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## **CLASS STRUGGLE IN ITALY: 1960’s to 70’s**

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# Glossary

## MAJOR CORPORATIONS:

*FIAT*: Largest Italian and European automobile manufacturer, based in Turin, owned by Agnelli family.

*Pirelli*: Milan based Italian rubber manufacturer, linked to Dunlop's in Britain, owned by Pirelli family.

*Montedison*: Italian chemicals manufacturer, based outside Venice, dominated by state ownership vested in IRI, ENI, and Banco d'Italia.

*ENI*: Italian state petroleum corporation.

*Italsider*: Italian steel manufacturer, dominated by state ownership vested in IRI.

*IRI*: Italian state holding company with stock portfolio covering Italian industry.

*Banco d'Italia*: Italian central reserve bank.

## POLITICAL PARTIES:

*DC (Christian Democrats)*: Largest party based among Catholic voters, governing Italy with changing coalition partners since World War II.

*PCI (Italian Communist Party)*: Second largest party, chief opposition to DC.

*PSI (Italian Socialist Party)*: Main Social Democratic party, vacillating between alliance with PCI in the unions and DC in the Cabinet.

*PSDI (Italian Social Democratic Party)*: Right-wing anti-communist labor party originating in Cold War split from PSI, member of governing coalition.

*Republicans*: Small party of liberal urban professional and white collar workers.

*Liberals*: Traditional laissez-faire capitalist party with anti-clerical heritage.

*MSI (Italian Social Movement)*: Neo-fascist amalgamation of old fascist and monarchist parties, based largely in the South.

## LABOR ORGANIZATIONS:

*CGIL (General Confederation of Italian Labor)*: Largest trade-union confederation, led by PCI and PSI,

*CISL (Italian Confederation of Free Labor)*: Second largest trade-union confederation, originally a DC union for Catholic workers which has moved leftward.

*UIL (Italian Union of Labor)*: Product of Cold War anti-communist split from CGIL, currently collaborating with other confederations, led by PSDI and PSI.

*FIOM*: Metalworkers' union of CGIL.

*FIM*: Metalworkers' union of CISL.

*UILM*: Metalworkers' union of UIL.

## HOUSING AGENCIES:

*GESCAL*: State agency for planning development of public housing.

*IACP*: State agency for the building and managing of Italian housing.

*UNIA (National Union of Italian Tenants)*: Traditional national tenants' organization led by PCI.

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*Radical America*, Vol. 10, #4, 1977

## **The Italian Background by Ernest Dowson**

### **“Reconstruction” and “Economic Growth**

After the Second World War, the Italian ruling class, aided by the Marshall Plan, began the reconstruction of a capitalist economy. The parties of the Left, including the Communists, co-operated with them. The revolutionary hopes of the workers who had fought against Fascism were traded for a seat in the Government. All over the country anti-fascist groups, who had been armed since the time of the Resistance and were now preparing to combat the presence of the US, were persuaded to lay down their weapons. Once the threat of armed insurrection was out of the way, the bourgeoisie swiftly ousted the Communists from the Government and set about a program of suppressing working-class organizations. The trade unions, particularly the militant metal workers' union (FIOM) at Fiat, were broken up. Conditions were now ripe for the exceptional growth of Italian industry, which lasted from 1948 to 1962. During this period, with considerable financial backing from the State, massive investment occurred, especially in export based industries and automobile production. Industry was streamlined, and the most modern methods were introduced into the factories. This growth, far from benefiting the workers, was largely paid for by them through the low wages and lousy living conditions they endured. Since the new industry was highly automated it only very slowly created jobs, and unemployment remained high throughout the period.

### **The South**

This industrial growth was concentrated in the northern cities and was based on a policy of keeping the South poor and underdeveloped. Southern Italy's position in relation to the North is very much like that of the North to the South in the US, or that of Ireland (North and South) to the UK. Predominantly an area of agricultural work, it has a long history of a client system based on large landowners. Jobs, homes, schools, everything depended on the patronage of the local boss. This system was maintained after 1945, with the difference that control was no longer in the hands of the landlords, but was now in the hands of government officials who handled public money. Agriculture was “rationalized” into larger units and mechanized, and millions of people were driven off the land into the cities, especially Naples and Rome. Between 1950 and 1967, some 17,000,000 Italians, more than a third of the population, moved from one district to another. Although a certain amount of small industry and construction work did come to the South, it was not enough to prevent a massive migration to the North. This constant reserve of labor was exactly what the Italian bosses needed. It helped to keep wages down, even when the demand for workers began to grow.

The year 1962 brought the first halt to this murderous progression. The workers at Fiat came out on strike and demonstrated in the streets of Turin. The demand for workers, caused by the boom of 1959, was beginning to push wages up, while unemployment was falling. Italian bosses began to find it more and more

difficult to make the massive profits to which the boom years had accustomed them. Investment began to tail off, and more and more money went abroad or into other more lucrative areas such as property speculation. Now, instead of pushing up productivity by the introduction of new machinery, as they had been doing, they began to put the squeeze on workers to work harder. Speeds on the production lines were pushed up and up, to become the highest in Europe. The years during which their organizations had been smashed gave Italian workers no chance, for the time being, of resisting this process.

### **Conditions in the Cities**

The bosses managed to retain the upper hand, and conditions for the workers grew worse. Unemployment rose once more, and the prices of food, housing, and transportation shot up in an ever-growing inflationary spiral. Life in the cities became unbearable. The growth of Italian capitalism had involved a massive influx of people into the towns. From 1951 to 1961, the four largest urban districts (Milan, Rome, Turin, and Naples) and their outlying districts had a population increase of 2,000,000, two-thirds of the total national increase in population. From 1951 to 1969, the population of Turin and its suburbs alone grew from 868,000 to 1,528,000. The bosses and their State did nothing at all to make this forced migration less painful. Public housing was minute. The main State agency, GESCAL, built only 390,000 apartments between 1949 and 1971- the same number that was built privately in one year. In 1971, GESCAL built 3,254 apartments and had a waiting list of 138,931 families. GESCAL gets its money from the workers and the employers. The workers' contribution is 0.6% of their wages, and the bosses' is twice that. A good deal of this money disappears through corruption. The rest is invested either in industry or abroad, and will remain there, since it takes years for GESCAL to get planning permission for its projects. More over, GESCAL usually gets outbid for the little land that becomes available by private developers. Thus workers had to find accommodation where they could. People often had to sleep six to eight to a room, and shanty towns spread around the large cities. When apartments could be found, rents consumed up to 40% of a worker's wages.

### **Bosses' Crisis, Workers' Struggle**

By 1968 the workers were beginning to fight back once more. The incidence of strikes and absenteeism grew rapidly, and in the South there were a number of violent riots. At this time the Italian economy was entering another difficult phase. Competition for markets was increasing between Italian firms and rival firms, especially from the US. In many cases there was direct competition between, say, Fiat and Ford, Pirelli and Firestone, or Italian oil companies and their US equivalents. This process was reflected also in an increasing antagonism between different sectors of Italian capital: between large scale industries, Italian owned and heavily subsidized by the State and small scale industry, relying on or even owned by US companies. The small firms were increasingly faced with either liquidation or absorption into one or another of the larger monopolies.

