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Italy

A new centre-right (with a hyphen) is born

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The Conte government is the first government of a new Italian centre-right. A centre-right which to be precise has to be defined as hyphenated – bringing together distinct political currents.

The **right wing** is clearly represented and proudly invoked by Matteo Salvini and partly by the abstention of Giorgia Meloni and her Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) party which is the most coherent and direct orphan of what was Gianfranco Fini's MSI (Italian Social Movement) before the turn to form Alleanza nazionale (National Alliance). The **centre** – which is *sui generis* because it is not evident nor claimed but hidden behind the generic formula of “neither right nor left” – is represented by Di Maio's M5S (Five Star Movement).

We have already come to define the M5S as a party – the “catch-all” party defined by Otto Kirchheimer. Defining it as a movement or some sort of nebula on the web after its accession to the government should be completely dropped.

The M5S is a party that tries to appeal across the board, across social classes. It is particularly attractive to a middle layer hit hard by the crisis, which has become poorer and expresses today the highest levels of social resentment. But it also appeals to a sector of working people, especially in the public sector.

Such a demographic is not so different from the social base that characterised the old DC (Christian Democrats) and to which Luigi Di Maio's project has often been compared. The “yellow whale” of our time. [\[1\]](#) It is characterised by indignation and a desire for change but this is mixed – and the longest crisis of the Republic has shown it – with an institutional reflex, an appetite for power and an arrogant management of internal debate.

The M5S has put into the government programme key measures from its manifesto, in prime position, the **citizens' income proposal**. It is no accident that Di Maio has taken on the portfolio for the ministry that will apply this change. The policy has the M5S trademark and he will be able to pin this medal on his chest and display it at the next elections. Assuming of course that the income is actually introduced since it has to be compatible with the EU financial strictures that Sergio Mattarella has succeeded in imposing on the government team.

The Five Star centre comes up against the right wing led by Salvini. The Lega is a right wing party that is *xenophobic, nationalist and in favour of some social reforms but neo-liberal at the same time (therefore the latter is just demagoguery)*. It has disturbing relationships with people like Marine Le Pen and Steve Bannon. So no longer like the right wing Lega Nord led by Umberto Bossi which was also racist but more moderate about it, partly because the economic situation at the time favoured that approach. Bossi's Lega also inherited some of the DC tradition but today Salvini's Lega expresses a coherent, nasty and full on racism. This wins him support and we can only respond to it by campaigning for the key value of solidarity between human beings as the one and only means of guaranteeing all people can live together in a civic manner. We need the expansion of real social rights against the overwhelming power of markets and capital. Salvini's policies are incubating civil war and endless conflict as history has already taught us. Also as we see today everywhere in the world where global contradictions – and migration is a contradiction that involves us all – are managed through the dog whistle solution of our nation first whipped up against any number of scapegoats - black people, arabs, Roma, sometimes Jews. In other words, policies that basically restrict the rights of everybody.

The new centre-right is hyphenated because it is different from the centre right created by Silvio Berlusconi. There remains a distinction between the M5S and the Lega whatever some people on the left think when they scream about the advance of new fascisms and want to ignore at all costs any differences. On the one hand you have a party

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among the oldest in the political arena that is xenophobic, corrupted by multiple ties with Berlusconi's empire and a cheerleader for a national sovereignty without perspectives (can Italy really succeed on its own against global competition?). On the other hand there is a new party that has taken up environmental concerns, is substantially honest, has linked up with the genuine demands of many citizens. But at the same time has significant links with the old establishment and whose internal structures are not managed democratically. Within the parliamentary groups there has been criticism of Di Maio on the latter. However there is a great deal of expectations focussed on the M5S in government. â€”

So we have a new sui generis centre, to be tested in government, and a disturbing right wing. The new centre-right as soon as it becomes the government of the country sweeps away the opposition, so dear to Salvini, between the â€”bottom' and the â€”higher ups', between the people and the establishment because the government of one of the ten most important countries in the world certainly will not represent the people from below. Then if this framework of people at the bottom and the top is no longer useful in any analysis, politics will re-impose the more usual counter position of the left against the right. The fact that this conflict today seems out of date is not because it has been overcome but simply due to the non-existence of one side of it – the left.

The left does not exist today not because the leadership groups are â€”bad' or because they have the wrong line or are disunited and should stop arguing but because the abstract conception of the left must once again be incarnated in reality. The left has to find its protagonists, its key ideas, a strategy for society, and political tactics. Thirty years or more of errors, betrayals and real stupidity have left us in ruins and created this situation.

However dealing with a new centre-right which has latched onto a world that traditionally was on the left cannot be adequately done by using old schemas, conditioned reflexes or effective soundbites (which do not really have any effect, someone should tell Renzi this. [2] The above point was correctly made by Susanna Camusso [leader of biggest trade union, CGIL] in the *Fatto Quotidiano* the other day. We need intelligence, serious analysis and credible action. It is no use raising the alarm by shouting that “they are fascists” – even if there will be disturbing policies with regard to migrant workers. It is not enough to make abstract references to the values of democracy.

The crisis of global capitalism – this is the phase we are living through – requires a complete change in our political system. This means a drastic shift of resources between those who are rich and those who are poor, new exercises in democracy, including direct democracy and new, radical forms of solidarity rather than racism

A worse error is the absurd proposal of Carlo Calenda (minister in the previous government) for a republican front. The word front says it all – frontism against Berlusconi's centre right buried the left, imagine how it might work against the new centre-right.

Source, *Italian daily newspaper Il Fatto Quotidiano* 1 June 2018. Translated by **International Viewpoint**.

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[1] The DC was known as the “white whale”.

[2] Renzi, the previous PD leader had made the comment â€”Now it is up to them and it's popcorn for everyone' about the prolonged political

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haggling prior to the formation of the new government.