

With re-election of Mattarella, Italian government will seek to enforce “EU recovery plan”

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In the evening hours of Saturday, January 29, the current president of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, in the absence of a successor, was elected head of state for another seven years. The election ended an undignified spectacle. The six government parties, which sit together in a broad all-party coalition, were unable to agree on a personality to replace the office-weary 80-year-old.

For a week, the assembly of more than a thousand deputies, senators and representatives failed to find a common solution. Time and again, proposed candidates failed due to majority abstention. Some cast no vote while others cast blank ballots or voted for soccer stars or fantasy figures. After seven inconclusive ballots, Mattarella was finally persuaded to run for another term. He obtained the overwhelming majority of 759 of the 1,009 “elettori,” the highest tally for a president in 44 years.

A sigh of relief swept over the European press because the only other likely candidate was 74-year-old head of government Mario Draghi. If Draghi had been elected, the country would have needed a new prime minister, and the current all-party coalition would have collapsed. With the current stopgap solution, parliamentary elections are not on the agenda again until the end of the legislative term in May 2023.

Italy’s bourgeois rule is in such deep crisis that its stability depends on two old men, one 80, the other 74.

The German business paper *Handelsblatt* commented on the election outcome as the “best possible solution for Italy”: “Because the prime minister still has much to do—and not much time left to do it.” The Zurich *Tagesanzeiger* pointed to the relief in the European banking world: “In Italy, one assumes that the stock markets will joyfully celebrate the epilogue of the long and adventurous election week—although less because of Mattarella’s confirmation in office than because of that of Mario Draghi. In the immediate the latter’s role is more central.”

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote: “That’s what this

election was about: the future of Italy, about its stability. About the implementation of the initiated reforms and the management of the billions from Brussels for the reconstruction. And since Italy is system-relevant, it was also about the future of Europe.”

And that “future of Europe” ostensibly stands or falls with Draghi’s persona as prime minister. This is the man who took over a year ago after serving in senior roles at the World Bank, Italy’s finance ministry and central bank, Goldman Sachs International in London, and most recently as head of the European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt. He stands for a policy of giving financial markets unlimited funds for self-enrichment. Draghi’s phrase “Whatever it Takes,” with which he opened the central bank’s money spigot in 2012 when the euro was under pressure, is infamous. The consequences are being borne by the European working class in the form of ever-new EU austerity dictates.

Specifically, the Draghi government’s task in Italy is to enforce the “EU recovery plan” against the will of the working population. The European Union, which is granting Italy a €209 billion coronavirus aid package, demands in return that the government “modernize” Italy’s economy, administration, judiciary and pension system. In plain language, this means systematically paring down and abolishing the last social benefits and rights the working class has left after 30 years of austerity.

The country is already a social powder keg. According to the statistics office Istat, official unemployment stands at 9 percent. At least another 12 percent are “working poor,” who can barely make a living from their employment. In addition, the proportion of “inactives,” i.e., people of working age who do not count as “job seekers,” is unusually large in Italy at 35 percent. Youth unemployment, at 26.8 percent, is also extremely high.

The social situation has deteriorated dramatically during the coronavirus pandemic. The number of people living in

absolute poverty rose to an all-time high last year. More than 2 million families, or 5.6 million people, were thus categorized in 2020; that is 1 million more people than a year earlier.

The figures also show that poverty has arrived in the relatively affluent North. There, the number of those in absolute poverty grew twice as much as in the South. All these people, who lack the basic necessities for a normal life, are moreover being hard hit by rising inflation: in December, inflation rose to an official 13-year high of 3.9 percent.

The government is resting on a mountain of corpses resulting from its handling of the pandemic: Italy currently counts 147,000 coronavirus deaths out of a population of 60 million. The coronavirus situation was particularly stark in Lombardy at the beginning of the pandemic, sending images around the world of military trucks filled with coronavirus victims.

This may have contributed to the relatively high vaccination rate: More than 90 percent of those over 12 are dually vaccinated, and two-thirds of them are also “boosted.” The government now wants to use this accomplishment, in defiance of the Omicron wave, to disband all measures against the coronavirus at the end of March. This ruthless mass infection, combined with the social crisis, is creating an ever more explosive situation.

To minimize opposition to his “profits before lives” policy, Draghi appointed representatives of all major parties to the cabinet he formed a year ago. The government, which did not emerge from democratic elections, has 23 ministers, 15 of whom are party representatives.

Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement (M5S) provides the foreign minister in the form of Luigi di Maio. The Social Democratic Party (PD) is responsible for social affairs and defence. Matteo Salvini’s far-right Lega holds the Economy Ministry, while other ministerial posts are under Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia. Several key positions—finance, justice and interior—are entrusted to nonpartisan technocrats, who hold a total of eight ministerial posts.

The Ministry of Health, which is particularly important in the pandemic, is headed by Roberto Speranza. His Articolo 1 party (referring to Article 1 of the Italian Constitution) arose from a split within the Democrats. Its members were formerly in the CPI, SEL and Rifondazione. Articolo 1 is part of the Liberi e Uguali (LeU) faction and is supported by pseudo-left groups. Another PD splinter is Matteo Renzi’s Italia Viva, whose party provides the Minister for Family.

The only party of national importance that is not in the government is Giorgia Meloni’s fascist party Fratelli d’Italia (FdI). It follows in the tradition of Benito Mussolini, whose march on Rome a hundred years ago kicked off the fascist dictatorship. Its 2018 election result was 4.4 percent,

but today, after four years as the sole opposition party, the FdI claims five times that figure in polling.

A new poll by the daily *La Stampa* from after the presidential election showed Meloni’s Fascists to be the strongest party, with 21.1 percent. This means they have overtaken both the Democrats (20.8) and Salvini’s Lega (18.2), while the Five Star party, at 14.2 percent, is below half of its 2018 vote. As early as last summer, the neo-fascist Meloni proposed herself as a possible new head of government.

The anti-working class offensive of the Draghi government and the rise of the Fratelli d’Italia make clear the urgent necessity of an independent working class movement, a party that resolutely leads the struggle against mass infection, social impoverishment and war. Resistance among the working population is growing daily. In mid-October, for example, tens of thousands immediately joined demonstrations against fascism when far-right thugs attacked a trade union headquarters and tried to storm parliament.

Necessary is a party that opposes the right-wing policies of the PD, the unions and the pseudo-left and leads the struggle for socialism independent of all bourgeois forces. In the absence of such a socialist perspective for the working class, there is a real danger that the fascists will profit from the right-wing policies of politicians officially labelled “left wing.”

Across the world the ruling class is deliberately strengthening far right and fascist forces in order to impose its policies of mass infection, militarism and social attacks against the enormous opposition in the population. If the same ruling class that brought Mussolini to power is not to plunge Italy once again into disaster, Italian workers must act now to build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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