

# The struggle against the reactionary transformation of the Italian bourgeois State and the December 2016 referendum

In April of 2016, the Renzi government, after having imposed four votes in Parliament at forced stages, was able to obtain the approval of a counter-reform (the Boschi Bill) that undermines the principles and values of the bourgeois-democratic Constitution of 1948, won by the Italian working class and people in their victorious struggle against fascism and the monarchy.

The central aspect of this counter-reform is the replacing of the "perfect bicameralism" [in which identical bills must pass both houses of parliament – *translator's note*] and the "double vote of confidence", characteristic of the Italian republican constitutional order, whose historical and political reasons reside in greater guarantees against parliamentary coups and the rise of an authoritarian or fascist government.

Now, with the approval of the counter-reform, the Parliament will still have a Chamber and Senate, but only the Chamber will have the power of granting or revoking confidence in the government. Besides, the Chamber will have legislative pre-eminence.

The counter-reform abolishes the elected Senate, depriving it of its constitutional prerogatives and stripping the citizens of the possibility of directly electing the senators.

Thus, there will be both a drastic retrenchment of the role of the bourgeois Parliament and a new concentration of powers in the hands of the government, increasing the dominant function of the Prime Minister.

Another feature of this counter-reform is the increased number of signatures necessary for the presentation of laws by popular initiative (from 50,000 to 150,000 signatures) and of the abrogative referendums (from 500,000 to 800,000 signatures), making the exercise of direct sovereignty by the people more difficult.

Besides, some essential areas of responsibility (energy, strategic infrastructure, national system of civil protection, labor protection and security, etc.) that were previously entrusted to the regions are again transferred to the central and supreme power of the bourgeois State.

## A deadly mechanism

The constitutional counter-reform goes together with the new electoral law (called the *Italicum*), created on the basis of an agreement between Renzi and Berlusconi, which provides for:

- a) a large bonus for the largest party (54% of the seats, that is, 340 deputies) to the list that wins the elections with a minority of votes, on the first or second ballot;
- b) an anti-democratic threshold barrier for small parties (it is now 3% nationally, but it will increase);
- c) one hundred heads-of-lists reserved, that is not elected by the popular vote, since they will be directly chosen by the top leaders of the parties.

The authoritarian purpose of the neoliberal Renzi is a perverse combination of constitutional reform and the new electoral law that greatly benefits the largest party.

The results of this deadly mechanism will be:

- 1) the absolute majority of the Chamber, and therefore of the Government, will be the prerogative of a single party;
- 2) ordinary legislative functions will also be in the hands of the winning party; the Senate can raise objections to the laws approved by the Chamber, but, in case of a conflict between the two houses, the Chamber will always prevail, and it will actually be the Government that will dictate the contents, times and methods of developing laws;
- 3) the small and very small political parties will not be represented in the single legislative Chamber, not being able to obtain the minimum vote threshold;

- 4) many members of Parliament will not have popular legitimacy, because they will be named by their party heads-of-lists, and they, in turn, will decide the persons to be included on the lists;
- 5) the party that wins at the elections will always have control of the Parliamentary Committees, and it can assign all the Committees to itself, if it is politically suitable to them.
- 6) as the new Senate does not have a vote of confidence in the Government, the latter will be made up of the majority party in the Chamber without needing an agreement with other political forces, and so it can only fall on account of internal struggles in the winning party.

The combination of the constitutional counter-reform and the *Italicum* profoundly modifies the present institutional and political order.

This summarizes the transition from perfect bicameralism to perfect authoritarianism, transforming the Italian Republic, characterized by the centrality of Parliament, into an authoritarian and reactionary bourgeois State, dominated by a limited oligarchy.

### **From the bourgeois-democratic Republic to the authoritarian Republic**

The political aim of the Renzi government is the establishment of an absolute system of an autocratic kind, without external balances, minimizing the central role of direct suffrage and the effective role of Parliament, which becomes utterly subordinate to the executive.

Therefore, there will be a stable government with strong powers concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister, able to impose – without parliamentary intervention – the policy of the oligarchy over the workers and broad masses, to quickly approve the laws necessary to satisfy the interests of the financial monopolies, the wealthy and the parasites.

