Europe-wide strike wave: Prepare a European general strike!

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A new stage of the class struggle is developing across Europe. Following the mass strikes in France and Italy, and the international youth protests against war, conscription and austerity, further strikes and demonstrations are approaching. The working class is increasingly emerging as the decisive force against war and social cuts.

On Tuesday, according to trade union figures, more than 500,000 people participated in a nationwide day of strikes and protests in France. On Friday, according to the CGIL, up to 1.5 million workers and young people demonstrated in Italy against the budget of Giorgia Meloni's government. At the same time, young people protested in numerous countries against war, militarism and austerity, including around 87,000 in Germany alone, according to the organizers. In Germany, 151,000 workers in the metal and electrical industries also staged a full-day walkout.

Today, Monday, a nationwide trade union mobilization is taking place in Belgium, with a mass demonstration in Brussels accompanied by strikes. On Wednesday, a nationwide 24-hour strike will take place in Greece, with hundreds of private-sector unions planning to participate alongside public-sector workers. Walkouts are also taking place in Portugal, Spain and Britain.

These struggles are not yet coordinated, but they have the same underlying causes: falling real wages, skyrocketing living costs, the destruction of public services and the shifting of the costs of war and rearmament onto the population.

This places fundamental political questions on the agenda. The struggles must be developed independently and across national borders into a European general strike that raises the question of political power. For this, the working class needs a conscious international socialist perspective and a new revolutionary leadership.

Such a struggle can only be organized independently of, and ultimately against, the trade union bureaucracies. They defend capitalism and fundamentally support the policies of war and austerity, and are themselves involved in organizing the war economy. That is why they seek to limit opposition nationally and in time, orient it toward the respective governments and strangle it before it challenges capitalist rule.

Belgium and Greece: The trade unions limit resistance

In Belgium, the policies of right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Bart De Wever have triggered a severe government crisis. His five-party coalition is struggling to agree on spending cuts and additional revenues totaling around €10 billion by 2029. Measures under discussion include restrictions on the automatic adjustment of wages to inflation, higher consumption taxes and attacks on pensions, healthcare and social benefits.

In early November, De Wever offered his resignation. The king sent him back to the negotiating table. On the very day of the nationwide mobilization, the prime minister must report again on the budget negotiations. The opposition of the working class is confronting an open government crisis.

Yet the leaderships of the FGTB, CSC and Synova trade unions are restricting the movement to a national day of demonstrations accompanied by strikes. They are presenting an alternative budget worth €21 billion, appealing to the government and explicitly declaring that their proposals are also intended to strengthen the competitiveness of the Belgian economy. Rather than fundamentally challenging the attacks, they are orienting workers toward national economic and budgetary policies.

The same question arises in Greece. The ADEDY trade union confederation is restricting its mobilization against the Mitsotakis government to a one-day strike. Its demands include wage increases and the restoration of the 13th and 14th monthly salaries in the public sector, which were abolished during the European debt crisis. At the same time, the government is financing a rearmament program worth around €25 billion.

Greek workers have bitter experience with the trade union bureaucracies and pseudo-left parties. For years, their struggles against austerity programs were restricted to one-day strikes. In 2015, the supposedly left-wing Syriza government imposed new social attacks, betraying both its promises and the referendum rejecting the austerity dictates of the Troika.

Both countries demonstrate why workers must not subordinate their struggles to national trade union apparatuses. A Europe-wide offensive by finance capital can only be confronted by an equally international and independent movement.

The trade union bureaucracies are part of the war and austerity policies

The same fundamental orientation is evident in Italy's CGIL, France's CGT, Germany's IG Metall and trade union apparatuses throughout Europe. They are closely integrated with the state apparatuses and corporations, and defend their national industrial bases and competitiveness. In the deepest crisis of European capitalism since the Second World War, this increasingly means subordinating workers to the demands of rearmament and the war economy.

