

Five Star Movement and social democrats to continue attacks on Italian working class in new government coalition

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Italian President Sergio Mattarella formally granted Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte the authority to attempt to form a new government Thursday after the Five Star Movement and the Democratic Party (PD) reached an agreement to establish a coalition.

The stock exchanges and financial markets responded with relief. Interest rates for Italian government bonds declined to a record low, while the Milan stock exchange rose by 2.1 percent, reaching its highest level since the beginning of the month. The formation of the government is “from the point of view of investors the best thing that can happen in Italy right now,” remarked a markets analyst from the Commerzbank.

European Union (EU) representatives, together with politicians and media outlets, were also jubilant at the prospect of a new government, which, they claim, will stall the progress of former interior minister and leader of the right-wing extremist Lega, Matteo Salvini.

The official line was first presented by PD General Secretary Nicola Singaretti, who claimed on Wednesday night that the new government would end “this period of hate, horror, scheming, and egoism.” Although the forming of a new government would be “no walk in the park,” it must put a stop to “the shameful behavior ... which has violated human rights and damaged the rule of law.”

The Green Party-aligned German daily *taz* commented that the new coalition is “more than a new government,” because it is a “daring, bold experiment.” The issue “here is nothing less than preventing Salvini’s grab for ‘total power’ (according to him), to prevent one of the EU’s most important member states falling into the hands of an Italian Viktor Orban.”

Free Democratic Party politician Alexander Graf

Lambsdorff described it as “a glimmer of hope for liberal democracy that Salvini’s right-wing populist power play didn’t pay off.”

In reality, the new government, if it is actually formed, will not prevent, but rather accelerate the lurch of Italian politics to the right.

In content, it will largely continue the policies of the current government. This is already indicated by the fact that Conte will remain Prime Minister. For the Five Star Movement, this was a precondition to forming a government with the Democrats. The non-party lawyer served as the frontman for the Five Star-Lega coalition for 15 months and backed its most right-wing measures.

There are two fundamental reasons why, after years of bitter enmity, the Five Star Movement and Democratic Party have agreed to form a government. The first is the fear of new elections, which both parties want to avoid. This is not just because they face a massive loss of votes. They view any involvement of the masses in politics—even if only in an election—as a political threat and fear even more the emergence of open class struggles.

The second reason, closely bound up with the first, is the need to pass a budget in conformity with EU regulations for next year, which must be presented to Brussels by the end of October. This will entail savings of between €23 and €30 billion, which will be implemented above all at the expense of the working class.

This connection is widely recognised in the media. The German daily *FAZ*, the house organ of the Frankfurt stock exchange, wrote in a piece entitled “Rome’s left-wingers must take their turn”: “The last

thing Italy needs now is an election campaign. The budget for the next financial year must be ready by the end of October.”

An additional task is to convince the EU and NATO that they can rely on Italy militarily—after all, Salvini protested against the sanctions against Russia in the European Parliament. He met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Crimea in 2014, and his party signed an association agreement with Putin’s United Russia in 2017.

It is well known that Salvini’s Lega, which initially drew its support from wealthy sections of the population in northern Italy, enjoys strong backing in business circles. But his decision to end the coalition with the Five Star Movement during the summer and call for new elections was a bridge too far for many. They feared that the response of international financial markets would deepen Italy’s economic recession and bring the fragile banking system crashing down.

This was why Salvini was held in check with the help of the PD. The commentary in the Italian press was particularly harsh as a result. “In a moment of mental derangement” Salvini “committed the stupidest blunder of the century,” wrote the Silvio Berlusconi-owned paper *Il Giornale*. And the Five Star-aligned *Fatto Quotidiano* wrote of “a spectacular act of self-destruction.”

But Salvini will only be temporarily weakened. He believes that a Five Star-PD government will further strengthen him politically. The main reason for his rise is that the Democrats and their predecessors have spearheaded the assault on social services and public spending and were supported by all “left” organisations.

When the last government led by the media multi-billionaire Berlusconi collapsed as a result of the euro crisis in 2011, the PD refused to call for elections, which they certainly would have won. Instead, they supported the blood, sweat and tears cabinet of former EU Commissioner Mario Monti. The consequence of this was the dramatic rise of the Five Star Movement, which initially posed as anti-establishment before offering a platform to the right-wing extremist Salvini.

Even Salvini’s political “trademark,” his brutal policy towards refugees, was largely adopted from the PD. “His greatest success, the ‘solution’ of the problem of illegal immigration across the central

Mediterranean route,” wrote the *FAZ*, “was essentially inherited by Salvini from his social democratic predecessor Marco Minniti, who two-and-a-half years ago persuaded and paid the government in Tripoli and the tribes aligned with it to capture most African immigrants before they reached the Libyan coast and then detain them in terrible camps.”

Salvini has gleefully exploited the coalition of the Five Star Movement with the PD, which until now they denounced as the embodiment of the establishment. He has called a major demonstration in Rome for October 19 against the “government of Conte-Monti layabouts.” It will be “a day of Italian pride” against “the stealing of democracy.” The newspaper *La Repubblica* has already drawn a parallel with Mussolini’s march on Rome, which also began in the month of October in 1922 and led to the conquest of power by the fascists

In the final analysis, the political lurch to the right in Italy is part of an international phenomenon. Around the world, the ruling class is responding to mounting social and international tensions by promoting right-wing extremist forces and turning to authoritarian forms of rule to suppress the struggles of the working class.



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