In 1969, many of the important three-year contracts in the metal working

unworkable, and with their ability to resist and counter the direct repressive attacks by the State. The new agreement over a national COLA package, which includes revised rates for domestic electricity, has marked a significant step forward in the process of the unions' integration into the capitalist state apparatus. The extension of their bargaining functions into the politically explosive area of essential consumption makes the unions a crucial partner in capitalist planning. Not only do they co-manage the determination of wages and their distribution, they also co-manage the way wages are used in the area of social consumption. In retrospect, the unions' course of action had other significant implications in terms of the dynamics of the struggle. Their involvement had the function of separating the initial autonomous links between factory and neighborhood mobilizations and then attempting to impose a new link "from above" by co-managing along with the State the new electricity rates and their acceptance. This illustrates clearly the crucial political importance of the unions in the context of Italy's economic and political crisis; they are the only institution that can mediate between the worker as wage-earner, and the worker as consumer of essential goods and services, and thereby continue to conceal the exploitation of unwaged workers - above all housewives.

### **A Chapter Closes**

The agreement, however, has merely closed another chapter of this struggle. It has not put an end to the self-reduction practice, which, particularly in the neighborhoods, has continued practically unaffected by the trade-union/government politics. Nor has the mobilization in the factories been brought to a complete halt. The last few months or so, in fact, have witnessed a revival of the struggle in an increasing number of factories. A motion to support the struggle for the self-reduction of electricity approved at a special meeting of 1,000 workers' delegates from the Milan area indicates the degree of resistance the unions may still encounter among workers. In part this new upsurge stems from the workers' reaction to the new electricity rates, which became effective in January. The new rates are based on a graduated system, depending on the level of consumption of each household. In effect, for a typical working-class family consuming an average of 450 kilowatt hours per quarter, the new rates mean an increase of 33%.

Many feel this increase is certainly worth a struggle; particularly the millions of housewives for whom a forced reduction in the consumption of electricity means that all those domestic services which normally are done through electrical appliances, will now have to be done by hand. If the present policy of Italian capitalism is to reduce levels of consumption in order to patch up the current economic crisis, it has become clear to what extent the burden of this political operation falls on the shoulders of housewives. It makes it possible to squeeze from them huge new amounts of unpaid labor without serious inflationary consequences. The present Italian crisis has shown with unusual sharpness the importance of the home as a unit of production, and housewives as protagonists of the struggle against capitalist planning in this sphere.

solutions.” (L’ESPRESSO, September 29, 1974, p. 8)

When this “alternative solution” started rolling, it was again the old-time Italian union politics. While the lower-level union leadership in the main supported this new wave of militancy - being directly confronted by this new upsurge of struggles - the national leadership was buying time, avoiding a clear-cut position. This posture was largely dictated by the necessity to maintain the shaky balance of alliances among the three national union federations, which has repeatedly been threatened by the “ungovernability” of the working-class, and consequently by the state of crisis in which all political parties are enmeshed.

### **The Government Falls**

This wait-and-see strategy began to pay off when the Rumor Government resigned in early October, setting off a long governmental crisis which lasted throughout the rest of the month. The absence of a cabinet at a time when the self-reduction movement was quickly spreading throughout the country undoubtedly had the effect of dramatizing the impact of this wave of struggles. It also contributed to giving the unions - the only institution which could conceivably control and manage the upsurge - the leverage necessary to influence the formation of the new government. The political formula which enabled the new Moro Government to take power at the end of October is too complex to be discussed here. One essential ingredient of the formula, however, was the support given by the unions, on the condition that the Moro Government would commit itself to a national re-negotiation of cost-of-living allowances. A further condition was a revised schedule of electricity rates. From now on, the autonomous and rank-and-file controlled development of the self-reduction struggles had to be stopped. The logic of class mediation and the unions’ credibility vis-à-vis the government demanded it. During the long period of negotiations between the government and the three national union federations - culminating in the agreement by the end of December - the impact of the unions’ new policy vis-à-vis the self-reduction movement became evident in the factories. The overwhelming majority of workers’-councils executives ordered a stop to the mobilization. This meant that workers who wanted to continue the struggle had to do so in opposition to these union bodies. The confrontation was often fierce, showing the extent to which the unions cared more about their credibility with the government than about their credibility with the workers. At the ALFA SUD auto plant near Naples, for instance, the target of 2,500 reduced electricity bills was reached by bypassing the workers’ council. At the ITALSIDER steel plant, in Bagnoli, several workers’ council executive members were forced to resign from office because of their opposition to the mobilization.

### **Back to the Neighborhoods**

Despite these and other successes scored by autonomous rank-and-file forces in several factories throughout Italy, it was clear that the self-reduction mobilization at the factory level had been severely affected by the imperatives of trade-union politics. To a large extent, therefore, the continuation of the struggle lay with the neighborhood mobilizations, where the mediation of the unions was proving

industry were due to expire, over 50 of them. Many of the large firms were eager to negotiate new terms and to settle with the unions as peacefully as possible, thereby avoiding large scale disruptions of production. For their part the trade unions and the CP, and their parliamentary spokesmen, were ready to make a deal. They were hoping to strengthen their own position and to have their Importance recognized officially. The CP had dreams of once more of entering the Government. They were also worried by the existence of several unofficial workers’ committees and “base committees” which had emerged during the previous year. In exchange for industrial peace they would ask for higher wages and the promise of social reforms. But to ensure their bargaining position they had to mobilize the workers, at least enough to show their strength. And this was their big mistake, because the workers had had enough. They weren’t going to play the game of token gestures.

### **THE “HOT AUTUMN”**

Before the unions could sell them out, the workers were on the move. They soon went far beyond the control of the unions. For instance, when workers at Fiat were called out on a one-day token strike protesting the killing of a Southern worker during the rioting at Battipaglia, they refused to leave the factory, and started to take it over instead. Very quickly people began to develop aims, tactics, and organization which had nothing to do with what the unions were after. They didn’t just want a wage increase; they wanted the abolition of the grading system, equal pay raises for all, and a drastic reduction in work speed. Rather than passively coming out on strike, as the unions wanted them to, they began to organize a struggle inside the factories, with mass meetings on the job, rotating strikes in different sections which brought production to a standstill, marches through factories involving a lot of damage to plants, and direct confrontation with management. New organizations began to take control of the struggle, base committees at Pirelli (Milan) and at the chemical works in Porto Marghera, and the worker-student assembly at Fiat Mirafiori (Turin). Factory newspapers began to appear. Links were established with groups of students, and meetings were held regularly at factory gates.

This explosion inside the factories demonstrated decisively that the “economic partnership” which the bosses and the unions were interested in would not happen. The growing use by Italian firms of assembly-line production techniques had drastically changed the nature of work and the work force. The older, skilled workers, with pride in their work, who had been the backbone of the trade unions and the CP, had no place among a newer generation of workers whose individual skills were unimportant and who didn’t give a damn about the “dignity of labor”. Many of these young workers had come from the South, from agricultural communities with a long history of direct and violent struggle, where the burning down of the local town hall and the occupation of land were common happenings. They were part of a militant tradition, but not part of a trade union tradition. So when the militancy of these workers came into the open, the unions were not able to channel the struggle into demands for higher wages and reforms, as the French unions did in 1968. In the hope of buying peace, the bosses desperately made big concessions on wages. Between 1969 and 1970 wages went up by 23.4% compared with an average annual

increase of only 9% over the previous 10 years.

The signing of the contracts was concluded only a few weeks after 16 people were killed by fascist bombings in the center of Milan. The ruling class was developing two tactics for dealing with the militancy of the workers concessions and reforms on one hand, and open repression on the other. The continuation of the struggle inside the factories and its extension into the communities meant that the ruling class increasingly chose the second option. In the factories militants were sacked or moved into other jobs, fascists were planted to spy on militant workers, and many small firms closed down. At the same time, unemployment and prices rose sharply.