This is particularly evident in Germany. Together with industrial associations, IG Metall is demanding the expansion of the German arms industry and a new fighter aircraft developed under German leadership. In Berlin, it is accompanying Rheinmetall's conversion of the former Pierburg plant from automotive supply production to the manufacture of artillery ammunition components, as well as similar conversions at other plants. In doing so, it promotes militarization as a means of "securing

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jobs.”

The French CGT also links its industrial policy to the defence of national military capabilities. In early November, it demanded state intervention to keep production facilities for the French navy and arms industry under French control.

Other unions, such as Italy’s CGIL, publicly criticize rearmament but likewise subordinate their protests to a national reform perspective. The CGIL has organized five one-day general strikes against Meloni’s budgets. Instead of developing an independent political struggle against the government and capitalism, it demands amendments to the budget and orients workers toward the bourgeois opposition, which stands just as firmly for militarism and austerity.

The national and temporal limitations imposed on the struggles arise directly from the social role of the trade union bureaucracies. They defend capitalism, are themselves integrated into the policies of war and austerity and seek to control resistance before it calls capitalist rule into question.

Pseudo-left parties support these policies: Either they directly back rearmament and war, or they spread the illusion that strikes and protests can force governments to fundamentally change course.

Capitalism leads to war and barbarism

The global capitalist crisis rules out any return to peaceful reform policies. All European governments—from Macron, Merz and Klingbeil to Meloni and De Wever, and even the nominally left-wing PSOE-Sumar government in Spain—subordinate social needs to the interests of finance capital and rearmament.

The summit of the so-called “Coalition of the Willing” in Berlin last Thursday demonstrated just how aggressively the escalation of war is being pursued. Representatives of 37 countries, along with the leaders of the EU and NATO, gathered at the Chancellery to continue military support for Ukraine and advance European war and rearmament plans. The German government backed the European Commission’s proposal for up to €45 billion in additional financial aid for 2027.

The European powers are risking a direct confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia and thus a devastating war. Workers and young people are to pay the price through historic social cuts, militarization, the destruction of democratic rights and ultimately with their lives on the battlefields.

The ruling classes are responding to growing opposition with intensified attacks, authoritarian methods of rule and preparations for war. This development arises from the contradictions of capitalism: the struggle for markets, raw materials and geopolitical supremacy, which intensifies conflicts between the imperialist powers and the offensive against the working class.

Capitalism is once again leading to war and barbarism. The working class must counter it with an independent international socialist movement.

Prepare a European general strike that raises the question of political power!

The foundations for such a movement are developing with every new strike wave and the radicalization of young people.

The intervention of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the youth protests on November 20 demonstrated the response to a socialist perspective. In Berlin, a spokesperson for the school strike committees took up the demand for a general strike: “From an international youth strike to an international general strike—that would obviously be the ideal outcome.” At the Free University of Berlin, an IYSSE speaker received strong applause for calling for independent rank-and-file action committees and a socialist orientation.

The IYSSE is fighting to unite the youth protests with the working class. Workers in factories, ports, hospitals, schools and transport have the power to bring the economy to a standstill and paralyze the war machine.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is spearheading the fight to mobilize that power consciously and internationally. It urges the formation of independent, democratically controlled rank-and-file action committees in workplaces, schools and universities, that unite their struggles across industries and national borders to prepare a European general strike, and provide the organizational framework for doing so.

A European general strike must not be another symbolic protest aimed at putting pressure on capitalist governments. It must become the starting point for a political struggle for power.

This requires a socialist program that expropriates the banks and corporations, and places the economy under the democratic control of the working population. The imperialist European Union must be replaced by the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe, united with workers in Russia, Ukraine and throughout the world.

Above all, the working class needs a new revolutionary leadership. The objective internationalization and radicalization of the class struggle do not automatically produce socialist consciousness. The decisive question is whether the growing mass opposition is armed with an international socialist perspective and a revolutionary party capable of uniting its struggles and transforming them into an offensive for political power.

The Socialist Equality Parties and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to build this leadership. The European strike wave is creating increasingly favorable conditions for this task, and the ICFI calls on workers and young people throughout Europe to take it up consciously and with the greatest determination.

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