

Italy: Mass protests and general strike over Gaza signal mounting working class opposition to war and authoritarian rule

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One of the centers of the global protests over Israel's seizure of the Sumud flotilla is Italy. On Saturday, October 4, Rome witnessed a one million strong pro-Palestinian demonstration following Friday's nationwide general strike that had already paralyzed much of the country. The back-to-back eruptions mark the most significant wave of working-class and popular opposition in Italy in decades—an unmistakable signal of growing resistance to imperialist war, the genocide in Gaza, and the fascistic policies of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government.

The immediate trigger for the strike wave was the Israeli navy's violent interception of the Global Sumud Flotilla, a convoy carrying humanitarian aid and international activists seeking to break the blockade of Gaza. Among those seized were four Italian opposition politicians—from the Greens and Left Alliance (AVS) and the Five Star Movement—whose continued detention has provoked outrage across the country.

Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir boasted that flotilla members would be “treated like terrorists,” a statement that epitomizes the barbarism of the Netanyahu regime and its imperialist backers.

In response, dockworkers in Genoa, Livorno, Ancona, and other ports took direct action, refusing to load or unload ships carrying weapons bound for Israel. Their courageous stand ignited an outpouring of solidarity and forced Italy's largest union federations, CGIL and USB, to call the October 3 general strike despite their own efforts to avoid confrontation. It was compelled from below by rank-and-file pressure, revealing a powerful upsurge of anti-war sentiment in the working class.

Friday's strike halted large sections of economic and

social life. According to union figures, more than two million workers and youth participated in over 100 cities. Public transport in Milan, Rome, and Naples stopped almost entirely. Flights were grounded in Bari, schools and universities closed nationwide, and hospitals ran with minimal staffing.

In Rome, 300,000 people marched from Piazza Vittorio to Porta Maggiore, their banners demanding “Freedom for Gaza” and “Stop Italy's complicity in genocide.” In Bologna, 100,000 blocked both the A14 motorway and the city's ring road before police attacked with tear gas, arresting two. Genoa saw 40,000 join demonstrations recalling the militant port strikes of the 1960s and 1970s. Turin, Palermo, and cities across Calabria witnessed tens of thousands more.

Even prisoners in Bologna's Dozza prison symbolically joined the strike by refusing wages and privileges for the day, a striking expression of the movement's reach across all layers of society.

Saturday's massive protest in Rome – over one million converging again on the capital's historic center – confirmed that the movement is spreading and deepening.

The eruption of social and political opposition has shaken the Meloni government. Behind the façade of “stability” and a 30 percent electoral base lies a seething mass of discontent. The general strike and the continuing demonstrations have revealed that Meloni's rule, like that of Trump in the US and any other of the imperialist countries, is deeply unpopular and rests on a narrow social foundation.

Transport Minister Matteo Salvini responded to the strike with threats of repression, warning that “if violence prevails, the state will react” and vowing that

organizers would “pay personally.” Meloni herself sneered that the strike was “a long weekend disguised as revolution,” exposing both her contempt for democratic rights and the government’s nervousness in the face of mass opposition.

These reactions highlight a deep crisis of legitimacy. The ruling elite fears that the anger unleashed over Gaza and the cost-of-living crisis could fuse into a broader movement challenging the entire capitalist order. The scale of police repression—in Bologna, Milan, and Salerno, where water cannon and tear gas were deployed—reveals the readiness of the state to resort to violence.

Meloni’s so-called “Gandhi law”, passed earlier this year under the guise of “non-violence,” drastically curtails the right to protest by criminalizing spontaneous demonstrations and granting police wide powers to disperse gatherings. Coupled with the Commission on the Right to Strike, which arbitrarily declares industrial actions “illegitimate,” these measures have stripped workers of basic democratic rights.

While the general strike expressed the fighting spirit of workers, its organization and outcome were deliberately restricted by the union bureaucracy and its Stalinist and pseudo-left supporters. While the government prepares for war, declaring strikes and protests illegal, the unions are not mobilizing the working class to bring down Meloni, but instead pleading for the “right” to stage a mere protest. CGIL leader Maurizio Landini invoked Italy’s 1990 Law 146, claiming the action was justified as an “exceptional measure to protect public health and safety.”

Pseudo-left parties and opposition figures—Elly Schlein of the Democratic Party (PD), Nicola Fratoianni of the Green and Left Alliance (AVS), and Giuseppe Conte of the Five Star Movement (M5S)—sought to posture as defenders of democracy and peace. Yet these same forces share political responsibility for Italy’s participation in NATO wars and for the erosion of social and democratic rights. The PD’s *Jobs Act* gutted labor protections, while M5S endorsed anti-immigrant decrees and austerity budgets when in power.

The Italian strike forms part of a global resurgence of working-class struggle. In the days following the flotilla attack, protests erupted in London, Paris,

Madrid, Athens, Amsterdam, New York, and across the Middle East and Asia. Millions worldwide demanded an end to Israel’s siege of Gaza and the freedom of the detained activists. Internationally opposition to inequality, militarism, and genocide is converging with anger at collapsing living standards and authoritarian rule.

The strikes and protests of October 3–4 demonstrate that the working class is emerging as the decisive social force against war and reaction. Whatever the unions’ maneuvers, a general strike involving millions over the Gaza genocide represents a historic turning point. It confirms the analysis advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI): that the fight against imperialist war must be waged through the independent mobilization of the working class on a socialist program.

The task now is to give this movement conscious direction. The Italian and European working class must draw the lessons of the betrayal of the unions and pseudo-left parties and take the struggle into its own hands. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, port, school, and neighborhood—to coordinate actions, link up internationally, and develop a unified political offensive against war, austerity, and dictatorship and for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The same capitalist system that bankrolls Israel’s genocide and NATO’s wars imposes poverty and repression at home. To end war, workers must take power into their own hands, expropriate the banks and corporations, and reorganize society on the basis of social need, not private profit.



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