

Protests and strikes signal mounting hostility toward Italian government

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1 November 2018

A wave of strikes and protests across Italy this month reflects widespread and increasing hostility toward the coalition Five Star Movement-Lega government and increasing concerns over the rapidly deteriorating standard of living for the vast majority of Italians.

This past Saturday, nearly 10,000 Romans marched to protest against the crumbling infrastructure in Italy's capital city. The protest, organised by a group of women that founded Roma Dice Basta (Rome Says Enough), put forward demands for Rome to return to a city that is "inclusive, liveable, welcoming, and forward thinking."

There is widespread disgust for Rome's mayor, Virginia Raggi of the Five Star Movement, who was elected on an anti-establishment campaign with promises to clean up the city and significantly improve its infrastructure, but has been mired in scandal since taking office and hasn't fulfilled any of her election promises. Raggi was indicted last month on charges of making false statements regarding the appointment of Renato Marra as director of Rome's tourism department.

Residents and visitors are rightly shocked that garbage has been left to pile up, to the point that rats and wild boar regularly feast on the fetid mess, and that maintenance and improvement of transport services has been all but abandoned, with 35 percent of the bus and tram fleet out of commission and at least 30 buses in the city's aging fleet catching fire between 2017 and 2018.

Rome's problems, however, began many years ago, and since the onset of the 2008 world financial crisis, the city has been faced with increasing challenges as its administrators have either sought to find short-term solutions or been involved in shady financial derivative transactions that have further deepened the Eternal

City's budgetary crisis.

Contrary to the common mantra echoed by the servile media that workers as well as inept administrators are the main cause of Rome's budget imbalances, the role of finance capital and derivative schemes is largely responsible for Rome's—and Italy's—crisis. Raggi is merely a continuation of this trend.

The protest in Rome followed on the heels of a 24-hour "Black Friday" general strike by public sector workers in transportation, hospitals, and schools across Italy who walked off the job in protest over "salary, welfare, representation in the workplace, universal rights, against privatisation and liberalisation, the abolition of inequalities, and health and safety."

The four largest unions (USI, CUB, SGB, COBAS), sensing unrest among their membership, put forward workers' requests for "real increases in pay, provisions for sufficient staff, respect for the dignity of staff, and the right to retirement at 60 or with 35 years of contributions."

Since the 2012 Jobs Act, pushed through by the Democratic Party, public sector workers have faced increasingly harsh conditions. Citizens interviewed by local media outlets on the day of the strike were overwhelmingly sympathetic with the strikers, even as they expressed frustration over service interruptions.

Last month's protests and strikes took place as the coalition government continued its crackdown on immigration and submits the latest austerity national budget for approval by the European Union (EU).

While there is widespread concern among Italians about immigration, there is also mass sympathy for the plight of immigrants and an understanding that the significant increase in immigration is due to the unending wars and economic destruction abroad.

Last week, upon visiting the site in Rome where a

young woman was allegedly murdered by a group of Italian and immigrant men, Lega Party leader Matteo Salvini was met by hundreds of protesters who roundly jeered him as a “jackal” for taking political advantage of human tragedy to further vilify immigrants.

At the beginning of October, nearly 6,000 people demonstrated in Riace (southern Italy), Rome and Milan, to denounce the arrest of Riace’s immigrant-friendly mayor and the “fascist” anti-immigrant policies of the coalition government. Contrary to the government’s accusation that Riace’s immigrants represent a threat to Italy, the town’s immigrant policies are widely viewed as a role model for how immigrants can be integrated into society.

As the Italian government builds up a vast police state apparatus to carry out mass deportations of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, it is implementing further austerity through the latest national budget that pledges billions of euros for the military and the police, and tax breaks for businesses, while promising a miserly €780 per month “basic income” for Italian citizens, which comes with so many strings attached that it will be virtually impossible to qualify.

On October 24, the WSWS noted that a violent struggle is set to unfold on the summits of European bourgeois politics, as both pro-EU and far-right populist forces fight to impose their version of austerity while trying to avert a financial panic that could provoke an Italian and global market crash. The central question is a perspective for independent political opposition by the working class, uniting workers’ struggles against austerity in Italy and across Europe.



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