

Italy's summer of struggles: Workers confront Meloni's austerity, war and police state

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The Italian working class is in open conflict with the Meloni government. A wave of strikes concentrated into July, before the legal summer strike ban (*franchigia estiva*) takes effect, and set to resume with greater force in September signals that class tensions in Europe's third-largest economy have reached a breaking point.

Workers in aviation, rail, logistics, maritime transport, local transit and the public sector are fighting falling living standards, the government's military spending and the harshest anti-strike laws introduced in postwar Italy. The struggle is not merely economic. It poses directly the question of political power.

The strike wave continues a year-long cycle of working class resistance. National strike actions on September 22 and November 28–29 last year and May 18 and May 29 this year repeatedly brought large sections of the country to a standstill. Each has taken on a more political character, connecting wage demands with opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza, NATO's war drive and the government's authoritarian policies.

Because transport strikes are banned from July 27 to September 5, unions have concentrated major actions into the preceding weeks. USB Lavoro Privato has called a 24-hour national strike by easyJet cabin crews for July 5, while Filt-CGIL, Fit-CISL and Uil-UIL have called pilots out. Air traffic controllers at Milano Malpensa and Roma Fiumicino are striking through independent RSAs, CUB Trasporti is halting FedEx cargo operations at Malpensa, and local transit workers in Florence and Catania are also striking.

The wave continues with a 24-hour national rail strike by CUB Trasporti and SGB on July 23–24 and a maritime strike on Grandi Navi Veloci routes on July 22–23. After the August truce, workers will resume with a 48-hour public sector national strike on September 24–25, followed by a 24-hour multi-sector national strike on September 25 and a national aviation strike on September 26.

What sets this strike wave apart from the sector-by-sector stoppages of previous decades is its openly political character. Workers are demanding more than higher wages. USB calls for a legal minimum wage of €2,000 a month, restoration of the *scala mobile* wage-indexing system, a windfall tax on energy and banking corporations, and the defense of healthcare, education and pensions against a budget that shifts billions to military spending.

Under the slogan “Nemmeno un chiodo per guerre e genocidio”

(“Not even a nail for wars and genocide”), the May 18 national strike linked Italy's plan to raise military spending to 5 percent of GDP with cuts to social programs. USB demanded that the government sever all diplomatic, economic and military ties with Israel and condemned US attacks on Iran. Dockworkers in Genoa, Livorno and Ancona refused to load weapons bound for Israel.

At the May 29 strike in Rome, a SI Cobas logistics worker told the WSWS: “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.” Bereket, a worker from Eritrea, told the WSWS: “We, as workers ... fight internationally. I am not Italian, but I stand alongside Italians, alongside workers from other countries.”

Yet the strike movement exposes a deep divide within Italy's labor movement—and the political limitations of the forces leading it. The confederal unions CGIL, CISL and UIL have repeatedly refused to join the mobilizations called by the base unions. When USB and CUB organized a national strike against the “war budget” on November 28, 2025, the CGIL scheduled a separate action two weeks later, splitting the movement. The same occurred in May 2026.

The CGIL has long functioned as a partner of employers and the state, exchanging labor peace for its institutional role in collective bargaining and other services. Its leader, Maurizio Landini, criticizes government policy while limiting his proposals to reforms such as a more progressive tax system.

The base unions—USB, SI Cobas, CUB, SGB and Unicobas—emerged because many workers concluded the confederal unions imposed concessions rather than fought them. They have built support among logistics workers, dockworkers, educators, subcontracted employees and immigrant workers. Their militancy and opposition to war have attracted workers seeking a fighting alternative to the CGIL.

But the base unions remain within a reformist framework, and this is not a secondary limitation—it is their defining feature. While denouncing the Meloni government as authoritarian and calling its budget a “war financial law,” they continue appealing to government ministers for reforms such as a higher minimum wage, labor negotiations and policy changes.

