

Extreme right takes power in Italy

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The new Italian government sworn in yesterday afternoon in Rome is the most right-wing since the collapse of the fascist Duce Benito Mussolini's regime in 1945. Installed with the approval of President Sergio Mattarella, it is a coalition of the far-right Lega and the populist Five Star Movement (M5S).

The strongman within the government is Lega leader Matteo Salvini. Although his party secured just 17 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections, Salvini pulled strings and dictated terms during the weeks-long wrangling to form the government.

As deputy prime minister and interior minister, he is now gathering together the powers to proceed with the deportation of half a million refugees and the strengthening of the police, as agreed by Lega and M5S in their government coalition pact. He intends to construct a police state that will clamp down ruthlessly on all social and political opposition.

Salvini makes no secret of his fascist outlook. He invited leading figures of the European neo-Nazi scene to his rallies, including German New Right ideologist Götz Kubitschek and the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. He also collaborates closely with France's National Front, the Alternative for Germany and other neo-fascist parties. He regularly makes fascistic denunciations of refugees and Muslims.

Formerly called Lega Nord, the party defended the interests of privileged sections of the population in the better-off areas of northern Italy before developing into a nationwide party. It ran in the election in an alliance with the Forza Italia of Silvio Berlusconi, who more than anyone else embodies the corruption and criminality of the Italian bourgeoisie, as well as Fratelli d'Italia, whose roots can be traced directly to Italian fascism.

The fact that M5S, the largest party in the coalition, is helping hand the levers of power to this right-wing filth puts paid to the myth that M5S is a party neither of the

left nor right.

M5S was founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo following the 2008 financial crisis, which devastated Italy. For decades, every Italian government has pursued policies of militarism and austerity, including those based on the social democratic Democratic Party (PD) and various pseudo-left parties such as *Rifondazione Comunista*. The resulting social catastrophe and political vacuum on the left allowed Grillo to win a hearing with demagogic attacks on the corruption and self-enrichment of Italian politicians. M5S gained a foothold among youth who sensed that the so-called "left" around the PD defended capitalism.

However, the Five Star Movement's programme was in essence right-wing from the outset, as the *World Socialist Web Site* noted five years ago. We wrote, "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."

This assessment has now been confirmed. M5S' alliance with Lega, whose xenophobic programme M5S has fully embraced, directly targets the working class and youth.

In the election, M5S secured most of its support by promising to furnish a basic minimum income to everyone. It won votes above all from young people, many of whom are so impoverished that they cannot leave their parents' home until their late 30s and are unable to start a family. It also did well in the impoverished south.

As second deputy prime minister and minister of industry and labour, Five Star leader Luigi di Maio is now responsible for the implementation of this electoral promise, which amounts to a gift to the corporate elite. The basic income of €780 per month is conditioned on

recipients accepting any and all job offers. Like Hartz IV in Germany, it will serve as a mechanism for the creation of a huge low-wage sector.

Lega and M5S have also agreed on the introduction of a two-stage flat tax, a multi-billion-euro handout to the rich and big business.

The installation of such a government is a warning to workers not only in Italy, but across Europe and internationally. The ruling elite is rapidly turning to authoritarian forms of rule.

The fascistic Lega-M5S coalition is coming to power with the stamp of approval of the European Union. Only days before Mattarella used his constitutional powers to give approval to the formation of an M5S-Lega government, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini stressed that she had “full trust” in the Italian president.

Last night, officials across Europe hailed the far-right regime in Rome. German Chancellor Angela Merkel praised the “close and friendly ties that unite Germany and Italy in all spheres—political, cultural and economic,” and told the new Italian government, “I look forward to developing and deepening this close partnership with you.”

EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker called for close collaboration between the EU and the new government, downplaying Salvini’s fascistic outbursts with the remark, “One should measure politicians by their deeds, not their rhetorical statements.”

The only reservations held by Mattarella and the EU were concerns that under Salvini, Italy might leave the euro or cease fully servicing its massive €2.3 trillion debt. Just last year, €66.4 billion in interest payments were due on the debt, though the interest rate of 0.7 percent was very low. A rise in interest rates would quickly multiply this figure.

Neither Mattarella nor the EU took issue with the government’s plans to detain and deport hundreds of thousands of refugees. They had just as little to say about the new interior minister’s racist tirades and his support for authoritarian rule. This is because these policies are now the consensus in Europe.

In every country, the ruling class is resorting to censorship, state repression and fascistic methods to defend its rule. This is driven on the one hand by the unprecedented crisis of European and world capitalism,

and, on the other, by the mounting opposition in the working class to social cuts, repression and militarism. This opposition threatens to break free of the suffocating grip of the trade unions, the social democrats and their allies in the pseudo-left, whose ability to contain and suppress the class struggle is eroding.

Far-right parties now sit in government in several European countries, including Austria, Hungary and Poland. The fact that an ultra-right government has assumed power in Italy, a founding member of the EU with a population of 60 million and the fourth largest economy in the EU, must be seen as a warning to the entire European working class.

The social democratic parties, the pseudo-left organizations and the trade unions are neither able nor willing to oppose the danger of fascism. They have helped legitimize the extreme right. By pursuing right-wing policies in the interests of big capital, they have allowed the fascist parties to posture as opponents of the status quo. Moreover, the social democratic and pseudo-left parties have adopted much of the platform of the extreme right, demanding a crackdown on refugees, domestic repression and the remilitarization of society.

Only an independent movement of the working class can oppose the threat posed by the far-right. The objective prerequisites for such a movement are present. Social tensions and the class struggle are growing across Europe, together with opposition to attacks on democratic and social rights and the militarisation of the continent.

Everything now depends upon the building of a new Marxist party to unite the Italian, European and international working class and mobilise its revolutionary potential for the overthrow of capitalism. This urgently poses the task of building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Italy and other European countries.



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