

# May 29 general strike in Italy: What way forward for the working class?

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On May 29, a general strike will bring large parts of Italy's transport network to a standstill for the third time this month.

The strike is the latest in a wave of work stoppages and mass protests that have paralysed public life over the past nine months. Following a massive one-day general strike on September 22, 2025, over one million people demonstrated in Rome on October 4, under the slogan "block everything", against Israel's seizure of the aid convoy "Global Sumud Flotilla".

Dockworkers in Genoa, Livorno and Ancona refused to load weapons destined for Israel. General strikes against the government's austerity and war budget followed on November 28-29 and on December 12. There were then numerous smaller walkouts and protests. On May 18, 2026, rank-and-file unions called for a further general strike against war and austerity under the slogan "Not even a nail for wars and genocide".

The escalating movement of principled opposition by the rank-and-file demonstrates the enormous power of the Italian working class. Millions of people realise that the billions of euros needed to fight NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, and back the Gaza genocide and the war against Iran, are taken away from wages, healthcare, education and pensions, and they are no longer prepared to put up with it.

The budget—the target of the wave of strikes and protests—reduces spending on social services, pensions, wages, healthcare, education and transport, while spending on defence is rising to meet NATO's 5 percent target. The social consequences are devastating. Already, the number of people living in absolute poverty—those unable to afford even the bare essentials—has reached an all-time high of 5.7 million, or 9.8 percent of the population. With unemployment falling, this means that more and more people are working for wages that do not ensure a minimal standard of living.

By contrast, the wealth and incomes of the rich have risen significantly. A flat-rate tax for foreign millionaires and billionaires, independent of their actual income, has turned

Italy into a tax haven for the super-rich.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is at the same time systematically strengthening the state apparatus to prepare for an inevitable confrontation with the working class. Following the example of her ally Donald Trump, she is filling the courts, state and cultural institutions with fascist party loyalists, purging universities and schools of left-wing influence, strengthening the forces of repression and, through a ferocious deportation policy, fueling racism and xenophobia. The danger of a fascist dictatorship is real.

## The political enemies of the Italian working class

Success in the fight against austerity and war therefore clearly requires the bringing down of the Meloni government. This raises urgently the question of adopting a socialist and anti-capitalist perspective, which begins with the systematic extension of the fight against the established trade unions and nominal opposition parties that block a struggle against the government and the ruling class at every turn.

It is the anti-worker policies of the nominally "left" pro-capitalist parties, the established trade unions and their "radical" political defenders that have paved the way for Meloni to come to power. As outrage over the right-wing policies of these parties and unions grew and they lost control of mounting social resistance, the Italian bourgeoisie turned to the fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), which within a few years became the strongest party with over 25 percent of the vote.

When the CGIL union federation, or occasionally the CISL and the UIL, now protest the government's austerity budget, they do so only to divert workers' anger into channels that do not threaten capitalist rule.

When the rank-and-file unions (*sindacati di base*) linked resistance to the austerity budget with opposition to the Gaza

genocide and the government's war course, and called for a general strike on November 28-29 2025, the CGIL sabotaged this initiative by calling for its own strike two weeks later, which was limited to demanding modest changes to the budget law. The CGIL was determined to ensure that resistance to war and genocide did not develop into a unified political movement against the Meloni government and capitalism.

As in the past, the CGIL leadership is again working closely with the Democratic Party (PD) and Five Star Movement (M5S) to police the class struggle, offering them as an alternative to Meloni. But should these parties return to government, they would continue Meloni's policies: support for NATO, military build-up and cuts to social services. This is confirmed by the record of their sister parties across Europe, whether it is the British Labour Party, the German SPD or the Spanish PSOE-Sumar coalition, which are all pursuing the same right-wing course.

The same applies to parties nominally of the "radical" left such as Sinistra Italiana (Italian Left) and the Greens. They provide a political fig leaf for the PD and the trade unions, expressing outrage at social injustices but refusing to fight for a different social order. These "pseudo-left" parties do not represent the interests of the working class, but of wealthy members of the middle class and trade union bureaucrats who see their privileges threatened by an independent movement of the working class.

Where this leads when the pseudo-left comes to power has been demonstrated by Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and Die Linke in several German federal states—they dropped their radical rhetoric and enforced the dictates of the IMF, the European Union and the banks against the working class.

### **Deepen the rank-and-file rebellion!**

To defeat Meloni, workers striving for political independence from the union bureaucracy and the parliamentary parties must be deepened through the establishment of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, port, school, logistics centre and working-class neighborhood.

These committees can unite all workers who are prepared to fight. They must be democratic and derive their authority from the direct participation of the workers themselves. Above all, rank-and-file committees should be guided by the socialist principle that the interests of society and the working class take precedence over the profit demands of

corporations and must defend every workplace, every social achievement and every democratic right.

Powerful conditions are already emerging for such a struggle against austerity and war to be waged, not just in Italy but internationally.

Meloni's government is part of a Europe-wide and global offensive with which the ruling class is responding to the crisis of capitalism and preparing for imperialist wars. Workers in Germany, France, Britain, the United States and across the world face the same attacks. Across Europe, they have already translated their outrage at the Gaza genocide into industrial action, including general strike actions in Belgium, Greece and Spain, demonstrating that the working class possesses the power to physically halt the machinery of imperialist war.

An essential task of the emerging mass movement is to overcome the division of workers by workplace, company, industry and country, which is deliberately encouraged by the trade union bureaucracy in the name of "competitiveness"—that is, the profits of the corporations. An international counter-offensive must be developed: uniting workers across all divides in the fight for a common socialist program.

To this end, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has launched the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) as a means by which workers can begin to coordinate their struggles worldwide.

The ICFI is the world party of socialist revolution, founded by Leon Trotsky in the struggle against the counter-revolutionary policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy and all those tendencies that have historically sought to tie the working class to the capitalist profit system, which is the source of austerity, fascist reaction, militarism and war.

We invite all Italian workers to contact the IWA-RFC, read the World Socialist Web Site (wsws.org), which is published daily in numerous languages, and get in touch with the ICFI to help build its Italian section.



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