

Vote no on the Italian constitutional referendum!

Joint statement of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain), Parti de l'égalité Socialiste (France), Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Germany)

3 December 2016

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls for a “no” vote in tomorrow's referendum in Italy on the constitutional amendments proposed by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. The referendum would give the prime minister virtually unchecked powers to impose his party's agenda on the legislature, in a step towards authoritarian rule.

The referendum is unequivocally reactionary. The Senate would be transformed into an unelected body selected by regional officials and deprived of its vote on many government affairs—in particular, of its ability to bring down a prime minister with a no-confidence vote. The referendum's “Italicum” measure would give a bonus to whatever party wins the most seats in the Chamber of Deputies, automatically handing it a 54 percent majority. It could then name a prime minister who would rule without any effective opposition from the legislature.

The referendum is supported by the European Union (EU), the banks, and Renzi's Democratic Party (PD). Last week, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told *La Stampa*, “I would like to see ‘Yes’ win,” because Renzi was carrying out the “right reforms.”

Their calculations were laid out, three years before Renzi proposed the referendum, in a JPMorgan Chase briefing lamenting the “deep-seated political problems” of southern European regimes, like that set up in Italy after World War II and the fall of the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini.

It stated, “The political systems in the periphery were established in the aftermath of dictatorship, and were defined by that experience... Political systems around the periphery typically display several of the following features: weak executives; weak central states relative

to regions; constitutional protection of labour rights; consensus-building systems which foster political clientelism; and the right to protest if unwelcome changes are made to the political status quo. The shortcomings of this political legacy have been revealed by the crisis.”

It is not difficult to see why Renzi has now proposed this referendum with the full support of Europe's ruling elite.

Europe is mired in economic slump, and Italian banks face hundreds of billions of bad debts, after nearly a decade of deep austerity measures have discredited its political system. A wave of corporate bankruptcies and social cuts is being prepared that will provoke explosive social anger among the workers. Renzi's referendum is intended to allow the PD to act ruthlessly against working class opposition to the demands of the banks and major corporations.

The ICFI's opposition to Renzi's referendum does not lessen our irreconcilable opposition to the groups across the political spectrum in Italy issuing nationalist calls for a “no” vote. These include the Italian right, such as the remnants of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, the far-right Northern League, and the fascistic *Fratelli d'Italia* organization. They have long demanded authoritarian measures like Renzi's amendments, but see a PD defeat tomorrow as a chance to regain power.

The Five-Star Movement (M5S) of Beppe Grillo has issued increasingly xenophobic and populist attacks against the EU, denouncing Renzi as a “wounded sow.” However, the M5S itself proposes to negotiate a settlement with the EU, based on a renegotiation of EU treaties and a referendum on Italy's exit from the euro currency.

Much of the PD's periphery is calling for a “no” vote. This includes the CGIL (General Confederation of Italian Labor) and FIOM (Italian Metalworkers Union) unions, the Italian Left composed of PD breakaways, and groups like *Rifondazione Comunista*—the main other tendency that emerged, besides the PD, from the break-up of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) after the Soviet bureaucracy restored capitalism in the USSR in 1991.

These groups have worked closely with the PD for decades and in *Rifondazione's* case, entered into government with the PD in 2006-2007 to vote pension cuts and credits for the Afghan war. They support the EU and offer no way forward for workers and youth seeking to oppose the policies of Renzi and of international finance capital.

They accommodated themselves to the capitalist state system created after World War II, based on the PCI's support for the Italian bourgeoisie and the Allied imperialist powers after the fall of Mussolini. The Stalinist PCI blocked a social revolution after World War II, betraying struggles of the working class in the Resistance. Now, a party descended from the PCI, that supported capitalist restoration in the USSR and is staffed with right-wing functionaries like Renzi, a former Christian democrat, aims to tear up what remains of the concessions granted in that period.

The critical task is to define a politically independent perspective for the working class on the issues raised by Renzi's referendum.

Whatever the outcome of the vote, the referendum will intensify the convulsive crisis engulfing the ruling classes internationally, which has been accelerated by the election of Donald Trump as US president. A “yes” vote would pave the way for intensified attacks on the social rights of the working class. Renzi has indicated that he may resign if the “no” vote carries, possibly bringing to power an anti-EU government including Grillo's M5S.

What is emerging everywhere is the conflict between the nation-state system and world economy, amid the escalating break-down of the institutions of the post-World War II order—and in Europe, the EU. After Britain voted in June to leave the EU, there is a strong possibility that an anti-EU regime could emerge in Italy, directly threatening the break-up of the EU and the euro.

Tomorrow, Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) presidential candidate Norbert Hofer could also become Western Europe's first far-right head of state, laying the groundwork for a possible chancellorship of FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache.

The ICFI opposes the referendum from the standpoint of an independent political mobilization of the working class on a European and international scale. Workers and youth in Italy opposed to Renzi's referendum face a common enemy with workers in every country across Europe: a capitalist class whose agenda of deep austerity, militarism and war drives it ever more rapidly to dictatorship.

There is deep and explosive opposition among workers and youth in Italy and across Europe. This opposition, however, must be unified and mobilized in struggle based on a clear political and historical perspective. *Rifondazione* and its allies have proved to be bourgeois parties and a dead end for workers.

The ICFI advances itself as the new political leadership that must be built, fighting to win workers to the perspective that, as the ruling elites turn to dictatorial forms of rule, the only viable response for the working class is international revolutionary struggle. Faced with the discrediting of European capitalism and the breakdown of its political institutions, the ICFI advances the perspective of the overthrow of the EU and its replacement by the United Socialist States of Europe.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact