

# Growing strikes against austerity policies in Italy

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After a wave of strikes and protests by truck drivers and fishermen paralysed Italy early last week, protests continue against the harsh austerity measures the unelected government of Prime Minister Mario Monti is imposing on the Italian working class.

Last Friday, a 24-hour national strike was called by main transportation unions in response to a series of tax and fee increases affecting broad layers of the population: IVA (value-added, or sales, tax) from 21 to 23 percent, taxes on individuals, health care co-pays, fuel taxes and the reinstatement of the tax on first homes (ICI).

According to an estimate by the USB (Federation of Basis Unions) union, 40,000 transportation workers were on strike in Rome, with an average of 70 to 80 percent participation in cities including Bologna and Venice.

Airline workers also went on a 24-hour strike called by the CGIL (General Confederation of Italian Labour) with estimated 100 percent participation. Also on strike were workers of Alitalia maintenance, and of the two main baggage-handling companies, Flightcare and Aviapartner.

Workers of Fiumicino and Ciampino, Rome's two airports, are convinced that "without rules this sector is going to collapse, so they ask for the renewal of the collective contract that expired on December 31," declared Alessandro Capitani and Stefano Monticelli, two airline union secretaries in Rome.

"Finally," they continued, "we are convinced that all the workers who participated to the strike today, want to dedicate this day to their 75 Argol (a logistic company) colleagues, who are threatened with losing their jobs due to a wicked decision by Alitalia."

In Florence, protesters dressed up as Monti, German chancellor Angela Merkel, and European Central Bank

president Mario Draghi staged a protest where they pretended to be stealing bags full of euros from a bank safe. A banner held over the event read, "Those are guilty for the crisis."

In Rome, there were slogans, banners and flags against the Monti government. "Out the government of the bankers, no to the diktats of the European Union, no to attacks on jobs and pensions. Monti vampire," a banner read. "The crisis is yours, the fight is ours. Let's take back our rights", "Let's raise our heads against layoffs, insecurity and unemployment," other banners read.

Eggs and smoke bombs were thrown at banks and the Department of Social Policies building in Rome.

Susanna Camusso, the general secretary of the Stalinist union CGIL, released an interview with the newspaper *La Repubblica* that showed her hostility to the broad masses of workers her union claims to defend. Instead of calling for a mobilisation of workers in political struggle to bring down the unelected Monti government, she simply insisted on a bogus table of negotiations with the government—its determination to ram through anti-worker austerity policies notwithstanding.

"Limiting precarious working conditions comes before than other issues. We think it's useful to propose a true negotiation and not to rely on premade policies, which failure is on the numbers of precarity and unemployment," Camusso said.

The negotiations Camusso refers to are nothing different than the usual stab in the back. She, along with her two colleagues of CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers Unions) and UIL (Italian Union of Labour), Raffaele Bonanni and Luigi Angeletti, on June 28, 2011, signed an agreement with the association of industrialists, Confindustria, paving the way to further

attacks on workers' rights.

On January 30, at the University of Bologna, students protested against the arrival of the Italian president, Giorgio Napolitano, a former member of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party (PCI), who came to the city to receive a degree from the prestigious university. Police attacked demonstrators with clubs, while students threw toilet paper, eggs and trash bags at the police.

“For us, Napolitano is not the clean face that everybody says...he’s the most responsible of a future characterised by precarious living,” a protester said.

The deans of the departments of political science, Fabio Giusberti and Paolo Zurla, praised Napolitano as “convinced supporter of the process of transformation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the direction of European social-democracy”. This underscores the reactionary character of academia, large sections of which have gone over to pro-market policies and in favour of big business.

While speaking, Napolitano lectured the protesters: “Manifestations of dissent and protests, if well motivated and expressed correctly, can be taken seriously.”

The University of Bologna awarded the degree to Napolitano for his “fundamental contribution to the development of European culture and to the overtaking of ideological barriers”.

That is, the university is grateful to Napolitano, other ex-PCI members, and the entire Stalinist apparatus that liquidated the USSR 20 years ago. As subsequent events have made clear, this eroded the key ideological barrier to massive social attacks by the bourgeoisie: conscious socialist aspirations in the working masses. Ex-PCI members have, over the last 20 years, evolved into right-wing politicians willing to carry out attacks on the European working class as devastating as the “shock therapy” that destroyed the Soviet economy in the 1990s.

That a prestigious university can call this a “development of European culture” only highlights the profound crisis of European culture itself.

There is broad consensus among the Italian ruling elite that its policies will encounter popular opposition. Interior Minister and ex-Bologna police chief Anna Maria Cancellieri warned of infiltrations of “mad dogs” who can take advantage of protests. She then endorsed unsubstantiated claims by the head of the industrialists

of Sicily, Ivan Lo Bello, that the *Movimento dei Forconi* (Pitchfork Movement)—which helped organise last week’s protests by truckers and fishermen—has ties to the mafia.



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