Neo-fascist Meloni under discussion as Italian head of government

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Five months after former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi formed a “government of national unity,” neo-fascist Giorgia Meloni is being given serious consideration as head of the next Italian government.

Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) is the only national party to have stayed out of the Draghi government, whose task is to “grind down all the social rights, achievements and securities that his predecessors have not yet destroyed,” as we pointed out on the occasion of its swearing-in.

Since then, the FdI's poll ratings have risen steadily—mainly at the expense of Matteo Salvini's far-right Lega. In July, it drew level with Lega for the first time. Both scored more than 20 percent, ahead of the social democratic PD (19 percent) and the Five Star Movement (16 percent). Together with Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (8 percent) they could form a government, which Meloni has already publicly claimed to lead.

However, the polls are just a snapshot. The next regular general election will not take place until February 2023. Even an early election is only possible following the presidential election in January 2022 at the earliest, as incumbent President Sergio Mattarella is not allowed to dissolve parliament in the last six months of his term.

Nevertheless, the rapid rise of Meloni, whose party only received 4 percent of the vote in the last general election in 2018, is a serious warning signal.

Now 44, Meloni stands in the historical tradition of Italian fascism. Raised as the daughter of a single mother in a working-class neighbourhood of Rome, she joined the youth movement of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) at the age of 15. The MSI had succeeded Mussolini's fascist party in 1946 and paid homage to the memory of the *Duce*.

In 1994, Silvio Berlusconi brought the MSI, which had previously been shunned by all other bourgeois parties, into his first government, opening the way to a political career for Meloni. She held leading positions in the MSI and its successor Alleanza Nazionale (AN), and in 2008 became the youngest cabinet member in Italian history as Minister of Youth and Sports.

Dissatisfied with the increasing moderation of the AN, which eventually merged with Berlusconi's Forza Italia, she founded the Fratelli d'Italia in 2012 to continue the fascist tradition.

Meanwhile, Meloni herself plays down this tradition and tries to present the FdI as a traditional right-wing conservative party. But the FdI’s party emblem continues to bear the flame symbol of the neo-fascists loyal to Mussolini, and numerous avowed neo-fascists in its ranks and in its periphery are tolerated and encouraged by the party leadership.

In autumn 2019, for example, numerous high-ranking party officials celebrated Mussolini's seizure of power in October 1922, including Meloni confidant Francesco Acquaroli, who is now prime minister of the Marche region. The *Repubblica* journalist Paolo Berizzi, who uncovered this and much else, regularly receives death threats and lives under police protection.

Meloni herself had once declared that she had “an easygoing relationship with fascism.” Other party members worship notorious war criminals. Extreme neo-fascist organisations, such as Casa Pound and Forza Nuova, also support Meloni's party.

Politically, the FdI holds similar positions to Lega: law and order, ultra-nationalism, hostility to immigrants and refugees, anti-Islamism, homophobia and opposition to abortion. More recently, they have also shown solidarity with coronavirus deniers and anti-vaxxers. Meloni combines these right-wing positions with social demagoguery and appeals to “the low-wage earners, the neglected suburbs and the working class.”

Meloni supports and admires former US president Donald Trump and has appeared as a speaker at the Conservative Political Action Conference and the National Prayer Breakfast during his tenure. Last year, she was elected president of the European Conservatives and Reformers, which also includes Spain's Vox, Poland's PiS, the Czech Republic's ODS, the Sweden Democrats and Britain's Tories. It also has close ties with France's National Rally of

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Marine Le Pen and Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán's Fidesz.

Instrumental in Meloni's rise has been the pervasive policy of the Draghi government and its predecessor under Giuseppe Conte, who was elected leader of the Five Star Movement by a large majority last week. With 128,000 dead and 4.4 million infected, Italy has one of the most devastating corona records in Europe. Only Great Britain has 2,000 more deaths.

Despite this, the Conte government only took lockdown measures after a spontaneous wave of strikes in March 2020 demanded a halt to production in factories and better control of the deadly disease. Under pressure from business and the tourism industry, it soon relaxed these measures. As a result, the number of daily infections exploded from less than 2000 to 40,000 in a matter of weeks last autumn.

This did not change under Draghi, who embodies the interests of finance capital and big industry like no other Italian politician. Only in June did the number of infections fall below 2000, but it is now rising steeply again.

The government has reacted by introducing a digital vaccination passport at the beginning of July. Only those who can prove with this green passport that they have been vaccinated or have recovered from an infection are allowed to visit restaurants, sports venues, concerts, museums and indoor gatherings.

Meloni, who in March had herself called for a European vaccination passport, became the spokesperson for the opponents of the green passport. Strengthened by the mantra of 'no more lockdown', advocated by Draghi, Salvini, Conte and Letta alike, she placed herself at the head of a right-wing movement that directly targets the health and lives of millions of workers and their families.

In typical fascist fashion, she presents this as a fight for 'freedom.' The vaccination card restricts citizens' freedom, destroys the economy and introduces de facto compulsory vaccination, Meloni claims. FdI MPs rioted in parliament against the passport and joined demonstrations protesting against it all over Italy.

Numerous articles have appeared in the international press attributing Meloni's rise to her alleged “straightforwardness,” her other character traits or the “general right-wing political climate in Europe.” But this explains nothing. One can only understand the rise of the ultra-right against the background of growing social polarisation and the complete bankruptcy of the supposed workers' organisations.

This is particularly pronounced in Italy. There, right-wing and so-called centre-left governments have alternated since the collapse of the old party system in the early 1990s. While the right-wing ones, mostly led by Silvio Berlusconi, plundered the state coffers for themselves and their clientele, the centre-left governments made sure that they were replenished at the expense of the working class and through social spending cuts.

Pseudo-left parties, which like Rifondazione Comunista, SEL, etc., enjoyed considerable support at the beginning, backed the government or joined it in crises, thus forfeiting any influence themselves. The trade unions also supported the attacks on the working class. The result was an unprecedented social decline, growing poverty and unemployment, which were further exacerbated by the pandemic.

The growing opposition kept looking for political ways out. In 2013, it carried the Five Stars protest movement to the top, which won 26 percent of the vote out of nowhere, and as much as 33 percent five years later. But the Five Stars formed a government with the far-right Lega, paving the way for the rise of the unrestrained demagogue Salvini, who tried to deflect pent-up social anger onto the weakest in society—immigrants and refugees.

Banker Mario Draghi's “national government,” in which all parties from the far-right Lega to the Five Stars and Forza Italia to the social-democratic PD and its offshoots Liberi e Uguali and Italia Viva are united at the cabinet table, is the pinnacle of this all-party conspiracy against the working class.

Meloni and her neo-fascists have been able to profit from this. But the confrontation has only just begun. Like everywhere else in the world, resistance and the willingness of the working class to fight is growing in Italy. There have been numerous strikes this year, especially in logistics companies like Amazon and FedEx-TNT and in rail and air transport.

Everything now depends on giving this growing readiness to fight an independent orientation and socialist perspective. All historical experiences show that only an independent movement of the working class can defeat the fascist danger. Its subordination to bourgeois parties and corporatist trade unions, on the other hand, inevitably strengthens the right.

This requires one thing above all—the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Italy.

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