

At least 35 killed in Italy bridge collapse

Allison Smith
15 August 2018

At around 11:30 a.m. local time Tuesday in Genoa, Italy, a major highway bridge collapsed, killing at least 35 people. A 209-metre (686-foot) section of the Ponte Morandi, centred on the western-most pillar and crossing the Polcevera stream and an industrial area of the city, fell into the river during a torrential rain storm.

Besides the 35 dead, there are at least seven people seriously injured and 440 forced to evacuate their homes following a gas leak. Rescue efforts are still underway to try to recover those who may still be trapped under the tangled debris.

Eyewitnesses reported seeing lightning strike the bridge immediately before it collapsed. Motorist Alessandro Megna reported to RAI state radio that he was stuck in a traffic jam below the bridge when he saw the collapse. “Suddenly the bridge came down with everything it was carrying. It was really an apocalyptic scene, I couldn’t believe my eyes,” he said. Shocked bystanders screamed, “Oh my god, oh my god” as the bridge collapsed.

An official with Italy’s civil protection agency reported that between thirty and thirty-five cars and three to five trucks were on the bridge at the time of the collapse. The portion of the collapsed bridge, with the vehicles on it, fell into the flooded Polcevera stream, while other fragments landed on the tracks of the Turin–Genoa railway and warehouses belonging to Ansaldo Energia, one of Italy’s leading energy production companies.

As of this writing, the central government’s official line is that the collapse was caused by lightning, however, expert engineers say that the collapse is likely caused by a structural weakness due to the bridge being in use far beyond the life span of its design.

Italian Transport Minister Danilo Toninelli tweeted that the incident is “an immense tragedy.” Giovanni Toti, governor of the Liguria region, said the loss of the bridge was an “incident of vast proportions on a vital

arterial road, not just for Genoa, but for the whole country.” But none of these officials offer any explanation for what happened.

The bridge, designed by Italian engineer Riccardo Morandi, was built between 1963 and 1967 by the Italian Society for Water Pipelines to cross the Polcevera stream in Genoa between the districts of Sampierdarena and Cornigliano. It serves as the primary artery to the Italian Riviera and to France’s southern coast.

Many of the cement structures built in the 1960s are at great risk. Most of them were planned and designed in anticipation of a lower traffic volume than today.

A 2011 report by Italian highways company Autostrade per l’Italia said that the Morandi viaduct was suffering from serious decay due to the enormous amount of traffic and it requires continuous maintenance. In the immediate aftermath of the tragic collapse, the company also reported that regular maintenance had been carried out and a bid for a €20 million contract was about to be awarded for extraordinary work on that particular section.

What is being prepared is a whitewash of the entire incident: a few scapegoats will be singled out, there may even be hypocritical shouts against “corporate greed” and similar populist slogans, while the entire operating system will be left intact and slashing funds for infrastructure work will continue unabated.

In 2016, Professor Antonio Brencich, a lecturer in structural engineering at Genoa University, wrote that the bridge is no longer structurally sound and should be replaced.

These warnings were ignored. Infrastructure projects across Italy have been delayed or scrapped as a consequence of decades of cuts to vital social and crucial infrastructural programs.

Today’s disaster resulted in an 11 percent drop in the stock price of the road’s operator, Atlantia, before it

recovered somewhat, closing slightly below 5 percent for the day.

The reaction of the political establishment has been an operation in control damage. In typical Mussolini-like fashion, leader of the neo-fascist Lega and co-Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini threatened that he “will do everything humanly and government-wise possible to get the full names of those who erred. Make them go to jail and pay until the end.”

The 5 Star Movement (M5S)—currently governing Italy in coalition with the Lega—was also caught in flagrant contempt for the need of infrastructure and maintenance projects. In 2014 after a major flood hit the city of Genoa, Beppe Grillo, then leader of M5S, aligned the party with the “No Gronda” movement (Gronda is the name of the alternative highway project), denounced the waste of public funds for big infrastructure projects saying, “we need to stop them with the army.”

The Gronda road project seeks to relieve traffic from the Morandi Bridge, by diverting at least the heavy goods vehicles, but M5S deemed it a waste of money and appealed to its supporters to block the project. To make matters worse, the current Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation Danilo Toninelli, a member of M5S, presented a proposal which includes the Gronda among the public works that should be subjected to “a total revision, which contemplates even the abandonment of the project.”

The other co-deputy prime minister, M5S leader Luigi Di Maio, struck a similar chord when he suggested diverting the “funds allocated to the Gronda project to boost public transportation, shared mobility ... and to allow rail passenger transport.”

For decades, Italian governments have pursued policies of militarism and austerity, whether center-right or center-left coalitions like those led by the Democratic Party (PD) with the support of various pseudo-left parties such as Rifondazione Comunista.

The resulting social catastrophe and political vacuum on the left allowed the M5S and Lega to win a hearing with demagogic attacks on the corruption and self-enrichment of Italian politicians. M5S in particular gained a foothold among youth who correctly identified the so-called “left” around the PD as equally responsible for the crisis as the center-right.

The current coalition government, the most right-

wing since the fascist regime of Mussolini, pledges to continue austerity and vows to focus most of its efforts to attack and expel immigrants, which also serves the purpose of diverting social opposition to austerity and inequality. Italy’s crumbling infrastructure will not be addressed within this political framework.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact