

# *Italians Protest Government Economic Policies*

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Rome, October 25 (RHC)-- Workers in Italy have staged a nationwide strike to protest against the government's economic policies including cuts to public services and labor reforms.

On Friday, the USB union called the 24-hour walkout that disrupted train services and local transport in several cities across the country including the capital, Rome.

The demonstrations expressed discontent with a new labor reform package presented by the administration of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. Under the initiative, procedures in Italy's labor system will be simplified with aims to boost employment. The new measures will also reduce a variety of job contracts and layoff benefits.

Proponents have applauded the approach, saying companies hiring young workers on a full-time basis will benefit from lighter taxation and will have a better chance to dismiss workers.

Meanwhile, opponents of the reform package say the move undermines the rights of the workers and fails to address the underlying causes of decades of economic stagnation.

Although official statistics indicate that the unemployment rate in Italy hovers over 12 percent, labor market experts insist that the situation is much more alarming.

Italy's inactivity rate among those aged between 15 and 64 years has recently been recorded at nearly 40 percent. Over the past decade, Italy has been the slowest growing economy in the eurozone as tough austerity measures, spending cuts, and pension changes have stirred serious concerns for many people already grappling with the European country's ailing economy.

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