

Nationwide strikes called in Italy, Belgium and Portugal as social anger erupts across Europe

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Nationwide strikes and other mass workers protests are spreading across Europe against austerity and the bourgeoisie's remilitarization of the continent. As governments slash basic social services and impose regressive labor reforms to fund a rearmament drive and funnel wealth to the capitalist oligarchy, working class anger is erupting internationally across Europe.

In Belgium, a nationwide rail and mass transit strike is called for November 24, a nationwide strike of the public sector the day after, and finally a general strike on the 26th. They are called against moves by the right-wing government led by Bart De Wever's New Flemish Alliance (NVA) to slash pensions, end indexing of wages on inflation and slash benefits including unemployment insurance. Belgium spent over €1 billion (\$1.154 billion US) on arming Ukraine against Russia this year and is raising military spending €4 billion (\$4.615 billion US) this year to reach 2 percent of its Gross Domestic Product.

In Italy, a general strike is called on November 28 by the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB, Union of Rank-and-file Unions) and the Confederazione Unitaria di Base (CUB, United Confederation of the Rank-and-file). Other Italian unions have not joined this action but are calling a separate general strike on December 12. These strikes oppose far-right Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's austerity budget and her pledge, alongside all NATO governments, to raise military spending to 5 percent of GDP.

In Portugal, a nationwide strike is called on December 11 against the draconian labor reform of right-wing Prime Minister Luís Montenegro. The reform would effectively eliminate legal barriers to mass sackings in Portugal, and is the signature policy of the Montenegro government alongside mass deportations of migrants backed by the far-right Chega party. Portugal is also increasing military

spending by €1 billion to reach spending of 5 percent of GDP on the military by 2035.

What is emerging is an objectively revolutionary situation across Europe, as the irreconcilable conflict between the working class and the capitalist oligarchy grows.

European imperialism has taken the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine as a chance not only to seek to extend its geopolitical influence eastwards and prepare broader wars but also to accelerate social counterrevolution at home. European governments face massive budget crises, as their debts hit 106 percent of GDP in Belgium, 101 percent in Britain, 102 percent in Spain, 115 percent in France, and 138 percent in Italy. Yet they are rejecting any substantial taxation of the rich, surging military spending and placing the burden on the backs of the workers.

European workers reject this policy and are trying to fight back and halt the accelerating plunge into war and social crisis. The current wave of strikes follows several nationwide general strikes, most recently in Belgium on October 14 and in Italy on October 3, which was then followed by a million-strong protest against the Gaza genocide.

The same issues face workers across Europe, and the same explosive social anger is growing there. A one-day national rail strike in Greece took place three days ago, after a series of nationwide one-day general strikes in the country earlier this year. These also follow recent strikes by junior doctors in Britain and mass "Block Everything" protests in September in France.

The movement in the European working class sharply poses fundamental questions of political strategy and historical perspective. The Italian and Belgian governments maintaining their policies despite mass

nationwide strikes in recent months underscores an essential point: Protest strikes will not shift the basic trajectory of European capitalist governments. To stop imperialist war, genocide and attacks on social and democratic rights, governments must be brought down across Europe and power must go to the workers.

The main obstacle to such a struggle is the national perspective of the union bureaucracies and allied middle-class political parties, who negotiate with the capitalist governments and seek to limit the movement in the working class to the borders of one or other capitalist nation-state.

Indeed, a common thread runs through the general strike calls of the General Federation of Belgian Labor (FGTB), the General Confederation of Italian Labor (CGIL), and the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP). They do not mention any events outside their own countries, they do not call to end imperialist wars, they do not call to bring down the government, and they do not call to establish any connection with workers' struggles outside their country. They leave workers only the invariably disappointed hope that the ruling class will somehow change its mind.

The Italian USB's strike call indubitably gives itself a different political coloration. Opposing the Gaza genocide and Italian militarization and calling for Meloni to resign, it seeks to align itself more with growing anger among rank-and-file workers at genocide, fascism and war. However, this only more sharply raises the political issues facing the working class.

The second signatory of the USB strike call is Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), a coalition of parties including the Stalinist Rifondazione Comunista and the Pabloite Anticapitalist Left to which the USB has close ties. These are practiced defenders of capitalist rule in Italy, having never fully recovered after they supplied key votes in the parliament for pension cuts and funding war in Afghanistan in 2007. Were Meloni to resign and be replaced by such forces, militarism and austerity would continue—as they have with the Stalinist-Pabloite Sumar party in government in Spain.

The European working class must be politically armed and prepared for the inevitable conflict that will emerge, as the class struggle develops, between the workers and these bureaucratic forces. The key political issues are the necessity of an internationalist perspective, a struggle against imperialist war and a struggle for workers' power and socialism.

Rank-and-file workers need independent organizations

of struggle to break through the limits that union bureaucracies and middle-class parties seek to impose on the class struggle. Only such organizations can oppose attempts by the union bureaucracies to stop or delay strike action if they fear the movement will escape their control, and coordinate struggles internationally against austerity, repression and war. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) must urgently be built across Europe.

The social concessions the European bourgeoisie are now repudiating were granted in Italy and Belgium after World War II, in response to the movement of the working class in resistance to Nazi rule. As Stalinists and social-democrats disbanded the workers' militias and factory committees that had underlain the resistance, thereby blocking a socialist revolution, they pledged these concessions would be eternal. Policies like state pensions and health care, job security were subsequently extended to Spain and Portugal after the working class brought down far-right regimes there in the 1970s.

The bourgeoisie's moves to scrap these concessions as capitalism plunges back into global war and far-right rule sharply raise the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) struggle against Stalinism and Pabloism. After World War II, in 1953, the ICFI split with forces led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel who sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into Stalinism or bourgeois nationalism. The ICFI remained oriented to the revolutionary role of the working class and fought for its political independence from imperialism and Stalinism.

To resist and defeat the onslaught of the European capitalist oligarchy, the struggles of the working class must be united in a socialist revolution. Sections of the ICFI must be built across Europe to fight for this perspective in the emerging movement in the working class. This is the basis for a struggle to bring down Europe's reactionary governments and replace the capitalist European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.



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