In this way, the Renzi government and the economic and political forces – national and international (US, NATO, EU, Vatican, Israel) – that support it, aim to rewrite Italian class relations in favor of big capital; they aim to liquidate the democratic rights and dismantle the political-institutional framework achieved by the anti-fascist struggle, in order to immobilize and disorganize the workers and trade union movement.

This project has been in preparation for a long time by the most reactionary sectors of the bourgeoisie that have attacked the Constitution since the 1950s, trying to modify it so as to strengthen the power of the capitalists.

In these decades the ruling class boycotted the bourgeois-democratic Constitution, so that some of its provisions became a dead letter. The bourgeoisie has always openly denied the Constitution inside the factories. It has gradually deprived Parliament of its functions, accomplishing *de facto* the growing prevalence of the executive over the legislative and judicial powers, and its “emancipation” from the popular will.

In the last decades – from the P2 (a criminal organization linked to the US) to Craxi, from Cossiga to Berlusconi, from Napolitano to Renzi – the trend has been the transition from parliamentary government to presidential government, from the electoral system based on proportional representation to the majority electoral system.

The constitutional reform and the *Italicum* demonstrate that, in the epoch of imperialism, the bourgeois State is losing its limited democratic features and is becoming more and more reactionary, abolishing the freedoms and democratic rights won by the working masses with their blood.

After the change to the second part of the Constitution, there will follow the inevitable attack on the first part, already starting on concrete political ground. For instance, Renzi’s Job Acts turns upside down the formula of the Republic “based on labor”, and enacts the primacy of capital and financial parasitism.

The liberal and reformist leaders are again preparing the way for right-wing populism and fascism.

### **The economic crisis is speeding up the reactionary change**

The reactionary process has been strongly speeded up by the outbreak of the economic crisis of 2008, which deepened the decline of Italian imperialism and drove the bourgeoisie to take more aggressive positions.

The political regression, the attempt to concentrate and strengthen the executive power, is connected to the increased difficulties in which the weak Italian monopolies find themselves and to the need to intensify their predominance over the economy and society.

In what way? By directly controlling the State and placing it at the service of their exclusive interests; utilizing its apparatus and its policies to increase the exploitation of the workers and to transfer wealth from the popular strata to the oligarchy; removing the traditional "obstacles" (the slowness of parliamentary activity, trade union relations and above all the rights and organizations of the workers) that slow down the destruction of social gains; arming the State to defend their spheres of influence and to plunder the raw materials of the dependent peoples.

In conformity with these needs, in the last years there has been a constant development of the reactionary process, accompanied by the following phenomena:

- The increasing restriction of popular sovereignty: since 2010 the government in Italy is no longer the result of the citizen's vote; first with the Berlusconi-Scilipoti government, then with that of Monti-Passera and Letta-Alfano, and finally with that of Renzi-Verdini, the bourgeoisie has adopted "technical" or extra-electoral solutions without a popular mandate.
- The almost exclusive prerogative of the legislative function has been in the hands of the government: in the last two legislatures, almost 80% of the laws approved were introduced by the government.
- A profound modification of the system of bourgeois and petty-bourgeoisie parties, that now have turned into "liquid" parties, characterized by a chief and a narrow group of devoted leaders, without any appearance of internal political democracy and without a large base of mass membership.
- The passive and full acceptance of the diktats of the EU-ECB-IMF, the neoliberal memorandums, the austerity policies, etc.
- The modification of the labor codes, the adoption of anti-worker laws and anti-democratic and discriminatory trade union agreements, the attack on collective bargaining, the continuous limitation on the right to strike.
- The persistent violation of article 11 of the Constitution and the reinforcement of war operations abroad, under the leadership of the USA and NATO, the growth of military expenditures and the militarization of society.

With the coming to office of the government of Matteo Renzi, the secretary of the Democratic Party (DP), to which the big bourgeoisie has assigned the command, the reactionary process has reached a new stage, in which – with the change of the State-form of the class rule of the bourgeoisie – what has happened on the political ground is being codified at the constitutional level.

### **The push of the international monopolies**

Of course, not only the Italian but also the foreign monopolies are interested in the constitutional counter-reforms and in strengthening the executive power.

