

Report from Rome by Antonio Gaspari

'How we beat the green referendum'

For the first time in the Italian republic's history, a national referendum organized by the ecologists was defeated.

Thanks to the Schiller Institute's catalytic role, on June 3, Italian voters nullified an ecologist-initiated referendum by massive abstention. This was an historic first in Italy, where the Green Party, together with the Communists, the Socialists, and other leftist groups, had succeeded in making Italy the first country to ban nuclear power, through a 1987 referendum.

This same political coalition promoted three referendums in the June 3 vote—two aimed at abolishing the rights of hunters, and a third which would prohibit the use of chemical pesticides in agriculture by revoking a clause in the regulatory law. Confident of victory, the ecologists had spent more than \$10 million on their campaign and enjoyed exclusive access to the major media.

But the Italian people did not bow to their dictatorship. More than 56% of the voters did not vote. This was not apathy, but the use of a right established by the Constitution (the referendum has no effect, whatever the result of the votes, if voter participation is less than 50%). The anti-Green forces, led by the Schiller Institute, organized the abstention as a political protest.

I had overall responsibility for the Schiller Institute's strategy. The Institute does not oppose defending the environment. It opposes the forces that are using environmentalism as a tool to destroy the national economy, science, and advanced technology. Behind the referendums there was a project to destroy the Italian light weapons industry (one of the best in the world)

by abolishing hunting, and to ruin modern Italian agriculture, especially the production of fruit, vegetables, and wine, by prohibiting the use of pesticides.

Furthermore, this referendum was meant to be a test for similar campaigns in the rest of the world.

One year ago, when the Greens started to gather the 700,000 signatures needed to promote the referendum, the Schiller Institute was the only opposition. We wanted to defend the Italian economy. We decided to take legal action to inform the magistrates that the promoters of the referendum were committing crimes in their campaign, scaring the people with "false and exaggerated news"; that they were making an "unfair competition," speculating on so-called organic produce, and favoring an increase in imported fruits controlled by the international food cartels.

Most of the farmers' magazines reprinted the full text of our legal petition. We set up stands at every important agricultural fair. We organized forums and debates on a national level. We became a reference point and our ideas began to penetrate among the farmers and the hunters.

At first, the official farm organizations were afraid to take clear-cut stand. But the campaign we conducted among their base produced so much ferment, even they had to move. They used the Schiller Institute method as a guide for their own campaigns. The hunters began a mass campaign for abstention. The biggest Catholic farmers association, Coldiretti, start-

ed out saying that they only wanted to wage an "informational campaign," but in the final weeks officially asked the voters not to vote.

We also sent a letter to every member of the board of directors of Agrofarma, the association of the chemical industries, asking them to support the Schiller Institute campaign against the Greens. The debate at their national meeting was very hot, but they did make a public call for abstention.

In past years we produced two special dossiers, one on the "Ecologists' Conspiracy" detailing the history and the financial supporters of the Greens, and a second on "The Ecologist Movement: the Biggest Fraud of the Century," detailing the scientific hoax behind the ecologists' scare stories. These have been a very important weapon to educate the opposition. Our dossiers, the most effective source of information, were also requested by parliamentarians and senators.

While not one party officially opposed the referendum, the citizens ignored the parties. The Italian Communist Party, for example, had been the biggest promoter of the referendum. During the electoral campaign, they split. The base demanded the resignation of the leader of the environmentalist faction. The referendum received its lowest vote in former Communist strongholds. In the last year the party lost 300,000 members, partly in revolt against the zero-growth policy adopted by the leadership.

The Schiller Institute will not rest on its laurels. We think there is an opportunity now to reopen Italy's nuclear power plants. We can show that the anti-nuclear referendum of 1987 was unconstitutional. We are also gathering evidence that it was promoted as a plot of international oil companies such as Exxon, with the help of corrupted Italian politicians.