

Two weeks of Italy's Meloni government: Social cuts, refugee baiting and preparations for dictatorship

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Two and a half weeks after Giorgia Meloni came to power in Italy, the basic lines of her ultra-right government's policies are becoming apparent. The new Italian government is continuing NATO's war policy and the pro-business policies of her predecessor Mario Draghi. This is combined with unrestrained refugee-baiting and draconian attacks on democratic rights.

In her first government statement, the leader of the fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) made an unqualified commitment to the European Union and NATO. "Italy is fully part of Europe and the Western world" and would "not slow down or sabotage" European integration, Meloni assured. Italy would "continue to be a reliable partner of NATO" in the Ukraine war and would stand firmly "by the side of the Ukrainian people who were attacked by the Russian Federation."

Meloni's first trip abroad was to Brussels, where she was warmly received by the President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. She is currently at the World Climate Change Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where she is meeting with old and new political friends who are predominantly on the right.

Full of pride, she posted a picture on her Twitter account showing her with the Butcher of Cairo, Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. "Wonderful to meet @RishiSunak," she wrote after meeting the new British prime minister. "A great opportunity to renew our friendship, strengthen the transatlantic bond and reaffirm our willingness to tackle together the important challenges ahead."

"I am delighted to see my friend @P_Fiala again," she reported an hour later. "Our cooperation is key to meeting the difficult challenges of our time and standing up for our shared values." Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala is a member of the right-wing conservative ODS. In between,

Meloni had met "His Majesty King Abdullah II and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Al Hussein" and praised the "longstanding roots" of the "friendship between Italy and Jordan." She also had a friendly conversation with the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

At the end of last week, the new government presented its first budget. "Meloni continues the Draghi course," cheered the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, which otherwise never tires of criticising Italian fiscal policy. Despite the economic crisis and record inflation, new government debt is to fall from 5.6 percent of gross domestic product this year to 4.5 percent in 2023 and 3.7 percent in 2024. In 2021, it was still 7.2 percent. This requires massive cuts in social, health and education spending.

Her government only wants to spend an additional 30 billion euros by the end of next year to provide relief to companies and households from rising energy costs. All other additional expenditure must be financed by savings in the same department, as Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti (Lega) stressed.

To suppress working class and youth resistance to these attacks, the Meloni government is establishing a police state and mobilising the right-wing dregs of society through ruthless attacks on refugees.

Barely in power, it closed Italian ports to rescue ships from aid organisations. At the end of last week, hundreds of refugees were held up in catastrophic conditions on overcrowded ships off the Italian coast.

At the end of the week, the government allowed two ships to enter Italian ports. But only sick people and minors were allowed to disembark, healthy adults had to stay on board. The Meloni government takes the view that countries like Germany, under whose flag the ships sail, must take in the refugees.

With these illegal methods, the Meloni government is trying to completely prevent maritime rescues and criminalise the aid organisations involved.

Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, who is close to the far-right Lega, has convened a “National Committee for Public Order and Security” consisting of top officials from the Interior Ministry, the Coast Guard, the Defence Staff, and the intelligence services. Its task is to keep refugees from Italy’s coasts. Piantedosi wants to set up reception camps on the other side of the Mediterranean, where refugees will be detained, and their personal data recorded. Only a fixed and controlled quota would then be allowed to come to Europe.

Here, too, Meloni and her interior minister are following the policy of previous governments and the European Union. The European border protection agency Frontex stopped rescuing people at sea years ago, illegally pushes migrants back and locks them up in inhumane camps on both sides of the European border. Since 2014, over 25,000 refugees have drowned in the Mediterranean because of this policy, about four times the number of civilians the UN estimates have died so far in the Ukraine war.

But while the EU and Frontex try to hide their murderous actions, the Meloni government is trying to get as much publicity as possible. Like all right-wing and fascist movements, it uses terror against refugees to incite a right-wing mob atmosphere.

Although it tries to play this down, the government itself is teeming with open fascists. New cases are coming to light all the time.

For example, pictures from 17 years ago of the new Secretary of State in the Ministry of Transport, Galeazzo Bignami, have surfaced showing the Fratelli d’Italia member wearing a swastika armband at a bachelor party. A photo has circulated of the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Research, Augusta Montaruli, showing her giving the “Roman salute” (like the Nazi “Sieg Heil”) during a pilgrimage to Mussolini’s birthplace, Predappio. The Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove, has quoted Belgian Nazi collaborator and SS officer Léon Degrelle on Facebook.

Barely in office, the Meloni government also made its first preparations for the violent repression of political and social resistance. By decree it created a new criminal offence. Anyone who organises or participates in an “assembly” of more than fifty people by “invading the space of other people’s public and private properties or buildings” can be punished with imprisonment of between

three and six years and a fine of up to 10,000 euros if the event “may result in a threat to public order, security or health.”

The pretext for the decree was a harmless rave party in a disused hall in Modena, which 3,500 young people had attended. When the owner of the hall filed a complaint because he feared it would collapse, the police sealed off the building. The ravers then left the area peacefully without any incidents.

If the decree “survives its way through parliament in its current version, the occupation of a school, university or factory in a strike and the occupation of abandoned buildings could also be punished,” comments the *FAZ*. “Many believe that with the ‘anti-rave norm’ the government had created a tool to suppress manifestations of collective dissent through pre-emptive repression and surveillance. In this reading, the illegal rave was merely a welcome opportunity.”

That resistance to the policies of the ruling class is growing is shown not only by recurrent strikes in the public and private sectors, but also by the mounting opposition to NATO’s war policy.

Last weekend, according to the organisers, more than 100,000 people took to the streets across Italy to demonstrate for a negotiated peace in Ukraine. More than 500 organisations, including trade unions, had called for the demonstrations.

But the same parties that have strengthened NATO in recent years, organised the social attacks on the working class and thus helped the right-wing to power, are now trying to misdirect and paralyse the growing opposition. Three former heads of government spoke at the rallies: Giuseppe Conte (Five Star) and Enrico Letta (Democrats) in Rome, and Matteo Renzi (Italia Viva) in Milan.

Social attacks, war and dictatorship can only be fought by an independent working class movement that breaks with these bankrupt parties and stands for an international, socialist programme.



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