

Renzi's resignation threatens to bring down the Italian government

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14 January 2021

On Wednesday, former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's Italy Alive (IV) party resigned from Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's government. Yesterday, emergency talks took place at the Senate, where Conte's Five-Star Movement (M5S)-Democratic Party (PD) coalition may no longer have enough votes to survive a parliamentary challenge after IV's departure. Conte will speak to the Senate Tuesday morning to avert the fall of his government and new elections.

The Italian government faces collapse amid mounting working class anger at the ruling elite's murderous "herd immunity" policy on COVID-19, and as political shock waves spread worldwide from the fascist storming of the US Capitol in Washington on January 6.

Italy was initially the European country worst hit by the virus, but wildcat strikes in Italian auto, steel and engineering forced Conte to adopt a lockdown that slashed the contagion. Since then, the European Union (EU) adopted a "herd immunity" policy of forcing workers back to work and youth back to school that has since led to an explosive regrowth in the virus. In an attempt to let off steam last month, Italy's trade union federations held a brief, symbolic one-day national strike.

On Wednesday, in his resignation speech, Renzi claimed his party was leaving the government to try to improve Italy's response to the pandemic. He said: "It's much more difficult to leave a government post than to cling to the status quo. We are experiencing a great political crisis, we are discussing the dangers associated with the pandemic. Faced with this crisis, the sense of responsibility is to solve problems, not hide them."

Renzi's maneuver led to bitter criticisms yesterday from his erstwhile allies in the M5S and PD and calls from the neo-fascist Lega and Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia) parties for new elections. The Lega and Fratelli currently stand to win such elections, were they to be held, in an electoral alliance with Silvio Berlusconi's

Forza Italia party. The Lega would have 23 percent of the vote, ahead of the PD, and the Fratelli 16 percent, ahead of the M5S, and Forza Italia 6 percent.

From the M5S, the leading party in Conte's coalition, Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio called Renzi's manoeuvre an "irresponsible gesture" and appealed to European industrialists to work "for the redemption of Italy." The M5S's founder, comedian Beppe Grillo, also expressed his support for Conte—a law professor who is not a member of any party, but whom the M5S has repeatedly named for high office.

Leaders of the PD, Renzi's former party, also denounced his party's manoeuvre. PD Vice-Secretary Andrea Orlando said: "There are 500 deaths per day and an uncontrolled economic crisis, but Italy Alive has taken upon itself to provoke a crisis that has thrown the country into uncertainty and confusion."

Former PD Prime Minister Romano Prodi complacently claimed, nearly a year since the COVID-19 pandemic began, that he was beginning to be concerned by the situation: "This is the first day I have been really worried. This is impossible, given the problems we have: the Recovery Fund [EU bailout fund], refugees in Bosnia and Libya, and the preparation of the G20 summit. ... This is not a simple resignation. It is the country that is resigning."

Lega leader Matteo Salvini and Fratelli leader Georgia Meloni responded to Renzi's resignation by demanding that Italy hold new elections, even though this would accelerate the ongoing upsurge of COVID-19 infections. Meloni said, "They are all inventing [reasons] why, yet again, they want to avoid presenting themselves before the Italian people in free elections. It is a lie that we cannot hold a vote. Hold elections immediately!"

Salvini tweeted: "We warned the country that this government would fight over everything and soon go home. Is there still a government?" He added that the

political establishment should “trust the Italian people, giving them back their word.”

What is occurring is a vicious faction fight inside the Italian ruling class, in which each faction presents itself to the workers under false pretences. In reality, Renzi is not opposed to EU “herd immunity” policy, which has claimed over 80,000 lives in Italy and 600,000 across Europe, any more than the Italian neo-fascists are dedicated to reflecting the will of the people. Rather, bitter divisions are erupting over how to impose continued “herd immunity” and austerity policies amid an accelerating political breakdown in all the major NATO countries.

On December 17, Renzi published an open letter in the *Corriere della Sera* laying out his criticisms of Conte’s government. He primarily raised differences on how to spend the €209 billion allocated to Italy in the EU’s €750 billion corporate bailout fund adopted amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and criticisms of the Conte government’s geostrategic orientation.

Renzi began by emphasizing his pessimistic view of the political crisis provoked by the EU’s murderous handling of the pandemic. Implying that official rhetoric falsely blaming workers for the explosive growth of the virus no longer had any credibility, Renzi wrote:

“Those €200 billion are our last chance. As [former European Central Bank head] Mario Draghi astutely notes, ‘The problem is worse than it looks, and the authorities must act urgently.’ The situation is serious, prime minister. We have the most COVID deaths in Europe. It is useless to keep up the ‘Everything is going great’ rhetoric. ... We should not guilt-trip citizens who have followed with discipline the government’s instructions, but rather reflect on what has not worked well ...”

Calling to spend EU grants on hand-outs to “green jobs” and high-tech industries such as artificial intelligence, robotics and “Internet of Things” connected devices, he said Italian health spending should come from a further “allocation of €36 billion from the European Stability Mechanism.” The Conte government has so far refused this, however, as it would allow the EU to deploy “troika” (EU-ECB-IMF) financial monitors to Italy to take over the state budget, as occurred in Greece after the 2008 economic crash.

Renzi also demanded a greater say on foreign policy, where the Conte government has cultivated ties with Moscow and signed a memorandum of understanding to participate in China’s global Belt and Road Initiative

infrastructure projects. He wrote:

“Let us decide together Italy’s place in the new world of Biden’s America and the new Europe. And how we position ourselves on the great challenges of the [US-UAE] Abraham Peace Deal and the Asian century. We go to Africa to create development and cooperation, not with the rhetoric of your first government’s security decrees. And we play a certain role in the Mediterranean, where in recent years our presence has become less palpable, and the impact of Russia and Turkey stronger.”

Renzi himself has little support, IV only has 3 percent of the vote, and it remains unclear what he hopes to accomplish. Some editorialists have speculated that he may simply seek to drive a harder bargain and obtain more influence in a new government agreement with Conte, although M5S officials said last night Renzi is “no longer an interlocutor” they would speak with. There is also the possibility that his manoeuvre could end up in new elections and the coming to power of the neo-fascists.

In the aftermath of the January 6 coup in Washington, there is increasing political activity in far-right circles across Europe. Spain’s fascist Vox party—which is still hailing Trump and applauding Spanish fascist army officers who are calling for a coup and the mass murder of “26 million” people in Spain—is meeting today in Barcelona with Meloni, of Fratelli d’Italia, and US Republican Party anti-tax operative Grover Norquist.

What is evident, however, is that none of these reactionary forces speak for growing opposition to “herd immunity” policies, unsustainable levels of social inequality, and war that exists in the Italian and international working class. The way forward is the construction of a socialist and internationalist movement in the working class and the preparation of political general strikes internationally against “herd immunity” policies and the threat of authoritarian rule.



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