

Tens of thousands march across Italy against genocide in Gaza

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On Monday, September 22, tens of thousands of Italian workers and young people staged one of the largest demonstrations in Europe against Israel's US-backed war in Gaza. Protests and strike actions, coordinated under the slogan "Blocchiamo tutto" ("Let's Block Everything"), erupted across more than 75 Italian cities, closing schools, halting transport networks and blocking strategic ports.

The demonstrations, among the most powerful in Italy in decades, expressed the deep and growing anger of workers and youth against both the genocide in Gaza and the open complicity of the Italian state, the European Union, and the United States. They also revealed the immense potential for a movement that could develop into an international counter-offensive by the working class against war, fascism and the capitalist system that breeds them.

In Milan, more than 50,000 people gathered in the city center, waving Palestinian flags, setting off smoke bombs, and chanting "Free Palestine." Over 20,000 assembled in Rome, converging on Piazza dei Cinquecento after smaller marches set off from neighborhoods across the capital. In Bologna, Turin, Naples, Palermo, Bari, Florence, Venice, and dozens of smaller towns, crowds took over squares and thoroughfares, paralyzing traffic and disrupting commerce.

The scale of the demonstrations was unprecedented. In Genoa and Livorno, dockworkers blocked major ports, denouncing Italy's role in facilitating weapons transfers to Israel. In Ravenna, only days before, port workers had forced Mayor Alessandro Barattoni to block the transit of two containers of explosives bound for Haifa after exposing their contents. These actions show the growing centrality of the ports—arteries of global trade—in a developing confrontation with imperialist war.

Students and youth played a decisive role. In Rome, high schoolers blocked streets near the Colosseum and gathered at Largo Preneste and Piazza Annibaliano before joining the main march. At Aldo Fabrizi elementary school, children displayed peace flags and paper boats for Gaza's children. At La Sapienza University, activists occupied entrances, chanting "Let's block the university," while professors demanded severing ties with Israeli institutions and the arms industry.

Protesters firmly rejected attempts to equate solidarity with Palestine with antisemitism. Alessandra, a student in Rome, explained: "This doesn't mean we're anti-Jews or antisemitic, and we're tired of the media and politicians playing on this. It just

means we're against a government that's committing genocide while the international community looks the other way." This sentiment was echoed across the marches, where many Jewish organizations participated.

The state's response: criminalization and repression

Despite the overwhelmingly peaceful character of the mobilizations, the government and media seized on limited clashes in Milan to criminalize the entire movement. Masked demonstrators attacked the central train station with stones and smoke bombs. Police replied with pepper spray; in Bologna, water cannons were deployed. Given the political stakes, it is more than likely that police provocateurs were involved in these clashes.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni immediately condemned the protests. "Violence and destruction have nothing to do with solidarity and won't change a thing in the lives of people in Gaza," she declared. Meloni's words epitomize the cynicism of a government that, while posturing as a defender of "order," supports the massacre of Palestinians and shields Israel from consequences.

Transport Minister Matteo Salvini dismissed the mass movement as a "far-left mobilization," parroting the rhetoric of Donald Trump against demonstrators in the United States. Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi claimed there had been "a deliberate attack against the police." Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani intoned: "It is not with violence that the Palestinian civilian population is helped." Milan's Democratic Party (PD) mayor Giuseppe Sala condemned "vandalism" and insisted it "finds no justification."

These orchestrated denunciations reveal the alignment of Italy's ruling class—from fascists to Democrats—in defending both Israel's genocidal policies and Italy's indispensable role in NATO's military machine.

Port workers at the forefront

The actions of dockworkers in Genoa once again placed the working class at the heart of opposition to war. In recent weeks, they prevented the Saudi ship *Bahri Yanbu* from loading military matériel. At a rally of thousands in Genoa last month, the Autonomous Collective of Dockworkers (CALP) declared solidarity with the Global Sumud Flotilla, which has set sail with humanitarian aid for Gaza.

