

Italy to reopen schools, outdoor dining as hundreds die daily of COVID-19

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Last Friday, in a press conference with Health Minister Roberto Speranza, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi announced a significant loosening of lockdown restrictions starting Monday, April 26. The announcement, which comes as hundreds of people continue to die every day of the virus, will ensure a further rise in coronavirus cases and deaths and has been widely denounced by medical professionals and scientists.

All schools are to resume in-person classes beginning next Monday. Restaurants and bars in so-called “yellow zones,” where there is a less rapid spread of the virus, will be permitted to reopen for outdoor dining. Swimming pools and outdoor sports can reopen.

There are currently more than 14,000 daily cases in Italy. The B.1.1.7 strain, referred to as the UK variant, is the dominant variant in the country. An average of 381 people are dying every day. Just a week ago the daily death rate stood at 470. More than 3,000 people remain in intensive care.

Under these conditions, Draghi’s reopening announcement has a clearly homicidal character. In the course of the Friday press conference, he made no serious effort to justify the decision from a medical standpoint. Instead, he declared that it involved a “calculated risk” that there would be another resurgence of the virus.

This calculation has nothing to do with the protection of the population and everything to do with the interests of the Italian capitalist class. Schools are being opened so that parents can be freed to go to work and Italian capitalism can continue to make profits for its super-rich.

Medical professionals immediately denounced the announcement and warned that it will lead to unnecessary deaths.

“I would like to understand what has been calculated and considered, and how many deaths we are willing to accept,” said Sergio Abrignani, an immunologist in Milan on the “Che Giorno” program of Rai Radio1. Without sufficient vaccinations “and a high level of transmission, it is a biological threat,” he said.

Andrea Crisanti, the director of the Department of Molecular Medicine at the University of Padua, told Radio Capital that the reopening would be “irreversible, and there will clearly be a price to pay to be taken into account. ... The figures do not justify the government’s decisions. How many deaths from COVID-19 are we willing to tolerate?”

He said, “For weeks we have been moving between 15,000 and 20,000 cases per day, a very high plateau, which does not permit us to plan reopening.”

Massimo Galli, the head of infectious diseases in Milan, told the *Daily* that “with Friday’s announcement, an all-clear message has been given that we cannot afford.”

Filippo Anelli, the president of the Federation of the Order of Doctors, said that “as doctors we cannot say that we are not worried that the situation will get out of hand.”

Even by the standards of other European countries, Italy’s current vaccination campaign has been a debacle. Only 17 percent of residents aged 70–79 have had at least one dose of the vaccine, the lowest level in the EU, apart from Bulgaria. With the health care system undermined by decades of funding cuts, the government had no coordinated national program for vaccine distribution, and left this to regional governments.

The widespread opposition among students and teachers to the reopening of in-person classrooms was expressed in a letter to Draghi written by a 16-year-old

high school student, Flavia di Nocera, published in the *Corrierino* on Monday.

“The prospect of returning to school in the month of May is a measure in which I do not see any benefits, but only innumerable disadvantages,” she wrote. “My first reaction was anger: How is it possible to completely negate the sacrifices of the past year just to prove our efficiency, when the current conditions do not allow such a measure?”

Returning to classrooms “will not guarantee us immunity from the coronavirus, which can never be completely isolated from our classrooms, nor from public transport which many students use every day to get to school. This is not my hypothesis, but a fact attested to by the main newspapers that report many schools closed due to infections,” she wrote.

“Why reopen schools now? What drives us to throw away all our efforts, to make the infections spike again, to speculate on the lives of students, like guinea pigs in a monstrous experiment that pays for every mistake with human lives? ... I have decided ... that I, like many other children, will not take part in face-to-face lessons until my words and those of all the students of Italy will have been listened to and properly weighed. We do not want to be the puppets of macabre propaganda.”

The WSWS noted when Draghi became prime minister in February that he “personifies European finance capital like no other” individual in Italy. The former investment banker for Goldman Sachs and then head of the European Central Bank, Draghi’s name is identified with the policies of providing unlimited funds to the financial markets and imposing austerity on the working population.

“Will these openings be definitive?” Draghi asked on Friday. “When I said this was a calculated risk, that is exactly the answer. We have taken this risk; we are reopening ... I have no doubt that the vaccination campaign will get better and better, if the correct social distancing measures are maintained, including masks, the chance that we must go into another lockdown is very low.”

Draghi is stating in a particularly open manner what is the policy of all the European governments. In France, Emmanuel Macron is moving to reopen primary schools the same day: April 26. His government has set a target date of mid-May for further relaxations of the limited lockdown measures in place.

In a speech at the end of last month, Macron refused the closure of nonessential workplaces or an extended closure of schools, insisting that it was necessary to consider the broader impact of a lockdown, including on “the economy.”

Draghi’s announcement is in line with the campaign by the neo-fascist Fratelli d’Italia, which is continuing to campaign for an end to all lockdown restrictions, including the full reopening of all restaurants, and the pushing back of the curfew until 11 p.m.

The Fratelli d’Italia is attempting to capitalise on social immiseration of small businesspeople—including restaurant owners and other shopkeepers, who have been ruined by the pandemic and the lack of government support—to direct it behind the homicidal demands of big business for an end to all coronavirus restrictions. Many small businesspeople have reported not having received any government assistance at all.



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