

In Rome, Salvini and Le Pen launch campaign for a neo-fascist Europe

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Amid an intense crisis of the European Union's (EU) principal member states, neo-fascist leaders Matteo Salvini and Marine Le Pen—the Italian interior minister and leader of France's neo-fascist National Rally (RN, formerly the National Front), respectively—met last week in Rome. Their talks were widely covered in the press.

At a press conference of the General Labor Union (UGL, close to Salvini's Lega party), they presented a "common plan for Europe," aiming to install a neo-fascist majority in the European parliament in next year's elections. They declared that they would undermine the existing EU and demagogically pledged to reverse Brussels' austerity policies.

Exploiting the reactionary austerity policies carried out by social-democratic and pseudo-left parties across Europe, they posed as the defenders of the European popular masses. Pledging to create a Europe that would not "be the slave of budgetary rigor that does not spare social rights," Salvini said: "Le Pen and I are reviving the social heritage of the left, which has betrayed its values. We are defending the vulnerable whom the left has forgotten."

Claiming to defend working and poor people, the two leaders piled on promises to invest in jobs and the defense of social rights, which they noted are "trampled upon by Brussels." Salvini insisted that "the true challenge is the struggle against misfortune and precariousness," while Le Pen denounced the "social carnage" organized by the EU.

Le Pen added, "The EU has trampled upon the values of solidarity: now we are at a historic moment. In May, we will succeed in creating a union that bases itself on new values, against globalization. This is the struggle that we are waging together with Matteo Salvini, firmly convinced of the need for an alternative in Europe."

She denounced the EU Commission, saying it was "buried in a Brussels bunker."

If the political descendants of Italian fascism and French collaboration with Nazism falsely posture as the heirs of the left, it is above all due to the well-known treachery and hostility of the social democratic and pseudo-left parties against the working class. In 1991, the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union and restored capitalism, pillaging the workers and devastating the Soviet economy. Since then, the plundering of European workers and attacks on social and democratic rights they won in struggle in the course of the 20th century have continued unabated.

Discredited by their police-state and austerity policies, Greece's Syriza and Pasok parties, France's Socialist Party (PS), the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and Italy's Rifondazione comunista have all suffered devastating political collapse.

Now, amid a mounting crisis in international financial markets and growing workers' struggles in America and Europe, powerful factions of the European bourgeoisie are considering whether to set up neo-fascist regimes, like Salvini's Italian regime, across Europe. In France, where President Emmanuel Macron's government is on the verge of collapse amid deep social anger against austerity, Le Pen is clearly preparing to lead an alternate government.

She told the *Corriere della Sera* that Italy's Lega-M5S (Five-Star Movement) coalition government is the proof that she could take power in France. "Our ideas can come to power and once we are in power, we can really change things," she said. "Matteo Salvini, thanks to a politics of firmness, has been able to reduce immigration and shake up the EU."

A neo-fascist Europe as outlined by Salvini and Le Pen would only accelerate the stampede of the entire

European ruling class towards the far right; the two neo-fascist leaders represent the same basic class interests as Macron or the Grand Coalition government in Berlin. Salvini in fact underscored the essential identity between the class interests served by the current EU and an EU remodeled by him and Le Pen by stressing that in their plans “the euro is not in question.”

At the same time, Italian Vice-Prime Minister Luigi di Maio (M5S) was signaling to the banks on the negotiation of the Italian budget with the EU that Salvini wants to obey the EU’s deficit limits: “Now the dialogue with the EU and big private investors is beginning, and our intention is not to go into conflict mode.”

As early as 2017, Le Pen did an about-face in the French presidential election, suddenly dropping her calls for France to exit the euro, after meeting with a consortium of French banks.

Salvini and Le Pen are not insurgent populists, but representatives of parties that have played a well-established role in the political establishments of their respective countries for decades, essentially since the end of World War II. The Italian Social Movement (MSI), descending from the Mussolini regime and its successor, the National Alliance, and the FN, descending from the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, have been cultivated via various political maneuvers, state financial subsidies and media operations.

Le Pen made clear that the neo-fascist Europe she is proposing would represent the interests of the European ruling classes—not those advanced by the political advisor of US President Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, who is campaigning to build a global neo-fascist movement.

She said, “Mr. Bannon does not come from a European country, he is an American. He has suggested a foundation that tries to offer European pro-sovereignty parties studies, polls and analyses. But the political force that will be born from the European elections will be structured by ourselves, and ourselves alone, because we are attached to our liberty and sovereignty.”

The sharpest warnings must be made about the significance of the European bourgeoisie’s promotion of far-right forces. As it faces unprecedented social anger after a decade of deep austerity and growing

imperialist war since the 2008 Wall Street crash and global capitalist crisis, it is stepping up its maneuvers to establish police state regimes targeting the working class.

The central question in the struggle against the rise of neo-fascism is the alternative posed by Leon Trotsky and by the International Committee of the Fourth International, in the wake of the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR and amidst the bankruptcy of the official “left” parties in Europe.

Marine Le Pen’s decision to organize her first FN congress as leader of the party in 2011 in Tours, where the Communist Party was founded in France in 1920, was a deliberate calculation. She was exploiting the lack of a visible alternative to Stalinism and social democracy on their left, in order to advance the claim that the only alternative is on the far right. She was also putting forward her party and exploiting the PCF’s nationalist traditions to pretend that the FN represented the continuity of the PCF as a mass party in the French working class.

This is a historical lie, as far-right nationalism has always been the most determined and bloodthirsty enemy of workers’ struggles. The alternative to the collapse of the Stalinist parties, the social democrats and their allies—including those like Rifondazione or France’s New Anticapitalist Party that descend from various renegades from the Trotskyist movement—is the ICFI’s struggle to bring a Trotskyist perspective to the growing struggles of the European working class.

This growing wave of strikes and protests across Europe, and the struggle to unify them on the basis of a Trotskyist program and leadership, represent the alternative to the neo-fascist wave that is spreading across the European ruling elite.



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