General strike in Italy: The struggle against Meloni’s war and austerity policies requires a socialist perspective

Johannes Stern
19 November 2026

On Friday, November 20, a nationwide general strike will take place in Italy against the anti-working-class and militarist policies of the government of fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Workers in industry, public services, healthcare and education have been called upon to stop work. Demonstrations are planned in numerous cities.

The fact that the largest Italian trade union confederation, the CGIL, is calling for a strike alongside the base (independent) unions is an expression of the enormous social and political opposition to the government. Millions of workers and young people are no longer prepared to accept the destruction of their living conditions, rearmament and support for imperialist wars.

The strike is part of a growing movement. In September and October 2025, workers walked off the job in protest against the Israeli genocide in Gaza, while dockworkers refused to load weapons. On October 4, more than a million people demonstrated in Rome. Further strikes and mass protests followed. As recently as October 30, according to the organizing base unions, around 1 million workers and young people participated in actions in 70 cities.

The decisive question is how this opposition can be developed into an independent political movement capable of overthrowing Meloni and ending the underlying capitalist policies.

Part of a Europe-wide movement

The general strike is part of an international radicalization of the working class and youth. On Tuesday, November 17, according to trade union figures, 500,000 people participated in a nationwide day of strikes and protests in France. On November 11, a general strike and protests against rising living and housing costs took place in Spain, involving more than 3 million people, according to the organizers. Another nationwide public-sector strike has been announced in Greece for November 25.

On Friday, coordinated youth protests against war, conscription and austerity will also take place for the first time in more than 20 countries. In Germany, more than 120,000 young people had already participated in protests in over 30 cities on October 31.

Everywhere, billions are being allocated to war and rearmament while wages and pensions come under attack, public services are starved of funding and democratic rights are dismantled. Whether governments are openly fascist, as in Italy, conservative-social democratic, as in Germany, or describe themselves as “left-wing,” as in Spain, they all enforce the interests of finance capital. This objective international expansion of the class struggle requires workers to consciously unite across national borders.

Meloni’s budget for rearmament and social cuts

In Italy, this contradiction is particularly stark. The draft budget for 2027 provides additional funding for rearmament. Spending by the Defence Ministry is set to rise to almost €38.8 billion. At the same time, the government is cutting public services and social spending. Only in the face of massive opposition did it announce that it would reverse the planned elimination of almost 7,000 positions in public schools. The fundamental course of austerity remains unchanged.

According to ISTAT, more than 5.4 million people, including over 1.1 million children, lived in absolute poverty in 2025. Millions of workers can barely afford rent, food and energy costs despite having jobs.

Meloni is responding with nationalist demagogy, repression and aggressive war policies. As recently as Wednesday, she claimed that her government was cutting taxes and leaving Italians with more money, while the opposition was merely arguing over a wealth tax.

On the same day, Defence Minister Guido Crosetto announced further billions in investments in parliament, not only in conventional but also in hybrid warfare. “There is only one war, and we must prepare to fight it at every level,” he declared.

This policy is part of the European powers’ preparations for war against Russia. At the same time, Rome supports Israel and the imperialist war drive of the United States. The billions for rearmament and corporate profits are to be financed through the intensified exploitation of the working class. Against growing opposition, the government is resorting to nationalism, authoritarian measures and fascist methods.

The CGIL seeks to keep the opposition under control

Under these conditions, the CGIL leadership finds itself compelled to call a general strike. Its aim, however, is not the independent mobilization of the working class against the government, but to confine opposition to demands for reforms and negotiations.

This is demonstrated by the official strike call. It criticizes inflation, underfunded public services and rising military spending. But its perspective ultimately amounts to a demand for negotiations, for a “genuine debate on the budget law.”

© World Socialist Web Site

As recently as November 13, a CGIL delegation participated in talks with the government. Its representative Christian Ferrari subsequently described the meeting as “cordial but politically useless” and confirmed the strike. The trade union bureaucracy acts as Meloni’s negotiating partner in an attempt to secure limited concessions that ultimately will not materialize. For the bureaucracy, a strike is above all a means of controlling opposition and preventing an independent political struggle against the government.

