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Italy

# Mass protests of youth and workers spread to Italy

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**On the interminable political news and discussion TV programmes here in Italy the pundits are all talking about ‘catching the virus’ of the huge protests in the Spanish state and France. Hundreds of thousands of students mobilized on 16 October. Tent protests have sprung up in some city squares and there were minority skirmishes with the police in a few places.**

On 17 October students joined the national demonstration against the spiraling cost of living called by the General Confederation of Italian Workers (CGIL) – the largest and most progressive of the union federations. Around 100,000 marched in Rome, beyond official expectations. There were more significant incidents in Milan where some shops were looted and some fires started. A police car was burnt out.

In the TV debates you see the same old positions expressed. Both the centre left and the right condemn all violence. The right wing call for a firmer response from the police and condemn the centre left for encouraging the demonstrations and not denouncing the incidents strongly enough.

Much is made of rupture between generations and the sense among many people that their future is looking a lot bleaker than previous ones. The mainstream press and the government are all issuing grave warnings about the risks of things getting out of hand on the general strikes called for 30 October by the rank and file USB unions and those on 20 November by the CGIL. Student organizations have already indicated that they are supporting these days of action and there is a national organizing meeting for students on 23 November.

## Spontaneity of youth upsurge

Luciano Cimino, for radical left daily newspaper, Il Manifesto described 16 October student mobilization in the following way:

“No national coordination between cities, no shared platform, no leading organisation – simply the announcement of a date led yesterday to student demonstrations on a scale not seen for years. Tens of thousands of people marched in the capital, two thousand in Florence, five thousand in Milan, and similar numbers in Turin, Naples, Genoa and Palermo. And hundreds more took part in marches in smaller towns, such as Latina, Mestre and Padua. In total, half a million young people took to the streets yesterday with a range of demands: the impact of the ‘security decrees’ on their schools, solidarity with Palestinians amid soaring rents, the climate emergency alongside the issue of gender-based violence. All united by opposition to right-wing parties that are increasing military spending whilst cutting welfare.”

The mobilization was called the ‘No Meloni Day’ calling out the far right prime minister who has denounced the protesters. You can see a significant degree of spontaneity at this stage. Social media means the message from France and the Spanish state travel fast and then it acts as an effective tool of mobilization.

The idea that there are ‘extreme left’ organizations behind the movement is just something the government wants people to believe. In that sense there are similarities with what is happened elsewhere in Europe. The Italian radical left is far weaker than in its heyday back in the 70s where it had tens of thousands of activists. Palestine solidarity has certainly played a role also in radicalizing young people before the recent demonstrations.

As in France, you can see too that young people from the poorer urban periphery are involved. They are at times more likely to be targeted by police since that happens anyway in their neighbourhoods and they are more likely to fight back. Consumer capitalism creates its own explosions. Young people are subject to endless advertising that only certain products will make them fully human. They have less money than ever, hardly surprising that when the opportunity arises a small minority will take advantage. As one said on the TV – my father would need two weeks salary just to buy some of this stuff in the luxury shops.

The government response has not been to negotiate or discuss improvements. Instead it has extended its power to put people it deems to be a threat to order in preventive detention. From now on it can also detain minors. New crimes and more severe penalties have been created. Government ministers have made ludicrous accusations today that the hand of Moscow or the Islamists are behind the incidents. It's all about hybrid warfare against the left and Western values because kids are nicking trainers from FootLocker.

## Trade union day of action on cost of living

At the end of the CGIL demonstration on Saturday there were many incidents. Fires were started. People attacked shops. A big Feltrinelli book store was invaded, books were scattered and some electronic items were pocketed. Official reports say 80% of those arrested were the previous day there were skirmishes in Turin and Bologna.

Landini, CGIL leader, provided some militant rhetoric at the march in Rome:

We are placing ourselves at the service of this process of change to put social justice back at the centre,' because 'this is not the time to ask young people to fight; it is time for us to fight to secure the rights they do not have, and the strike is the most solidarity-based tool there is'. A quote from Giuseppe di Vittorio (founder of the CGIL and member of the Constituent Assembly) is a must: "The working citizen, when alone, is weaker than the capitalist citizen.