### **1969-1973: Four Years of Struggle**

Since the “Hot Autumn” of 1969, the class struggle in Italy has spread from the factories to every area of people’s lives. The working class has fought against their rotten housing conditions with widespread and prolonged rent strikes and mass occupations of empty flats. People have fought against rising food prices, expensive transportation, inadequate schools and nurseries, and lousy medical facilities. They have begun to create within their communities a new way of life, outside the control of the bosses. What’s more, Italian immigrants have taken the germ of this struggle beyond their national frontiers to other major European cities.

**Rents:** Throughout the country thousands of tenants have been on rent strikes, some lasting for several years. Tenants’ slogans have been “The only fair rent is no rent!” and “Housing is a right. Why pay rent?” Independent organizations like the Milan Tenants Union make sure that control of the struggle stays in the hands of the tenants themselves.

**Occupations of buildings:** Hundreds of people have been involved in taking over empty buildings. In Milan, during one series of occupations, 30,000 marched in a revolutionary demonstration through the city. In Taranto 182 families occupied a public-housing project in February 1973. The police came to throw the families out, but were forced to leave when the squatters were joined by hundreds of workers from Italsider, the steel plant, some of whom were squatting themselves.

**Food prices:** Militant women have picketed supermarkets. In Milan there were clashes with police. In Pisa, people organized a Red Market.

**Transportation:** In Spinea and Mirano (suburbs of Venice) workers and students stopped all busses from running as part of a campaign against high fares and bad service. They took some of them over and drove them all over the area. In Trento, workers commuting to factories refused to pay fares, saying that their wages were low enough.

**Schools:** There have been strikes and occupations of primary and secondary schools and universities in every major city. Since the autumn of 1969, when worker-student assemblies were formed, there have been many occasions on which workers and students have fought alongside each other. In the schools, the kids have fought for free books, free transportation, an end to exams, an end to the class bias in education, the opening of schools to the community, and so on.

**Health:** In Rome a Red Health Center was set up to provide free medical treatment.

self-reduction struggle as merely a show of solidarity toward factory struggles would be clouding a very important class process with empty leftist rhetoric. Their role as central protagonist can only be understood by the fact that their material conditions of work are the immediate target of capital’s attack, and hence that this struggle is in a very important sense their struggle against their increased exploitation. Only after this point has been made clear can one talk about solidarity.

In this light, the struggle to reduce substantially the monetary cost of a family’s productive consumption has become very crucial for the survival of many working-class households. This is particularly true in many large urban neighborhoods, such as in Rome and Naples, where many people make their living through marginal occupations (petty trade, black marketing, prostitution, etc.). The fact that in most of these cases the wage relation between capital and the male breadwinner is either non-existent or highly unstable has produced a dynamic which escapes the trade unions’ mediating mechanisms. This explains why in these cases the self-reduction practice has exhibited a higher degree of autonomy both in its direction and in its content, allowing housewives to exercise the leadership which the terrain of these struggles confers on them. It is important to note, for instance, that in many of the cases the slogan was not “50% reduction” (the directive given by union officials in factory mobilizations), but rather “let’s pay the rates that bosses are charged” - which means a reduction of over 75%.

### **Factory/Neighborhood**

The contrast between factory mobilizations and neighborhood mobilizations can be better grasped when one looks at the strategy pursued by the unions in order to control and channel the self-reduction struggles - a strategy which is reminiscent of the 1969 wave of factory strikes. The initial outbreak of self-reduction struggles and the workers’ use of the workers’ councils (most of which are union-controlled) forced union officials to take a position. Similarly, in many large working class neighborhoods, the Communist Party was confronted with the situation of many party militants joining the self-reduction struggles and often even using the local Party sections to help the mobilization. But while the CP leadership did not take long to condemn this practice, calling it “divisive” and a “provocation” by a few extra-parliamentary groups, the situation was much more complex for the trade-union leadership.

There is no question that the role played by local union officials - many of whom are members of other Marxist organizations - was very instrumental in gaining the support of the various labor bodies, especially in the Turin and Milan areas. But for many other union officials, the outbreak of self-reduction struggles was viewed in the context of the increasing dissatisfaction among workers with the unions’ obstructionism in the development of a broad mobilization against the rising cost of living. This was clearly expressed by the Secretary of the Turin Labor Council: “... what is at stake here is our relationship with the people; what is being questioned is our ability to build an alternative. In these last months the credibility of the unions has hit a low ebb. (... in order to regain it) it is not enough to demand 50,000 or 100,000 liras for the workers; we must instead come up with alternative political

### Self-Reduction Committees

This mobilization however, was not confined to factories. As this practice spread throughout Italy, self-reduction committees sprang up in urban neighborhoods as well as in small rural towns. In some of the large urban districts the setting up of these committees was facilitated by the prior existence of neighborhood committees with a long history of community struggles. Most of these committees are made up of delegates, a few from each block or apartment building, whose task is to mobilize their neighbors, coordinate the activities of various buildings, and make links with nearby neighborhoods and factories. The support given by ENEL workers who often refused to enforce the company's orders to disconnect electricity was also an important factor contributing to the success of the struggle. Through this combination of factory and neighborhood mobilizations, by the end of December tens of thousands of electricity bills had been collected in each major Italian city. Turin was at the head, with about 140,000 bills collected.

To a large extent the political significance of this wave of struggles lies in the territorial link-up it is providing between factories and neighborhoods. As a worker from Naples explained: "In Naples in the past we have had experiences of self-reduction of water bills, gas bills, and electricity bills; but they have always been restricted to some building or some neighborhood, and have never caught on in the factories or in the unions. But today the situation looks quite different, and offers a great political potential." (LOTTA CONTINUA, October 4, 1974. p. 2)

### Speed-up in Housework

It is, however, in the neighborhoods that this mobilization is having its most dramatic effect, because it is often interwoven with other struggles such as squatting and self-reduction of rents. Moreover, despite the fact that often factory workers have been the spearhead of the mobilization, it is ultimately at the level of the neighborhood that the brunt of the struggle has been borne. This is where people have to face ENEL officers who come to either collect the bills or disconnect the electricity. And this is where they often have to confront the police and the fascist groups who are sent to disrupt the mobilization. It is this dimension of the struggle which has shown the crucial role of housewives as central protagonists. Their role stems also from other considerations. If there is one item of productive consumption which falls squarely within the work of housewives, this is electricity. The increase in the electricity bill amounts in effect either to a speed-up imposed by the State on housewives, as it would force them to perform the same amount of domestic services (cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning, etc.) in a shorter time, or to an extension of their working day, as it would force them to do more work by hand.

It is obvious that capital's attack at the level of productive consumption stems from its difficulties in halting the wage increases that workers have won in the factories. Although this attack is directed against the working class as a whole, it tries to exploit the division of labor (factory labor versus domestic unwaged labor) on which capitalism rests, by hitting a weaker sector of the class, i.e., by squeezing more unpaid labor from housewives. To see the role of housewives in this wave of

It became a center for organizing struggles around living and working conditions, the real causes of ill health. Throughout the country, Left-wing doctors have become involved in fighting class based medicine. For example they have given evidence in court cases involving workers whose health has been impaired by factory conditions. Their evidence has been essential in combating the evidence of the bosses' doctors.

**Prisons:** Prisoners in many Italian jails have been fighting against their conditions. In prisons in Milan and Naples cells have been set on fire and prisoners have gone onto the roofs with banners. A Red Help organization has been formed to support their struggles from the outside.

