

Five Star-Democrat coalition government announced in Italy

Alex Lantier
5 September 2019

A shaky coalition government between the Democratic Party (PD) and the Five-Star Movement (M5S) is set to be sworn in at 8 a.m. this morning in Rome.

Yesterday, outgoing Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte informed President Sergio Mattarella that he had found the necessary support in parliament for an M5S-PD coalition government. A month ago, on August 8, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini of the neofascist Lega had withdrawn his support from Conte's M5S-Lega government, bringing it down. While Salvini was seeking new elections, hoping to form his own government in alliance with the fascist Fratelli d'Italia party, the M5S and PD desperately sought to block elections and thus reliably keep the M5S in power.

As he announced his new government to the press, Conte pledged: "Based on our program oriented to the future, we will dedicate our energy, our skills and our passion to make Italy better in the interests of all of its citizens."

But the new M5S-PD government, cobbled together in backroom deals whose stated purpose was to avoid elections and any input from the population, is no alternative to its far-right predecessor. It will maintain European Union (EU) austerity and the assault on refugees, setting it on a collision course with the working class. It also opens the door to Salvini and his allies falsely posturing as defenders of democracy and the electoral process and as opponents of austerity, while escalating their virulently nationalistic and anti-refugee propaganda.

Ministerial nominations include Roberto Gualtieri, a member of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party (PCI) and now in the PD, who will lead the austerity offensive as economy minister. With Italy's debt

standing at €2.3 trillion or 132 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Brussels is expected to demand tens of billions of euros in austerity measures. This year's Italian budget is to be negotiated by October.

Le Monde hailed Gualtieri's nomination as a "peace offering" to the EU: an advisor to pro-austerity PD governments under Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni, he is widely expected to ruthlessly implement social cuts dictated by Brussels. Already, unemployment stands at over 10 percent and at nearly one third of youth 15-24 in Italy. Further austerity would likely savage its economy, which contracted in the second half of 2018 and is set to grow only an anemic 0.1 percent this year.

Conte named Roberto Speranza, a leader of the small Free and Equal (LEU) party, as health minister, apparently to ensure that his government could count on LEU support in the upcoming confidence vote. He divided all the remaining ministerial positions save one between the M5S and the PD.

M5S leader Luigi di Maio will become foreign minister, while Lorenzo Guerini, an associate of Renzi at the PD, is slated to become defense minister. Conte also nominated former Milan police prefect Luciana Lamorghese, who is affiliated to no political party, to replace Salvini as interior minister. Together, they will have the task of continuing the assault on refugees that Salvini made his trademark policy, provoking mass protests in several Italian cities.

While Salvini publicly and aggressively refused to allow any refugees from the Mediterranean into Italy, the main lines of his immigration policy were put in place by his PD predecessor. PD Interior Minister Marco Minniti worked with the EU to seal off the Mediterranean Sea, establish the Libyan Coast Guard

and Libyan concentration camps to hunt down refugee vessels and imprison refugees in horrific conditions in Africa, and block the arrival of refugees from Africa to Europe.

In a column yesterday, the daily *La Repubblica* expressed confidence that the new government would continue attacking refugees: “For at least twenty years our rulers, of all political colorations, have shared the same conviction: immigration is a bomb that can be defused only by stopping its flow. While there could be disagreements as to how to treat those who crossed our borders—integration or discrimination—there was none on the absolute priority of limiting new arrivals.”

In an unmistakable sign of the new government’s antiworker orientation, the EU and Berlin have signaled their support for it. EU Budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger, a member of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, hailed its announcement. He told Germany’s SWR radio that the EU officials in Brussels were ready to “do everything to make the job of the new Italian government easier when it takes office and so to reward it.”

Similarly, Confindustria, Italy’s big-business confederation, praised it for “focusing on the real economy and showing sensitivity to development issues.”

The forming of the latest M5S-PD government sharply expresses basic problems facing the working class over the last three decades. Since the Soviet bureaucracy restored capitalism and dissolved the USSR in 1991, and the PCI dissolved itself and split into the PD and the pseudo-left *Rifondazione Comunista*, the working class has been confronted with the overt treachery of what the bourgeoisie falsely promoted as “left” politics. This allowed fascistic forces to denounce policies of war and austerity implemented by the PD and *Rifondazione*, and posture as friends of the people.

Salvini’s decision to break up the M5S-Lega government and move into opposition, while criticized by some commentators as political suicide, in fact lets him keep working off this playbook. The M5S, founded by comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009 after *Rifondazione*’s infamous vote for PD pension cuts and the war in Afghanistan, proclaimed itself to be the alternative fighting the corruption of both the left and the right. It

now stands exposed, having allied itself first with the neofascists and now with the PD, which it previously derided as Italy’s most corrupt party.

Salvini is moving aggressively to exploit the bankruptcy of the incoming M5S-PD government and prepare his return to power, perhaps after the M5S and PD pass the austerity budget. Having denounced it as “brought to you by Paris, Berlin, and Brussels,” he has called a neofascist protest on October 19 in Rome. Responding to Conte’s announcement of the new government yesterday, Salvini denounced it and publicly appealed to opposition to Conte in the police and armed forces.

“Many policemen, *carabinieri*, firefighters, financiers, and local police officers have told or written me that ‘you will always be our minister’,” Salvini declared. He said that they should view the new Conte government as only a “transition,” adding: “This morning, I greeted hundreds of employees of the Ministry of the Interior. I saw tears and asked to please transform the tears in a smile. I understand the anger of seeing this senseless government born.”

There are powerful antifascist traditions in the working class in Italy and across Europe, stretching back to the resistance to Mussolini and Hitler during World War II. Strangled time and again by the Stalinist PCI and its descendants in the PD and its petty-bourgeois periphery, however, these traditions can only find expression through the building of a genuine socialist and internationalist leadership in the working class.



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