

Strikes across Italy opposing Meloni's social cuts and war policy

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On Friday, May 26, Italian transit workers in both private and public companies, including local and long distance services, began a 24-hour strike, as did many public school workers. In as many as 25 cities, drivers of trains, streetcars and buses as well as teachers and, in Trieste, dock workers, struck for higher wages and against precarious and insecure jobs. In Milan, Naples and Turin, strikers marched through the city center chanting, “Abbassate le armi, alzate i salari!” (Down with arms, up with wages!).

In Rome, schoolchildren and students answered the call of the Unione sindacale di base (USB) union, and demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Education. In Lombardy, the train service of the Trenord company was suspended for 24 hours, while Trenitalia went on strike from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In Naples, the entire public transport system, including the metro, bus, streetcar and cable car, was suspended for 24 hours, as was the case in Turin and Palermo. Workers also struck in Genoa, Florence, Livorno, Bari and Catania. The toll stations on the major highways likewise went on strike, causing long lines to form.

Clashes occurred in Milan as strikers moved toward the heavily guarded Confindustria corporate headquarters. Demonstrators tried to break through the barriers, throwing tomatoes and eggs. Police officers, reinforced by military police, countered with shields and batons.

Excluded from the strike were certain high-speed Freccie and ICE trains. The city of Rome and the flood-affected regions of Emilia-Romagna and Marche were also exempted from the transit strike, as was air traffic. At airports, a national strike has been announced for Sunday, June 4.

The key demands were: €300 net monthly wage increase and adjustment of wages to inflation; €10 minimum hourly wage for all those whose earnings are still below that; and an end to precarious, temporary and low-paid jobs.

In May there were several strikes in Italy demanding increased wages and greater job security. They are part of a growing movement throughout the European working class, from France, Spain and Britain to the warning strike movements in Germany and Scandinavia and the recent

teachers strikes in Romania.

In Italy, a four-hour national transport workers strike took place on May 2. On May 3, air traffic controllers went on strike, supported by Air Dolomiti and Vueling flight attendants. On May 19, ground crew workers at all Italian airports went on strike against exploitation, starvation wages and precarious conditions. At ITA Airways, the successor to Alitalia, which is being taken over by Lufthansa, there have already been several walkouts protesting the elimination of 4,000 jobs.

The strike movement is directed against the pro-business social and war policies of the government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who belongs to the fascist Fratelli d'Italia. The Meloni government is trying to extend the expired collective agreement in the public sector until 2024, replace it with arbitrary and puny inflationary bonuses and so impose the budget constraints dictated by Brussels.

The government has approved a new decree for labor and social affairs that includes cuts in social benefits and a relaxation of regulations on short-term employment contracts. In May, the three traditional union confederations CGIL, CISL and UIL held three large rallies opposing these policies, with 30,000 to 40,000 workers participating in each of Bologna, Milan and Naples.

Meloni is implementing tax cuts for entrepreneurs and the rich. In populist manner she compares taxes on small businesses and the self-employed to mafia protection rackets. Her finance minister, Giancarlo Giorgetti (Lega), cut by three-quarters an excess profits tax on energy companies that Meloni's predecessor, Mario Draghi, had introduced. Another tax giveaway on the government's horizon involves abolishing Italy's extra tax on high-horsepower Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Maseratis.

Meloni is concurrently in the process of phasing out the Citizen's Income (Reddito di cittadinanza). This was the central election promise of Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement. Although it was only a drop in the bucket, it has provided around 1 million needy people with an additional social assistance of up to €780. To the applause of EU

partners and financial markets, Meloni announced back in November 2022 that she would grant the Citizen's Income only for a limited period in 2023 and abolish it altogether from 2024 on.

At the same time, poverty in Italy is on the rise. According to the Caritas poverty report, 5 million Italians live in absolute poverty. The south in particular is turning into a poorhouse: poverty there has doubled in the last 10 years to 10 percent of the population. Throughout Italy, 1.4 million children are at risk of poverty. Youth unemployment is on the rise, as is the precariousness of work, for which reasons among the "absolute poor," immigrants are particularly affected. While 7.2 percent of all Italians are poor, among immigrants, poverty affects one in three (32.4 percent).

The gaping social inequality is not solely due to tax giveaways to the rich and entrepreneurs nor the austerity measures dictated by the EU. War policies are devouring billions. In her militarist policy, Giorgia Meloni is continuing the pro-NATO course set by Draghi. She supports Ukraine with military and financial aid and is arming the army and police state in Italy. In March, she visited President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kiev and promised him an air defense system. A few days ago she in turn received the Ukrainian head of state in Rome.

Meloni is at pains to highlight her agreement with the EU's right-wing, militaristic and highly dangerous policies. Like Germany, Great Britain and France, Italy is to arm itself for a third world war at the expense of the working population.

The only answer to this is a common struggle of the European working class against capitalism. To counter the attacks on jobs, wages and democratic rights, the international unity of the working class must be established on a socialist basis. This urgently requires the building of a revolutionary leadership, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Italy.

The Italian trade unions, as in other countries, are vicarious agents of capital. In this capacity they work closely not only with the Democrats, who have carried out massive social cuts when in government, but also with Meloni. For example, Maurizio Landini, leader of the largest trade union confederation, CGIL, and a former member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), invited Meloni to speak at the last trade union congress.

Because the traditional CGIL, CISL and UIL union federations are so deeply entangled in the Italian economy, members are leaving them in droves. The USB, which called a strike on May 26, and other unions such as Cobas, CUB, etc. are trying to fill the vacuum. But their national orientation and perspective is essentially no different from that of the old union bureaucrats.

Time and again, unions call for one-day strikes so as to maintain control over a growing movement and to prevent a social uprising against war and capitalism from occurring. Their leaders are linked to Italy's pseudo-left and Stalinist parties, from Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) and the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), newly formed in 2016, to Potere al Popolo (PaP), Sinistra Italiana and the Democrats. Both USB leader Pierpaolo Leonardi and Cobas leader Piero Bernocchi are close to the Rifondazione Comunista, which supported the Romano Prodi government's policy of budget cuts and war between 2006 and 2008.

In the recent local elections, union bureaucrats, when they spoke out at all, supported the PD (Democrats). PD's newly minted leader Elly Schlein, 38, whose only trump card is her relative youth, began her career on Barack Obama's campaign team in the US and has been vice president of Emilia-Romagna for two years. In the elections, however, the bankrupt policies of the so-called "left camp" have led to another, even more significant electoral victory for the right and fascists around Meloni.

In Emilia-Romagna, these bankrupt policies are particularly evident. The recent massive flooding, which has claimed 15 lives, relentlessly expose their blatant failure. In this region, where the "left" camp has been in government for 78 years, everything that is necessary to prevent floods, landslides and other disasters has been neglected.

Not only has infrastructure been neglected, soils paved over, rivers straightened and mountains deforested, and long overdue dam work repeatedly postponed. The austerity measures in the public sector are now also taking their toll. There is a shortage of well-trained and reasonably paid workers, including agronomists, urban planners, structural and civil engineers, firefighters, social workers and many more.

The disastrous flooding shows the true face of the capitalist crisis. While those in charge in Rome and Bologna argue over responsibilities and funds, the people in the flooded region are left to fend for themselves and rely on the help of volunteers.



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