One of the obstacles that the financial oligarchy wants to eliminate in order to completely achieve its criminal policies is the existence in Europe of the constitutions won after the Second World War that protect the fundamental rights of the workers.

For example, in May 2013, JP Morgan, the powerful global financial services monopoly (well known for the fraud of the subprime mortgages and the scandal of derivative securities) published a report showing the need for political intervention in the internal affairs of the States of southern Europe, in order to promote constitutional reforms based on the neoliberal policies of austerity of an authoritarian type.

In that report JP Morgan defined the constitutions adopted as a result of the fall of fascism as “*unsuited to further integration in the region*”, as they show “*a strong socialist influence, reflecting the political strength that left wing parties gained after the defeat of fascism*”.

These constitutional systems exhibit “*weak executives, weak central states relative to regions; constitutional protection of labor rights; consensus-building systems which foster political clientelism; and the right to protest if unwelcome changes are made to the political status quo*”.

The report ends with a significant statement: “*The key test in the coming year will be in Italy, where the new government clearly has an opportunity to engage in meaningful political reforms*”. That is, it must get rid of the Constitution of 1948.

Evidently, the process of authoritarian transformation of the bourgeois institutions in Italy corresponds to definite needs of international financial capital, which aims at increasing the exploitation of the working class, wants to place onto the workers the consequences of the economic crises, and is interested in the privatization and the interests of the colossal Italian public debt.

With the constitutional and political counter-reforms, the Renzi government has transformed into law the needs of the most reactionary and most imperialist sectors of finance capital, engine of the reactionary and fascist change all over the world.

### **The referendum of December 2016 and the social-democratic opposition**

The law of the constitutional counter-reform was passed by Parliament with less than 2/3 of the votes of its members. Consequently, in order to come into force, according to article 138 of the Italian Constitution it has to be submitted to a popular referendum, which will probably take place next December.

This is the third constitutional referendum that has taken place in the last 15 years and it comes after the one in 2006, in which the attempt by Berlusconi to change 57 articles of the Constitution was rejected.

Renzi has declared many times: “If I lose, I will go home. And not only will I go home, but I will withdraw from political life”. Maybe this is a bluff; anyway it is proof of the fact that the arrogant prime minister has made great promises to the imperialist circles that put him in power. Now he is seeking to make more compact the DP, he is mobilizing the media and the university professors, and he is trying to transform the referendum into a personal plebiscite. He is going on the attack, relying on the subordination of the minority of the DP and the weakness of the bourgeois opposition. The General Confederation of Italian Industry, Confindustria, announced its support to Renzi in exchange for a new reduction of taxes on enterprises.

The referendum will be an important political battle. If the number of "NO" votes exceeds the number of "YES" votes (in this type of referendum a *quorum* is not necessary), there will be two political consequences: the constitutional counter-reform will be rejected and the Renzi government will go through a crisis.

Renzi and the Democratic Party (a rotten fruit of the long transformation of the old revisionist CPI), as the principal authors of the reactionary transformation of the Italian State, have started a big political and media campaign to approve the counter-reforms with the support of the biggest

economic and the financial oligarchy, and with the backing of right-wing sectors that voted for the Boschi bill (for instance, the Verdini group, linked to Berlusconi and the “dark forces” of the State).

Against the Renzi reforms a large democratic and progressive coordination has been created, which brings together some two hundred parties, associations, trade unions, etc., and thousands of individuals.

This is a positive act, which shows that there is a great social and political division on the question of the counter-reforms. But there are profound limits and errors in the leadership of this coordination.

The social-democratic and reformist leaders, the left wing of the bourgeoisie and its intellectuals, hide from the masses the character and origin of the reactionary measures, and present themselves as the defenders of the current state of things.

These people limit themselves to the juridical-constitutional arena, trying to avoid the mobilization and direct intervention of the working class, the development of a large movement of struggle against the reactionary project supported by monopoly capital. They want to avoid the connection between the victory of the "NO" votes in the referendum and the fall of the Renzi government.

The revisionists go on deceiving the workers, stating that is possible to achieve socialism in the framework of the present bourgeois-democratic Constitution.

In reality, they both cannot conceive of any system except the capitalist one, and go on spreading old and new disastrous illusions. Their political objective is to be an “alternative” government with a new bourgeois center-left, based on the DP.

