

Lega and Five Star Movement prepare a joint government in Italy

By Peter Schwarz
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In Italy, the right-wing extremist Lega and the Five Star protest movement are negotiating the formation of a joint government. The negotiations are said to be progressing rapidly, with a result expected at the beginning of next week.

As late as Monday, President Sergio Mattarella had declared that his efforts to form a new government had failed. He proposed the formation of a government of experts and the holding of early elections.

On Wednesday, Silvio Berlusconi paved the way for renewed negotiations between the Lega and the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement—M5S). These had previously failed because the M5S did not want to govern together with Berlusconi's party Forza Italia, which had participated in the parliamentary elections in an alliance with the Lega. On Wednesday, Berlusconi signaled his willingness for the Lega to form a government alone with the M5S.

If such a government is established, the far-right Lega will set its political agenda. Although the Lega is only slightly more than half as strong as the M5S in terms of the votes it received, the M5S spokesman Vincenzo Spadafora has already stated that his party is not insisting on the post of prime minister.

It is likely that neither Lega leader Matteo Salvini nor M5S leader Luigi Di Maio will become prime minister, but rather a third person who was “in line with our government programme,” Spadafora told *Corriere della Sera*. In discussion as a possible candidate for prime minister, in addition to two non-partisan figures, is the leading Lega politician Giancarlo Giorgetti.

The task of such a government would be to impose the dictates of the international financial markets in a country characterized by high levels of poverty and unemployment, a deep banking crisis and extremely

high levels of public debt. In an interview with *Corriere della Sera*, Spadafora emphasized that the future prime minister had to be a “person of high standing, who enjoys the trust of both Italian citizens and international partners.” By “international partners” he meant the European Union.

It is significant that both the Lega and M5S have recently backed away from the call to withdraw from the eurozone and the European Union, or hold a referendum on membership. Both had fiercely attacked the EU in the election campaign.

They both continue to criticize the EU's stability legislation, about which they intend to negotiate with Brussels in a “polite and responsible manner,” Lega leader Salvini told a press conference in Brussels. But this concerns the disadvantages for Italian businesses and not the devastating consequences of EU austerity policies for the working class.

The Lega wants to introduce a flat tax, which would result in a decrease in tax revenues and massively unburden the rich and Italian companies. The reversal of the last pension reform, promised in the election campaign, which would have increased the retirement age to 67, is being sacrificed to the red pen. And the promise of an “unconditional basic income,” which brought the M5S numerous votes in the poor south of the country, turns out on closer inspection to be an Italian version of Germany's Hartz labour and welfare “reforms.” It is bound up with strict requirements to rapidly accept a poorly paid job.

The biggest agreement between the Lega and M5S is in the areas of immigration and domestic security. In the election campaign, the Lega promised to immediately deport half a million migrants, which is possible only by means of Nazi methods. The M5S has largely joined this campaign, which serves to fuel

chauvinism, create a xenophobic climate and increase the powers of the state apparatus to suppress any form of social resistance.

The Lega has been following this course for a long time. In the 1980s, when the Lega Nord (Northern League) was formed, it originally had the goal of dividing the richer north from the poorer south of Italy. It formed part of all the governments of the right-wing real estate and media tycoon Berlusconi. Its specialty was witch-hunting refugees and migrants. Under Salvini, it expanded nationally, dropped “Northern” from its name and modeled itself after the French National Front of Marine Le Pen.

The Five Star Movement has a different history. It arose in 2008, the year of the international financial crisis, in response to the political bankruptcy of the official left and its pseudo-left appendages. While one after another government led or supported by the Democratic Party (PD) shifted the burden of the crisis onto the general population, the M5S thrust itself into the resulting vacuum and exploited the growth of popular anger and frustration for its own ends.

The founder of the M5S, the comedian Beppe Grillo, initially did little more than rail against the corruption of the ruling elites. His party pretended to be neither right-wing nor left-wing and was able to win many former voters of the PD and its pseudo-leftist supporters.

The right-wing character of the new party, however, was already evident. Five years ago, on March 9, 2013, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote that the economic part of the M5S programme was “unmistakably right-wing.” The WSWS said: “Under the guise of a struggle against corruption, monopolies and bureaucracy, it calls for an historic assault against workers and the entire framework of the post-war welfare state. While M5S claims to oppose the corrupt political class, its target is the social gains of the Italian working class.”

Its programme emphasizes “the interests of small and medium-sized businesses, who regard both the working class and the big monopolies as opponents,” we said. “Grillo deliberately seeks to divide the working class—playing off the youth and impoverished layers against older workers and public-sector employees.”

We stressed that the Grillo movement categorically rejects a socialist reorganization of society. “Its

response to the domination of capitalist monopolies is not their socialization, but rather the promotion of small and medium enterprises. Its response to globalization is not the unification of the international working class, but the strengthening of the nation state on an austerity program.”

At that time, we received many outraged responses calling the M5S a progressive movement. The fact that five years later it is ready to form a government with the ultra-right Lega is an important lesson that extends far beyond Italy.

“Only the independent intervention of the working class based on a socialist program can provide a progressive response to the capitalist crisis,” we wrote five years ago. “This requires an unsparing critique of Grillo’s M5S as well as the trade unions, the fake-left and all the other organizations upon which capitalism relies for survival.”

This has been confirmed by recent developments.

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