Their demands, including a €300 monthly wage increase, a €2,000 minimum wage and a shorter workweek, seek better

conditions within capitalism rather than challenging capitalist property relations or state power. Without a political movement aimed at replacing the existing system, they remain pressure groups hopelessly seeking concessions from the same state they condemn. Decades of experience have shown that reforms alone cannot reverse austerity, militarism and authoritarianism as the crisis of capitalism intensifies.

The anarcho-syndicalist traditions represented by the USI offer no strategy for winning political power. Refusing to handle weapons shipments is a principled act of solidarity. But refusing to build a political party capable of replacing the government that orders those shipments leaves workers without a means of ending war and austerity. Isolated actions, however courageous, must be developed into a coordinated political movement.

Nor does the parliamentary opposition provide an alternative. The Democratic Party (PD) and the Five Star Movement (M5S) criticize Meloni while bearing major responsibility for the conditions that brought her to power. These parties are not an alternative to Meloni but different managers of the same capitalist state—bound to the same imperialist alliance system, the same EU austerity framework, and the same defense of capitalist property relations. Their criticisms of the government serve to channel working class opposition back into parliamentary channels that have already demonstrated their incapacity to defend workers' interests.

Under Matteo Renzi, the PD introduced the Jobs Act, weakening labor protections, and imposed EU-backed austerity that cut social spending and expanded precarious work. The M5S, after campaigning as an anti-establishment force, governed first with the far-right Lega and then with the PD. It continued anti-immigrant policies, backed EU austerity and military spending, and supported NATO.

Giuseppe Conte, now presenting himself as a critic of Israeli actions, led a government that maintained NATO commitments and anti-immigrant decrees. Elly Schlein condemns attacks on the Gaza flotilla while her party remains committed to the NATO alliance backing Israel. Their opposition is a rotation of personnel within the same state machine that workers confront in the streets.

Meanwhile, the Meloni government has strengthened the state's powers of repression. Law No. 80/2025, adopted in June 2025, is the broadest expansion of criminal penalties in postwar Italy. Its key provision restores criminal penalties for roadblocks. Since 1999, blocking a road with one's body had been treated as a civil offense. The new law makes it punishable by prison and imposes sentences of six months to two years when carried out by groups.

The measure directly targets strike pickets, especially in logistics and transport, by treating workers peacefully blocking a workplace as participants in an aggravated criminal offense. It also increases penalties for protests affecting energy, transport and telecommunications infrastructure and creates a new offense of "mutiny" in prisons and immigration detention centers that includes nonviolent resistance.

The Turin Prosecutor's Office has asked the Constitutional Court to review the law, arguing it violates constitutional rights to free assembly and expression, while the Unione delle Camere Penali Italiane has denounced it as a step toward authoritarian

"criminal law of the enemy." The government nevertheless forced the measure through parliament using confidence votes, giving the state sweeping new powers as the 2026 strike wave unfolds.

The crisis facing Italian workers is part of a global crisis. The same capitalist system that funds Israel's war, finances Italy's military buildup and imposed austerity measures such as the abolition of the scala mobile and the Jobs Act cannot be overcome within national borders. Workers in Italy and internationally confront the same system. Both the CGIL's class-collaborationist leadership and the base unions' left-syndicalist approach accept the framework of the capitalist nation-state. They limit the struggle to economic reforms rather than the fight for political power.

The alternative is for workers to break with all pro-capitalist parties and union bureaucracies and build rank-and-file committees in every workplace, democratically controlled by workers and linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Dockworkers' refusal to load weapons for Israel demonstrates the potential of international working class action, but such actions must be subordinated to the building of a revolutionary party.

To this end, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), founded by Leon Trotsky, is building its Italian section. It advocates the international unity of the working class based on a socialist program, including public ownership of the banks and major corporations, the establishment of a workers' government and the creation of a United States of Europe as part of a world socialist federation. It calls on workers dissatisfied with the existing unions and parties to join the IWA-RFC and help build a revolutionary party.



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