One of their speakers warned: “If we lose contact with our boats even for just 20 minutes, we will block all of Europe. From the Port of Genoa nothing will leave anymore.” This statement points to the potential of a worker-controlled international network capable of paralyzing imperialism’s war machine.

The dockworkers’ actions defy the “anti-Gandhi law” that Meloni implemented in June 2024, seeking to criminalize certain forms of public disruption, including port blockades.

Hypocrisy of the Democrats, pseudo-left and unions

Predictably, the Democratic Party sought to straddle both sides. PD secretary Elly Schlein condemned the protesters in Milan, saying, “I have no difficulty condemning the devastation of the station and the injury to the officers. We have always condemned every form of political violence because we never consider it justifiable.” Yet, under pressure from port workers, she hypocritically called for “a total arms embargo to and from Israel.”

The Democrats’ posturing is nothing but damage control. They have consistently supported Italian imperialism’s integration into NATO, the deployment of weapons and troops to the Balkans, Libya and Ukraine, and the use of Italian ports and bases for US and Israeli operations. Their uncritical denunciations of “violence” against buildings, while a genocide unfolds in Gaza, expose them as cynical defenders of the status quo.

Behind the bipartisan support for war lies the intertwining of the Italian state and the military-industrial complex. Leonardo S.p.A., Italy’s flagship arms producer, is 30 percent state-owned. The government holds “golden powers” to intervene in strategic defense sectors and appoints top management. Fincantieri, Avio, and Officina Stellare are similarly integrated into the apparatus of war production. Among their major investors are global finance giants such as BlackRock, Vanguard, and Capital Research and Management.

Whether under Meloni’s fascists or the Democrats, the Italian state has ensured the flow of arms to Israel and NATO, profiting from mass death abroad. The government allowed the US to use Italian bases for transiting weapons, a mechanism fully supported by the PD and its allies, including the trade unions. The defense of these vast interests explains why all factions of the ruling class—from Salvini to Schlein—unite to smear and repress demonstrators.

While the protests revealed enormous anger and militancy, they were systematically contained by the unions and pseudo-left organizations. On September 19, the General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), Italy’s largest union, called a four-hour strike

followed by protests in many towns and cities, an attempt to preempt and deflate the larger protest prepared for three days later.

Parroting the hypocritical stance of imperialist countries like the UK, Canada, Australia and Portugal, Italian union leaders appealed to the Meloni government to recognize the State of Palestine.

By appealing to the fascists to recognize Palestine, or to enact an “arms embargo,” these forces foster illusions that the capitalist state—the very instrument of war—can be pressured into reversing course. Their nationalist orientation is not toward mobilizing the working class independently, but toward maintaining control and channeling opposition back into the safe channels of parliamentary politics and the trade union bureaucracy.

Toward an international struggle

The September 22 protests showed that opposition to genocide runs deep within the working class in Europe and internationally. The far right, whether in Italy or the US, has risen not from its own strength but due to the cowardice and collusion of the bourgeois “opposition.” By suppressing the resistance of the working class, the social-democrats, the unions, and the pseudo-left have created the danger of a fascist takeover.

A breakthrough is possible but only if workers organize their struggles independently of all the institutions that defend the capitalist system and imperialist war, by building rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves in every factory, port and workplace. These committees must discuss and prepare common action to defend the working class from exploitation and austerity, and unite with workers internationally against imperialist war and fascism.

The eruption in Italy is part of a broader process of opposition to all the bourgeois parties that are demanding workers pay the cost of rearmament and the expanding world war for imperialist conquest from Gaza and Iran to Russia and China.

The future of this movement depends on clarifying its aims, breaking from the straitjacket of the trade union bureaucracies and parliamentary politics, and advancing a conscious internationalist socialist perspective that starts from the building of independent rank-and-file committees. Only on this basis can the immense power revealed in Italy’s streets and ports be developed into a force capable of halting war and ending the capitalist system that spawns it.



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