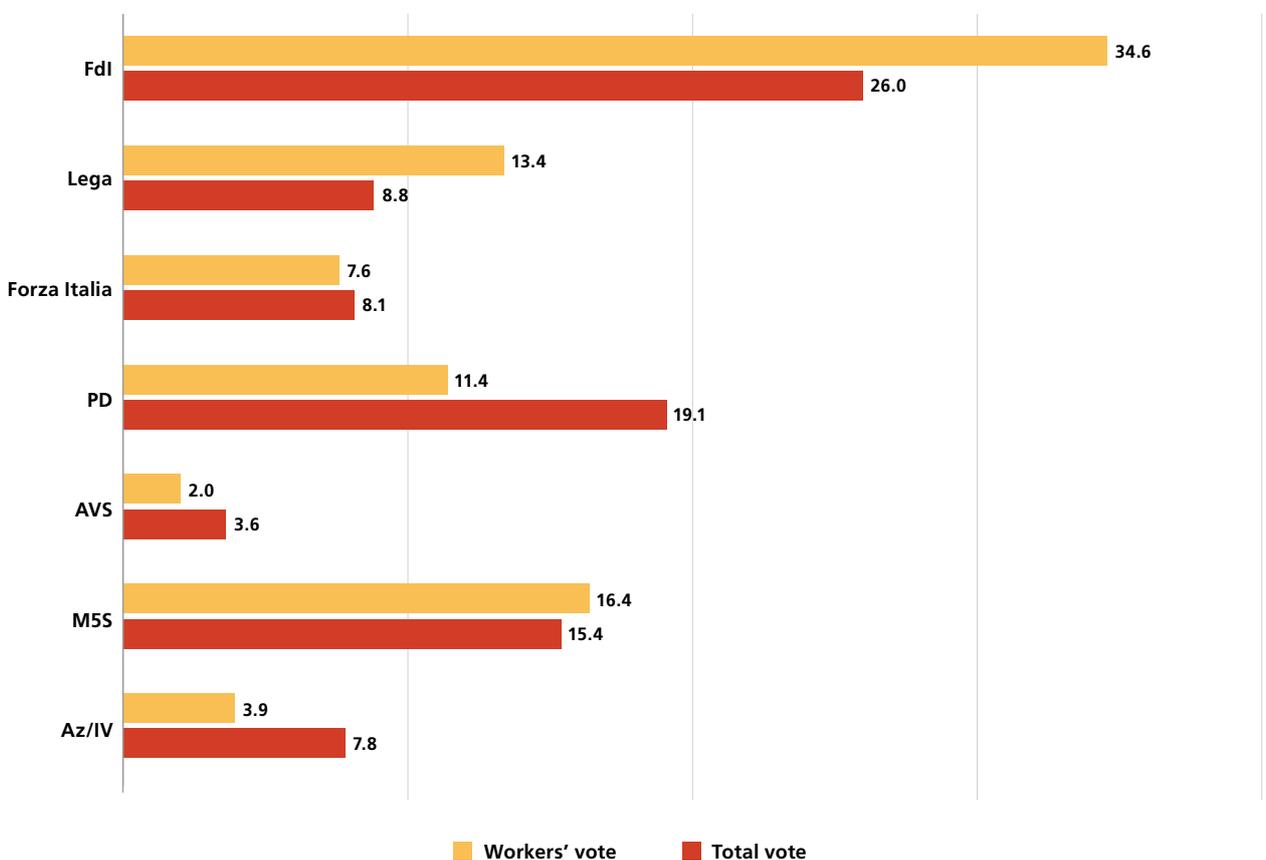
having won over blue-collar workers in northern Italy over the years with their anti-central state and anti-immigrant political position, *Lega* and *Fratelli d'Italia* are now enjoying increased popularity among blue-collar workers, along with the self-employed and low-skilled, in the rest of the country (Biorcio 2010, Marafii 2018, Leonardi / Carrieri 2020).

A post-election analysis by IPSOS (2022) shows that the centre-left does better among white-collar workers and the middle class more generally, winning about 30 per cent of the total vote. This brings the centre-left camp very close to the centre-right, without surpassing it.

As a SWG study also shows, a significant portion of lower-income voters voted for the M5S. This can be explained by the fact that this party has a voter base mainly located in southern Italy, and by the credit given to former Prime Minister Conte and Minister of Labour and Social Policies, Luigi Di Maio, for introducing the Citizen’s Income in 2019. This is a financial support measure designed to supplement family income, foster labour market integration, and to promote social inclusion.

<sup>11</sup> As Carrieri and Leonardi (2020) point out, the fact that blue-collar voters are voting for right-wing populist parties is by no means unusual behaviour for this social class. With the exception of the 1970s, Italian workers have never voted in a majority for the left.