(from *Il Manifesto*, Luciano Cimino 18 October)

## Poverty and inequality

So there is a potential for the demands of young people and of workers in general to come together. Already the south of Italy is being affected by industrial action taken by hauliers who are reeling under the costs of diesel. Poverty and inequality is rampant in Italy. As Franco Turigliatto from Sinistra Anticapitalista (Fourth International organization in Italy) points out on its web site:

- The full burden of PAYE tax (80 per cent) falls on the shoulders of workers and pensioners. A jeweller declares less income than a teacher.
- Too many flat-rate taxes for the self-employed, whilst inflation erodes pay packets.
- Reduced spending, steep utility bills.
- The cost of the weekly shop has risen by 24 per cent in five years.
- Electricity prices are up 13 per cent.
- The huge drain of rent, a hidden tax that eats into wages and savings. In Milan, rent amounts to 76 per cent of the average wage; in Rome, 65 per cent.
- Millions of Italians (5.8 million) are foregoing medical treatment due to costs and regional inequalities: the figures on the healthcare crisis. Healthcare spending in Italy has fallen to 6.2 per cent of GDP, a figure below the European average that places our country among the lowest-ranked G7 nations.
- Wages of Italian workers are lower than they were 30 years ago. It is less well known that the current wage agreement system is governed by rules which provide for wage increases linked solely to the price index, without, however, taking into account rises in energy prices. Not only, therefore, is any real improvement in wages prohibited, but their reduction is actually planned; all productivity gains benefit only the capitalists;
- Added to this disgrace is an even greater one: there are millions more workers in precarious or part-time employment, the vast majority of whom are underpaid, and many others working entirely off the books on starvation wages. [\[1\]](#)

# Right wing government stokes fear of other

One tactic the right wing government has been using to divide workers is to actively encourage fear over migration and crime. This works well for a key part of its electoral base which is self employed and small business people. Italy has a much bigger number of smaller family businesses than other European countries.

Fear of the other is also shamelessly cranked up by government passing laws against Muslims wearing the veil or the burka. Islamophobia is stoked and the rightwing split from Salvini's Lega by ex General Vanacci only encourages this. Taxation is modified to reduce its weight on the self employed and business. Attacks on Palestine solidarity is another form of this – the amalgam between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is pursued in further anti-democratic moves.

The febrile political situation is also animated by next year's general election. As is customary in Italy, the government is tweaking the electoral law so that the proportional representation system is modified to give an every bigger 'bonus' of seats to the winning coalition. The rules favour the formation of pre-electoral coalitions with the designation of the potential prime minister. This takes Italy further away from its much more democratic system that lasted until 1993. Meloni favours a more presidential system concentrating even more power in the hands of one individual.

As a result the opposition forces – the Democratic Party (PD) led by Elly Schlein, the Five Star movement (led by ex PM Conte) and the Left/Green Alliance (AVS) – are jockeying for who will lead the opposition coalition. There are some smaller even more moderate currents led by Calenda and Renzi (another ex PM) which may or may not end up inside the broad front. The prime minister designate will be decided by a primary where anyone can vote. Consequently the leader of the largest party does not necessarily win. Schlein's latest declarations tack a little to the left as she criticizes the historic tendency of the PD to make electoral coalitions with the moderate centre. Inside her party three are the 'reformists' who want to do precisely that.

## A fighting programme

We still do not know the programme of this centre left opposition. It will not be anything like the policies being proposed by Jean Luc Melenchon and La France Insoumise (LFI – France Unbowed) in France which do have a potential anti-capitalist dynamic. Turigliatto outlines some of the key policies that could repeat that in Italy:

- substantial pay rises, including the minimum wage and a new sliding scale;
- fair and proportional taxation;
- the rejection of increased military spending – indeed, its reduction – and the conversion of arms factories;
- a campaign against the normalisation of war;
- the rights of migrants – which are nothing other than the rights of everyone – and the unity of all workers, putting an end to the disgrace of detention centres;
- strong measures to restore public healthcare and the right to housing.

Of course the left needs to explain that the resources for this have to come from the pockets of the bosses and their profits. Over 40 years they have grabbed an additional 15 per cent of national income.

The anti-capitalist left in Italy has to build all these movements and the mobilizations on 30 of October and the 20 November. The various demands of the youth and students need to be brought together. A political alternative to the social liberal policies of the so-called centre left has to be patiently built.

### Mass mobilizations can help give people on the left hope again.

Speaking to friends and comrades here you feel that a lot could be built if people could overcome the years of demoralization. The revolutionary left used to have a consistent presence in parliament but that has not been the case for a long time now. There is unlikely to be a coalition or current running to the left of the broad front. Nevertheless successful mobilizations could at least prevent a Meloni government mark two. Current opinion polls still indicate this is the most likely outcome if the social balance of forces does not radically change.

20 October 2026

Source: [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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[1] Sinistra Anticapitalista, 30 September 2026 "[L'autunno delle ingiustizie. Unire le mobilitazioni dei tanti scontenti](#)".