

## Mayors in revolt, march on Milan

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Five hundred mayors from Lombardy marched on Milan. The mayors of the “most virtuous towns in Italy” walked the few blocks that separate San Babila Square, where they met this morning at 10 am, and Palazzo Dotti, where the prefect Gian Valerio Lombardi was waiting to give them the symbolic, red, white and green sash. It is the desperate act of those who have to balance the books in administrations burdened by growing cuts and absurd budget constraints, which, for many councils, mean having their coffers full of money that they cannot spend.

The demonstration was by ANCI Lombardia, with the support also of UPEL, which, led by the Mayor of Varese, Attilio Fontana, headed a cross-party group of mayors to the meeting with the prefect.

There were the right-wing PDL, the left-wing PD, the Lega Nord, and the municipal lists; today, no distinction was made, all marched together, to the shout of “Let us run our councils”.

Today, with the prefect, they managed to obtain a meeting, which is soon to take place, with Minister Tremonti and Gianni Letta, to discuss their problems.

Basically the mayors are asking for two things: for the parameters of the stability pact to be revised, and for adequate state funds to be provided to pay for services for the people.

What the stability pact is is easy to explain. It is a budget restraint that forces councils to respect fixed expense parameters. The aim is to limit council spending, which, after being recorded, increases the public spending in the overall state budget, with the danger that the parameters imposed by Europe will be exceeded.

And so, there are 500 mayors supporting local organisations, and there is the Treasury Minister, all battling for a piece of a cake that is getting smaller and smaller.

Among the councils, there are also those who do not have any money at all, who, today, were asking for funds necessary for the fundamental services for the people. Indeed, in 2010, €22-million cuts in funds have been planned for councils in Lombardy, and additional savings of €200 million, with respect to 2008, are going to be imposed.

Conclusion: the investment in councils has fallen 18% in two years, and with 2010, the fall will be 30% in three years.

The mayors all agree: with resources scarce, in the choice between essential services and the investments for virtuous and long-term development and planning, they undoubtedly go for the services that are essential for the people, and best wishes to territorial development. In the end, although it is they who are protesting, it is, above all, the people who will suffer.

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