Since Meloni took office, the CGIL has repeatedly organized time-limited general strikes that, from the standpoint of the unions, served merely to let off steam without fundamentally threatening Meloni’s right-wing course or the policies of rearmament and social attacks.

Closely connected to this is the orientation toward the parliamentary opposition. At the CGIL demonstration on October 17, Democratic Party (PD) leader Elly Schlein and Five Star Movement (M5S) leader Giuseppe Conte stood at the center of the event alongside CGIL leader Maurizio Landini.

These parties are presented as an alternative to Meloni, but they represent the same class interests. The PD supports NATO, arms deliveries to Ukraine and the militarization of Europe. The M5S and the Alliance of Greens and the Left (AVS) criticize individual aspects of these policies but are equally adamant in defending the capitalist framework and a common European defence policy.

They are currently negotiating a joint government program for the Campo largo, a broad center-left alliance. The CGIL wants to direct the opposition of the working class toward this alliance. Such a government, however, would continue the war drive and the associated social attacks, just like its sister parties in other European countries.

The limitations of the base unions

The base unions, including USB, COBAS and CUB, adopt a considerably more militant stance. They combine social demands with opposition to rearmament and the genocide in Gaza and have therefore gained support among workers and young people.

In their November 6 statement, COBAS declared that the mass protests have long since gone beyond outrage over Israeli crimes and express a broader social and political conflict. They demand higher wages, investment in public services and drastic cuts in military spending. Their perspective, however, remains limited to pressuring Meloni to back down through national strikes and demonstrations.

The USB goes further in its rhetoric. It criticizes trade unions that seek only limited adjustments and has called for a demonstration on December 12 under the slogan “Cacciamo il governo Meloni!”—“Drive out the Meloni government!” It combines this with opposition to NATO rearmament and the militarization of education.

But the decisive question remains unanswered: Through what social force, with what program and toward what political goal is the government to be overthrown?

The base unions offer no answer to this question either. Their fundamental weakness is the absence of a strategy for overcoming capitalism. The notion that Meloni can be forced to make concessions or replaced by another bourgeois government leads into a dead end. The reforms being demanded stand in direct contradiction to the objective development of capitalism.

Under conditions of the deepest crisis of European and international capitalism since the Second World War, there is no room for social reforms, even for nominally left-wing parties. All factions of the ruling class are responding to the increasingly sharp conflicts between the major powers and the struggle for markets, raw materials and strategic supremacy with trade war, rearmament, the destruction of social gains and war.

All capitalist governments act as direct agents of finance capital and powerful imperialist interests. Openly fascist forces such as Meloni express this development particularly starkly. But social democrats, Greens and pseudo-left parties also implement these policies when in government. The experiences with Syriza in Greece, Podemos and Sumar in Spain, and Rifondazione Comunista in Italy itself are clear examples.

This proves that it is no longer possible to make capitalism more socially just. The working class must itself take political power and expropriate the banks and corporations in order to use society’s resources to meet its needs rather than finance war and profits.

For a European general strike and a socialist perspective!

To achieve this, the growing readiness of the Italian working class to fight must be guided by a conscious socialist and internationalist perspective. Workers must build independent rank-and-file action committees in factories, ports, logistics centers, hospitals, schools and universities, democratically controlled by the workers themselves and acting independently of the trade union bureaucracies and capitalist parties.

They must unite the struggle against falling real wages, layoffs and social cuts with resistance to war and fascism, and organize across national borders within the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Workers in Italy confront the same banks, corporations and European institutions as their counterparts in France, Spain, Greece and Germany. The general strike must become the starting point for coordinating these struggles internationally and preparing a European general strike that raises the question of political power: Who decides how society’s resources are used and what the future of Europe will be—the financial oligarchy or the working class?

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* and members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) will intervene in the protests in Italy on Friday. In their call for the Europe-wide youth protests, the IYSSE explain that the movement against war and austerity must be organized independently of the capitalist parties and trade union bureaucracies and armed with a socialist program.

This requires the building of a new revolutionary leadership: sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Italy and throughout Europe. The struggle against war, fascism and social cuts must be united with the struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish the United Socialist States of Europe.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site