

Democratic Party's Enrico Letta will try to form Italian government

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After the Italian parliament reelected the Democratic Party's (PD) Giorgio Napolitano to an unprecedented second term as president on Saturday, Napolitano named Enrico Letta as prime minister-designate yesterday. Letta, the PD's second-in-command until the mass resignation of the PD national leadership this weekend, will now attempt to form a government.

Italy has been without a government since February elections produced a hung parliament. The vote was a resounding rejection of the austerity policies that technocrat Prime Minister Mario Monti has carried out with the European Union's (EU) support. In the Italian Senate, the PD won 119 seats, the People of Freedom (PdL) party of Silvio Berlusconi won 117, populist comedian Beppe Grillo's Five-Star Movement (M5S) won 54, and Monti's Civic Choice Movement (SC) won only 18.

Upon leaving the presidential palace, Letta called for talks with all of Italy's major parties and said he faced a "complicated and difficult attempt" to build a coalition government. He called the responsibility involved "heavier than what my shoulders can bear."

Government talks are expected to begin tomorrow. If Letta succeeds in forming a government, a proposed cabinet could be submitted to parliament for a confidence vote by next week.

After Letta's nomination, Italy's major political parties are trying to assemble a parliamentary dictatorship to keep imposing social cuts overwhelmingly opposed by the working class.

The 87-year-old Napolitano, who began his career in the Stalinist Italian Communist Party (PCI), has threatened to resign if the parties do not unite behind continued economic "reforms." The PD, Berlusconi's PdL and Monti's SC have all indicated they would cooperate with a prime minister-designate chosen by

Napolitano.

Letta is reportedly considering Bank of Italy Director-General Fabrizio Saccomanni as economy minister, the Italian statistics agency ISTAT's chief Enrico Giovannini as industry minister, and Monti himself as foreign minister.

Letta tepidly criticized EU austerity policies that have devastated Italy, Greece, and other countries, saying, "Europe's policy of austerity is no longer sufficient." Letta's entire career shows, however, that even if he were to adjust Monti's policies, he would continue the assault on the working class.

The nephew of top Berlusconi advisor Gianni Letta, Letta began his career as a member of the Christian Democracy and the Italian Popular Party (PPI) in the 1990s. He was a top Treasury official in the 1996-2001 Olive Tree coalition government, which brought together the PPI and the Democratic Left Party (PDS), the largest party to emerge from the collapse of the PCI.

Letta helped formulate the Olive Tree government's policies for Italy to meet financial guidelines to participate in the euro, which was launched in 2002. These policies prominently included the 1997 pension cuts, designed to limit public spending.

Since the Olive Tree government collapsed in 2001, Letta has occupied various high-ranking posts—in think tanks, as an aide and state secretary to Prime Minister Romano Prodi in 2006, and then in the PD, which formed in 2007 when the PDS and PPI merged.

Letta himself praised the technocratic Monti government when it was installed in November 2011 for "getting off on the right foot," including women, and promoting "growth." In the event, the Italian economy shrank by 2.4 percent last year under the impact of Monti's cuts, with industrial new orders

falling 7.9 percent in the year starting in February 2012.

The financial markets reacted positively to Napolitano's selection of Letta, lowering the interest rates charged on Italian state debt. French business daily *Les Echos* said of Letta, "A man of the shadows, he is considered one of the PD's best brains... He is a convinced European whose career inspires confidence."

Monti himself applauded Napolitano's selection of Letta. He added, "Thanks to his proven and significant experience in the political, cultural, and social fields, despite his youth, Letta will know how to efficiently guide Italy through the challenging path of necessary institutional and cultural reforms, and to consolidate Italy's credibility on the international stage."

The maneuvers of Napolitano and Letta are yet another indication of the bankruptcy of the Italian political establishment. Under Monti, the PD and the PdL tried to hide their parliamentary support for Monti's cuts behind claims that Monti's was a "technocratic" government, and not a government of political parties. Rising opposition to austerity in the working class and Monti's defeat in the polls are coming together to explode this cynical pretense that the PD and PdL did not support Monti's agenda.

Significantly, it is the PD—Italy's main bourgeois "left" party—that is leading efforts to form another pro-austerity government. The resignation of the PD's ex-Stalinist leader Pier Luigi Bersani on Friday, followed by that of the entire PD leadership, marks the collapse of attempts to organize a PD government excluding Berlusconi's PdL. Now the PD is handing over power to its Christian-Democratic elements, for them to organize a government resting also on Berlusconi.

This exposes more than just the empty hypocrisy of the Italian bourgeois "left" parties' attempts to shore up their dwindling support by making moral appeals to voters' disgust at Berlusconi's corrupt career and mafia ties.

From the standpoint of economic questions, there is increasingly little difference between the "right" and "left" in Italian capitalist politics. Having completely lost the PCI's working-class base since the collapse of the USSR, the various parties on the Italian "left" that emerged from the PCI's collapse have become pro-business parties. (See: "In the Italian elections, Rifondazione Comunista emerges as a bourgeois party"). Since the outbreak of the 2008 economic crisis, they

have waged unrelenting war on the working class.

The central features of the present situation are the complete political disenfranchisement of the working class and, amid rising popular discontent, the increasing likelihood that it will emerge in open struggle against the entire political establishment.

Broad sections of the ruling class fear such a development—including M5S's celebrity populist Beppe Grillo, who has criticized the major parties and, until now, refused to openly sign alliances with them. (See: "The political significance of Beppe Grillo's Five-Star Movement")

He initially denounced Napolitano's reinstatement as a "coup" and called for the population to refuse to recognize it. However, he subsequently pulled back, fearing protests against the government.



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