### **The position and struggle of the communists**

We communists are carrying out a harsh battle in opposition to the constitutional counter-reforms from our class and revolutionary perspective.

As opposed to every position of indifferentism, we do not underestimate the importance that the laws approved by the Renzi government have for the bourgeoisie, which strengthen the power of the executive, curtail the rights of Parliament, eliminate the democratic freedoms of the workers, and prepare a harsher repression against the workers and popular movement.

They are measures that lead to the establishment of a reactionary, anti-worker and warmongering regime, with some fascist features, in our country.

The attitude of the Marxist-Leninists towards bourgeois democracy is not characterized by indifference and a schematic approach, and it is not always the same under different historical and political conditions.

As firm supporters of the revolution and the proletarian dictatorship, we tirelessly defend the basic democratic gains that the working class has wrung from the bourgeoisie through many decades of relentless struggles and we resolutely fight to expand these freedoms; we denounce the authoritarian positions of the bourgeoisie and the Renzi government, and we act to provoke its fall through struggle and under an avalanche of "NO" votes in the referendum, in order to defeat the reactionary plan of monopoly capital.

In this political battle we do not forget the real class character of the bourgeois-democratic Italian Constitution of 1948, the restricted and conditional nature of its rights and freedoms, limited by the existence of capitalist exploitation and a bourgeois State which, *"even in the most democratic republic, and not only in a monarchy, is simply a machine for the suppression of one class by another"* (Lenin, *"Democracy" and Dictatorship*, 1918).

One simple example: the right to work, solemnly proclaimed by the Constitution, has largely disappeared for the new generations in Italy.

Therefore, we call on the working class and unemployed people to mobilize *en masse* and to organize the united front of struggle against the capitalist offensive, political reaction and the perils

of war, to open the road to an alternative of power: a popular Republic with a socialist Constitution that guarantees the rights to the proletarians and all the working people, using the concrete methods to make these rights effective.

On the tactical basis, we promote the organization of the workers, the working people, the youth and the women of the popular strata, in Committees for the "NO" votes in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods, etc. These Committees should have two functions: to explain the nature and political and social consequences of the constitutional and political counter-reforms; to support and broaden the existing struggles of the exploited people, together with the other existing class organizations. We are working for local demonstrations and for a great united national strike with a demonstration to take place in Rome before the referendum.

The victory of the "NO" votes to the constitutional modifications can only occur as the result of a broad worker and popular mobilization against the capitalist and government forces that are directing the anti-democratic and authoritarian projects.

### **Toward a sharpening of the class struggle**

The defeat of the reactionary project in the December referendum and the consequent resignation of Renzi would create serious political problems for the bourgeoisie in the formation of a new governmental majority; it would sharpen the clash among the State powers, which is taking place together with the economic crisis and the downfall of Italian imperialism.

At the same time, a popular victory against one of the most important political projects of the ruling class could foster the rise of a mass movement able to carry out a revolutionary practice.

In this situation new political perspectives could be opened up: it would be possible to put on the agenda the question of a government based on worker and popular organs, able to carry out a real struggle against reaction, to take resolute measures against finance capital and to satisfy the vital needs of the working class and broad masses.

If, on the contrary, the "YES" votes wins, it is foreseeable that Renzi will move forward the date of the congress of the PD and will move at once to early elections with the new electoral law, in order to exploit his advantage and to take control of Parliament and the government. In this way, he would proceed to eliminate the remaining rights and gains of the workers and their organizations, to eliminate public services, to apply unmercifully the Jobs Act and the EU measures, etc.

In either case, a sharpening of the economic and political class struggle in our country is looming, in which the working class can develop the consciousness of the need for a revolutionary rupture with the capitalist-imperialist system.

The struggle of the working class and the most advanced sectors of the broad masses has to continue regardless of the results of the referendum, at a higher and more determined level, within the more general battle for the revolution of the proletariat, the only social force that can take our country out of the blind alley into which the bourgeoisie has dragged it.

This is a revolution for which the subjective political conditions – first of all, the independent and revolutionary Party of proletariat – are lacking, while all the objective conditions of an economic and social nature for its success have existed for many decades.

*July 2016*

**Communist Platform – for the Communist Party of the Proletariat of Italy**