

Italy's Northern League backs Scottish independence

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In its statement on the referendum in Scotland due on 18 September, the British Socialist Equality Party described Scottish independence as a right-wing, nationalist project; the victims of which would be workers on both sides of the border. This judgment has been confirmed by the fact that Italy's ultra-right Northern League is fully behind the Scottish independence campaign.

At the party's congress in Padua, Northern League leader Matteo Salvini expressed his support for Scotland's separation from the UK. In an interview with the Italian language Moscow-based radio *La Voce de la Russia*, he justified his advocacy of independence for Scotland, Catalonia, Ireland, and northern Italy with anti-immigrant chauvinism as well as economic arguments. The people want to "come together against immigration and Islamic extremism," he said.

The Northern League's support for Scottish separatism discredits the attempts of organisations like the Socialist Workers Party and Scottish Socialist Party to portray Scottish independence in left, social reformist terms. The Northern League is characterised by law-and-order hysteria and anti-immigrant chauvinism. It mobilises backward sections of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie, by blaming immigrants, the poor in southern Italy, and the national and European bureaucracies for the social crisis.

Already two years ago, the Northern League lined up with Scottish separatism. When the British government agreed to the referendum on Scotland's withdrawal from the UK, the Northern League immediately proposed a joint project with the Scottish nationalists in the event Scotland became independent.

Together with a representative of Austria's extreme right Freedom Party (FPÖ), Heinz-Christian Strache, then-Northern League leader Roberto Maroni planned

the construction of a network critical of Europe, focusing on immigration and Islamism. Proposed partners in this network included Germany's conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Catalan and Scottish independence movements.

In reality, there are clear parallels between the separatists in Scotland and northern Italy. Both claim that things would be better if their regions had autonomy over their own finances and were no longer dependent on a central government.

This is precisely the Northern League's main argument. It demands an end to the financing by the better-off north of Italy (Padania) of the poorer south. It represents a small, privileged social layer that wishes to organise its relations with the transnational corporations and banks independently from Rome. By contrast, the working class would be severely weakened by the separation from their colleagues in Italy and Europe, as shown by the experience of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

In the interview, Salvini said: "Today, hunger is rampant, unemployment even in the richer northern provinces is over 20 percent, one in three young people is sitting at home. That's why today I think, when Lombardy, Venice, and Piedmont are paying for the rest of the state, the right time has come for the people to rise up."

The League's separatism is combined with racism and the most repugnant anti-immigrant chauvinism. A decade ago, former party leaders Umberto Bossi and Roberto Calderoli called for the use of force and cannon fire to drive refugees away from the Italian coast. Calderoli was compelled to resign in 2006 as a minister in the Berlusconi government due to his Islamophobic statements, and last year he caused a scandal when he compared integration minister Cécile

Kyenge, an optician born in Congo, to an orangutan.

In 2000, Northern League member of the European Parliament Mario Borghezio set afire the tents of refugees who were sleeping under a bridge in Turin. In an interview with radio 24, Borghezio declared that he was in agreement with the ideas of fascist mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 mostly young people in Norway in 2011. Many of Breivik's ideas, according to Borghezio, were good and some excellent.

The Northern League's outrageous provocations have been well known for some time. The reason for their continued rise is the right-wing politics of the supposedly "left" parties. While every government has for years intensified attacks on the working class, whether nominally centre-left or right-wing, no force in Italy mobilises workers against this.

The Northern League has been able to profit from this vacuum, and their demagogic slogans sometimes found a response. Founded in 1989, when the christian democrats and social democrats collapsed due to the "Tangentopoli" corruption scandal, it served Silvio Berlusconi for two decades in various governments to guarantee a majority.

Despite its vociferous calls for a struggle against corruption, the party was entangled in its own corruption scandal in April 2012. The party's founder and long-term leader Umberto Bossi, and his family, were not only convicted of illegal party financing, but also money laundering to benefit the N'Drangheta mafia organisation. Bossi resigned from all his party positions and was replaced by Maroni, a long-time minister in Berlusconi governments.

Last year, the League temporarily lost a significant section of its support to Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement. The rise of current party leader Salvini took place during this time, and he replaced Maroni in December 2013. He resurrected the project of a European-wide network, attempting to win Scottish separatists, the National Front of France's Marine Le Pen, Geerd Wilders' Party of Freedom from the Netherlands, the party of Mølzer from Austria, and the True Finns.

Salvini published a detailed document, *L'altra Europa della Lega* (2012), in which he declared that a victory for Scottish independence would greatly assist the efforts of the Northern League in Italy: "If

independence is achieved, it would set off a chain reaction which would be capable of fundamentally changing the geographic map of the old continent. A mighty wave, which would also be felt here with us."

The Scottish campaign has already given the separatists a new lease of life. In March, businessman Gianluca Busato organised a private online referendum on the separation of Venice from Italy. Two million people, nearly half of the population of Venetia, allegedly took part in the referendum, and almost 90 percent voted yes.

Although the online vote was neither reviewable nor legally binding, Busato threatened the government in Rome with an "immediate withholding of tax receipts." The Northern League calculated that the residents of Venetia could thereby save at least €20 million per year. Busato boasted that his own organisation, state of Venetia, had been invited to Edinburgh on September 22, 2012 for a rally for Scottish independence.

The excitement with which right-wing separatists like the Northern League and its satellites have greeted Scottish independence confirms what the Socialist Equality Party and the World Socialist Web Site has written about this referendum. In the SEP statement on the referendum, it explains, "In Europe, a "yes" vote would be seized on to accelerate a similar process of breakup in Spain, Italy and Belgium, with disastrous consequences."

As a firm opponent of all forms of nationalism, the SEP calls for a no vote in the referendum on 18 September.



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