Figure 1  
Distribution of the Workers’ Vote (Proportion of Total Votes)



Source: Own interpretation of data from IPSOS (2022).

## THE NON-EXISTENCE OF RIGHT-WING TRADE UNIONS IN ITALY

Italy's most important right-wing trade union is the *Unione Generale del Lavoro* (UGL; General Trade Union), which was founded in 1996 and succeeded the previously most important right-wing trade union, *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Nazionali del Lavoro* (CISNAL; Italian Confederation of Trade Unions)<sup>12</sup> and other independent, politically right-wing organisations. The UGL's proximity to the centre-right governments led by Silvio Berlusconi during the first decade of the 21st century was beneficial, as seen in an increase in its visibility, standing, and membership.<sup>13</sup> In more recent years, the union leadership that had maintained a close connection to centre-right political parties (first *Forza Italia*, then *Fratelli d'Italia*) moved closer to Salvini's *Lega* via deputy leader Claudio Durigon. Durigon himself, who joined parliament as an MP for *Lega* in 2018, played a key role in anchoring the party in central and southern Italy and facilitated close organisational and political cooperation between the UGL and *Lega*.

However, it should be noted that the political success of a more or less radical right has not yet been accompanied by an equivalent rise in right-wing trade unions or the UGL in particular. Indeed, UGL's presence in the workplace is generally very low, both in the metal sector and in the internal trade union representations. While radical right-wing parties, first *Lega* followed by *Fratelli d'Italia*, have grown in recent years, culminating in an electoral victory in September 2022, support for the three major unions CGIL, CISL and UIL has remained unchanged (Leonardi / Carrieri 2020).

## TRADE UNIONS AND THE RISE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT: PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES FOR COUNTERACTION

As already mentioned, right-wing trade unions have very little presence in the Italian workplace. Nevertheless, the increase in political power for the extreme right, which now governs the country, does pose a threat to trade unions. This threat comes from *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Lega*'s socio-political background as neo-populist entities, which are far removed from the traditional positions of the liberal right, and the

growing importance of disintermediation<sup>14</sup> in the narratives, policies, and communication of the populist right (Leonardi / Carrieri 2020).

The greatest danger for unions at the moment, however, comes from the far-right movements that have infiltrated protests occurring after the first wave of the 2020 pandemic. In Italy, as elsewhere in the world, these protests were first against curfews and later against vaccination campaigns and compulsory vaccination for work and public places (*Certificazione verde*; Green Pass).

On October 9, 2021, following a demonstration in Rome against the Green Pass system, some groups from the extreme right stormed and looted the headquarters of Italy's largest trade union, causing considerable damage. The CGIL was the victim of numerous subsequent attacks on offices and workers' councils across Italy. The di Vittorio Foundation mapped the assaults in an interactive online document, the *Mappa del vandalismo antisindacale*<sup>15</sup> (Map of Anti-union Vandalism), which paints an unsettling picture. As of October 2021, the di Vittorio Foundation had counted 46 attacks of varying degrees of severity in 40 cities across 13 regions, classified by the group taking credit for the assault. The extreme ire towards the unions in general, and the CGIL in particular, is due to the decision made at the beginning of the pandemic to regulate job security. Trade unions joined meetings with the government to draft a joint protocol for pandemic mitigation and containment measures in the workplace (*Protocollo condiviso di aggiornamento delle misure per il contrasto e il contenimento della diffusione del Covid nei luoghi di lavoro*).

The anti-vaccination movement, infiltrated by the extreme right, heavily criticised the participation of trade unions in these meetings and accused the CGIL of being in part responsible for a "health dictatorship", expressing the belief that Draghi's government's pandemic mitigation measures were at the expense of workers and individual freedoms. The extreme right was able to exploit the pandemic to gain public legitimacy and ground in the political sphere, fuelled by the general resentment that spread across society in response to restrictions and requirements (including

<sup>12</sup> CISNAL was founded in 1950 and was politically close to the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*.

<sup>13</sup> The highpoint for visibility and political importance for the UGL was likely in 2010, when it participated in negotiations on Colaninno's Alitalia rescue plan.

<sup>14</sup> It should be clear that disintermediation as a policy determination is not only relevant for the populist right. Matteo Renzi, PD leader from 2013 onward and prime minister from 2014–2016, took a political approach based on charisma: Renzi presented himself as a popular reformer, pursuing a strategy of disintermediation and personalisation to bypass trade unions and the media in their traditional roles as mediators (Kim et al. 2020).

