

Italy's general strikes against the 2026 budget of austerity and war

Marc Wells**26 November 2025**

Italy's proposed 2026 budget law has provoked a wave of opposition that is coalescing into two national general strikes, the first led by the base unions USB, CUB, SGB, Cobas (small ostensibly left and militant formations) on November 28-29, followed by a separate strike called by the much larger CGIL trade union on December 12. The confrontation unfolding in Italy is a political eruption of the working class against a government steering the country into austerity and militarism.

The fascist Meloni government's draft budget is a declaration of war on the Italian and international working class. Modeled after Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill," it is crafted to restructure the economy toward war spending, corporate profit, and authoritarian rule. At its core is the massive diversion of public resources from wages, essential services, and social protections into a multiyear rearmament program aligned with the European Union's Re-Arm initiative and NATO's strategic directives.

Tens of billions are stripped from healthcare, education, pensions, and local services to meet military-spending targets dictated by Brussels and Washington. Workers are being compelled to finance a war drive they oppose overwhelmingly.

The bill simultaneously deepens labor precarity by expanding subcontracting, deregulating hiring, and incentivizing employers to replace stable employment with short-term, low-wage jobs. It accelerates privatizations of public assets, handing infrastructure and services to corporate and financial interests. Every measure guarantees new revenue streams for speculators while raising costs and reducing access for the population.

The budget expands repressive legislation criminalizing protests, increasing police powers, and tightening controls on dissent, to suppress the inevitable resistance to the social devastation it creates. It is a mechanism for offloading the crisis of capitalism onto the working class while preparing the economic and legal architecture for war.

The working class has responded with anger and determination. Earlier this month, the base unions' national

assembly of cadres and delegates issued a mandate for a national general strike on November 28-29. On this basis, USB, CUB, and other self-designated rank-and-file unions formally proclaimed the November 28 strike across all public and private sectors.

USB and the base unions have framed their strike as a militant, anti-austerity action centered on wage recovery, defense of public services, opposition to war spending, and rejection of the government's social and economic policies.

USB and CUB issued political indictments of the 2026 budget and the broader war agenda. Both denounce the shift of resources from wages and essential services to rearmament and condemn Italy and the EU for backing Israel's genocide in Gaza. They oppose the conversion of industry and research to military purposes, the movement of arms through ports, and the expansion of repressive laws to silence dissent.

The budget, they declare, loots workers' futures through privatizations, subcontracting, and a planned €22 billion surge in military spending, serving corporate and imperialist interests at the expense of the working class.

The CGIL, Italy's largest union, has intervened nearly a week later with a separate and intentionally misaligned general strike planned for December 12.

CGIL's action is narrowly focused on the budget law, with demands concerning wages, tax "justice," public health, education, pensions, precarious work, and industrial policy. This platform corresponds to CGIL's longstanding institutional campaign for modest amendments to the finance bill. Its aim is to contain workers' anger within state-approved channels and preserve the union's role within the government apparatus. CGIL is working to redirect the growing opposition back into appeals to the very government imposing austerity and militarization.

Italy's unrest is part of an international wave of resistance. Across Europe, workers face the same basic program: slashing social protections, increasing the burden on ordinary people, and diverting massive funds toward militarization.

In Belgium, a general strike was called for November against pension cuts, abolished wage indexation, and benefit reductions, while the government raises military spending to meet NATO's 2 percent target. In Portugal, a national strike on December 11 opposes draconian labor reforms under a right-wing government backed by the fascistic Chega party, even as Portugal commits to raising military spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2035.

These protests are rooted in a broader crisis: European governments are using the NATO-Russia war as geopolitical cover and economic justification for austerity and rearmament. They are treating the war as an opportunity to accelerate a social counter-revolution, increase police powers, repress dissent, and make workers pay for the warmongering ambitions of their ruling classes.

Italy's budget is aligned with this trajectory. Its planned increase in defense spending reflects the broader NATO logic. In this sense, the USB and CGIL strikes are not only industrial actions: they are protests against Italy's deepening role in imperialist war and the systematic impoverishment of the working class.

The upcoming general strikes follow a major eruption of working-class opposition in Italy earlier in 2025, when mass protests broke out against Italy's complicity in the genocide in Gaza. In September and October, tens of thousands took to the streets in more than 75 cities. Transport networks were disrupted, schools shut down, and port workers refused to load or unload arms shipments. This movement forced the union bureaucracies to call for mass actions, revealing the explosive potential of rank-and-file mobilization.

The anger has not dissipated. It is flowing into opposition to the 2026 budget and the broader fight against militarism.

What is emerging in Italy is the initial stages of a world revolutionary crisis. Across Europe, right-wing governments are intensifying austerity, militarization, and repression. The ruling classes are preparing for war abroad and class confrontation at home. Workers are beginning to push back.

The greatest obstacle remains the union bureaucracies. The CGIL acts as an instrument to contain and disarm the working class. USB and CUB, despite their militancy, remain limited by a national framework and by leaderships tied to anarchist, Stalinist and bureaucratic traditions that cannot break decisively with the capitalist order. Their demands, however radical, deliberately avoid an open class struggle to overthrow the Meloni government and expand the fight to other countries.

None of the problems facing Italian workers are "Italian." Their root is the world crisis of capitalism. The working class must reject all nationalist framing of the struggle, all negotiations with the government, and all attempts by the union apparatus to limit the scope of the fight. An

international network of independent workers' committees, democratically controlled and coordinated, must be built in every workplace. These bodies, not union leaderships, can unify the struggle against austerity, against militarism, and against the capitalist system that generates both on the basis of a strategy for state power.

Internationalism cannot be reduced to symbolic appearances by public figures or to the cosmetic language of parties that operate entirely within national boundaries. The participation in the strikes of individuals such as Greta Thunberg, Francesca Albanese, Roger Waters or Yanis Varoufakis does not in itself give the movement an internationalist character. Varoufakis in particular, responsible for SYRIZA's historic betrayal and the social catastrophe it produced in Greece, symbolizes precisely the adaptation of pseudo-left forces to the dictates of European capitalism.

The path forward for workers in Italy, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, and across Europe lies in a unified struggle to overthrow the social order that imposes austerity and war. Either the working class confronts the capitalist war machine and its political representatives, or it will be forced to pay for the next stage of imperialist conflict in blood.

The general strikes of November 28 and December 12 mark an important step in this developing confrontation. Their ultimate significance, and their success, will depend on whether workers seize the initiative, break free from bureaucratic control, and advance a genuine international, socialist strategy against war and inequality.



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