

Italian workers enter an autumn of struggles against austerity and militarism

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3 September 2026

Italian workers enter September and October 2026 in mounting conflict with the neo-fascist government of Giorgia Meloni, the most right-wing since the fall of Mussolini. After a summer in which strikes were restricted by the *franchigia estiva*, the ban of strikes in the transport sectors during the holiday period, the resumption of industrial action marks an escalation. The grievances driving the mobilization are the accumulated product of a government reorganizing the Italian state around austerity, repression and war.

The immediate political flashpoint is the new Security Bill, or *DDL Sicurezza*, approved by the Council of Ministers in July. The legislation represents a sweeping attack on basic democratic rights: it expands the state's powers to suppress protest and criminalize forms of collective action. Its aim is to intimidate those who challenge government policy. It also restricts the right to assemble, extends preventive detention to minors and increases criminal penalties for conduct deemed threatening to public order.

Taken together with the government's broader campaign against strikes and demonstrations, these measures give the police and judicial authorities expanded powers to intervene against mass political opposition. What is being prepared is not merely a tougher public-order regime but a legal framework for suppressing the forms of collective action through which workers defend their social and political rights. This is the political expression of a party, *Fratelli d'Italia*, whose lineage runs directly to the fascist tradition, and whose program is to dismantle the democratic rights won by the working class in decades of struggle.

The legislation is part of the government's broader assault on the right to protest. Law No. 80/2025 restored criminal penalties for roadblocks and created a new offense of "mutiny" covering nonviolent resistance in prisons and migrant detention centers. The cumulative effect is to expand the state's ability to criminalize forms of collective action that have long been weapons of the working class.

Behind this juridical offensive lies an economic one. The government's fiscal policy, set out through the Economic and Financial Document and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, subordinates wages and public services to debt reduction and EU deficit rules.

The rail sector provides a particularly clear example. The government is moving to break up the national Intercity Universal Service into three regional lots for tender (the *spezzatino*, or carve-up). Parliament has rejected protections for workers' pay and seniority when services change operators. Maintenance and station operations are increasingly outsourced to private contractors, threatening both workers' conditions and passenger safety.

The response is a national rail strike from September 7 to 8, called by CUB Trasporti, SGB and other railway organizations. The action opposes the fragmentation of the national service, the weakening of contractual protections and the deterioration of working conditions.

In the public sector, the government has left hundreds of thousands of healthcare workers without renewed contracts while restricting hiring. It continues to reject a statutory minimum wage, favoring mechanisms that leave low-paid workers dependent on inadequate contractual arrangements and the proliferation of so-called "pirate contracts."

At the same time, the state is being openly militarized. The government is pushing military expenditure sharply upward while Italian ports, including Genoa, Salerno and Livorno, have become transit points for arms shipments bound for Israel. Dockworkers invoking Law 185/1990 have refused to handle military cargo. The grievances of this autumn are therefore simultaneously economic, political and anti-war.

The mobilizations planned through October are extensive and increasingly interconnected.

Transport is the spearhead. The September 7–8 national rail strike will be followed by freight strikes at DB Cargo Lombardia and Captrain Italia on September 10–11, targeting cross-border cargo corridors into Central Europe. Aviation faces action by Poste Air Cargo flight crews on September 11, airport security and ground-handling workers on September 13 and a nationwide four-hour strike by air-traffic controllers at ENAV and Techno Sky on September 30. Urban transit strikes are also scheduled in cities and regions including Genoa, Venice, Naples, Florence, Pisa, Ravenna, Bergamo and Umbria.

The public sector is preparing its own actions: a multisector strike on September 25–26 by CSLE and FI-SI involving

administration, healthcare, education and fire services; a national school strike on October 16 by SISA against precarious employment and budget cuts; and a general strike on October 30 by USI-CIT over wages, housing and privatization.

Most significant politically is the convergence of labor action with the anti-war movement. Dockworkers of CALP and USB are planning actions at Genoa, Salerno and Livorno against vessels carrying military supplies to Israel. SI Cobas has called a national inter-categorical general strike for October 3, linking austerity to military expenditure, followed by a mass demonstration in Rome on October 4. The climate and anti-war movement is also mobilizing. What is emerging is a broader confrontation over the direction of Italian society.

The potential is enormous. The refusal of dockworkers to load arms for Israel demonstrates in concrete terms the strategic power of the working class. Workers who occupy the choke points of transport and logistics possess the ability to disrupt not only production but the machinery of war itself.

The implications are international and the working class can and must be mobilized as the central force against genocide and dictatorship. Once workers begin linking wages and working conditions to militarism, austerity and war, the question of political power inevitably emerges.

Precisely here lies the central danger. The organizations leading the mobilizations remain divided between the major confederations—CGIL, CISL and UIL—and the base unions, including USB, SI Cobas, CUB and SGB. Despite differences in militancy and rhetoric, both orientations remain fundamentally confined to the framework of the Italian state.

The role of the CGIL is particularly clear. It has repeatedly sought to contain and fragment industrial action, separating its own initiatives from those of the base unions. Its political perspective remains one of pressure on the government for reforms, epitomized by CGIL general secretary Maurizio Landini's appeals for a "progressive tax system." The union bureaucracy's strategy is to negotiate the terms of capitalist policy and prevent the working class from mobilizing to challenge the system that produces austerity and war.

But the base unions do not constitute a political alternative. Their militancy is real enough, but it is the militancy of petty-bourgeois formations that ultimately address themselves to the very state they claim to oppose. USB's response to the Genoa blockade, for example, called on the government to impose an embargo—as though the fascist government responsible for austerity and rearmament could simply be pressured into ending its participation in the war it is waging. Such appeals are not a deficiency of the base unions' program but the expression of their class character: they seek to channel working-class opposition back into the framework of the capitalist state.

The same contradiction runs through the base unions' program: higher minimum wages, windfall taxes, restoration of the *scala mobile* and other reforms within the existing economic order. Even the more radical rhetoric remains tied to

appeals for the capitalist state to regulate capitalism.

The anarcho-syndicalist wing, represented by USI, goes further in rejecting the construction of a political party, substituting militant action for the struggle to establish working-class political power. This is not a tactical difference but a strategy that has been tested and found wanting. In 1936-37, when the anarchist-led CNT held the power to take the state in Barcelona, its leaders capitulated to the Popular Front rather than lead the workers to power, because anarchism has no strategy for the conquest of political power.

This is the decisive contradiction. The dockworkers mobilize against arms shipments and demand that the government stop the war. On 30 October, the USB is participating in an International Day of Action, uniting dockworkers in more than 40 Mediterranean and European ports against the transport of weapons to war zones and demanding better wages, safer conditions and protections against automation.

But the struggle remains on the basis of putting pressure on existing governments. There is no strategy to unite the working class in the struggle for political power, to break it from the corporatist unions and pro-capitalist "left" parties.

The answer is not to pressure the union bureaucracies but to build an independent movement of the working class against them and the system of which they are ultimately part. Rank-and-file committees must be established in every workplace, democratically controlled by workers themselves and linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Italy's Hot Autumn contains the potential for a far broader confrontation than the individual strikes now being announced. But that potential will be realized only if workers take political leadership of their struggle out of the hands of the bureaucracies that seek to contain it and build an international movement aimed at the conquest of political power and the reorganization of society on socialist foundations.



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