<sup>15</sup> The map made by Anna Chiara Manzo can be found here: [https://www.cgil.it/la-cgil/aree-politiche/internazionale/2022/11/03/news/una\\_mappa\\_del\\_vandalismo\\_antisindacale-2468375/](https://www.cgil.it/la-cgil/aree-politiche/internazionale/2022/11/03/news/una_mappa_del_vandalismo_antisindacale-2468375/)

compulsory vaccination to vaccine passports) necessary to curb the spread of the virus (Toscano 2022). In particular, the extra-parliamentary right gained from this situation, increasing its public profile; meanwhile, the right-wing parties represented in parliament remained rather ambivalent and inconsistent on the topic. Some *Lega*-affiliated regional presidents, such as Luca Zaia, president of the early-impacted Veneto region, and Atillio Fontana, president of the Lombardy region, followed restriction measures advocated by then-health minister Roberto Speranza and even openly opposed their party leader Matteo Salvini, who tended to downplay the dangers of the pandemic. *Fratelli d'Italia* has had a rather ambiguous position when it comes to the pandemic: On the one hand, the party supported the vaccination campaign, while on the other, they condemned the restriction of individual freedoms, invoking a vague notion of individual responsibility. This ambiguity was a political tool that allowed the party to wink at the anti-vax minority in the name of a broader condemnation of the government-imposed 'health dictatorship'.

Points of contact between extreme right populists and anti-vaxxers can be traced back to mutual distrust of political institutions responsible for pandemic mitigation measures, a widespread distrust in science, and the classic populist narrative that political-economic elites have deceived the honest people in a singular black-and-white painting of the world (Eberl et al. 2021).

## TRADE UNION RESPONSE TO THE RISE OF THE RIGHT IN THE WORLD OF WORK

The rise of the extreme right in the workplace<sup>16</sup> did not go unnoticed by Italian trade unions nor by the CGIL: Unions are undertaking a number of initiatives in confederations, at the national level, and in sectors where members are increasingly voting for radical right parties, such as in the metalworking industry, so as to be able to understand this shift and be able to counter it accordingly. In addition to the map of attacks on its offices, CGIL has also promoted initiatives to define a common strategy and exchange with other organisations in the trade union's struggle against the extreme right and neo-fascism. These include seminars organised by Redes, a network of European and Latin American trade unions, which includes CGIL, CUT/Chile, CTA-T Argentina, CUT/Brazil, CCOO/Spain, and TUC/

UK.<sup>17</sup> The goal of these initiatives is two-fold: To better understand the rise of the extreme right and to develop appropriate counteraction. On the one hand, it is necessary to understand how the extreme right is able to develop relationships at the European and international levels and, on the other hand, it is important to learn about the effectiveness of training initiatives that have already been implemented in other countries in the Redes network. Moreover, it is necessary to create an international training programme that prepares trade union functionaries to handle the spread of neo-fascist concepts (such as racism, violence, populism, denialism, xenophobia, and homophobia) and to participate in communication, especially through digital media, in order to win over younger generations and new labour market participants.

The *Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici* (FIOM; Federation of Metal Workers Employees), the CGIL-affiliated metalworkers' union, has been active in several production plants in recent years, such as in the Lamborghini factory near Sant'Agata Bolognese, where, thanks to its historical presence and the fact that it provides a majority of union representatives, it has been able to organise a number of initiatives of note (Kim et al. 2022). For example, the Sant'Agata Bolognese plant has a compulsory course on the constitution (as part of the three-year 24-hour training required by law). Additionally, for a number of years now, the FIOM has organised an annual general meeting between April 25 and June 2<sup>18</sup> at the Lamborghini factory; this meeting focuses not on collective agreements or working conditions but on current issues (such as, for example, gender equality, immigration and racism, and impact of war on immigration), which are discussed in the presence of experts and allow for people to share their own experiences. FOIM also advocates for (and in some cases has already negotiated for) anti-discrimination rules to be included in the company's code of conduct and in company agreements so that they are binding and workers can be punished for discriminatory, racist, sexist, or homophobic behaviour.

<sup>16</sup> FIOM-CGIL Bologna General Secretary, interviewed for this report, believes the spread of right-wing extremism among FIOM affiliates to be marginal; however, *Movimento 5 Stelle* enjoys wide support.

<sup>17</sup> The most recent seminar, "Building an International Trade Union Strategy to Face Up to the New Forms of Fascism in Workplaces and Society", included speakers from all participating countries and was held in October 2022 at the very same CGIL headquarters that were stormed and destroyed by fascists and anti-vaxxers in 2021.

<sup>18</sup> These two dates have strong symbolic significance in Italy: April 25 marks the liberation from Nazi fascism and June 2 commemorates the birth of the Republic of Italy.

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