

Tens of thousands of Stellantis workers strike in Italy

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Tens of thousands of autoworkers at transnational corporation Stellantis and many of its suppliers held a one-day national strike Friday in Italy. The main demonstration took place in Rome, where more than 20,000 workers rallied against Stellantis' threat of plant closures and layoffs.

The strike is the result of rank-and-file outrage over a situation where Stellantis has squandered a fortune over the years by blackmailing governments to obtain subsidies and then utilizing the funds it has extorted for the sole purpose of enriching a tiny layer of investors at the expense of workers' future.

Under enormous pressure from below, the leaders of the Fim-Cisl, Fiom-Cgil and Uilm-Uil unions were compelled to call for a general national strike. It was clear, however, that the intent of the union bureaucracy was not to wage a real fight, but to dissipate the anger of workers in order to control and disarm them.

Decades of government policies aimed at weakening workers' social position and emboldening multinational corporations have produced a situation that threatens as many as 24,000 jobs in the Italian automotive industry, in addition to more in many other sectors. The most obvious attack against workers came from the Italian Democratic Party, which sent its leaders to Friday's rally in Rome to make sure workers' demands are subordinated to the needs of capital.

Under then-Democratic leader Matteo Renzi's government, the Jobs Act was implemented in 2016, which dismantled most of the earlier gains achieved through bitter struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Article 18 of the Workers' Statute, providing protection against arbitrary dismissal, was destroyed by the Democratic Party, whose leader today, Elly Schlein, showed up at the rally in Rome and appealed to the fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, "criticizing the delays and hesitations of this government," which she pleaded "has to do more."

According to Schlein, the fascist Meloni government "has to do more." However, Italy's history contains important lessons from the 20-year rule of Mussolini's fascist regime. During those two decades, all workers' organizations were under ruthless attack, workers' struggles were violently suppressed and workers dragooned into world war. By her participation in the strike and appeals to the fascists, Schlein is not in any way standing on the side of workers. On the contrary by her groveling she emboldens the fascists to perpetrate ever more brutal attacks against workers.

At the same time the unions' uncritical support for capitalist, Democratic Party-led governments has allowed the ruling class to divert billions in social funds into the pockets of big finance.

In a further appeal to the fascist Meloni government and finance capital, CGIL General Secretary Maurizio Landini stated, "Prime Minister Meloni must summon Stellantis with CEO [Carlos] Tavares, the supply chain companies and the unions for a real industrial plan of revival."

As a measure of the level of collusion between the political elite and the union bureaucracy, fascist Minister for Business and Made in Italy Adolfo Urso declared his intention to use the trade union apparatus in order to submit workers to the needs of capital, saying, "I am very close to the trade unions and to workers, they know it."

Workers know no fascist is close to them. Moreover, no national government can solve the global crisis of capitalism that is at the root of the problem. The issues confronting Stellantis workers in Italy are the same as those in the US and every other country. In the face of an unprecedented systemic crisis, the financial oligarchy is using all of its means to squeeze as much profit as possible off the backs of workers by way of global restructuring, plant closures, layoffs and attacks on social programs.

The threatened closure of plants and job reductions in

Italy are part of a broader global effort by Stellantis to cut costs, which recently included the layoff of 2,400 workers at Stellantis' Warren Truck plant outside of Detroit.

The United Auto Workers apparatus in the United States sent a token delegation to the Rome demonstration. Like its counterparts in Italy, the UAW bureaucracy has sought to divert workers' anger away from a real fight against job cuts through pathetic appeals to Stellantis management and the Biden administration. Nationalist to the core, the union apparatuses are incapable of and hostile to waging a coordinated global struggle, which is the only way to confront the transnational auto companies.

Italian workers, like their brothers and sisters around the world, face precarious and unsafe conditions. Annarita Rosa, a data management and archival worker for Smart Paper, whose husband works in the auto supply industry, traveled to Rome from the Basilicata region to support the strike.

"In the complex context of my region, Stellantis has a heavy social weight from the viewpoint of working opportunities, since the region's economy relies on Stellantis as well as the whole supply chain," commented Annarita. "The strike is motivated by a desire to salvage the automotive industry. What's so terrible is that from the government we don't see any project, vision or future."

The Stellantis plant in Melfi, Basilicata employs about 6,000 workers from the region and has faced significant production challenges recently, including a reduction in shifts and frequent production stoppages. In 2023, the plant lost 1,300 jobs, mainly as the product of "voluntary" exit packages offered by the company to get rid of older and more expensive contracts.

Annarita commented on the consequences of Stellantis' policies: "They launched a plan of 'voluntary' layoffs. The social damage will be dramatic; many would have to leave the region, since it doesn't offer much and it has been hyper-exploited for decades. It could possibly become a vast dumpster for nuclear waste. The South also lacks infrastructure; it's a rather unsafe situation."

She also reflected on the political origin of the current situation: "The situation in the job market is dramatic, it's precarious and they blackmail us. There are mass firings taking place. Most workers have lost faith in the politicians. The Renzi government abolished Article 18, weakening workers and creating two tiers." She added: "Employers also save on safety, resulting in deaths on the job, which should not be a normal thing in a civilized

society."

Annarita also emphasized the correlation between war and the attacks on workers: "There's a genocide in Palestine, continuing to support Israel with weapons means fomenting war. The same in relation to Ukraine." She then concluded: "There's a correlation, because all resources utilized for war and weapons need to be used for jobs, infrastructure, public health."

Also in Southern Italy, the Pomigliano d'Arco facility, known as the Giambattista Vico plant, is located in the greater Naples metropolitan area. Established in 1972, it currently manufactures the Fiat Panda, Alfa Romeo Tonale, and Dodge Hornet. Over the years, the number of employees has gone from almost 7,000 to the current 4,600, of which only 3,000 actually work, with the others on redundancy fund. At least 424 jobs are at immediate risk.

Tommaso Pirozzi, a worker at the plant, was critical of the confederated unions: "While they demand more [social] funds in favor of Stellantis and Tavares, we want a different industrial plan." Tommaso insisted that what is required is "the nationalization of industry."

He too identified the responsible parties for the current situation: "For the last 20 years we have been in a state of perennial crisis... From Fiat to FCA to Stellantis, a long series of programs, first [former CEO Sergio] Marchionne, then Tavares, had only one goal: maximum profit with the help of the state, stealing money from the public purse through redundancy funds (Cassa Integrazione) and subsidies, with the complicity of political parties and trade unions."

He continued: "Instead of a real fight against Fiat/Stellantis for the preservation of jobs and to make sure this crisis would not fall on the backs of workers, in reality they continued to demand funds to gift Tavares."

"Everyone remembers when Marchionne came to the Cassino plant, at the time there was Renzi [government], and asked for more money in exchange for nebulous productive plans that were really lies and no political or trade union force has ever demanded their application."



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