

# The growing wave of workplace deaths in Italy and the need to build Rank-and-File Committees

**Marc Wells****28 August 2025**

On August 25, 58-year-old Demetrio Rima, a maintenance worker employed by Cebat Spa, was electrocuted while performing maintenance inside an Enel power cabin located between Sparanise and Francolise in the province of Caserta. His death is part of a broader pattern of workplace fatalities in Italy, where 873 workers have died since the start of 2025—an average of one death every six hours.

According to data from the National Observatory on Workplace Deaths, 621 of these fatalities occurred directly at workplaces (as opposed to when in transit to and from), marking the highest toll since the institution's founding in 2008. Among the dead, 32 percent are migrant workers, disproportionately assigned to the most hazardous, underpaid and precarious jobs. Over 30 percent are over the age of 60, with many compelled to remain in unsafe environments well past retirement due to declining pensions and stagnant wages.

## A week of death

The death of Demetrio Rima follows a week marked by a series of horrific incidents that underscore the systematic character of this slaughter:

- August 19: Mario Fabbro, 61, collapsed and died from a heart attack while working on the Pinzolo bypass construction site in Giustino, managed by Sac Costruzioni. Colleagues reported brutal 12-hour shifts, broken-down equipment, no air conditioning, and vehicles with worn tires and shattered windows—a lethal combination of exhaustion and corporate neglect.

- August 20–21: Hussain Mazammal, a 28-year-old Pakistani migrant, was crushed to death while operating a forklift at a pellet production facility in Marmorta di Molinella. The company is now hiding behind an “ongoing investigation,” but the reality is evident: speedups, unsafe machinery and cost-cutting killed him.

- August 22: In Ragusa, 15-year-old Andrea Passalacqua, a student from the Fabio Besta Institute, was crushed by a tractor on his family’s farm. The fact that a teenager was pressed into an unsafe agricultural environment that exposed him to deadly risks illustrates the economic desperation confronting large sections of

Italian workers.

This wave of deaths exposes a deepening social crisis, the product of decades of deregulation, cost-cutting, the normalization of overwork, precarious contracts, the brutal subcontracting regime and the systematic subordination of workers’ lives to profit. It is necessary to call this what it is: a social crime perpetrated by the capitalist state, major corporations and the trade union bureaucracy that has facilitated these policies.

## Deregulation and the Jobs Act

The Observatory’s report is unequivocal: workplace deaths have surged 43 percent since the abolition of Article 18 of the Workers’ Statute, which once offered limited protection against unjust firings. A June 2023 subcontracting law has worsened the crisis, driving a 15 percent rise in fatalities in sectors like construction and public works.

Central to this disaster is the 2015 Jobs Act, imposed by the Renzi government with full backing from the Democratic Party and the collaboration of CGIL, CISL and UIL. The law granted employers sweeping power to hire and fire without cause, abolished mandatory reinstatement for unjust dismissals, introduced a “unified employment contract” that eroded hard-won protections, legalized invasive surveillance of workers’ emails, browsing and phones, and replaced Cassa Integrazione with a weaker safety net.

Propagandized under the guise of “modernization,” it was a deliberate prioritization of corporate profits over workers’ lives. Companies now exploit fragmented subcontracting chains to evade responsibility, while inspections are gutted and safety regulations dismantled.

In response to rising deaths, Parliament passed Law 203/2024, allowing the Meloni government to allocate €650 million to “incentivize prevention.” In reality, it cuts costs for employers and shifts blame onto workers through the fraudulent notion of a “culture of prevention” that emphasizes individual accountability in workplace safety and employment practices. Through this mechanism, individual toilers, not corporations, are held

responsible for their own disablement and deaths.

### **The trade unions: accomplices in a social massacre**

The CGIL, CISL and UIL unions respond to each workplace death with the same hollow statements:

“Another life cut short, another worker who will never return home. Another death crying out for justice.”

These perfunctory “condolences” act like automated replies. They name no guilty parties and mobilize no struggle. In reality, the union bureaucracy collaborates closely with Giorgia Meloni’s fascistic government and corporations, working to contain anger as it blocks strikes and protects the system responsible for these killings.

In May 2025, CGIL General Secretary Maurizio Landini met with the Meloni government under the pretense of improving workplace safety. He emerged praising the outcome:

“For the first time, they have formally declared their willingness to engage in discussion and address the substance of the issue.”

Three months later, CGIL confederal secretary Francesca Re David was forced to admit:

“The commitments made at the table held on May 8 at Palazzo Chigi have not been honored.”

No worker can believe that a government rooted in fascist traditions would voluntarily improve safety. Landini and his counterparts knew this, but helped Meloni buy time to push through more reactionary measures.

On August 4, the Council of Ministers approved the “Simplifications Bill,” modifying Article 4 of the Workers’ Statute to allow employers to install video surveillance and control devices “without the need for union approval, as previously required.”

Re David made clear she relies on the traitors in the Democratic Party: “We intend to strongly oppose the measure throughout the parliamentary process.” Her concern is not the historic assault on workers’ democratic right to privacy and dignity—but that the union has lost the power to authorize such attacks.

### **State policies deepen the crisis**

Recent policy changes worsen the situation. The 203/2024 Law allows employers to appeal INAIL decisions. INAIL is Italy’s main statutory workplace safety and insurance body responsible for managing mandatory insurance protecting workers from damages caused by workplace accidents and occupational diseases and this measure weakens the agency’s enforcement power. At the same time, restrictions on confined-space labor have been loosened, allowing work in dangerous environments without adequate monitoring of toxic emissions.

A “safety commission” has been established, but it is entirely controlled by the executive branch, with no independent workers’ oversight. Migrant, informal and subcontracted workers—already among the most vulnerable—remain effectively uncovered.

Neither Meloni’s fascist government nor the so-called “center-left” has any solution to this mounting catastrophe. The Democrats’ Jobs Act paved the way for today’s massacre, while the right accelerates the destruction of remaining protections.

This bipartisan unity mirrors trends across Europe and internationally. Under conditions of sharpening global capitalist crisis, all sections of the ruling elite—regardless of political

labels—are dismantling worker protections to maintain profitability and competitiveness. Italy’s record-high death toll is part of a broader offensive against the working class, in which human life is subordinated to the relentless accumulation of capital.

### **The way forward: rank-and-file committees and international struggle**

Workers cannot place faith in the government, the state, its courts or the union apparatus. These institutions are structurally committed to defending capitalist interests and maintaining the conditions that lead to workers’ deaths. The only way forward is through independent organization, outside and against the control of CGIL, CISL, UIL and their affiliates.

Workers must form rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace, linking up across sectors, regions and countries. These committees must take matters into their own hands, following the lead given by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which launched an investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. in the United States. This initiative, led by workers themselves, shows the only way to carry out independent inquiries with the goal to expose the truth and hold those responsible accountable.

Such committees must demand full transparency on workplace fatalities, conduct workers-led safety inspections and fight against the corporations, the state and the union bureaucracy that defends them. But above all, they must unite Italian workers with their class brothers and sisters internationally, forging a global network of rank-and-file committees to confront the shared conditions of exploitation created by capitalism.

The escalating slaughter of workers will not be stopped by appeals to the same forces that created it. Only through collective, independent action and the building of an international socialist movement can workers defend their lives and fight for a society that places human need above profit.



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