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Right wing in Italy greets Trump's election

By Marianne Arens

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The election of Donald Trump has been enthusiastically greeted by the right wing and far-right in Italy. At the same time, prospects for the constitutional referendum due on December 4 are worsening. The head of government Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party, PD) has linked his own political future to a positive outcome of the referendum.

Trump's election victory has been celebrated by Beppe Grillo, the initiator of the Five-Star Movement (M5S). In a video on his blog Grillo saluted Trump's victory obscenely, writing: "This is a general 'f**k-off' (un Vaffanculo generale)."

"It is those who dare, the obstinate, the barbarians who will take the world forward," Grillo wrote. "We are the barbarians! The real idiots, populists and demagogues are the journalists and the establishment intellectuals." ... "Corncob [Trump] has told everyone to piss off: Masons, banking conglomerates, the Chinese."

Grillo, who three years ago presented himself as a spokesman for the environmental and protest movement, claiming he would mobilize the population against the corruption of the ruling elite, has shown his real colours—as a right-wing populist.

Grillo joins a long chain of right-wing and far-right politicians who have welcomed the election of Donald Trump.

Eighty-year-old Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia, FI) expressed his enthusiasm for the comparisons made in the media between Trump and himself, a billion-dollar entrepreneur who was four times prime minister in Italy. Trump had been elected, Berlusconi said, because Americans were sick and tired of politics “that commits the typical mistake of the left all over the world: i.e., to believe that what is ‘politically correct’ corresponds to the needs of the people.”

Referring to Renzi’s constitutional referendum, Berlusconi said that the same spirit that led the Americans to choose Trump would now lead Italians to say: “No to a referendum, which restricts their freedom of choice.”

Renato Brunetta, a spokesperson for FI, called on the head of government to resign and said: “From this day forward Matteo Renzi is politically finished, he is a dead man walking.” He justified his remark by saying that Renzi was a recent guest of Obama who had expressed his support for Renzi’s constitutional reform.

The reform, which is due to be voted on December 4, is a reactionary undertaking. The Renzi government wants to abolish the current parliamentary two-chamber system in order to speed up the decision-making process in parliament. The government is responding to the requirements of finance capital and is preparing for war and violent class struggles.

In his almost three years in office, Matteo Renzi has introduced reactionary policies such as his “Jobs Act” and pension reform, attacking the rights of the working population and youth. Renzi, who came to power as a “modernizer” and “pulveriser” of vested party interests, confronts growing popular resistance. Polls on the result of the referendum have put the “no” camp in the lead for weeks.

Renzi has repeatedly linked the referendum to his own political fate. In a television broadcast last Sunday he declared: “You remain in power as long as you can change something. If you have to leave things as they are, others should take over. ... Politics is not the only thing in life.”

Italy is in deep economic crisis. The third largest economy of the European currency union has still not recovered from the global financial crisis in 2008. Government debt, at almost 133 percent of GDP, is the second largest in Europe behind Greece and the country’s banking crisis remains unresolved. Bank balance sheets reveal bad loans amounting to €136 billion. Many small and medium-sized companies cannot pay their loans and are going bankrupt.

Many commentators fear that Italy could be the next country to leave the European Union (EU), following the UK. “The Trump effect is immensely dangerous for Italy,” wrote the German newspaper *Die Welt*, and ARD television reported on November 14: “Investors currently consider Italy leaving the euro as more likely than a Greek exit.”

Poverty and unemployment are rising, and the government has become less and less popular. Tens of thousands of young Italians are voting with their feet and are leaving the country in search of better conditions.

Meanwhile strikes and protests are increasing. Car workers, teachers, railway workers, bus, train and flight personnel, parcel carriers and transport and logistics workers are preparing to take up the fight against the government's austerity measures. Strikes in the middle of November against the government's budget are due to be followed by a general strike throughout Italy on November 24-25.

The strikes, however, are designed to merely let off steam and strengthen the influence of the official trade union federations. The major trade unions support the economic program of the Renzi government, while so called rank-and-file unions share basically the same bourgeois program as their bigger counterparts.

Under conditions where a progressive socialist alternative is lacking, opposition to Renzi's referendum has been dominated by the right wing. The Northern League (Lega Nord) and fascists are not only mobilizing impoverished shopkeepers, artisans and small entrepreneurs, but also desperate workers eager to fight against Renzi, the "establishment" and the EU in Brussels.

Last Saturday, the right-wing camp called for a rally at Piazza Croce in Florence, the city where Renzi was formerly mayor, and which is traditionally governed by the centre-left. "On December 4 we will dispatch with Renzi home," cried Matteo Salvini, head of the Northern League. The city of Florence was "not a communist city, but rather an occupied city," he said, but the people would expel the liars. Salvini said he was ready to take over the government: "If required, I am ready to run."

On the same day, Giorgia Meloni, president of the fascist Fratelli d'Italia, also made an appearance. She called for an insurrection in Florence if, after a defeat in the referendum, President Sergio Mattarella refused to hold elections. "Then we will mobilize the people," Meloni said.

The referendum reveals the urgent need to construct a revolutionary leadership in the working class. As the constant stream of strikes and workers' protests show, workers are ready to fight and very angry. But they lack a revolutionary party and an international socialist perspective to defeat the ruling elite's program of social devastation, dictatorship and war.