## ORGANISING AT FIAT

"In statements to the Bologna newspaper *Resto del Carlino* today the heads of Italy's two largest industrial groups, Sig. Gianni Agnelli of FIAT and Sig. Giuseppe Petrilli of IRI expressed their anxiety over the situation in industry, which is grinding to a halt because of the strikes. In describing the situation within the plants, Sig. Petrilli said bluntly that it amounted to anarchy." (*Financial Times* 8th July 1970)

*This is a speech made by a FIAT worker National Conference of Workers' Base Committees in Turin July 26th-27th, 1969 describing the build-up to the struggles of the Hot Autumn in Italy, reprinted from La Classe #13-14, August 1969. The speech deals with the period from Battipaglia, (a massive riot by tobacco workers in response to layoffs), when FIAT along with many other Italian factories struck in sympathy with the dead worker, to the battle in Corso Traiano. It explains how the workers organized inside the factory, the demands they were putting up, and how they planned the struggle over the renewal of the contracts in the autumn of '69.*

COMRADES,

I speak to you as a worker from FIAT Mirafiori. I want to explain how our struggles started there, how they developed, and the lessons we feel they hold for all Italian workers.

Nobody could say that our fight at Mirafiori developed out of the blue. It was the product of everything that the working class had learned by their struggles of 1968-69, and at Mirafiori the way in which all these experiences came together marked an important step forward in our political growth and understanding. In April 1968 the union called us out on yet another routine strike concerning hours, piecework, and speed-up. And this was where it all started. We realized immediately that our unity and militancy on the strike were much higher than we had expected

and that if we acted on our own strength we could really make something of the strike. But right away the union jumped in to keep us in check by calling for referendums, secret ballots, and the like. Everybody understood what the union was up to, but at the same time we weren't able to put this understanding into practice. We knew that it was time for us to take the leadership of the struggles into our own hands, and that this was something we would soon be in a position to do.

### **BATTIPAGLIA**

It was during the strike in sympathy with the two workers killed in Battipaglia (April '69) that we took our next step in this direction. We are workers who come from the South, and we carry on our shoulders the full weight of the exploitation that capitalism allows in the South so that it can increase its profits in the North. We were angry, and instead of just going home as we would have done on a normal strike, we stayed inside. Just downed tools and ambled off the job, right under the noses of the foremen, to a mass meeting in the canteen. This was our first step toward internal struggle keeping the struggle inside the factory and the workers at Mirafiori were beginning to discover their own strength. It was a good experience. After the strike, not surprisingly, many comrades thought that we should begin to push harder. But for the time being this was difficult, because there was nowhere they could turn for organizational support. The unions were out of the question, and the students hadn't yet arrived on the scene.

The strike for Battipaglia was a political strike. A factory in the North responds to and concentrates the immense drive of a city that revolts in the South. The revolt was against planned underdevelopment that drives young, able-bodied men and women from the South to seek work at FIAT and other factories in the North. But we can say that the struggles that began almost immediately after the Battipaglia strike were political too. They began in the Auxiliary Plant, and spread like lightning to the crane drivers, the trolley drivers, and the press shops, and in every case were dominated by the militancy and the drive of the immigrant workers. Immigrants from the South, showing their anger against the boss class, against the whole planning policy of capitalism, its government, its police, et cetera. They arrive in Turin, hunting the big wage packets they have heard so much about, but find instead that FIAT is a slave camp. Naturally they rebel. They refuse to work. Passively at first (with thousands of workers a day going off sick), but then more actively. They force the unions to call strikes, and really begin to make their presence felt.

### **UNION STRIKES?**

The labor unions had 1969 all planned out as far as strikes were concerned. They wanted a whole series of strikes just involving a few people at a time, so that production would never be blocked completely, and so as to prevent large numbers of workers getting together. But we took the initiative and speeded things up, which meant an almost total stoppage of production, involving the great majority of workers. When the union called a two-hour stoppage, the men made it four, and later stepped it up to eight. And different shops would stop work at different times, so causing maximum havoc. The presses weren't producing a thing, the crane men

action was ready. Workers set up tables near the Pinerolo bus terminal with signs

all around saying "Refuse the fare increases!" But more importantly they issued substitute weekly bus tickets, selling them at the old price (tickets are normally bought by commuting workers on Monday and entitle them to a week's travel). The bus company responded by shutting down its operations, so hundreds of Pinerolo workers that morning did not go to work, and continued their mobilization. In the afternoon they sent a delegation to the Regional Bureau of Transportation to demand that the old fares be reinstated, and that in the meantime the substitute bus tickets be accepted. After a few days of pressure, the Bureau ordered a suspension of the new fares.

The spark had caught fire. Within a few days, similar events were occurring throughout the heavily industrialized region around Turin. On September 17, the Regional Authorities issued new guidelines for interurban transportation fares applicable to the 106 private bus lines operating in the region - guidelines which substantially reduced the increases already enacted or proposed by the bus lines.

The first round of self-reduction struggles had yielded its fruits. The practice, however, was quickly spreading to other regions of Italy, disseminating chaos in municipal and regional governments and in the trade-union bureaucracies. By the end of September the media networks were hysterically condemning this outbreak of "civil disobedience", and the Italian Communist Party was solemnly reminding workers that the only valid method of struggle is the strike.

### **The Electricity Bill**

The next logical step for the workers was to apply this form of struggle to other areas of social consumption. The electricity bill figures high in the budget of most working-class households, and it is to this item that the struggle suddenly turned. One could hardly think of a more politically explosive choice. For one thing, in Italy the electricity industry is nationalized and adopts rates which are applied throughout the whole country. The State would therefore become the direct target in a struggle whose potential for generalization among the working-class would be enormous. Moreover, popular sentiment against the state-controlled electricity corporation (ENEL) was at a high point because of recent increases in electricity bills at a time when the corporation had been caught in a scandal involving the financing of political parties. ENEL's policy of granting reduced rates to industry as a form of subsidy (roughly 25% compared to domestic-use rates) also added much fuel to the fire, as it was viewed by many as a blatant act of discrimination. The initiative came again from the heavily industrialized areas of Turin and Milan. The initial support given by local trade-unions officials, or local union bodies (such as for instance the Turin Labor Council) was very instrumental in facilitating mobilization of workers in factories. It made it possible to utilize the organizational apparatus of the workers' councils for this purpose, especially once the councils' executives had expressed their support of the struggle. In most cases, the mobilization involved setting up "self-reduction committees" whose task was to collect workers' electricity bills, often bearing the stamp of the unions. Workers would then enter the new amount, usually cut by 50%, and pay the bill.



# The Working-Class Struggle Against the Crisis: Self-Reduction Of Prices in Italy

by **Bruno Ramirez**

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With an inflation rate of over 25%, widespread unemployment, and increasing repression, Italy's current economic crisis shows how far capital is willing to push its attack against the living conditions of the working class. One of the distinct marks of this crisis - in Italy as well as in other capitalist countries - is the extent to which class conflict has widened, involving directly the area of social consumption. The dramatic increase in the cost of living is in fact setting off a wave of struggles dictated by the working class' need to protect their wage gains, and to ensure adequate access to essential goods and services such as food, housing, utilities, and transportation. It is no coincidence that - particularly in Italy - capital's massive move onto this terrain comes after a long cycle of factory struggles which have yielded considerable gains in wages and working conditions. It shows the coherence of capitalist strategy - a coherence which has been forced to become explicit by the organized resistance of wide sectors of the working class. The practice of "self-reduction" - i.e., the refusal to comply with price increases of essential services - is an answer that has emerged from this terrain of struggle. The character of this struggle raises important political questions for both capital and the working class. How can this struggle be mediated and brought under control? To what extent does the brunt of this struggle fall primarily on one sector of the working class - i.e., housewives, as the central protagonists in the area of social consumption?

