

Italian president considers installing neo-fascist government

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On Wednesday, two days after Italian President Sergio Mattarella approved a technocratic government under Prime Minister Carlo Cottarelli, he reversed course and signaled that he might instead install a far-right government. He had vetoed a government of the two leading parties in the March elections, the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the far-right Lega, warning that it could lead Italy out of the euro currency.

Yesterday, however, Lega and the M5S advanced a chaotic range of competing scenarios for possible governments or new elections. There were reports that elections could be scheduled as early as September. All the proposals being advanced make clear, however, that Italy's far-right is rapidly entrenching its position in ruling circles.

Initially, M5S leader Luigi di Maio said he could abandon his proposed economy minister, anti-euro economist Paolo Savona, if Mattarella would agree to a M5S-Lega government led by Giuseppe Conte. "There are two paths ahead. Either we launch the Conte government with a reasonable solution or we vote right away," di Maio said.

Lega leader Matteo Salvini rejected this proposal and instead called for fresh elections, mocking di Maio for surrendering to Mattarella on the euro currency: "Di Maio is open to a deal? We are not on the market. Let's go vote right away. We have tried to do a government, but it is never good enough for Mattarella, so then you give up. The president should explain how we get out of this impasse."

Yesterday evening, however, reports emerged that Mattarella was considering holding a snap election, approving a Conte government with or without Savona as economy minister, or approving a M5S-Lega government led by Salvini, even though M5S received more votes than Lega.

Salvini also backtracked, indicating that he might agree to this, or to a coalition of Lega, M5S and the fascistic Fratelli d'Italia party of Georgia Meloni. He also suggested that he might briefly adopt a posture of "technical non-distrust," allowing the technocrat Cottarelli to stay in office by not voting to bring him down.

There are also reports that, to calm fears of a euro crisis on the financial markets, Mattarella and Cottarelli may seek an intermediate outcome, where Lega and M5S members are incorporated into the technocratic government led by Cottarelli.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the crisis, it is clear that 75 years after the fall of Mussolini during the Allied invasion of Italy, the Italian ruling class is considering resorting to a neo-fascist government. This is a warning to workers and youth not only in Italy, but internationally.

The bourgeoisie's turn towards the far-right in Italy is a response not only to an intractable crisis of European capitalism, but to the growth of the class struggle. After years of social crisis in Europe, workers are being radicalized. Mass strikes and protests by German metalworkers, French rail workers opposed to privatization, teachers and anti-war protesters in Britain, and opponents of Spanish state repression in Catalonia all express rising social anger and militancy.

The EU has stepped up police-state measures, including France's state of emergency, police crackdowns on peaceful voters in Catalonia, and campaigns against "left-wing extremism" in Germany. The EU is also working closely with Facebook and Google to implement Internet censorship. Now, amid international tensions and social conflict at home, the ruling class is turning towards more explicitly right-wing and militaristic forms of rule.

It is ten years since the aftershocks of the 2008 Wall Street financial crash exposed the deep economic and class contradictions in the euro zone. Panic in financial markets about potential state bankruptcy of euro zone countries led to speculation against state debts that governments used to press for unprecedented austerity measures in Greece, Italy, Spain and beyond. Ten years later, none of the underlying conflicts have been resolved.

The fact that Lega and M5S have emerged as the beneficiaries of this is a devastating indictment of the Democratic Party (PD) and its pseudo-left allies such as *Rifondazione Comunista*. After years of austerity and economic stagnation overseen by these parties, as well as by right-wing governments, social conditions in Italy are disastrous. Ten million people are living in poverty, 7.5 million are unemployed, and 10 million are without health care. The richest 1 percent of the Italian population owns 240 times as much as the poorest 20 percent.

An extremely dangerous situation is emerging. Amid mass anger against the EU and all of Italy's mainstream bourgeois parties, Lega and M5S are exploiting the political vacuum on the left to make a demagogic nationalist appeal, posturing as the most ardent defenders of Italian interests against the EU. At the same time, they make blatant appeals to racism and fascistic calls for the round-up and expulsion of 500,000 immigrants.

These threats have provoked mass opposition in Italy, with over 100,000 people joining protests against anti-immigrant racism in Rome shortly before the March elections.

When Mattarella vetoed di Maio's initial plan for an M5S-Lega government, he did not object to their police state policies or their appeals to anti-immigrant racism. These policies enjoy unanimous support in the European ruling elite. Mattarella objected only to indications that an M5S-Lega government might turn to a policy of competitive devaluation by exiting the euro group and introducing a weaker Italian national currency.

Such proposals, which Lega is still making, are fueling fears on financial markets of a collapse of the euro and an international financial crisis over Italy's €2.3 trillion state debt. At a meeting in Pisa yesterday, Salvini said: "We will go vote together with those who

support our program, because Italy can no longer be the country that always says, 'Yes, sir' to Europe."

Yesterday morning, *Ouest France* reported, a video of a 2016 interview with Salvini spread across Italian social media. In the video, Salvini said his party would take Italy out of the euro and do it overnight to prevent speculation against Italian debt like that carried out by financier George Soros against the British pound in the 1990s.

Salvini said, "What I can say is that if Lega goes into government, we leave (the euro). But it's the sort of thing that you have to do very fast in such a situation, otherwise if you do a three-month campaign for a referendum, the Soros types will slaughter you. They would leave us nothing but our underwear. They would buy up all the remaining pieces of Italian industry that are still healthy in our country. So there is no middle road on this subject: you are either in or out."

On Europe1, economic columnist Axel de Tarlé warned of a potential disintegration of the euro. Noting that 56 percent of Italians do not think Italy benefits from EU membership, he warned that future Italian elections could become "a referendum on the euro."

He added, "If people start thinking about the end of the euro, you will see: depositors will run to their banks to get their savings in euros and put them in a safe place before the forced devaluation involved in a return to local currencies, the (Spanish) peseta, the (Italian) lira and the (Portuguese) escudo. We are not yet in this catastrophic scenario. They say Europe moves forward in crises, we will see. We will see in particular whether Germany, which currently has a very clear 'every man for himself' policy, will take a softer approach."

No faction of the European bourgeoisie has anything progressive to offer to the workers. The conclusion to be drawn from Mattarella's talks with Salvini and di Maio is the urgent need to build a united socialist movement of the working class across Europe in a struggle against militarism and austerity.



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