

Mussolini's heirs return to power in Italy

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Seventy-seven years after fascist dictator Benito Mussolini was shot by partisans as he tried to flee to Switzerland, Mussolini's political heirs are back in power in Italy for the first time since the end of World War II. It is a historical milestone in the European bourgeoisie's legitimization of fascism.

In Sunday's election, the Brothers of Italy (FdI) received the largest single vote of any party, with 26 percent, as the social-democratic Democratic Party (PD) collapsed to 19 percent. Amid a record abstention that left participation at only 63 percent, the FdI-led far-right coalition won an absolute majority in both houses of parliament. The FdI is the successor of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), formed by top fascists who benefited from the blanket amnesty for fascist crimes in Italy approved by the Allied powers and signed by Stalinist Justice Minister Palmiro Togliatti in 1946.

Italy was the country that, after World War II, had the most powerful Communist Party in Western Europe. The mass strikes and armed insurrections against fascist rule in cities from Naples to Rome, Turin and Milan were recalled for decades as great struggles of the workers movement. Yet with the FdI now in power, Mussolini's legacy is firmly entrenched in the Italian political establishment.

This development is, moreover, not Italian but international. In France, neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen won 45 percent of the vote in this year's presidential run-off against Emmanuel Macron; she is a possible winner in 2027. New far-right parties, like the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Vox in Spain, have rapidly become central to the official promotion of militarism, inaction on COVID-19 and mass detention of migrants.

Moreover, FdI leader Georgia Meloni has longstanding ties to Steve Bannon, the adviser of far-right former US President Donald Trump, who on January 6, 2021 launched a far-right coup in

Washington D.C. to try to steal the 2020 election and set up a dictatorship in the United States.

What political dynamic has underlain the rise of Meloni? It is not the growth of a mass fascist movement in Italy or elsewhere. A century since Italian King Victor Emmanuel III made Mussolini prime minister after the 1922 March on Rome of his "Black Shirt" fascist squads, there is no equivalent today of the "Black Shirts"—petty-bourgeois militias that murder strikers and socialists or massacre entire villages to punish acts of resistance.

Meloni's rise is the product not of mass fascist sentiment but of a systematic disenfranchisement of the working class by the nationalist, bureaucratic organizations which the media and the ruling elite have for decades presented as the "left."

For whom could workers vote to express their opposition to the US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, which threatens to escalate into nuclear war; to multi-trillion-euro bank bailouts of the rich that are impoverishing workers with inflation; or to official inaction on COVID-19? There was no one. On each burning issue facing workers, the PD and the remnants of *Rifondazione Comunista* inside the Popular Union had the same basic position as Meloni.

The working class faces the task of coming to grips with the pseudo-left parties and national union bureaucracies that sit atop it and politically strangle it. They are gravediggers of left-wing struggles. From Greece's Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") government, which imposed EU austerity in alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks, to Spain's Podemos government, which oversees bank bailouts and arms Ukraine's far-right Azov Battalion, they pave the way for the extreme right.

This is the end result of a reactionary evolution that has spanned decades. Since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, the ruling elites

have redefined the “left” as a type of anti-worker politics acceptable to the affluent middle class. This had been prepared ideologically by “New Left” tendencies in the post-World War II period, which took the form in the Fourth International of the revisionist tendency led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that split with the genuine Trotskyists, who formed the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953.

The Pabloites demanded Trotskyists dissolve themselves in each country into Stalinist or bourgeois nationalist parties, claiming they were the natural leaderships of the working class. They were silent on how Togliatti’s Italian Communist Party (PCI) backed the postwar capitalist state, disbanded factory committees and resistance militias, and blocked socialist revolution. Rejecting a struggle for workers’ power, the Pabloites focused on addressing personal and lifestyle issues in the framework of the postwar capitalist regime.

The Stalinist and union bureaucracies these petty-bourgeois forces relied upon to maintain a base in the working class completely disintegrated, however, after 1991. The same year the Kremlin dissolved the Soviet Union, the PCI dissolved itself and split in two. One faction became the PD, while the other allied with Pabloite and anarchist groups to form *Rifondazione Comunista*.

These parties waged imperialist wars and imposed austerity to ensure Italian banks and affluent stock owners got their share of the profits extracted from a globalized capitalist economy. The Olive Tree coalition governments they joined in the 1990s and 2000s relentlessly pursued these policies. In 2007, Pabloite lawmaker Franco Turigliatto cast deciding votes to cut pensions and fund his government’s participation in the NATO war in Afghanistan.

The nearly 15 years since the 2008 crash plunged Italy and Europe into economic collapse and mass unemployment have completed their transformation into tools of social reaction. The PD and its pseudo-left satellites like *Rifondazione* supported the EU austerity diktat and NATO interventions in the Middle East and Ukraine. Before the latest elections, the PD sat, fittingly, with Salvini’s far-right Lega in the government coalition backing Prime Minister and former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi.

The far right has profited from mass bewilderment and anger produced by the reactionary role of the pseudo-left. Meloni denounces the “left” and immigrants, while tailoring her rhetoric—boasting of support for Ukraine and endlessly proclaiming that she is a woman—to the pro-war, petty-bourgeois identity politics of the affluent middle class. She uses this far-right exploitation of mass anger with the PD and the pseudo-left to give a false, populist veneer to her championing of the agenda of the European ruling class.

Meloni’s election does not portend mass popular support for her far-right government, however, but the emergence of explosive conflict between the working class and European capitalism, with revolutionary implications. The fascistic evolution of the ruling elite has not reconciled workers and youth with the despised legacy of Mussolini and Hitler.

Instead, there is across Europe and internationally a growing wave of strikes and protests against inflation and the danger of nuclear war. The fight against inflation, fueled by NATO’s cut-off of energy imports as it wages war with Russia, as well by EU bank bailouts and the shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, is bringing workers into conflict with the policies of the entire ruling elite. The fact that this agenda is now implemented in Italy by the political heirs of Mussolini is exposing its essentially fascistic character.

After a half-century of economic globalization, there is no basis for left politics but the international unification and mobilization of the working class on a revolutionary, socialist line. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees as independent organizations of struggle of the working class, and sections of the ICFI in Italy and internationally as the Marxist-Trotskyist alternative to the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left, leading the struggle for socialism.



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