## Self-reduction

Self-reduction is not an entirely new phenomenon in Italy. For instance, at Magliana - one of Rome's largest working-class districts - some two thousand families have been practicing self-reduction for the past two years, cutting their monthly rent payments by 50%. And this is by no means an isolated case. What is new is the way in which this practice has spread to other sectors of essential social consumption, such as public transportation, electricity, and home heating. When viewed in the context of parallel practices - such as squatting and organized mass appropriation of groceries from supermarkets - this struggle becomes more than merely a defensive one. It becomes, as some militants have called it, a struggle for the re-appropriation of social wealth produced by the working class but unpaid by capital.

When on a Monday in August 1974 hundreds of commuting workers found out that their bus fare from Pinerolo to Turin had been increased by almost 30%, few people would have predicted that such a relatively insignificant event could provide the spark for a new wave of struggles. To those commuters, the fare increase - decided by the bus line during the two-week summer shutdowns - sounded like an act of cowardly provocation. It took only a few days to organize some action and mobilize the commuters traveling on that line. The following Monday the plan of

and the trolley drivers had nothing to transport, and thus the production lines were virtually at a standstill.

This was dangerous for the unions. They had lost control, and they had to try to stem the tide of the workers' struggles. So they tried the same arguments that the foremen and the supervisors use: that every hour that the workers struck autonomously (that is, unofficially) should be penalized. But the threats didn't work, and the strike carried on. The very fact that the line was not running sparked off meetings and discussions among the men: first of all inside the factory, next to the stationary assembly lines, and then outside, together with the groups of students who had gathered at the gates. The strike spread down the line, and political discussion followed it. Everyone was arguing and talking, and it was suggested that the demands of the Press Shop could be taken up by the assembly lines. The strike had begun in protest against the speed of the line. But work speeds are decided from above in the factory, and are based on the whole way that capitalism organizes work, that is, gradings and wages. So our initial limited protest soon spread to all aspects of the work relationship.

## WILDCAT

For the moment, though, it was important to pass from words to action. There was one line still running, and we had to stop it, even though it was our weakest point in the factory. And this is where the Snake came in. For three days there were stoppages up and down the line, and we would all get together in big groups and march round the factory, pulling out anybody who was still working. This was how we stopped the "500" line. And we added demands for big wage increases to our initial protest. At this point the union really tried to throttle our struggle. It reached into its box of tricks and pulled out a new disguise for itself: the line delegate. They said that the delegates would represent us, but in actual practice the delegates' only role is to negotiate with the boss the extent of our exploitation and just as we say NO to exploitation, we say NO to the delegate. If we really need anything like a delegate, then our attitude is that WE ARE ALL DELEGATES. When they try to speed up the line, we'll just stop working.

That's the way we organize internally, and naturally the union's game did not succeed. After two days of official union stoppages, and four days of truce for the negotiations, the unions mistakenly thought they had the situation back under control. But on the very day they informed us that they had signed the agreement about the delegates, the strike restarted, and once again all the lines were stopped. The unions had called four days of truce, but we had used those four days to prepare our struggle, to clarify our demands, and during those days, in some shops, our thrust began to take on the forms of a real autonomous organization. This time there were hundreds and hundreds of us marching round the factory in the Snake, and we marched till we came to the big office block that houses the administration. We weren't going to avoid a confrontation with the management and the unions, in fact we went looking for it, determined to hit them where it hurts. By this time things were no longer running on an ad hoc day-to-day basis. In Shop 54 we knew we would be able to last out about a week. So we organized with other shops so that they would relieve us

when we'd had enough. And sure enough, at the end of a week, the strike is taken up by Shops 52 and 53 and once again the lines are at a standstill.

## **ORGANIZATION**

All this has needed, and will need, organization. We have begun to build organization at two levels, both inside and outside the factory. There are groups of workers who get together on the job, and they organize with the students into intervention groups outside the factory gates. Then there are the worker-student assemblies that we have been holding every day in a warehouse near the factory, where we come together to exchange and share news and information from all the different plants and factories in the FIAT complex.

But these assemblies don't just work at the level of co-ordination. On one hand we began producing leaflets to tell workers in other parts of the complex how our struggles were going, and we also began to take initiative in deciding what course the struggles would take. In fact it was in one of these oh-so-many assemblies that the workers and students decided to organize the demonstration for July 3rd of this year, which, as everybody must know, exploded into a great workers battle. At this point (July '69) we are now faced with the coming clash over the renewal of the contracts, and in the light of this, over the past few weeks, we have been restoring a strong degree of autonomy to the worker-student intervention groups at the gates. The aim of this has been to widen political discussion at a shop-floor level, and to put us all in a better position to begin to consolidate the organization of all workers at all points in all of Fiat's factories. When the official union strikes begin this is going to be crucial.

## **WORKERS AND STUDENTS**

There are some things that ought to be said about our relations, as workers, with the students, and about the relationship of the factory as a whole to the external political groups. Our reason for deciding to work with the students was, and is, political. The students with whom we work are people who fight, and who are ready to fight with us, and like us, against the common boss, right to the end. The unions and the political parties will not fight the boss to the bitter end: they stop halfway at compromises that only end up reinforcing the control that our employers have over us. This means that they're always fouling up the works, trying to put the brakes on our struggle, trying to slow us down. It's clear to us that if you're going to fight the employers right to the last ditch; you need organization and a clear political understanding of what you are going to do. It is a struggle that's going to last a long time, and you can't just improvise it from day to day. But we do not accept that we should be fed this organization and this understanding ready-made by groupuscules that come round advertising themselves and who are far more interested in strengthening their organization than in helping us in our fight. In the last few months, we have seen many of these groups coming round, particularly when the struggle's all over. But we have had nothing to do with them. It's for us to create our own organization and our own political understanding based on our own experiences of struggle continuously discussed and examined among ourselves. The contact with the students is also

Large numbers of kids have rheumatic fever, heart conditions, bronchial pneumonia, and so on. School is a place to catch diseases, just one more reason for not going. The kids spend the whole day hanging around the area in a freaked-out state. But they're still not too young to learn how to hustle . . . so many families have someone in Poggiorale prison or Filangeri juvenile prison.

After nine years of demands, a miniature school was opened. From the outside it looked beautiful, but inside there was no electricity or heating, and the children shivered with cold. They had to go to school wearing hats and scarves. After two weeks the new school was closed, and the kids went back to their old shanty hut of a school. But now there were too many of them, so the school had to be run in two shifts. The results are exactly the same as before. Few kids go to school, there's a high turnover of teachers, and no one studies. No one does anything. It wasn't long before people had had enough. So they began to organize and prepare for a fight. They held a meeting and organized marches in the neighborhood. The kids came out on strike. They felt that they had to carry the struggle beyond the area. So groups of parents went to the center of Naples, to the Department of Education and to the Town Hall. They shook up the bureaucracy: "We've had enough of rubber stamps and promises. We want the school reopened immediately, with the electricity turned on." The various officials responsible were really scared but it still wasn't enough to get them off their backsides and make them finish the building. People realized that they were in for another swindle, and immediately began organizing again. They cordoned off the school with chains, and a large number of people went to the Town Hall to put pressure on the officials. They forced the authorities to come to the area the next day so they could see for themselves what things were like. The headmaster and the teachers joined in what was going on, though they'd accepted shoddy treatment for years. From now on the school will be run on different lines, because the community is taking direct control over every aspect of its running.

the bosses and bureaucrats things were getting too hot, Two hours later the President returned and announced that he was going to withdraw the injunctions for rent arrears. For the time being people decided to leave the Institute (by then it was 6 pm), but the struggle for these objectives was to go on. The most active of all the people were the women, the true militants of this day of struggle and clashes with the police. Among other things, they succeeded in freeing a comrade who had been arrested by the police.

