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Italy's Draghi government comes to an end

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi resigned for the second time in a week on Thursday. This time President Sergio Mattarella has accepted the resignation. The third largest economy in the European Union is therefore without a functioning government.



Draghi speaks ahead of Senate vote of confidence (Photo by governo.it / CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 IT) [Photo by governo.it / CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 IT]

In a vote of confidence in the Senate on Wednesday evening, only 95 of 321 members of the Second Chamber of Parliament voted in favour of Draghi and 39 against him. The Lega, Forza Italia and the Five Star Movement, which belong to Draghi's government of "national unity," denied him confidence by abstaining from the vote. A planned vote of confidence in the Chamber of Deputies did not take place.

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Eighty-year-old President Mattarella dissolved the parliament on the same day. This means that there will be early elections on September 25. Draghi will remain in office until then. The election was scheduled to take place in April next year.

Draghi's fate is a consequence of the sharp class tensions and social contradictions in Italy. Mattarella appointed the former head of the European Central Bank as head of government in February 2021, when the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic in Italy claimed tens of thousands of lives and the economy was in free fall with a decline of 8.9 percent.

All parties—from the right-wing Lega, Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the Five Star protest movement to the Democrats and their various split-offs—took refuge behind Draghi, who, as the trusted representative of international finance capital, was to ensure that Italy received the €206 billion it was entitled to from the European Union's Coronavirus Fund.

The European Commission tied the allocation of these funds to the implementation of a total of 42 “reforms” that would “free the Italian economy from obstacles to growth” and make it more “competitive,” make the state “leaner” and make social systems “more effective”—all slogans for massive attacks on the working class and the lower middle classes.

Draghi lived up to their expectations. He filled central economic posts with external experts, such as the former investment banker and Vodafone boss Vittorio Colao, and advocates of austerity and privatization, such as Giancarlo Giorgetti of the Lega, whom he made Minister for Economic Development.

Draghi “solved” the coronavirus crisis with a massive vaccination campaign led by a high-ranking general. Although it did not stop the spread of the pandemic—with 170,000 deaths in Europe, Italy is second only to the United Kingdom—the high vaccination rate provided the pretext for lifting all lockdown measures and maintaining industrial production and the tourism industry.

With a restructuring of social spending, Draghi relieved the corporations at the expense of the workers. He revoked the pension reform of the previous government, which had lowered the retirement age under certain conditions. He declared the “citizen's money,”

which the Five Stars had introduced instead of social assistance, to be a “flop” and restricted it with strict conditions and control measures.

Draghi’s tax reforms and liberalization measures bailed out large corporations, while the livelihoods of apartment owners and small self-employed, an important clientele of the Lega and the Five Stars, were threatened. Earlier this month, all over Italy, taxi drivers who have paid high fees and are now being driven to ruin by Draghi’s liberalisation measures went on strike.

The “Competition Decree,” which Draghi wanted to use to enforce the so-called Bolkestein Directive of the EU, also had an impact. This stipulates that publicly owned operations run by private individuals are to be put up for tender every few years. This means that, among other things, 14,000 lidos, beach resorts which are mostly run by families, could now be taken over by major investors.

In terms of foreign policy, Draghi pledged Italy’s support for NATO’s war against Russia, although the Lega and Forza Italia reject arms deliveries to Ukraine.

Draghi’s politics met with enthusiasm in the international finance world. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* cheered in November of last year, “So far, we must say, things are going splendidly. ... The enthusiasm for the unusual dynamics puts Italy in high spirits.” According to Laurence Boone, the OECD chief economist, Italy is “for the first time in many decades in a position to completely rebalance its economy. It’s now or never.”

The Italian working class does not share in these high spirits. Under Draghi, the polarization of the country has intensified further. The official unemployment rate is 8.4 percent, while youth unemployment is 24 percent; 3.4 million workers are precariously employed. The number of poor has risen to 5.6 million during the coronavirus pandemic, with official inflation at 8 percent. Strikes against job losses, low wages and unsustainable working conditions continue.

It is significant that under these conditions Draghi’s government of “national unity” was overthrown by the Five Stars and the right-wing parties, and not by the supposedly left-wing parties.

The Five Stars, which emerged as a protest movement against the political establishment, first governed with the far-right Lega and then with the Democrats and finally supported Draghi, are in free fall and have split. In the polls, they fell from 33 percent in the 2018 parliamentary election to 11 percent.

Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio has left the movement and founded his own party, “Together for the Future,” which Draghi supports. Giuseppe Conte, Draghi’s predecessor as prime minister and chairman of the Five Star Movement, has opposed him.

The Lega and Forza Italia have also lost support in the polls, but not by as much as the Five Stars. They hope to form a right-wing government with the fascist Fratelli d’Italia after the elections. Fratelli never joined Draghi’s government and has become the strongest party in the polls with 23 percent. In the last parliamentary election, they received only 4.4 percent.

Fratelli leader Giorgia Meloni, who worships Mussolini and works closely with the Spanish Vox Party, could become the next Italian prime minister. Together, the right-wing parties of Meloni, Salvini and Berlusconi reached 46 percent in the polls.

The Democrats, their pseudo-left supporters and their allies are responsible for the rise of the right. They are concerned about the stability of the bourgeois order, not the fate of the working class. They suppress workers’ struggles and support Draghi all the more resolutely, the more obvious the anti-worker character of his policies becomes.

After Draghi announced his resignation for the first time last Thursday, they organized a campaign to keep him in office. Two thousand mayors published an appeal; trade unions, entrepreneurs and the Church also called on Draghi to stay.

According to Italian media reports, Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz and Ursula von der Leyen also telephoned Draghi to persuade him to stay. They fear that their war front against Russia will fall apart and that inflation and the looming recession in Europe will be compounded by a renewed euro crisis if the trusted representative of finance capital leaves the Italian seat of government.

The slavish subordination of the trade unions, the Democrats and the pseudo-left under Draghi and his anti-worker policies have created the conditions under which the ultra-right

and fascists can exploit the anger and frustration of petty-bourgeois strata and, in some cases, of workers.

The right-wing danger can only be combated by an independent offensive of the working class, which combines the defence of wages, jobs and social rights with the fight against war and for an international socialist program.

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