

Italy: Salvini seeks coalition with fascist Fratelli d'Italia

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The leader of the far-right Lega, vice-premier and interior minister Matteo Salvini, is looking to end the governing coalition with the Five Star Movement (M5S). Under conditions in which no political party represents the interests of the working class, the Lega is mobilising its far right base and appealing to the Italian bourgeoisie and political establishment to install Salvini as the head of a fascist government..

On Thursday, Salvini visited the head of government, Giuseppe Conte. He called on him and President Sergio Mattarella to put an immediate end to the government coalition and to initiate new elections. In the European elections at the end of May, the Lega had doubled its votes to 34 percent. It is currently polling around 37 percent.

Now it wants to get rid of its weakened coalition partner, M5S, with the aim of forming a joint government with the Italian fascists Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy). This party, whose roots—through various branches—go back to the National Fascist Party of Benito Mussolini, is currently polling around 7 percent. A coalition with Forza Italia, led by former head of government Silvio Berlusconi, is also under discussion. It also stands at 7 percent.

Speaking to followers on the beach of Pescara, Salvini said on Thursday evening: “I ask the Italians to give me full power so that things can be done the way they have to be done.” In order to end the government by a vote of no confidence, he continued in a deliberately coarse tone, the elected deputies would have to be willing to get off their asses and return from vacation to parliament.

Salvini is seeking to take advantage of the present situation to prepare fascist forms of rule in a surprise coup. This goal was already strengthened by the adoption of the new, stricter security law in the Italian Senate on August 5. The *Decreto Sicurezza bis* has once again significantly amplified the features of the previous Salvini Decree, which has already driven tens of thousands into illegality.

While the NGO ship Open Arms has been waiting nine days on the open sea for 121 rescued migrants to be allowed to land, the Senate has once again drastically tightened the

penalties for rescue at sea. The new law provides for fines ranging from €150,000 to €1 million and the immediate arrest of captains of ships sailing in Italian waters without permission. The state may now immediately seize and expropriate the vessel concerned. In addition, the law requires hotel owners and other accommodation providers to inform the authorities of newly arrived migrants within 24 hours under threat of severe penalties.

The obligation to report the presence of migrants shows that the bans and police-state measures of the new law are directed against the entire working class. This is also made clear by Article 5, which refers to public demonstrations and sporting events. It imposes heavy penalties on any “destruction, plunder and damage” in public spaces and makes the organisers liable for it. This is also directed against strikes, demonstrations and rallies by workers fighting for their wages and jobs, whose leaders can now be held liable for all damages, even if caused by provocateurs.

The new law also provides for prison sentences of one to three years for those who evade the state authorities at public events or oppose the police with “signs or other passive objects of protection” or projectiles. Funds for the police and covert investigations are also significantly increased. Here, too, the law serves to promote a police state.

Salvini owes the passage of this law in parliament to Lega’s partner M5S, as it could not have passed in the Senate without the votes of the M5S MPs. Although some of them had argued against it, in the end all M5S senators voted for it or abstained.

It was not until Wednesday, during the vote on the TAV high-speed rail project, that the government camp was openly split. The rejection of this railway project, which connects the cities of Turin and Lyon, France, by means of a mountain tunnel, was one of the central election promises of the Five Star Movement and won the votes of many environmentalists.

While in the Senate most M5S representatives voted against the billion-dollar project, it was approved with an overwhelming “yes” by all other parties. Even the non-

partisan prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, who had previously rejected the rail link, had reversed course recently and spoken in favour of completing the EU-sponsored project.

The “no” votes of M5S were the welcome occasion for Salvini to announce the breakup of the coalition. The extent to which he will succeed in this is still uncertain. Head of government Conte refuses to resign voluntarily and in the event of a successful vote of no confidence, the decision to dissolve parliament can be taken solely by 78-year-old Sergio Mattarella, who comes from the opposition Democratic Party (PD) and began his career with the Christian Democrats. He could also appoint a “technical”, i.e., non-elected transitional government or try to form another coalition.

None of this, however, will prevent a further sharp shift to the right. It would only make the bankruptcy of all bourgeois parties more explicit. Neither the previous government partner M5S, nor the parliamentary opposition parties, nor the trade unions represent serious obstacles on the road to the right. On the contrary, they have created the conditions for it.

The so-called “centre-left” camp, led by the PD, has for years promoted a right-wing social counterrevolution. Under the Letta, Renzi and Gentiloni governments, the pension system had been dismantled, labour law had been eroded and the advance of precarious labour conditions had been encouraged, while public debt continued to rise and the purchasing power of the working population continued to decline. Pseudo-left parties like Rifondazione Comunista have given left cover for this policy and done everything to suppress an independent working-class offensive against it.

The meteoric rise of the Five Star Movement, whose leader Beppe Grillo never tired of scolding the corruption of the politicians in Rome, was based on social opposition to this corruption. With election promises, such as a basic income for all and the restoration of pensions, the M5S became the strongest party, winning a third of all votes in the March 2018 parliamentary elections.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* had already predicted in 2013, the M5S proved to be right-wing bourgeois party. Many workers and members of the middle classes voted for the M5S out of pure outrage, but as the WSWs wrote: “Grillo’s program stands in stark contrast with the class interests of those who fell victim to his populist appeals. They will soon confront the reality of his reactionary, right-wing program.”

Once in power, the M5S served mainly as foot soldiers for Lega, to whom it granted a parliamentary majority until last Monday, when the authoritarian security law was passed. Little or nothing remains of their grand promises.

Behind the government crisis is the unprecedented decline of the Italian economy and a rapid escalation of social tensions. The economy has never really recovered since the 2007-2008 financial crisis. Gross domestic product has fallen further and is below the 2007 level. The net incomes of Italian private households continue to fall, and lower income groups are recording up to 25 percent lower incomes. Over 5 million people are already living in abject poverty. The state is over-indebted and the banking system overburdened with bad loans.

In this situation the ruling class is moving towards fascistic forms of rule. No opposition can be expected from the EU, which has responded by demanding that Italy continue to meet its deficit targets and cut its debts. On Salvini’s basic political agenda—deep austerity, war, and vicious police-state and anti-immigrant measures—European ruling circles unanimously agree.

On Tuesday, Salvini met with the so-called social partners. Not only the employers’ representatives, but also the trade union leaders accepted Salvini’s invitation to the *Viminale* (as the Ministry of the Interior building is called). “Of course, the [largest union] CGIL will go to see Salvini in the Viminale,” union leader Maurizio Landini confirmed to the press. When invited to discuss the budget in a meeting with the government, the union had always accepted, Landini affirmed.

This makes one thing clear: The trade unions will mount no serious resistance to the dangerous drive toward fascism. This development can only be fought and reversed through the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist and international program.



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