*Palermo, 1973*

Early this year building workers took over a block of luxury flats they have just finished building. They moved in with their families and other working class people. Police were called by the local CP administration, but could not gain access to the barricaded block of flats.

## **NAPLES**

The local capitalists have hardly invested in industry, finding it more profitable to make money in real estate and tourism, as well as through Mafia-run industries like prostitution and smuggling. The main sources of employment are various forms of hustling. Children, who are particularly successful at this, play an important role within the economy of the family. Unlike other cities, in which schools are places where kids are accustomed to the discipline of work, in Naples working-class children are systematically discouraged from attending school. In this situation, the struggle to keep a school open takes on a wholly-different dimension: parents are refusing to allow the system to put their children on the streets.

*February 1970.* Secondiglio is an Ina Casa housing development on the outskirts of Naples. It's one of the many dormitory suburbs into which the bosses shove all the people they don't want around the city center. Go back 10 years, and it wasn't so bad, at least on the map. But it wasn't long before it became clear that the map was only for show. No one had any intention of making it a reality by making the area a pleasure for people to live in. A dump of a flat was enough; there were no decent streets, no services, no schools, no parks.... (These things aren't profitable for the investors). There are about 14,000 people there. About 2,000 of them are people who, having waited 10, 20, or even 30 years in hovels, have now been re-housed in apartments without adequate windows, without water, without drains, without furniture, without light.

The first struggle in Secondiglio was for a primary school. People wanted a prefabricated building to hold a thousand children, and the promise of a proper building before too long. About 40% of the children attending school are at least a year behind the normal. Another 30% are two years behind the normal. About three months after the beginning of the school year at least a year, many kids get demoralized and stop coming. And then came the "motherly" advice of the schoolmistress: "School's not for you. Why don't you get a job?" The worst crime of all is the way kids are made to believe that school only runs up to the 6th grade (primary) level. Local industry couldn't supply itself with cheap labor otherwise. As a result, 90% of the "educated" have only a primary school certificate, and 30% are illiterate. What's more, the children are highly vulnerable to all kinds of illnesses.

useful in other respects, because we can pool experiences of struggles in other places, as the first step toward our unification with the struggles of all working people; farm laborers, peasants, white collar workers, technicians.

## **CORSO TRAIANO**

And inevitably, the organization that we have created will have to come to terms with not only the problems inside the factory, but also the problems of the workers' life in the city of our relationship with this dormitory city, this robber city of Turin. We have understood that FIAT controls this town, and that therefore it is not good enough to fight just inside the factory. We must also fight outside. The struggle must become generalized, massive, and social and this is precisely what happened a few weeks ago, when the struggle spread outside, and we had the street fighting in Corso Traiano. By now everyone knows the story of Corso Traiano. After the battle we went back into the factory with our heads held high. We have not been defeated. We are not defeated. Anybody who says that the struggle has died down since Corso Traiano is forgetting two elementary facts: First, that Agnelli (head of FIAT) has not managed to regain control over the speed of the line, over timings, over the whole way production supposed to run. Second, that he has not been able to do this because our organization is getting stronger and stronger inside the factory.

We say this so as to highlight a tendency: that is not to say that Agnelli finds himself unable to speed up the line, to state categorically that from now on he is going to find it less and less possible. The workers of Mirafiori are no longer going to be trodden on. We have organization now, and not the sort of organization that is only strong during high points of struggle. The proof of this is Agnelli has been forced to take back various people that he had sacked or transferred, because of the organization response from the workers in Shops 53 and 54 and in the Auxiliaries. But this is not enough. We must go further. The next stage will be the renewal of the contracts. In September, the majority of Italian workers (metal workers, chemical workers, building workers, and others) are going to find themselves called on strike, all together, by their union.

We know what the contracts mean for the unions and the employers. They are their way of ensuring that workers only fight once every three years, and that after that they sit still and behave like good children, the contracts are a sort of cage, in which the worker is locked up, and the unions given the keys and told to make sure that the cage stays shut. But in the last year, in hundreds of factories all over Italy, it has become clear that workers don't accept orders from bosses or from unions. The employers would have liked to come to the renewal of the contracts after a long period of social peace and with a working class that was divided and weak. But the battles that workers have been fighting over the last year have smashed that plan one factory after another.

Now, the first thing to be said is that we refuse to tie ourselves to the contracts. The employers and the unions have already planned out the strikes for the contracts, but we refuse to fight by their timetable. However we realize that we shall be able to use the renewal of the contracts for developing our own struggle. It will enable us to use the strength that we have developed, and unite the factories

that have been in the vanguard of the struggle with those that have so far remained outside it. The employers and the unions use the contracts as a means to keep us down, but we shall transform them into weapons with which the working class will be able to organize and fight. We shall use them to develop the revolutionary political organization of the workers and all working people. We shall do this by consolidating and generalizing the lessons that we have learned from the struggles of the past year. The workers have virtually expelled the union from the factory, and have begun to formulate their own demands, and carry them forward in a fight that is led entirely by themselves. During contract struggles we shall have to make this a permanent conquest of the working class, in every Italian factory, in every productive sector, exploding all the ways in which the contracts and the unions are designed to divide and weaken us.

During the struggles of the last year certain demands have cropped up repeatedly. We must take these and use them as our first priority to unify workers throughout Italy. They are: equal wage raises for all, not linked to productivity or any other employer's standard (like time and motion, incentives, plus payments, conditions payments, et cetera), an immediate reduction in working hours, without loss of wages, abolition of compulsory overtime, abolition of the lower gradings as the first step toward abolition of all grading divisions and complete parity with the white collar workers. We are organizing political discussion on these points by circulating a discussion document inside the factories. But it is not enough for us to know what we're fighting for, because we also have to know how we're going to fight. The age of passivity is dead. The old days are past in which we would wait for the union to call a strike from the outside, and then take a day's holiday at home. It is possible, in fact probable, that as the autumn progresses wildcat actions are going to start happening in the same way in other factories. And if, in any place, the union does call an official strike, then it will be used by the workers as a chance to move, united, into the fight.

### **OUR FIGHT: OUR POWER**

The sort of strikes that the union intends to call for the autumn are the sort that cost us the most and cost the employers the least, the sort where the employer has plenty of warning of the strike, and can organize himself so as not to be hit too hard and the sort that gives us precious little help to get together and organize ourselves. But in the strikes at Mirafiori, and previously at the PIRELLI rubber factory in Milan, as well as in many other advanced struggles recently, we have been able to organize in new ways. We have understood that if the factory is the heart of the employer's power, then it can and must become the center of our power. We have understood that organizing and fighting inside the factory allows us to come together to discuss and organize much more than was the case when we all just used to go home for the day. And we have understood that if we use this sort of organization arranging to relieve each other in our strikes, taking it in turns to strike, we shall hit the employers more effectively, and pay less of the cost of strikes ourselves. This kind of autonomous organization already exists in many shops at FIAT, and during the strikes for the contracts this autumn we are going to have to spread it both to other parts of the

city, the street cleaners, the fishermen, and the unemployed were particularly quick to act. Today there's not one apartment left empty in all these buildings. But we know that there are many other buildings empty around here and in other parts of the city. We've got to find out where they are, because the whole city is in ferment, and all the working-class people want to occupy houses."

