

International opposition to Trump and ICE shape opening of Milan Olympics

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The 2026 Winter Olympics has seen an outpouring of opposition to Trump and the presence in Milan of agents of his murderous Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.

Italy's fascist prime minister, Georgia Meloni, welcomed U.S. Vice President JD Vance to Milan and placed the city on lockdown. Nearly 6,000 heavily-armed Italian police and military officers are patrolling the streets. Snipers are deployed on the rooftops, no-fly zones have been established across the city and a special decree allows police to jail people in Milan for 12 hours on the flimsy grounds that police suspect they might engage in violent protest.

Nonetheless, what has attracted world attention to the Games, beyond the athletic feats performed by the Olympians, is not the machinery of police-state rule but expressions of the growing political opposition to fascist policies on both sides of the Atlantic. Protests have shaken Milan, expressions of anti-war sentiment marked the Games' opening ceremony and US Olympians publicly criticized the Trump administration.

Illegal ICE occupations of US cities, deportations of immigrants and the executions of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis are shocking and radicalizing masses of people across Europe and beyond. It is becoming evident to working people around the world that they confront, in the Trump administration, a US government unlike any they have ever seen: an utterly lawless regime that brazenly announces and enacts fascist policies.

Events in Milan reflect the initial stages of the response this is provoking among broader layers of the population internationally. On January 30-31, thousands in Milan protested the announcement that ICE would attend the Games. They rallied on April 25 Square, named after the April 25, 1945 general strike and armed insurrection of the Italian resistance in Milan against Nazi and Italian

fascist authorities that led to the capture and execution of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

The eruption of anger shocked Italian officials, and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani denounced criticism of ICE. "It's not like the SS are coming," he said, referring to the genocidal Nazi SS paramilitaries. This did not calm the situation, however, as clear resemblances between ICE and a Nazi militia are evident to masses of people. ICE is an organ of police-state terror overseeing mass repression, deportations, mass detention and extrajudicial murder on behalf of a ruling class that views working people as expendable.

Protests against social conditions in Italy, the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the ICE presence in Milan continue. Thousands rallied this weekend again in Milan, defying the police lockdown of the city to march towards the Olympic Village, clashing with riot police who fired tear gas and water cannons into the crowd.

Anti-war or veiled statements of opposition to Trump made their way even into the scripted proceedings of the opening ceremony. Milanese rapper Ghali performed Gianni Rodari's famous 1948 anti-war children's poem *Promemoria*, while US/South African actress Charlize Theron read a quote from former South African President Nelson Mandela opposing racial prejudice.

The 60,000-strong crowd at the opening ceremony booed US Vice President Vance when, during the applause for the US Olympic delegation, footage of Vance and his wife Usha arriving at the stadium was broadcast on the stadium screens. The crowd ignored appeals from Olympic organizers not to boo while US athletes were marching.

Finally, the Trump and Meloni governments have been deeply shaken by statements made by Olympic athletes themselves. These are in many cases individuals of extraordinary athletic talent, who have devoted years of their lives to rigorous training. Many live in the Olympic

Village during the competition and meet athletes from around the world, fostering international camaraderie and respect. Their statements make clear that the nationalism and flag-waving that saturate the media coverage of the Olympics is not something they embrace voluntarily but something that is imposed upon them.

Asked whether he felt comfortable representing his country during ICE operations, US freestyle skier Hunter Hess replied: “Just because I’m wearing the flag doesn’t mean I represent everything that’s going on in the US.”

His fellow US freestyle skier Chris Lillis said he was “heartbroken” about ICE actions and broader events in the United States: “I think that, as a country, we need to focus on respecting everybody’s rights and making sure that we’re treating our citizens, as well as anybody, with love and respect. I hope that when people look at athletes competing in the Olympics, they realize that that’s the America that we’re trying to represent.”

Such statements are part of a long tradition of critical moments in Olympic history that have carried powerful political significance. There was the iconic 1968 protest by US athletes who raised their fists in the Black Power salute in order to oppose racism, only a few months after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

During the 1936 Berlin Olympics hosted by the Hitler regime, black US athlete Jesse Owens upset Nazi racial ideology with four gold medals. German long jumper Luz Long gave Owens key advice after Owens committed two fouls during the initial round in that event, allowing Owens to qualify and advance and ultimately win the gold. Luz, who won the silver medal, publicly congratulated Owens arm in arm in Hitler’s presence.

Statements like those of Hunt and Lillis reflect a growing hostility among broad layers of the world’s population to what governments like those of Trump and Meloni represent. A deep-rooted social and political radicalization has begun against reactionary governments that are isolated and despised. Despite censorship and police-state repression, this mass sentiment has begun to force its way to the surface of events.

Unsurprisingly, Trump and Meloni have responded with degraded denunciations of athletes and protesters opposing them during the Games. While Trump attacked Hunter Hess on Truth Social as “a real Loser, says he doesn’t represent his Country in the current Winter Olympics,” Meloni attacked those protesting during the Olympics as “enemies of Italy and of Italians.”

But it is not hard to see who the “enemies of the people” are. It is the fascist representatives of the ruling

capitalist oligarchy who resort to war, genocide, stoking anti-immigrant racism, austerity and police-state repression—not workers and youth protesting against them.

Moods of opposition are growing internationally in line with a resurgence of class struggle and an activation of the social force that can take economic and political power out of the hands of the capitalist oligarchy: the working class. The mass protests in Minneapolis in January against the police murders of Good and Pretti are expressions of a developing social upheaval in the United States and internationally.

Indeed, the day of the Olympic opening ceremony—amidst ongoing strikes by 46,000 nurses in the US—port workers in Italy and across the Mediterranean launched a one-day “Dockworkers do not work for war” strike. Their strike delayed the arrival of arms headed for the Middle East and the genocide in Gaza, blocking ships bearing weapons in ports where union officials kept dockworkers on the job.

These events point to the possibility and necessity of the international unification of the struggles of the working class. The conscious goal of such a movement must be the mobilization of workers’ social and industrial power to bring down capitalist governments pursuing policies of austerity, imperialist war and dictatorship and to transfer power to the working people—building a socialist society in which social and economic resources are used to meet social need, not private profit.



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