

Prodi government takes power in Italy: a right-wing regime with a left fig leaf

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Five and a half weeks after parliamentary elections, a new Italian government was sworn into office Wednesday.

The governing coalition stretches from moderate Christian Democrats to liberals, Greens, social democrats, the Democratic Left (the successor organization to Italy's Communist Party), and Communism Refounded (Rifondazione Comunista). In order to satisfy all eight governing parties the head of the government, Romano Prodi, distributed a total of 25 ministerial posts, one more than the cabinet of his predecessor, Silvio Berlusconi. When deputy minister and state secretaries are added, the total of government ministers exceeds well over one hundred.

The majority of cabinet posts go to the Democratic Left—which received nine—and Margherita with seven posts. The smaller parties have to make do with just one post each. Despite the broad spectrum of parties in the cabinet, the key ministries are securely in the hands of persons close to Prodi who are committed to pursuing a right-wing, pro-business and pro-European Union policy. While less significant ministries were divided up to create enough posts for the various parties, the Finance and Economic Ministries are in the hands of one man—66-year-old Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa. Like Prodi he belongs to no particular party and enjoys the confidence of the international financial markets.

Padoa-Schioppa, who has a diploma from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US, has spent virtually his entire professional career in the executive levels of major banks. At the age of 28, he joined the Bank of Italy. Eleven years later in 1979 he switched to become the general director for economic and financial affairs in the EU Commission. Four years on he returned to the Bank of Italy. In 1997 he took over the supervision of the Italian Stock Exchange for a year. He then spent the last seven years as an executive of the European Central Bank.

Padoa-Schioppa's task will be to drastically cut back Italy's burgeoning budget deficit (currently at 4.1 percent of GNP—well over the EU limit of 3 percent) and breathe life into Italy's flagging economy. It can be expected that all the social projects of the new government will be subordinated to this aim and that the new minister will have the right of veto over any promised reforms.

The Interior Ministry, which has responsibility for Italy's Kafkaesque plethora of police units and security services, also goes to an old trusted stalwart of the ruling elite. The 68-year-old jurist Giuliano Amato has been a member of various governments since the end of the 1980s, and was even prime minister on two occasions: from 1992 to 1993, at the highpoint of the corruption scandal that led to the collapse of the old party system in Italy, and once again from 2000 to 2001.

Amato climbed the political ladder inside the Socialist Party led by Bettino Craxi and was regarded as his right-hand man for a long time. For his part Craxi enjoyed close relations with Silvio Berlusconi, who laid the basis for his huge business and media empire in Craxi's stronghold of Milan under the protective hand of the SP chief. Amato distanced himself from Craxi prior to the latter's fall from grace. Although he still continues to play a leading role in European social democracy, he enters the new government without a party affiliation.

The Justice Ministry is also headed by a man who stands as a guarantor of continuity of the era of Berlusconi. The unprecedented tirades by Berlusconi against the judiciary, which he denounced as crypto-communists ("Red Robes"), were amongst the most scandalous pronouncements made by the former head of government.

The new justice minister Clemente Mastella, head of the Christian Democratic Union Democrats for Europe (UDEUR), is by no means inferior to Berlusconi in this respect. Amongst accusations made by Mastella include his claim that the investigations by Italian judges had created a "climate of horror". Like Berlusconi himself Mastella has a number of skeletons in his closet. According to the journalist Marco Travaglio Trauzeuge, he was a marriage witness to a mafioso who supplied false documents for top mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano.

According to newspaper articles Mastella achieved his new post only after the UDEUR threatened to pull out of Prodi's coalition.

Another ultra right-winger is Francesco Rutelli, the head of the Margherita Party, who has been appointed vice premier and minister of culture. The culture ministry includes tourism, which is a vital branch of the Italian economy.

At 1 years, Rutelli is a puppy amongst the veterans in the

Italian government. Nevertheless, he has had a long and eventful political career. He started off as a member of the libertarian Radical Party and entered parliament for the party at the age of 29. In 1992 he founded an environment party and was environment minister—for just one day. Between 1993 to 2001, he was the mayor of Rome and finally made the break from any form of political radicalism. This former radical is a close friend of Camillo Ruini, the chairman of the Italian Bishops Conference, and argues for the family policies of the Vatican.