### **PALERMO**

#### *Red Flags over the IACP—April 1971*

The NEZ (Northern Expansion Zone) is an IACP estate about 10 miles outside Palermo. About a thousand families live there, mostly unemployed building workers, clerical workers who occasionally work on the land, and fishermen. These families are mostly earthquake victims from the Western Sicily earthquake disaster of June 1968. They took possession of the houses after they had been requisitioned by the Prefect. Many people simply squatted in them. Of course the IACP regards this occupation as "illegal" and it has started sending out injunctions for the payment of arrears: 30,000 lira (\$500) per flat. On Thursday, March 27, there was an occupation of a block of flats that were still being built. The police came to evict people, but the houses were occupied again, and this time the people stayed there.

Since the building was still not finished, the squatters themselves organized to get the drains working and set up electrical supplies and so on. On Sunday there was a mass meeting to discuss the problem of the injunction. There were 300 people there, mostly women, who are the most active and determined people in this fight. A strike of the whole area was scheduled to begin the next day, and a platform was approved including flats to be provided officially for everyone; cancellation of all arrears of rents; building of roads, schools, and all the amenities which are totally lacking in the area; and self-determination of contributions. The people of the NEZ area don't want to talk in terms of rent, because they don't agree with the idea of paying rent. But they are prepared to provide a small contribution, according to what they can afford, for the building of new homes.

The next day (Monday), beginning at 4:30 in the morning, the whole area was at a standstill. There were pickets on the street corners, as well as a large contingent of police. People gathered in the Central Square, and at 8:30 am a march set off in the direction of Palermo. Women and children rode in cars and trucks, and men walked. Throughout the march the police continually provoked people. The marchers arrived at the IACP offices in Palermo. The police set up a cordon across the road, but the marchers broke through the lines and about 50 demonstrators managed to get into the building. Others got in over the balconies and through windows. Inside the IACP there was a huge commotion: For once the tables were turned on the people who govern our lives. When the women came into the building all the officials beat a hasty retreat. The President of the IACP appeared, pale and trembling, and agreed to speak to some sort of "delegation". He tried to evade their questions and give nothing away. But the demonstrators decided to occupy the Institute. Meanwhile the people who had stayed outside began to mobilize other people in Palermo. The Base Committee from the shipyards arrived, and also a number of working people from other parts of town. This struggle became a reference point for everyone. For

to live lies in becoming a member of a political organization. Frustration erupts in angry, violent outbursts, for instance in Battipaglia, where days of rioting followed the closure of a local factory. Over the past few years there have been a growing number of housing occupations (Salerno: 80 families; Torre del Greco; Messina: 328 families; Carbonia: 130 families). In Syracuse, where houses are usually allocated to the “clients of local political bosses, people’s anger became so great that new tenants had to take possession of their apartments under heavy police protection. Other projects which had been walled up before they were finished had their entrances smashed open by violent demonstrators.

## **TARANTO**

### *Occupation of GESCAL apartments*

In December 1970, 200 families occupied apartments belonging to GESCAL (the State housing authority) in the working-class district of Tamburi. They had been living in the slum tenements in Via Lisippo. Police threats and vague promises from the Council had no effect on them. People had gotten it into their heads to take direct action. They took the initiative themselves, going around from tenement to tenement, organizing and bringing people together.

One of the activists said: “We have abandoned all faith in politicians, people who come round every five years asking us to vote for them. They say they’ll give us work and homes, but every time they just leave us where we are, in the cold and damp. We hate them all, because they live off our slavery. And they do everything in their power to make sure people don’t rebel and take what is rightfully theirs. Because we’ve behaved ourselves, because we’ve listened to their promises, dozens of children have died in the slums where we live. We have all had illnesses, and we have all suffered. We shall bear these marks within us for ever. The people who have our suffering on their consciences will be made to pay dearly, pay the whole price. We organized the occupation the evening of December 2. Within a few hours the slums were empty, but the GESCAL apartments were full. Now the apartments are OURS. We haven’t got water or electricity yet, but we’re already getting water from down in the courtyard, and we’re trying to organize the provision of supplies for every apartment. And as far as the electricity is concerned, we’ll see about that too. Meanwhile we’ve begun cleaning the place up. It’s never very nice wearing yourself out with this sort of work, but at least it’s a bit more satisfying than sweeping out the rat holes we were living in before. We’re happy. We’re confident in ourselves and our own strength. We’ve organized in each building and made links between buildings. We intend to keep these apartments, and we need to organize to keep the police out. We’ve had a couple of meetings everyday to talk over any problems, to clarify our ideas, and to decide what has to be done. We’re keeping in contact with other people in the area, and trying to spread the word to people in the factories. On Sunday, December 6, we had our first general meeting. This was important because it meant that we could all get together, and we could also talk to workers, women and children, and unemployed people from different parts of the city. It wasn’t just the people from the slums who organized this occupation. The initiative came from there, but it quickly spread to other parts of the city. The folks in the old part of the

plant, and to other factories that it has not yet reached. For us the password is FIGHT INSIDE THE FACTORY, because it is only through fighting inside the factory that we shall be in a position to outlast a prolonged clash with the bosses and the State. We must put them in the weakest position, where they will have to pay the highest price, and not us.

## **THE AUTUMN**

I need hardly say that all this does not mean that we should confine our struggle to the shop floor. But we must use the factory to build the strength that will mean we can move outside of the factory in a way that is not totally disorganized and in such time as we ourselves may choose. This also means that when employers try launching particularly hard attacks on us inside the factory, like lockouts and reprisal sackings, we shall be in a position to respond equally hard with an intensification of the struggle inside the factory, to the point of actually occupying it if need be. Now, the struggles in the autumn are going to be hard. Nobody is saying that we shall see the final frontal clash of the proletariat with the armed forces of capitalism for the conquest of State power. But in the last year, Italian workers have revealed a certain revolutionary awareness that their problems are class problems, and that the only way to solve them is to mount an attack on the system that perpetuates them, with the aim of destroying capitalism and abolishing all classes. Our problem now must be to use the struggles over the contracts this autumn to translate this general awareness into organization the general autonomous organization of the Italian working class.

## **BATTLE IN CORSO TRIANO**

*This article is taken from La Classe Number 10, July 1969. It is an account of a demonstration called by workers and students in Turin which developed into a running battle with police and spread to many other parts of the city.*

### **THURSDAY, JULY 3RD, 1969**

*5:00 am:* Groups of workers and students gather at the gates of the Mirafiori and Rivalta plants for the strike picket. By 6 am barely a single person has entered the factory, either at Mirafiori or Rivalta. At Gates 1 and 2 of Mirafiori the police are out in force, with lorries and Black Marias. Police Chief Voria is doing his best to intimidate the workers and students: the picket lines are repeatedly being broken up and pushed back to the other side of the wide avenue that runs round Mirafiori.

A few scabs try to get in, and the police do everything in their means to prevent them being stopped. Despite this no more than five or six manage to get in, and at Gate 1

they are immediately met by workers coming off the night shift, who drive them right back out of the gates again.

*1:00 pm:* Tension on the gates is rising. At every entrance the picket lines are growing. Whenever the workers try to stop the few scabs who are trying to enter the factory for the second shift, they are charged by the police.

*2:00 pm:* In the area in front of Gate 2 the workers of shifts 1 and 2 begin to gather, along with a few hundred students. There are already more than 3,000 people there, and people keep arriving. There are two big banners proclaiming "All Power to the Workers" and "The Struggle Goes On". A hundred, maybe two hundred police, in full riot gear, with helmets and tear gas, begin pushing people to the center of the area, deliberately provoking them and trying to isolate them in every way. The Police Chief announces that under no circumstances will the march be allowed to leave.

