

Italian rank-and-file unions hold nationwide strike against austerity and war

Joshua Seubert, Alex Lantier
1 June 2026

Workers across Italy struck on Thursday against austerity, genocide and war. The action was called by *sindacati di base*, Italy's rank-and-file unions. It mobilised workers in transport, air traffic, ports, motorways, logistics, healthcare, schools, universities, public administration, and fire services, including in Turin, Milan, Bergamo, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Naples.

It was the latest in a cycle of working class resistance in Italy. It followed nationwide strikes in September against the Gaza genocide, in November against the Meloni government's austerity and rearmament budget, the Manovra 2026, and a May 18 strike and protest against the Israeli seizure of the Global Sumud Flotilla. Each of these actions was called by rank-and-file unions. Each time, Italy's traditional union bureaucracies—the Stalinist-led General Confederation of Italian Labor (CGIL), Union of Italian Labor (UIL), and Italian Confederation of Trades Unions (CISL)—stood apart.

The May 29 strike was called by a coalition of unions including CUB (Confederazione Unitaria di Base), SGB (Sindacato Generale di Base), SI Cobas (Sindacato Intercategoriale Cobas), ADL Varese, and USI-CIT. These unions emerged and grew precisely because workers in critical sectors including logistics, ports, and education correctly concluded that CGIL, CISL and UIL served to impose concessions and productivity deals on the workers. They function, as one logistics worker told the WSWs in Rome, “like bosses.”

National rail struck from 21:00 on May 28 to 21:00 on May 29, and air transport for the full day, while local-transit strikes varied by city. In Rome and Milan, disruption fell mainly on municipal transport, with guaranteed-service windows only within the legal bands surrounding normal rush-hour traffic in the morning and evening. A protest march started in Milan from the Piazza della Scala.

In Naples, trains and certain metro lines faced delays, and Si-Cobas members staged a sit in at the Port Authority to protest dismissals of rank-and-file union members and arms shipments to Israel. Union members, including dockers and logistics, metal and health contract workers, marched to the offices of Grimaldi, which controls port operations. They reportedly obtained a commitment to improve trainee working conditions but no commitment on Israel.

In Turin, rail and air transport were shut down, though municipal transport functioned normally. There was an evening rally at the Piazza Costello, and a daytime protest march organized by the

“Torino per Gaza” coordination. Around 100 protesters gathered near the Turin offices of defence firm Leonardo, though no clashes were reported unlike at similar protests last year.

WSWS reporters in Rome spoke to members of the SI-Cobas rank-and-file union, which mainly organizes logistics workers, at a demonstration outside the Economy Ministry.

Bereket, a worker from Eritrea, told the WSWs he was striking against a “minimum services” law Georgia Meloni's far-right government is using to limit workers' right to strike. He said, “We are striking against Law 146, which prevents you from going on strike when there is a problem at the warehouse. If the safety rules are not respected—or payment rules, or anything inside the warehouse—if you have problems, you cannot strike.”

He stressed that the right to strike is the fundamental weapon of the working class to defend its rights and living standards against austerity and war: “In the warehouse, work is the foundation of life. If there is no work there is no life, you cannot get by. Everything has gone up because of the wars the politicians are making: they keep pushing up prices for everything... and the salary has always stayed the same. So we pay for petrol, for the high cost of living, we try to improve our salary at the warehouse, because the bills all go up, but not the salary.”

Meloni, Bereket added, “has opposed the struggle for workers' rights. So the grassroots unions are truly fighting to bring about change, both for workers and overall. They fight for healthcare, because the money for healthcare is taken and goes into weapons, into war, elsewhere—in Iraq, Palestine—as all capitalist imperialists do.”

Asked about the necessity of the international unification of the struggles of the working class, Bereket said: “We, as workers, together with the rank-and-file unions, we fight internationally. I am not Italian, but I stand alongside Italians, alongside workers from other countries. I always go out to demonstrate, against the war and against what the politicians do.”

Leonardo, also from SI-Cobas, told the WSWs he was striking against war and austerity, as Italy funnels billions of euros into rearmament and war. “Today the situation of wage workers in Italy is dreadful,” he said. “Spending on armies and on war—spending ordered by governments—keeps rising, and it is paid for by workers: through rising living costs, rising military expenditure, cuts to healthcare, cuts to pensions.” He added:

With rising military spending, healthcare, pensions, hospitals and schools are cut. So workers must organise and oppose wars waged by bosses for the bosses' profits. In Italy in September, there were very important mobilisations in which hundreds of thousands of workers took to the streets against the genocide. We have a duty of international solidarity to oppose the imperialist war and all imperialist wars. Within our union we have more than fifty, sixty different nationalities—many workers who come from theatres of war. So today we are in the streets against the genocide in Palestine, against the United States' aggressions against Venezuela, Cuba, Iran—but against all wars waged by bourgeois governments and paid for by workers with their own lives.

The growth of the influence of rank-and-file unions, he added, was the product of this situation and deepening disillusionment among workers with the CGIL, UIL and CISL bureaucracies. "Today workers obviously realise that the confederal unions no longer protect workers; they often go along with the logic of companies and governments," Leonardo said. "And so more and more they are turning towards the base unions."

Asked about his union, Leonardo said: "SI-Cobas was founded 10 years ago in logistics. In logistics the situation was one of slavery: we were working off the books, twelve, thirteen hours a day. Through our struggles and strikes, we won our rights, we raised wages, we improved working conditions in the workplace. Today we are here in the streets together with dozens of logistics workers... Thanks to the struggles, workers improved their working conditions."

Leonardo stressed his agreement with the need for an international struggle: "It is essential today to build international solidarity—as was done in the ports, and in certain sectors—and to build this international unity to bring together workers from all over the world, first and foremost in Europe and then worldwide, and to fight against the big companies that keep exploiting workers, so as to be more effective in our struggle."

Asked about a revolutionary struggle for workers' power and socialism by workers in Europe, he pointed to both the mortal crisis of capitalism and workers' disillusionment with existing parties. These include both parties like Rifondazione (Communist Refoundation Party) that emerged from the 1991 dissolution of the Stalinist Communist Party and the descendants of Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism, like Sinistra Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left). Since 1991, they have amassed long records of voting to support pro-austerity, pro-war governments.

Leonardo said, "As comrades in the union, many of us are communist comrades, we are anti-capitalists. It is clear to us today that the contradictions of this system are growing ever stronger. Italy has had a powerful workers' movement; over the last 30 years that movement has been weaker, and in this one can see how the contradictions of this system have advanced and grown."

He indicated workers' lack of confidence in Italy's established parties, saying: "I do not believe that the left-wing parties currently in opposition or in parliament are workers' parties."

Two fundamental questions are posed. Firstly, there is the necessary unification of rank-and-file workers in struggle, not in a national but in an international organization that can coordinate and oversee joint action in workplaces in many different countries to stop arms deliveries, genocide and war. International solidarity must be realized in the building of international organizations of struggle.

Secondly, the building of such an organization is inseparable for a political struggle for socialist internationalism against Stalinism and Pabloism in the working class. As the WSWS noted in its perspective on the strike, "May 29 general strike in Italy: What way forward for the working class?":

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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact