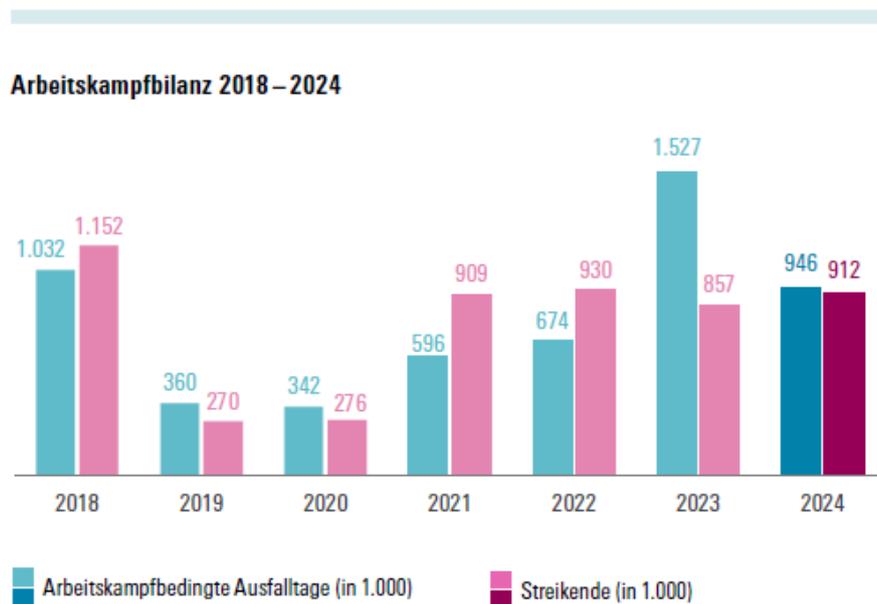


# The development of social struggles in Europe. Reports from Italy, France, UK, Germany, Slovenia & Russia

## (1) Decline of the strike as a means of protest of the working class

During our initial meeting in Varna 2023, we discussed the increasing number of strikes in European countries. We analysed it more as a reaction to inflation than an expression of new union or working class radicalism in general. Some individuals had been more optimistic about the future of class struggles. They highlighted the class experiences in the context of the strike wave. These experiences of struggle with both the capitalists and the union leadership could raise class consciousness. However, for now, we observe a decline of strikes. We can see this in Germany (strike-related lost labour days (blue)/ strike participants (pink)). Unfortunately number for 2025 are still missing in the WSI statistics.



In the year 2025, we expect a decline in the number of strike days in comparison with the years before in all European countries. Of course, there are some exceptions:

- Italy had seen an enormous strike wave in 2024. There was an average of three strikes per day, a quarter of which were in the transport sector (but also in schools and universities (also explicitly against militarisation), hospitals (doctors and nurses – 80% participation, 24 hrs), steelworks (car workers) and in logistics. However, we do not know the numbers for 2025.

## (2) Decline of the car industry and growth of the war industry

We observe an economic downturn all over Europe which affects especially the metal sector. That is why the massive nationwide strike movement in metal sector in 2025 in Spain is very interesting. Thousands of metalworkers went on strike for one week, after that the yellow unions stopped the strike and made an agreement with the capitalists. More often, it seems that the crisis atmosphere weakens the strike capacity of the workers and their unions. For example, the warning strikes at Germany's biggest car producer VW with 100.000 participants had a very defensive character. It was a defensive struggle against job and wage cuts in the context of the crisis of the car industry. Of course, the IG Metall agreed in the end to job cuts. The transformation crisis has also negative consequences to the working classes of other countries like Slovenia. Slovenian component producers are highly integrated in the production networks of German car factories. There are no projects like Ex GKN in the German (or other national) car industry as this is not in the current strategic repertoire of the unions.

However, it was mentioned that the weapon industry is getting more important in various countries (Germany, Italy). The case of Leonardo in Italy demonstrates that the good business opportunities for the weapon producers strengthen the unions' bargaining power in this sector. However, weapon factories will not offer jobs to all the unemployed car workers. Rhein Metall, Germany's biggest weapon producer, will only create 500 new jobs. There is repeated talk of converting automotive production facilities for weapons production. However, little progress has been made in this direction so far.

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## (3) Austerity regimes

It was reported about cuts in social expenditures in many countries (e.g. end of reddito di cittadinanza, which was a social program for unemployed (Italy) or the Herbst der Reform (autumn of reforms) (Germany)). Often, they did not cause mass protest movements. Comrades from three countries reported protests against austerity:

- Hessian university employees protested for one day against budget cuts by the state
- In the UK, we saw a protest movement against the cut of the Personal Independence Payments, which is a benefit for disabled people.
- There is a coalition of unions against a pension reform in Slovenia. However, there were no mass movements.

There were also protests in France after the summer camp against cuts to social benefits and pensions. However, such massive social mobilisation seems unrealistic in countries like Germany or the UK.

## (4) Anti-War- & Palestine-Solidarity-movement

Despite the decline of strike activity and few protests against social cuts, we saw protest movements in the last month. The peace and Palestine solidarity movement was quite huge in many countries.

In Italy, single protests against the transport of weapons to Israel and war territories have taken place since 2023. After the camp, there were more labour protests against the war in Gaza in Italy and Spain in autumn 2025. So, a strike was used as a weapon in non-economic conflicts, which is unimaginable in countries like Germany or the UK at the moment.

After the end of movements like Fridays For Future, the anti-war and Palestine solidarity movement became more important everywhere in Europe (Italy, UK, Slovenia, Germany etc.). Some reporters noticed quite an explicit sympathy for Hamas at the protests in their countries (Italy). We will have to continue to monitor this trend. It is also unclear whether this movement will continue to develop after the provisional ceasefire in October 2025.

## (5) Social movement of the far right

Beyond those two movements, big protests were organised by the far right. The English comrades report on the anti-asylum seeker movement in the UK:

*The main protest movement of the last year were the riots against asylum seekers, which are currently flaring up again. The media give these protests a lot of air time, perhaps in order to create a social atmosphere which allows the government to increase the amount of anti-migration raids, as Labour deported many more migrants than the Tory government, and to restrict migration laws, e.g. there is a new deal with France to curb boat migration, the work visa regime has been changed, you now need to work 10 instead of previously 5 years in order to apply for citizenship. At the same time, these riots are more than a media show, they are a new composition of far-right organisers, local lower working class with many women and children involved and a strata of self-employed building workers or small entrepreneurs. The riots mainly happen in the poorest parts of the country.*

At the same time, it is not unrealistic that the right wing party Reform UK could become the strongest party in the upcoming elections. Also in other countries right wing parties are very strong in the polls or in government. In the last meetings, we neither had a focus on those protest movements, although mass mobilisation and violence against migrant and PoC took place, nor on the implications of right-wing governments for our struggles and strategies.

In the discussion, we noticed an antagonism in the national debates: Migration is considered necessary everywhere, even if it is fought against ‘populistically’ everywhere. Even in smaller countries like Slovenia, migrants play an increasingly important role for the economy, especially in the low-wage sector. The Slovenian comrades report:

*There has been a significant uptick in migration from South Asia (India-Kerala, Nepal, Bangladesh and Philippines) in the last two years. The workers are coming on both work and student visas. These new migrants and asylum seekers from African and Middle Eastern countries now present an important share of the workforce and pose a new challenge for organizations dealing with labour rights since they are mostly used to dealing with migrants from former Yugoslavia.*

The new labour regimes, which are based partly on the exploitation of migrant workers of different countries of origin in different ways, are challenging for activism inside or beyond the labour unions as the quote shows. We discussed in the meeting we should dive deeper migrant labour at the upcoming meetings.

## (6) Restrictions on the right to strike and protest

Different governments – not only explicit fascist governments like in Italy – introduced new laws that have limited the rights to protest in the last years. The Italian comrade reported:

*The DDL Sicurezza introduced by the Meloni government includes more protections for police and secret services, and higher sanctions for protests, road blocks, squatting, prison revolts and passive resistance (including in prisons). For instance, participating in a roadblock as part of a demonstration, organising a rave or squatting a building can result in six years or seven years in prison respectively. Sanctions have also been increased for crimes against those employed in law enforcement. There are also specific sanctions for those who protest against public works (this aims to punish protest movements such as the No TAV movement or the No Ponte protests in Sicily) or who commit crimes on railways. It also allows the state to strip new citizens of citizenship if they commit a crime and makes it more difficult for migrants to get SIM cards*

However, militant workers and social movements are not only oppressed in Italy. Spanish comrades mentioned several cases of imprisonment and high fines for labour activists, e.g. the imprisonment of metalworkers from Cadiz (Spain):

*The recent demos in Cadiz caused 24 arrests, some of them were sent to immediate detention accused of throwing stones to the police. One of them being the son of one unionist from CTM, a very good target to press the union reps. The leaders of this union have been organising the workers of the subcontracted metal companies in Cadiz province and cannot work anymore after being blacklisted, so they had to quietly work in a cooperative in order to survive. In the*

*general strike taking place in 2021, 3 metal workers are sentenced to 10 and a half years of prison plus 64000€ in fees for demonstrating against the loss of job positions. The socialist government brought a tank against the demonstrators that year.*

Furthermore, it was reported about the criminalization of protest actions against sexual abuse in a Spanish bakery. Not only the labour activist but also the Antifa suffer repression in Spain. Right-wing judges sentence Antifa activists who protest against the VOX party very harshly. The Spanish comrade writes in the country report:

*Antifa movement has caused several imprisonments to start with the 6 in Zaragoza who are imprisoned for almost 5 years for participating in a legalised demo against the right win party VOX, accused of vandalising public property. Little after them, the 7 of Somosaguas are facing accusations of “hatred crime” (delito de odio), crime of attack against authority and coercion, who more likely would end up imprisoned. It’s quite crazy because the counter demo was legal whereas a right win spokesperson in the university was called off. Anyways, their tactic is to appear and provoke to target demonstrators afterwards. Judges in Spain are being consider as extremely right wingers.*

The new protest law and the experiences from Spain should be seen as a warning for social movements and the working class in other countries. Massive repression of the solidarity protest with the Palestine took place in UK and Germany.

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## (7) Country report from Russia:

As it is hard to compare the situation in current Russia with other European countries, I will add the short version of the country report here:

*In Russia, trade unions (unlike in Ukraine) are not restricted, but they do not go on strike anyway. There are strikes, but they are mostly wildcat, short and small, usually because of outstanding wages, and most often they end in legal decisions that employers should pay - but it is unclear whether this is implemented. Legal battles. Largest trade union loyal to the state, second largest critical, against the war, syndicalist group, no longer represented in companies. Last major strike in 2023: delivery centers of Wildberries (biggest online retailer), including background disputes over shares. Full capacity utilisation in war zones, special payments. Migration: harsh restrictions – but cheap labour is needed; recruitment from Myanmar in residential complexes – but little labour from Myanmar due to military service there. Protests against local construction projects. Small environmental protests with regional nationalist connotations. It is entirely unclear and controversial whether the ‘person-centred’ Russian regime can hold out.*

## Conclusion:

- The social movements of the left and the labour unions (both social partnership and base unions) seem to be too weak to react to the current attacks of the state (war and austerity) and capital (transformation). They are not able to stop the process of fascisation which takes place all over the world, and weakens the social movement even more (e.g. new anti protest laws and political court decisions).
- Labour markets in Europe, also in the Eastern European periphery, need an increasing number of migrant workers, especially in the low-wage sector. The digitalization created a lot of new jobs in this sector, and the citizens of the countries do not want to work there. At the same time, right-wing and fascist parties can use the topic of migration to mobilize voters. It is unclear where the contradiction will lead. In any case, we are seeing a simultaneous increase in violence at Europe's external borders, which is also a concession to the radical right on the one hand, and new recruitment strategies of countries like Germany, UK, Slovakia (and also Russia) in Africa and Southeast Asia on the other.
- However, the anti-war protest demonstrates that mass mobilisation and a politicisation of strike is still possible. It remains to be seen to what extent these protest experiences will play a role in future disputes.