General strike in Italy: Workers and students protest against Meloni government’s budget of war and austerity

Our reporters
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Up to 1.5 million workers and young people protested in more than 100 towns and cities across Italy on Friday against the far-right government of the fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

The demonstrations took place as part of a nationwide general strike called by the main union federation, alongside strikes by the smaller “base” unions. They were protesting the government’s upcoming 2027 budget and soaring military spending, being paid for in falling real wages, cuts to education and healthcare. Other demands were for a full indexation of pensions and measures to prevent a rise in the retirement age.

A WSWS reporter team took part in the protests in Rome and handed out hundreds of leaflets of the statement “General strike in Italy: The struggle against Meloni’s war and austerity policies requires a socialist perspective”.

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WSWS reporter Katja Rippert said in her video from the rally: “The general strike here in Italy and the international youth protests must become the starting point for a European general strike that poses the question of political power.” She added: “We fight for the international unity of the working class and the United Socialist States of Europe. This requires the building of a new revolutionary party – a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Italy.”

The WSWS discussed with young participants of the protests. Luca and Antonio, two high-school students, came for one reason above all: “We want money to go to schools instead of war.” Antonio describes conditions in schools and hospitals as catastrophic. A window recently came loose at their school and fell from the sixth floor, shattering into pieces close to students. “Someone could have been killed”.

Blanca came with her friends to protest “the wars and genocides going on. We see them live 24 hours a day. My country is one of the first funding the genocide in Gaza. We are ashamed of that.” She pins her hopes on the dock workers who have refused to load weapons bound for Israel. “The workers are the only ones who can stop this, because the whole society stands on workers,” she says.

Outside La Sapienza University, the WSWS spoke to students from IIS Giorgi-Woolf, a public higher education institute in Rome offering high school, technical, and vocational lessons. Angelo told our reporters they wanted nothing to do with either the Meloni government or the official opposition. “We don’t die for their war. We’d only die for our war, and now it’s a social war.”

Another said, “We’re just angry because millions of euros are going to war in Ukraine and Israel, but not to the schools like ours that are some of the worst in Europe. We’re in a school with broken walls, a bathroom that doesn’t work – and there are 1,600 of us.”

Living standards in Italy have declined even further as the economy stagnated in the third quarter. Real wages remain below early 2021 levels, as inflation reached 5.5 percent in October, up from 4.2 percent in September, according to the national statistics agency Istat – its highest level in more than three years. Energy prices are up by almost a third over the year.

The strikes were the latest in a series of mass protests across Europe, which has seen five days of general strikes in Italy, France and Spain since the beginning of September. Also on Friday, hundreds of thousands of students and young people demonstrated in coordinated protests across more than 20 European countries against the madness of war and social devastation. In Germany, around 150,000 workers took part in a 24-hour warning strike in the metal and electrical industries. Next week, a mass demonstration will be held in Belgium, while public sector workers in Greece will stage a nationwide strike on November 25.

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The main walkout was called by the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), the country's largest union confederation, for the full day across all public and private sectors, including contractors and support services. The call covered schools, health, public offices, local transport, logistics, ports, taxis and road haulage, but excluded air and rail transport. The CGIL claimed average participation of 60 percent.

Up to 50,000 people marched and protested in Rome as part of the main CGIL demonstration. In Milan, 100,000 protested. The CGIL said over 30,000 marched in Turin, about 25,000 in Naples. In Genoa, about 7,000 marched, plus about 500 students in a separate march; with a university occupied at the end of a march. In Cagliari, 20,000 demonstrated according to the CGIL. In Florence, around 10,000 participated.

In Bologna, riot police charged protesters near the headquarters of the employers' federation Confindustria Emilia. In Turin, where protesters burned an image of Defence Minister Guido Crosetto and University Minister Anna Maria Bernini, police blocked an attempt to reach the ring road.

The Meloni government did all it could to neuter the impact of the strike. Following the intervention of the Guarantee Commission for strikes in essential services, air and rail transport were excluded. Bus, tram and metro stoppages were limited to locally set hours, and several operators were exempt, including ATM in Milan, ANM in Naples, ATVO in Venice and AMTAB in Bari.

A separate rail strike, called by the SGB and CUB Trasporti grassroots unions, began at 9 p.m. Friday and runs until 8 p.m. Saturday. Air traffic controllers employed by ENAV, the air navigation services company, strike nationally from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, with a 24-hour strike at Milan's Malpensa airport on Sunday.

The grassroots Cobas Confederation, with the Clap and Sial Cobas unions, called a separate 24-hour strike in the public and private sectors, excluding transport, and held around 40 local demonstrations. The public sector section of the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) struck in schools and across the public sector.

The demonstrations nationally were marked by the presence of young people. In Rome, the grassroots unions organised their march with students, gathering at the Piazzale Aldo Moro outside La Sapienza University. *La Repubblica* said this was to "mark their distance" from the confederation CGIL. While the base unions adopt a more militant stance than the confederation they offer no strategy for overcoming capitalism, as the WSWS explained in its leaflet.

Students walked out of schools and universities as part of a co-ordinated global youth international strike. Demonstrations of youth and students took place in more than 50 Italian cities, according to *La Repubblica*. Its slogan was "We are fighting for our future, not for your war."

The youth protests had a pronounced anti-war character. In Rome, members of the Rete degli Studenti Medi burned an image of Defence Minister Guido Crosetto and a cardboard tank, chanting "We won't pay for the war," *Corriere della Sera* reported.

In Cagliari, CGIL confederal secretary Cristian Ferrari contrasted the lack of money for public services with "14 billion in expenditure over the next two years on debt" for armaments. The CGIL has a Stalinist tradition and is considered left-wing compared to other union confederations. But the CGIL leadership itself does everything possible to contain swelling mass anger from below into bankrupt pleas to Meloni to change course.

CGIL General Secretary Maurizio Landini addressed protesters at the conclusion of the march in Rome from Piazza Vittorio to Via dei Fori Imperiali. Speaking in Rome, Landini's appeal was directed to the government and parliament, "Deep down, they know as well as anyone that this budget is disgusting." He added, "We will not stop, because we are the majority in this country."

He called on "the entire political establishment" to "pay close attention and listen." But if they refused to listen, Landini did not threaten to escalate the struggle beyond sporadic one-day strikes. Instead, according to *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, he threatened to organise a "democratic picket" outside parliament if the budget was not changed.

The CGIL has lauded the rotten political organisations of the Democratic Party (PD) and the Five Star Movement (M5S)—both of which participated in previous pro-war and austerity governments—as a viable alternative to the Meloni government. PD leader Elly Schlein and M5S leader Giuseppe Conte marched alongside the CGIL in Rome.

Friday was CGIL's fifth general strike in succession against a Meloni budget, but all have taken place with the trade union leadership in other federations refusing to support them. The other two main union confederations, the CISL and the UIL, refused to support Friday's strikes on the basis that they were politicised by the CGIL and took place just before Meloni's budget was finalised. The cabinet approved the budget on October 28.



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