On a European level, Margherita is a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, which includes in its ranks the free market Free Democratic Party (Germany), the British Liberal Democrats and the French UDF. The Defense Ministry is also in the hands of a Margherita member, 65-year-old Arturo Parisi, who is also a close confidante of the head of government.

The foreign minister and deputy premier alongside Rutelli is Massimo D'Alema. This leading figure in the Democratic Left had already shown interest in the post of parliamentary speaker and state president. The eventual elected speaker is Fausto Bertinotti from Refounded Communism, while the state presidency went to the 81-year-old Democratic Left leader Giorgio Napolitano, who also enjoys the support of the right wing. D'Alema was compensated with the ministry position.

The 57-year-old D'Alema, reared by a family of established Stalinist functionaries, joined the Communist youth movement at the age of 14, and later took over the CP party daily newspaper *Unità*. Like many of his Stalinist counterparts, particularly in Eastern Europe, D'Alema welcomed the collapse of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to ditch his verbal adherence to communism and launch an ambitious career in bourgeois politics. In 1994 he took over as chairman of the Democratic Left and in 1998 he replaced Prodi as prime minister of a center-left coalition.

D'Alema is regarded as crafty and cynical. As head of government he followed such a right-wing course that the manager Guido Bossi commented that under D'Alema the seat of government had been turned into “the only merchant bank where one does not speak English”. A devastating defeat in regional elections forced D'Alema to resign after just two years in office. Since then he has altered nothing with regard to his right-wing politics.

The nomination of D'Alema has led to criticism from pro-Israeli circles because in the past he had often criticized Israel and made verbal gestures towards the Palestinians. But there is no expectation of any fundamental change in Italy's foreign policy, or any serious opposition to US policies in the Middle East. D'Alema has proved far too adaptable and ready to swim with the prevailing current.

Despite tensions between the European Union and the United States, the EU maintains a pro-Israeli policy and there can be no doubt that the new Italian government will strengthen its

orientation towards the EU in comparison to Berlusconi's government. This shift is assured not only by the presence in the government of D'Alema, who sat for a period of time in the European parliament, but in particular through the figure of Prodi and his closest confidantes, who have all filled leading positions in Brussels: Prodi as president of the EU commission, Interior Minister Amato, who was formerly vice president of the European Constitutional Convent, and Padoa-Schioppa, a former European central banker.

In Brussels these men were responsible for policies that served the interests of the major European business concerns and met with widespread hostility by working people across the continent. In a personal letter to US president Bush in 2004, Amato had assured him that a “strong Europe in a strong alliance” would not work against the interests of the US, but rather “in the long-term interests of the United States”.

The course undertaken by Prodi is only minimally different from that pursued by his predecessor Silvio Berlusconi or other heads of government in Europe, such as Angela Merkel in Germany or Jacques Chirac in France. On its own, Prodi's government would find barely any support from the population as a whole. In order to give his government a somewhat progressive and left-wing touch Prodi is entirely dependent on the services of the Italian Stalinists and Refounded Communists. These parties have taken over responsibility for the public image of the Prodi government and play a key role in propping it up in parliament.

With a vote of 5.8 percent in the Lower House elections and 7.4 percent in the Senate, the Refounded Communists made a considerable contribution towards Prodi's electoral victory. As parliamentary speaker, the RC chairman Fausto Bertinotti has the job of freeing up the government to carry out its work. Now RC also has its own minister in the government. Paolo Ferrero has taken over as head of the Social Ministry.

Three years ago the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed this leading member of Refounded Communists, a party which at that time was regarded by many in Europe as a role model for a large leftwing party, drawing together a broad spectrum of various groups. Ferrero himself continually stressed his opposition to what he termed “global neo-liberalism”.

What he further said in the interview was utterly opportunistic and we commented at the time: “As the discussion with Ferrero developed, it became increasingly clear that the PRC was unable to assume a principled position on any question and to fight for it. Their politics are limited to a series of tactical maneuvers.”



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