

Mass protests again grip Italy as Meloni government steps up repressive measures

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On Saturday 24 October, tens of thousands of students, school pupils, workers, the unemployed and pensioners took to the streets across Italy. Once again, numerous homemade signs could be seen reading “Welfare, not war”, “Wake up”, “Revolution!” or “Giorgia Meloni – demissioni [resign].” Once again, many Palestinian flags were also on display.

The largely peaceful protests defied bad weather and the warnings of Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi (independent), who had explicitly urged people to stay away from city centres in the afternoon.

Even the heavy deployment of police and military did not deter the demonstrators. Clashes with police occurred mainly where the state authorities tried to halt and disperse the protesters. Almost 4,300 mostly young people had their details checked by the police, and hundreds were taken into custody.

The protests took place outside the usual organisational structures. “Italia in Piazza,” which had called the protest last Saturday, wanted to take a “break” this Saturday. The trade unions had only announced actions for October 30 and November 20. An anarchist group in Milan expressly called off the action planned for Saturday. Nevertheless, thousands took to the streets in Milan, Rome, Turin, Bologna, Florence, Naples and Genoa, and demonstrations were also held in Bari, Padua, Lucca and Pescara.

The driving force was the new “*Movimento 17 Ottobre*” (M17), which first appeared in Milan on 19 October on Instagram and Telegram, after the previous weekend’s mass protests, and called for protests every Saturday until the government is toppled. Autonomous alliances against war and the housing crisis also took to the streets: in Rome the “*Asse Antiimperialista*” (Anti-Imperialist Axis) and in Turin the “*Torino contro il riarmo*” (Turin against rearmament) alliance. In Turin,

the banner at the front read “*Noi la guerra non la paghiamo*” (“We will not pay for the war”).

The strongest motives driving people onto the streets, alongside war, the housing crisis and the education crisis, were supply shortages and rising food prices. Lorry drivers in southern Italy had blocked roads all week in protest at high diesel prices. According to the Associated Press, the price of diesel currently stands about a third above its level before the start of the Iran war. Since the beginning of October, lorry drivers have therefore boycotted refineries, petrol stations and supermarkets, where customers now find only empty shelves instead of fruit, milk, butter and vegetables.

Despite the shortages, there is great solidarity with the lorry drivers. Videos circulating on Facebook show striking lorry drivers handing out entire crates of fresh food to passing motorists, who overwhelmingly support the strike.

The Meloni government had used the previous week’s unrest as a pretext for a massive build-up of the security forces. Milan was to be the first stress test. In addition to 5,000 police officers, 500 paratroopers of the Folgore Brigade were deployed there to patrol railway and metro stations; armoured Lince vehicles and drones were also used.

In Milan and throughout Lombardy, more than 150 searches of homes were carried out on Saturday morning. Harsh measures were imposed on participants in the previous Saturday’s protests: young people were taken into preventive custody and banned from entering city centres for up to a year. These measures are known as *Daspo urbani*. Even the National Association of Magistrates (ANM) warned against this, saying that the desperation and hardship of young people could not be combated by tougher punishments alone.

In Rome, where 10,000 participants marched on a

registered and approved route from Piazza della Repubblica to the Fori Imperiali, the state monitored the historic old town using cybersecurity measures, while the political police, Digos, monitored social media.

Interior Minister Piantedosi kept mobile units on standby to intervene wherever unrest might occur outside the designated zones. In the evening, clashes broke out at Termini rail station when police tried to break up the crowd with water cannon, tear gas and arrests, and around a thousand young people were kettled near the Colosseum and had their details recorded by police.

A new decree, which Meloni pushed through in an expedited procedure and President Mattarella has signed, permits arrests and preventive custody on the basis of video footage. Preventive custody is also being extended to a maximum of twelve hours for minors aged 16 and over. The decree introduces the criminal offence of “violent participation in a demonstration”, punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to €20,000. Demonstrators must pay for damage caused, and parents are liable for their children. Parliament has 60 days to convert the decree into law.

Meanwhile, right-wing forces mobilised, spreading scare stories online claiming that entire city centres had been laid waste by vandals on 17 October. Many shops then barricaded their windows. Some closed or had their entrances guarded by poorly paid auxiliary workers. In far-right social media, a campaign is raging against alleged “foreign terrorists” who are supposedly “planting bombs in Milan shops”. Young men who are not from Italy were shouted at: “The sooner you go home, the better.”

In Rome, the fascist *Gioventù Nazionale*, the youth organisation of the governing *Fratelli d’Italia* (Brothers of Italy), marched under the slogan “*Sblocchiamo tutto*” (“We unblock everything”). In Forlì, *Forza Nuova* held an authorised rally.

Defence Minister Guido Crosetto (Fratelli d’Italia) had wanted the security decree to give soldiers police powers. That provision was dropped before the Council of Ministers approved the decree on October 20. Crosetto declared himself “disappointed and concerned.” He wrote on X that the deployment made sense only if soldiers could “act like the police” for three months. Defence Ministry sources complained

that the 500 Folgore paratroopers sent to Milan, who carry no handcuffs, stun guns or pepper spray, were “useless and in danger.”

The journalist Youssef Siher was arrested as an alleged “mastermind” of the 17 October riots, because he was supposedly identified as the initiator of the *Movimento 17 Ottobre*. The 30-year-old from Brescia was held for twelve hours and is being investigated on suspicion of aggravated incitement to commit a crime.



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