

Italy's Constitutional Referendum of 25–26 June

A statement by the FdCA Council of Delegates

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

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For the second time in 5 years, and the third time in a decade, Italians are being called to vote on changes to the Constitution: first, in 1997, the D'Alema Bicameral Commission referendum;¹ second, the October 2001 referendum on Title 5 of the Constitution;² third, the forthcoming referendum which concerns the entire structure of the Republic.

A subversive strategy by both sides

For over a decade now, the best part of Italy's political powers and representatives of capital have been following two objectives:

- stability in the country's political system, and
- the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity.

Both of these objectives require profound changes to the Constitution, as the stability of the system demands an increase in the powers of the executive, while the principle of subsidiarity demands the introduction of federalism and regional devolution with the consequent privatization of public services. The changes to the Constitution are therefore an essential material and legislative step towards a successful conclusion to this subversive strategy.

The June 25–26 Referendum

On 25–26 June, voting will take place to confirm the changes to the Constitution which introduce two novelties:

- presidentialism, in the figure of a Prime Minister³ who will enjoy almost dictatorial powers, and
- federalism, with the principle of subsidiarity, itself already introduced in the 2001 referendum on the changes proposed by the centre-left government of the day.

Both changes will result in damage and restrictions to the freedom and equality of all citizens.

On the one hand, the introduction of a super-premier will transfer and concentrate in the executive a discretionary political power which will turn Italy into a monocratic regime, with all the risks that history has pointed out.

¹ The Bicameral Committee, presided over by Massimo D'Alema, was established in 1997 to reform the Italian constitution. The Committee's recommendations were subject to amendment by parliament and approval by referendum. The Committee ended up recommending an essentially French-style semi-presidential system, accompanied by an electoral law that offered a premium of an additional 20% of seats to the majority, with remaining seats being divided between a majority system and a proportional one.

² The October 2001 referendum shifted power from the central government to the country's regions. 70% of voters (in a turnout of only 24%) backed the proposals put forward by the previous centre-left government that gave the 20 regional authorities more say over taxation, education and environmental policy.

³ The leader of the executive currently holds the title "Chairman of the Council of Ministers" and enjoys no special powers.

On the other hand, the introduction of federalism (as in 2001) will give the regions⁴ greater powers with which to apply the principle of subsidiarity and transform public services into universal services, in other words privatized and no longer equal for all.

The trap of State federalism

Capital is using libertarian slogans such as federalism and subsidiarity, but distorts their true meaning.

- State federalism, both in its 2001 variety and the current one, is not governed by solidarity. Rather, it is based on the delegating of power to local institutions who will have power over locally-produced resources, thus increasing inequality among citizens and enabling a greater domination of capital, destroying the solidarity of the exploited. Exclusive competence by the Regions over such matters as healthcare and education is a threat to the system of national wage negotiations and introduces elements of differentiation between the various parts of the country.
- The principle of vertical subsidiarity, ie. between the various institutions, benefits the diversification of standards in education, healthcare and employment and creates differences in basic rights on the basis of the area of the country one lives in.
- The principle of horizontal subsidiarity serves to dismantle and privatize public services, farming them out to the private sector which can then profit from the management of services such as schools, hospitals, care, cultural activities and various social services. Universal services only guarantee a minimum service to all, services which are offered by various sources on the basis of particular interests often on an ethnic or denominational basis, through schools and services financed by public funds.

The libertarian vision

Federalism and subsidiarity from a libertarian point of view, however, are elements of freedom and equality:

- federalism means solidarity, enabling the redistribution of resources between rich and poor areas;
- vertical subsidiarity, as theorized in libertarian circles since the days of Proudhon, has as its basis a system of assemblies ensuring the participation of all in political management, structures based on self-management and the rejection of the electoral delegate and federated on an ever-growing territorial level;
- the principle of horizontal subsidiarity, as demonstrated by the experiences of self-management in Spain in 1936, the cooperativism of the peasant leagues, of the mutual

⁴ Italy is divided into 20 regions (e.g. Lombardy, Sicily, Tuscany). The regions are divided into 100 provinces based around cities, and the provinces are divided into over 8,000 “communes”, or local councils. The bigger “communes” are also divided into municipalities.

aid societies, is an instrument of self-government and participation, of the initiative of everyone in the management of services on the basis of solidarity in a harmonic vision of society, founded on the freedom of education, on pluralism in religious matters, on the rejection of divisions on the basis of ethnicity, race or wealth.

What is at stake

The result of the partisan, anti-fascist struggle for freedom and equality, despite being reduced to the form of a written document aimed at balancing (or evening out) the strength ratios that existed in 1946–47,⁵ is now once more under attack.

But what is at stake today for workers and for the exploited is not just the defence of the Constitution in itself. It is countering the strategy that lies behind the laws enforcing these changes and the consequences they might have. A strategy which serves:

- the interests of greater capitalist profit
- to strengthen social control
- to concentrate political power into the hands of one person
- to increase inequality and reduce freedom.

To defeat this subversive plan, voting NO is useful but it is not enough.

We must stop the privatization of public services, prevent the provision of services on the basis of unequal subsidiarity, take back politics and society into our own hands, without delegating!

⁵ The reference is to the creation of the Italian Republic following the fall of the Kingdom of Italy after World War II.

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