

General strike in Italy opposes fascist Prime Minister Meloni's austerity budget

Marc Wells**30 November 2024**

On Friday, half a million workers across Italy went on a one-day nationwide strike. The strike, called by several unions in response to mounting pressure from the rank and file, reflects broad working class opposition to the austerity policies and deepening social inequality overseen by fascist Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Many sections of workers participated in the strike action, and protest marches were held in dozens of cities. Public transport was affected in numerous cities, as bus, subway and tramway drivers walked off the job. Baggage handlers at the Milan and Venice airports went on strike, as did WizzAir Malta pilots and cabin crews. Public schools were significantly impacted as teachers struck to demand better funding and to oppose austerity measures. Stellantis workers struck in Naples, as did workers at the Fincantieri shipbuilders and auto parts maker Marelli.

Italian workers oppose the Meloni government's 2025 budget, which includes massive cuts to all social programs but increases the military budget by €2 billion, bringing it to a record €32 billion. This aligns the Meloni government with NATO's spending objectives amid its war with Russia in Ukraine. Proposed across-the-board five percent cuts would devastate Italy's public healthcare system, already teetering on the brink of collapse due to underfunding and staffing shortages. The same would apply to education, transportation and other essential services.

Public sector workers are being offered a paltry 6 percent wage increase over three years, against a cumulative increase in essential living costs since 2021 estimated at 16 percent. Furthermore, pensions are set to rise by a tiny €3 per month, while the Fornero Law raising the retirement age remains in force.

Workers also protested increasingly perilous working conditions leading to deaths on the job, dubbed by workers as "workplace homicides." Moreover, the government's draconian "Security Decree 1660" has

introduced harsh penalties against various forms of protest and dissent, aimed at workers in general and immigrants in particular.

Against the strike and its impact on public transport, far-right Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini threatened to invoke minimum service requirements, which seek to curtail the right to strike inscribed in Article 40 of the Italian Constitution.

These measures are part of an escalating, global class war waged by the capitalist ruling elites on the workers that is provoking mounting opposition. The bourgeoisie's savage movement to the right is epitomized by Meloni's close ties with the cabal around fascist US President-elect Donald Trump, which is preparing a staggering \$2 trillion austerity program against US workers to be overseen by the world's richest man, billionaire Elon Musk.

In recent months Elon Musk, appointed by Trump to head the new Department of Government Efficiency, has publicly praised Meloni as "authentic, honest, and thoughtful." Meloni, in turn, called Musk a "precious genius." Musk has expressed interest in expanding his businesses in Italy, including Starlink satellite internet services and building a Tesla manufacturing facility, in return for tax cuts.

Massive budgetary attacks are similarly being prepared against the working class across Europe. In October, Britain's Labour government adopted an austerity budget imposing £40 billion in spending cuts. Now, the French government is teetering on the verge of collapse over its budget, as the ruling class demands more military spending and spending cuts beyond the €60 billion the budget proposes.

The main political obstacle to a political counteroffensive of the working class against these threats are the bankrupt pro-capitalist parties and labor bureaucracies, linked to Stalinism, that seek to tie the working class to capitalism and subordinate it to austerity

and imperialist war. This is the role played in Italy by the successor of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party (PCI) after its self-dissolution in 1991, the Democratic Party (PD).

The PD now has a decades-long history of attacking the workers. After World War II, the Italian bourgeoisie was compelled to grant labor laws and social benefits offering significant protections for workers. The Italian working class had organized mass strikes and armed uprisings against Mussolini's fascist regime, and while the PCI blocked a socialist revolution, the capitalist class for a time had to make social concessions. But in the decades since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, successive PD-led governments systematically rolled back these gains.

The much-hated 2014 *Jobs Act*, implemented by then-PD Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, undermined job security by easing restrictions on dismissals and facilitating precarious employment.

Now, current PD leader Elly Schlein is criticizing Meloni but at the same time endorsing further austerity reforms, declaring: "We stand with workers who demand dignity and justice. However, we must approach reforms responsibly to ensure long-term stability."

The PD, like the Stalinist CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour) union bureaucracy and the social-democratic UIL (Italian Labour Union) bureaucracy, works to channel mounting working class anger into politically manageable avenues compatible with capitalist rule. Even facing Meloni, whose Brothers of Italy party descends directly from Mussolini's Fascist Party, the bureaucracies bend over backwards to maintain "social peace" and stabilize capitalism.

At the strike yesterday, Maurizio Landini, the secretary-general of CGIL, called for collaboration and dialogue with the Meloni government, stating: "This government must listen to the streets and open a serious dialogue with the trade unions to build a better future for all."

Significantly, the transport unions limited the strike to 3 or 4 hours (depending on location), while exempting rail workers from the strike altogether and guaranteeing service in compliance with an Ordinance of the Minister of Transportation.

For workers, Meloni's government represents a dangerous convergence of far-right nationalism, austerity and militarism. In its two years, it has aggressively pursued anti-immigrant policies, attacked democratic rights and participated in NATO's imperialist wars. This is part of a broader global trend, where capitalist

governments exploit economic crises to impose authoritarian measures and deepen inequality despite growing militancy and opposition among workers.

The general strike in Italy occurs in this international context. Earlier this month workers in Greece held a general strike to demand higher pay and end year of austerity. In the Netherlands, tens of thousands have taken to the streets to oppose education austerity. In Argentina, university students and workers have mobilized against fascist President Javier Milei's budget cuts. In the United States, strikes by autoworkers, teachers and healthcare workers signal a growing rejection of capitalist exploitation.

Workers globally are increasingly aware that their struggles are interconnected. In Italy, workers are adamantly opposed to Meloni's complicity in war and genocide. Widespread outrage was on display at the strike against the government's unconditional support for Israel's onslaught on Gaza, its defense of war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu, and Italy's participation in NATO's proxy war against Russia. Workers participating in the strike shouted, "No to War, Yes to Jobs!" and "Stop Funding Genocide!"

The war with Russia and the Gaza genocide, like the onslaught against the social and democratic rights of the working class across the imperialist centers of North America and Europe, can only be fought by an international mobilization of the working class. To wage such a struggle, workers must overcome the limitations imposed by the labor bureaucracies and bourgeois parties and the nationalist perspective they promote. Forces like the PD and its allied union bureaucracies are longstanding tools of Italian capitalism and are being pulled rapidly to the right.

Independent rank-and-file committees are being formed in multiple industries and countries. Building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) offers workers a way forward for organizing independently on an international scale and waging a revolutionary struggle for socialism against the capitalist oligarchy.



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