

Italian comedian Beppe Grillo's Five-Star Movement joins ranks with the far right

Marianne Arens, Peter Schwarz
1 July 2014

The Five-Star movement (M5S) of Italian politician Beppe Grillo has joined the ultra-right-wing EFDD (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy) fraction in the European Parliament. Grillo's movement steps into the shoes of the Northern League and the fascist Fratelli d'Italia, which were affiliated to the same fraction during the last legislature.

The biggest party in the EFDD, with 24 deputies, is the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which advocates the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union and defends anti-immigrant policies. Grillo's Five-Star Movement has 17 deputies.

Included in the EFDD are five smaller right-wing parties, each with one or two deputies: the Swedish Democrats, founded by a former member of the Nazi Waffen-SS; Joëlle Bergeron, a former member of the French National Front; Rolandas Paksas from the Lithuanian party Order and Justice (TT); the Czech Free Citizens led by Peter Mach; and the Latvian Peasant Union headed by Iveta Grigule.

With a total of 48 MEPs from seven countries the EFDD fulfills the requirements for group status in the EU, which is bound up with funding of tens of millions of euros, plus posts in EU committees and other privileges.

In the last legislature the fraction (then with the initials EFD), consisted of right-wing and fascist parties from 11 countries, including UKIP, the Greek LAOS, the True Finns, and the Danish People's Party. With the exception of UKIP, these organizations have either joined other right-wing groups or have not been re-elected.

The alliance with UKIP is confirmation of the right-wing character of Beppe Grillo's M5S. First founded in 2009, the M5S won a quarter of the vote in its first ever appearance in parliamentary elections in February

2013.

The former television entertainer, comedian and millionaire Beppe Grillo made a series of town square appearances and on the Internet to loudly denounce Italy's corrupt political elite. He was able to exploit the vacuum left by the bankruptcy of the official Italian left. In the years since the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR, during which they alternated in power with corrupt media billionaire Silvio Berlusconi, the various successor organizations of the Italian Communist Party and their pseudo-left allies carried out deep attacks against the working class.

Following Grillo's electoral success, there were many who sought to portray his movement as a progressive or even left-wing tendency. The *World Socialist Web Site* vigorously disputed such claims. We insisted that calls for a "struggle against corruption" and "direct democracy," together with an eclectic assortment of populist demands, was no substitute for a socialist program representing the social and historical interests of the working class.

A few days after the election, we published an article headlined "The political significance of the Five-Star movement of Beppe Grillo," exposing the right-wing, reactionary core of the Grillo movement.

"Many of the demands of M5S are borrowed from petty-bourgeois protest movements," the article declared, continuing: "The real centrepiece of its programme, its economic policy, however, is unmistakably right-wing. Under the guise of a struggle against corruption, monopolies and bureaucracy, it calls for an historic assault against workers and the entire framework of the postwar welfare state. While M5S claims to oppose the corrupt political class, its target is the social gains of the Italian working class."

The WSWs received numerous letters from Italy

describing our assessment as “lying” and “crazy” and accusing us of demonizing Beppe Grillo. The alliance struck by Grillo with the UKIP led by Nigel Farage has fully confirmed the accuracy of our analysis.

Both speak for ultra-right elements in the ruling class who seek to mobilize layers of the middle class against the working class with populist demagoguery against bureaucracy, corruption and monopolies. The main thrust of their program, however, is aimed at the social rights and gains of the working class.

In the name of the fight against government waste, they demand the destruction of hundreds of thousands of civil service jobs. The Five-Star movement wants to abolish all provinces in Italy and dissolve all municipalities with a population of less than 5,000. It advocates the reduction of state authorities, thereby facilitating further deregulation and privatization, and calls for the subordination of universities to private companies. In the health sector, the M5S demands that patients pay for “non-essential services” and pay for preventative and early detection treatments.

Similarly, the British UKIP of Farage advocates massive cuts in the British National Health Service (NHS), education and pensions.

On the armed forces, military, police and border guards, both parties call for the slashing of “red tape” so as to allow for more aggressive repression of workers, refugees and immigrants.

Xenophobia and aggressive nationalism are an integral part of the program of UKIP and M5S. Unable to challenge finance capital, to which they are intimately connected, Grillo and Farage seek to divert the fears of the petty bourgeoisie demonizing layers of the working class.

In an interview with the British *Telegraph*, Grillo emphasized his agreement with Farage: “Just like us, he wants [Farage] to control immigration flows in Europe. It is not true he is a racist.”

The M5S’ European programme says nothing about the environmental and civil rights issues which it originally borrowed from the Occupy movement, the Pirates and the Greens. Grillo has also dropped his former *leitmotiv*, the “struggle against corruption.” He even formed an alliance with former Lithuanian President Rolandas Paksas, who resigned over accusations of cooperation with the Russian mafia.

Grillo’s movement has lost support in Italy in recent

months and faces severe internal conflicts. In the European elections of May 25, it took second place behind the Democrats of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, but with 21 percent remained significantly behind its desired total.

The authoritarian manner of Grillo and his mentor, IT entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, has led to a series of fierce internal party conflicts. Since the general election 16 months ago, no less than six senators and dozens of MPs have either resigned or been expelled. An expulsion procedure is currently taking place against the mayor of Parma, Federico Pizzarotti.

Grillo’s entry into the EFDD group took place without any internal discussion. Members were officially allowed to vote online, but only 30,000—less than a third of registered members—did so. Of those who voted, a majority backed Grillo and Casaleggio’s recommendation to join forces with Farage. The other alternatives in the vote were either to join the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) led by the British Tories, or refrain from joining any alliance.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact