

Hung parliament emerges in Italy as social-democratic vote collapses

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Yesterday's general elections in Italy have produced a hung parliament and a historic collapse of the ruling social-democratic Democratic Party (PD). Initial projected returns show a surge of right-wing parties including the populist Five-Star Movement (M5S) and the far-right League (formerly the Northern League), and uncertainty reigns as to what government might emerge.

Official election results will only be announced this evening. However, current results show the M5S winning 31.93 percent of the vote, the right-wing coalition winning 37.12 percent of the vote, and the PD and its allies winning 23.23 percent. Inside the right-wing coalition, the League won 17.97 percent of the vote, while Forza Italia of former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi won only 13.91 percent, and the fascistic Fratelli d'Italia won 4.35 percent.

Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni's PD obtained only 18.98 percent of the vote, and its various political satellites won even less. The social-democratic Free and Equal (LEU) party won 3.35 percent, and the petty-bourgeois *Potere al Popolo* (Power to the People) party won 1 percent.

All indications are that a hung parliament will emerge, followed by negotiations between the various parties over how to form a governing coalition. Previously, rules over the attribution of seats in the Chamber of Deputies meant that a party winning 40 percent of the vote received an absolute majority of 54 percent. The election law adopted last year removed the bonus. Experts estimate that at least 40 percent of the vote are necessary to receive a majority of the seats. But now it appears that none of the parties will even reach this.

The M5S appears to have done particularly well in the Mezzogiorno, the economically devastated,

primarily agricultural areas of southern Italy. It has reportedly won over 40 percent of the vote in the region of Puglia, with over 45 percent in the region's capital, Bari. Former Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema has reportedly lost his seat.

The M5S has repeatedly said it refuses to make alliances with other parties, and uncertainty reigns as to what government could emerge. Germany's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* raised the possibility of an alliance between the M5S and the League, calling it a "horror scenario for Europe and for the financial markets," insofar as both of these parties are critical of the European Union (EU).

In France, *L'Obs* raised a possible M5S-League alliance, an "unlikely" PD-Berlusconi alliance, a technocratic government, and concluded that the most likely scenario is "a big mess followed by new elections." *Le Monde* called the result an "electoral earthquake," while *La Dépêche* wrote that its main fear was that Italy will become an "ungovernable country."

The election result testifies to the political bankruptcy of the PD and to the vast popular anger with the EU. It comes less than a year after the electoral collapse of both the German Social Democratic Party and France's Socialist Party.

Not only did the PD supervise years of EU social cuts and mass unemployment in Italy, but Gentiloni called for Italy to join the plans of Berlin and Paris to militarize the EU and aligned himself on NATO's reckless war threats against Russia. Gentiloni's government also led the EU intervention in Libya, a former Italian colony devastated by the 2011 NATO war, to set up prison camps for refugees. The PD's unpopular and reactionary policies paved the way for a degraded, anti-immigrant campaign.

There is broad social opposition, and mass protests

erupted against a fascist shooting in Macerata of six African immigrant youth. Nonetheless, it is right-wing or far-right parties that benefit. They were able to rise in the polls and carry the election, by presenting themselves as the best populist protest alternative to the PD and the EU.

In the face of their party's historic collapse, PD sources are reporting that former prime minister Matteo Renzi is preparing to tender his resignation as PD national secretary. He is scheduled to make an announcement on the elections at 5 p.m.

As for *Potere al Popolo*, its score reflects the fact that the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties offer no alternative to their social-democratic allies. It is drawn from various Stalinist and petty-bourgeois factions of *Rifondazione Comunista* that have made their hostility to the working class very clear over decades by working with the PD and its forebears—including by voting credits for the Afghan war and pension cuts under the 2006-2007 social-democratic “Union” government.

Workers are profoundly disillusioned with such parties, which are neither capable of nor interested in appealing to workers' opposition to austerity and war.

Potere al Popolo 's campaign demonstrated that it offered no alternative to the right-wing policies of the PD, with which it has at most tactical differences. It is allied with Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”), which is running a pro-austerity, pro-EU government in Greece in alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks (Anel) party. It also received support from Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose Unsubmissive France (LFI) party has announced its support for stepped-up military spending and is calling for a return to the draft in France.

What is clear today is that the Italian election has resolved nothing. Like the 2015 and 2016 elections in Spain and the 2017 elections in Germany, which all led to hung parliaments and long governmental negotiations, it has revealed the profound instability and crisis of European bourgeois politics.

It has also confirmed the assessment in the *World Socialist Web Site*'s analysis of the Italian elections. The critical question is the construction of a truly socialist and internationalist alternative to the PD, the anti-worker pseudo-left parties, which means the construction in Italy and across Europe of sections of

the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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