

# 10,000 airport ground workers strike across Italy

Marianne Arens  
21 July 2023

Some 10,000 ground workers at Italian airports went on an eight-hour warning strike on 15 July, lasting from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. As a result, almost 1,000 flights had to be cancelled, and an estimated quarter of a million passengers were affected.

The Italian news service ANSA reported that a “surreal silence” prevailed in the terminals of Linate and Malpensa, Milan’s two airports. Roma-Fiumicino, Bologna-Marconi, Venezia Marco Polo and Caselle Torinese airports were also badly affected. In Naples, Bari, Palermo, Genoa and Venice, many planes were grounded. The strike covered the whole country from Milan to Catania.

The strike was almost 100 percent solid. At Rome’s Leonardo da Vinci International Airport, 99 percent of the ground workers balloted had voted in favour of strike action, and throughout Italy the calls for a national strike were unmistakable. As a result, the unions were forced to call Saturday’s eight-hour strike covering ramp workers, ground handling and check-in services.

That the unions acted under pressure is shown by the statement of their spokesperson Sara Di Marco (FILT-CGIL) on the economic impact of the strike. She said her organisation had no intention whatsoever “to harm other colleagues” but that the workers had forced the union to go on strike after the government refused to sit down with the unions.

The transport unions involved in the strike were FILT-CGIL, FIT CISL, Uiltrasporti and UGL Trasporto Aereo. Their main demand concerned the collective agreement covering wages for airport ground service workers, which expired years ago. The contract for workers in so-called ramp handling, who load and unload the planes and handle all the luggage, dates back to December 2015 and expired six-and-a-half years

ago. In that time, inflation has really eaten into wages.

Apron workers toil in appalling conditions on the blazing hot airport tarmac. Italy is currently experiencing an unprecedented heat wave, with record temperatures reaching 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit). Even with headgear, neck protection and free drinking water, there is a risk of heatstroke or circulatory collapse for these workers, who have no way to avoid the heat. In autumn and winter, they are again exposed to wind and inclement weather.

Despite their great exertions, these workers earn a pittance. According to the website *Worldsalaries*, the gross monthly income of those working for Italian airport service providers ranges between €1,300 and €4,150 per month, including counter staff, security guards and control and administrative workers.

Apron workers are at the lowest end of the scale. The wage of unskilled handling workers can be so low that they take home only €800 euros. On average, the wage for aircraft handlers is around €1,400 net. For a single bedroom in Rome, the typical rent is around €600 euros. In Milan, monthly living costs alone are at least €1,200.

The strike was the second to disrupt Italian air traffic this summer, following a 24-hour airport strike on 20 June. It is part of the growing wave of workers’ revolts across Europe, which the Italian government obviously understands.

Two days earlier, Italian railway workers at the state-owned railway company Trenitalia, as well as of the private Italo group, went on a 24-hour strike, fighting against persistent overtime, poor pay and staff shortages. The strike was supposed to last until Friday evening.

But Italy’s Vice Chancellor Matteo Salvini (Lega), who is also transport minister, flatly forbade the strike

from continuing for a second day. In violation of the constitutionally guaranteed right to strike, Salvini also threatened the airport ground workers with a strike ban.

“I do not accept that some unions are obstructing Italy, causing inconvenience and harm to millions of Italian workers and foreign tourists,” Salvini raged. “If common sense does not prevail, I am ready to intervene, as I have already done, to prevent the total blocking of trains.”

However, he could not prevent several air crews from taking up and extending the strike on the strike day itself. Pilots and flight attendants of many airlines are also suffering job cuts and poverty-level wages, a consequence of government attacks and the merciless global competition in air transport.

Malta Air pilots, who operate Ryanair flights in Italy, went on a united strike from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the same Saturday, and at Vueling Airline, both pilots and cabin crew went on strike from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The strike at Malta Air also affected aircraft operated by ITA Airways, the former Alitalia, which had to cancel a total of 133 flights that day.

At Ryanair, the strike meant 120 flights were also cancelled at the Brussels South Charleroi Airport in Belgium, and Ryanair said that cancellations and restrictions were to be expected on flights to and from Italy. Ryanair pilots are still struggling to get their pay back to pre-pandemic levels. The unions had accepted substantial pay cuts during the pandemic, which have not yet been recouped let alone compensated for rampant inflation.

The case for a joint, transnational strike in European air transport is obvious. However, it requires a break with the trade union bureaucracies, which—frightened by the success of the strikes by railway workers, ground workers and pilots over the last few days—are seeking new talks with Matteo Salvini and the Meloni government as quickly as possible. What is needed is the formation of independent action committees that join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**