

Five Star Movement and Lega unveil coalition agreement to form right-wing Italian government

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The far-right Lega (formerly the Northern League) and the protest Five Star Movement presented a 58-page coalition agreement in Rome on Thursday. It is the programme of a reactionary government with semi-fascist characteristics.

The proposed coalition plans to impose the dictates of the financial markets and reduce state indebtedness in a country racked by poverty and unemployment. Both parties explicitly confirmed this in the coalition agreement. The agreement states, “The government’s actions will be based on a programme to reduce the debt burden.”

To achieve this, tax rates on the wealthy are to be radically cut. A so-called “flat tax” at levels of 15 and 20 percent is planned. According to the theory of the agreement, the reduced burden on business will result in an increase in gross domestic product.

Asked how reduced tax revenues will be offset, both Lega and the Five Star Movement have declared they will sharply reduce the expenditure for the “state bureaucracy.” In addition, they insist that special measures for the south, the “Mezzogiorno,” will be eliminated. This is necessary in the interest of “homogeneous economic development throughout the entire country.”

This already gives a sense of the extent of the attacks on the working class contained within the coalition agreement. Tens of thousands of jobs in the public sector are threatened, as well as jobs in businesses in southern Italy previously subsidised by the state. At the same time, reduced tax revenues will lead to cuts in social spending.

These attacks are barely concealed by the promise of a basic citizens’ income (“Reddito di cittadinanza”). In reality, the basic income is restricted to €780 (US\$ 920) per month and tied to strict conditions, much like Germany’s Hartz IV welfare benefit. Anyone who fails to cooperate or refuses a job offer will be denied any state support. In addition, only people with Italian passports will receive the basic income.

The widely publicised announcement withdrawing the

2011 pension reform, the “Legge Fornero,” turns out on closer inspection to be a non-binding project. The agreement states that anyone who can prove that the total of his or her age plus the number of years he or she paid in to the pension system is more than 100 has a right to a full pension. This would mean, for example, that all those who have gaps in their contributions due to unemployment would be left empty-handed and have to labour into old age.

The attacks on workers and the most vulnerable sections of society are combined with a brutal anti-refugee policy. This policy pursues two goals: Firstly, Lega and the Five Star Movement want to scapegoat the most vulnerable members of society, the refugees, for the social crisis and thereby divide the working class. Secondly, the policy will be used to justify a vast strengthening of the repressive state apparatus.

The coalition agreement identifies a figure of 500,000 illegal immigrants who must be deported within 18 months. This means that half a million people will be forcibly expelled if necessary! The state must resort to Nazi-style methods if it is to crack down so savagely on immigrants.

The coalition agreement states that the state must obtain the necessary resources to combat terrorism and launch a crackdown on radical Islamists. Another goal explicitly mentioned is the closure of all “nomad camps” on Italian territory. Reportedly, some 40,000 Roma live in such camps.

The agreement goes on to state that the Schengen and Dublin agreements on borders and immigration have failed and must be renegotiated with the European Union (EU). People smuggling across the Mediterranean must be stopped together with other EU states, it adds.

The Lega-Five Star agreement has been criticised by the EU and the European media in recent days. But the establishment critics do not oppose the inhumane refugee policy, and they have only occasionally mentioned the flat tax. Significantly, they have focused in particular on the basic income and the vague promise to overturn the pension

reform.

Nonetheless, it is obvious that Lega leader Matteo Salvini and Five Star's "Capo Politico," Luigi Di Maio, are seeking with the coalition agreement to reach an accommodation with the EU.

The financial markets responded nervously to a first draft released at the beginning of the week. It contained the demand for the European Central Bank (ECB) to forgive a portion of Italy's €2.26 trillion state debt. The Milan stock exchange declined sharply, while risk premiums on government debt rose dangerously high.

Responding with concern, EU Commission vice president Dimitris Avramopoulos urged that the EU stability pact be observed, while Italian president Sergio Mattarella warned he was not obliged to sign off on such a government programme. The president still has the task of approving the government, he added.

In the current draft, Lega and the Five Star Movement have retreated from making any concrete demands on the ECB. They merely note the necessity of renegotiating certain aspects of the stability pact, aspects that are not spelled out. The call for a possible exit from the euro, or even a referendum on it, has also been dropped.

Instead, the agreement now states that cooperation with the EU Commission and other agencies is essential and serves as "the best protection for Italian interests in Europe." In addition, the importance of a strong Italian state for Europe is emphasised. This includes "Italy's participation in international missions."

However, these are to be re-evaluated according to national interests. The new coalition commits to the transatlantic alliance with the United States as a privileged partner, but is also open to Russia. The latter country is not an enemy, but an increasingly important economic and trading partner, states the agreement.

It goes on to assert, "In addition, it is necessary to pay more attention to the south." In the struggle against "Islamic extremism" and uncontrolled immigration, cooperation is necessary with countries "engaged in combatting terrorism." In plain language, this means Italy's increased involvement in North Africa, and in oil-rich Libya in particular, which at one time was Italy's largest colony.

The agreement also states that the repressive state apparatus must be strengthened. More resources must be given to personnel in the armed forces, the Carabinieri, and the forces of law and order, the police. They must be better protected and financed so that they can accomplish their task, "the protection of Italy's territory and national sovereignty." The arms industry and high-tech defence research must also be protected, insists the agreement.

The aggressive imperialist character of the programme is

partially concealed in a few places to placate Five Star's supporters. For example, on "clean water" and "clean environment," there is a promise that the state will keep drinking water supplies under its control and will take action to protect the environment. Since the referendums of 2011, these demands are part of the five stars in the symbol of Grillo's movement.

Another heavily promoted point in the programme says, "Agriculture and fisheries: Made in Italy." This is aimed at the rural petty bourgeoisie, the farmers' and fisheries' associations, and domestic producers, who are being offered unabashed nationalism as a defence against competition from the EU and world markets. It is worth recalling in this regard that the Five Star Movement collaborated with Lega once before, during the "Pitchfork" protests against the government in Rome several years ago.

Another paragraph contains a "code of ethics for government members." Nobody can be a minister if he or she has a criminal record or was involved in corruption, has links to the mafia or was involved with the Freemasons. This point is obviously aimed at Silvio Berlusconi. The courts recently confirmed that in spite of his conviction for tax evasion, he could now stand for political office. The Five Star Movement has repeatedly promised its voters it would not join a government including Berlusconi.

An online poll of Five Star Movement members began yesterday. Salvini and Di Maio intend to meet with the president on Monday and inform him of their decision on the sole outstanding point, their nomination for prime minister. Although the Five Star Movement was by far the largest party in the March 4 vote with 32.7 percent, it may voluntarily give up that post.

The formation of a Lega-Five Star government could still falter, whether due to a failure to agree on a prime minister, a lack of support from the membership or other reasons. Mattarella would then be prepared to impose a non-elected "technocratic" government.



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