*2:45 pm:* People are still standing there when the police make their first charge, brutal, with them using their rifle butts as clubs. From this moment on the charges follow thick and fast: the people disperse, regroup, scatter, and regroup again. Police reinforcements arrive and begin to fire tear-gas grenades. They fire directly into the crowd. Nobody can breathe, and everybody scatters into the surrounding fields. The police start grabbing people. The response is immediate: the center of the street is won back again, and cobblestones gathered from the bed of the tramway begin to hail down on the police from all sides. They are driven back. By now the struggle is reaching mass dimensions. Seeing that it is now impossible that the march should start from Mirafiori, a new departure point is proposed.

*3:30 pm:* Around ten thousand people gather between Corso Agnelli and Corso Unione Sovietica. Then the march sets off. But when it turns into Corso Traiano the police attack in force, using jeeps to charge the crowds and tear-gas in incredible quantities. They try to encircle the crowd with a pincer action: with Carabinieri on one side and Public Security police on the other. Now a violent urban guerrilla battle begins which will last right on into the night. The police, with their violence and their tear-gas, are concentrating on preventing even small groups from re-forming. It is plain that they are absolutely determined to stop the march getting together again: they must foil any attempt at a repetition of the Piazza Statuto incident.

In the two hours that follow, the demonstration seems apparently to have dispersed. But in fact nobody has left the scene, and groups of people are reorganizing spontaneously, throwing rocks, and then dispersing, only to reappear somewhere else.

*4:00 pm:* Workers from the FIAT plants at Lingotto and Rivalta start arriving. The workers and students are joined by people from the neighborhood around Mirafiori: young kids join the battle, women hand round damp handkerchiefs to protect people from the gas, and many local homes open their doors to comrades who are being chased by the police.

*5:30 pm:* The real center of the battle is Corso Traiano. The wide avenue becomes the scene of a raging street battle: workers, students, and folks from the neighborhood return to the attack, construct the first barricades out of rocks, and almost succeed in capturing Police Chief Voria. Meanwhile groups of comrades have scattered and gone back to the University, where the Faculty of Architecture is occupied. Police

persuade us to go back home. (Where to?) Then they turned to insulting us by saying we were gypsies and thieves. In the meantime the police had arrived and surrounded the block. When they entered the courtyard we all came down, trying to stay together. But 12 of us were separated off and threatened with arrest. At this point the women attacked furiously. They started pushing against the police cordons and demanded the immediate release of everyone. It was a great moment. The police didn't know how to react; they were being attacked by women and kids. At first they tried to push them away violently, but in the end they were forced to release everyone. We all shouted and cheered loudly.

At an assembly in the afternoon, people had a go at the CP and all other reformists. We decided to occupy again so that the struggle wouldn't lose its momentum. That evening we occupied in the Magliana district, 70 families and their friends. A police car that got in the way was smashed; the police fired in the air; a police car that came toward us was stoned. At three in the morning the whole area was surrounded by riot police. We held an assembly in the courtyard and decided to march from the houses toward the police lines. This decision was not unanimous. Some of us wanted to stay and defend the flats. In the end we all marched out shouting slogans. People came to the windows. When we got to Via Magliana the police charged. Fighting was violent. There were 60 arrests. Many of us were kept in jail for hours. After this eviction, we decided to hold meetings in different neighborhoods of the city. Many people decided not to take part in the elections and to make sure the struggle goes on.

## THE SOUTH

Since its beginning, Italy's economic development has been uneven, the North growing faster than the South. High unemployment and low wages have forced millions to migrate. During the boom years, 1959 to 1963, almost a million people traveled north. This process has been accelerated by the mechanization of agriculture. Between 1951 and 1970 the number of people working the land fell from 7,200,000 to 3,800,000 out of a labor force holding nearly constant around 20,000,000. As in other Common Market countries, only the larger farmers prospered.

To stop this migration, the Government set up the Cassa del Mezzogiorno (Bank of the South). Initially its function was to provide subsidies to agriculture and help create social infrastructures (houses, roads, schools, hospitals). Its failure to make any significant change led to its roles becoming more and more to provide investment for factories. The factories that were built were all state-owned:

Alfa Romeo in Naples, Italsider (steel) in Taranto and Naples, chemical plants in Ban and Porto Torres on Sardinia. The building of these factories provided the first job for many of the workers coming off the land. But since it takes far fewer workers to run these ultra-modern factories than to build them, unemployment in these Southern cities has risen quickly in recent years and will remain high, since no other Industries can develop to complement the few existing factories.

Very little has been done to build enough schools, houses, and hospitals to cope with the growing population of these cities. The working class is controlled by a mixture of overt repression and political corruption, and the only hope of a place

trying to tell you.”

It went on like this for an hour, until 10 pm, with women pressing against the rostrum and the police, in confusion, not knowing how to control dozens of kids who were going round and round the orator in a line, howling into jam jars and making one hell of a dinner, and the professor? He was still at it, shouting insults: “You’re like donkeys . . . it’s easy to see that you’ve never been to school.” This remark was followed by a volley of eggs. Medi turned to the police and demanded that they take control of the situation. The cops put on their gas masks. People retreated. The police threw the first tear gas. The meeting ended. “Rome will sort your lot out, you barbarians; we’ll win, don’t worry.”

People came down from the blocks of flats. By now there were more than a thousand people. The police had remained grouped in the market place and continued to hurl tear gas at the windows and at women. One moment people saw a cop setting off on a bike; the next the reinforcements had arrived, about 40 lorryloads, more than 700 police in riot gear. Provenza, the Vice Commissioner of Police, also arrived, to take command of the operation. The area was besieged. The police, foolishly, decided to go into a block of flats and start beating people up. They were met by a continuous and very violent volley of plates, bottles, and anything else that people could lay their hands on. The police withdrew, and finally left the area. It was a little after midnight. In the market place, people set fire to the rostrum. Groups formed. People worked out who had been arrested and who had been injured. People tried to find out news about those who had been arrested.

### **Don’t Vote, Occupy!**

By June 1971, with regional elections only a few days away, all the political parties talked about was “law and order”. The PCI was making vague promises about housing reforms: something people were very preoccupied with. After an assembly in San Basilio, 20 families decided to occupy a block of flats on Saturday, the 5th. The occupation was a failure, since the flats are privately owned and impossible to defend. The families decided to turn back and wait a few days.

On Wednesday, the 9th, there were occupations at Centrocelle and Pietralate. At Centocelle, the police responded immediately: they tried to arrest an isolated comrade. The squatters reacted immediately, and managed to free him. A police car was smashed up, and another six or seven showed up with their sirens wailing. We woke up the neighborhood with megaphones, denouncing the police’s attack. People came out of their houses shouting to the police “This is our area; get the hell out of it, the police were forced to leave.

Meanwhile, at Pietralate, the occupation had gone off successfully, so we decided to go there and have one large squat. At the beginning there were 70 families. During the night 30 more arrived. The occupation got more organized. Doctors were found. Staircase assemblies were arranged and people were appointed to take charge of each staircase. During the night our assembly decided that if the police came to evict us, we would all stick together and regroup somewhere else to continue the struggle.

Early in the morning of the 10th the PCI officials arrived. At first they tried to

arrive there with jeeps and lorries and make ready to surround the building. There is a moment of confusion and uncertainty. Some people are proposing that there should be a General Assembly inside the Faculty, so a couple of hundred people enter the building. The police promptly fire tear-gas grenades through the windows. For this they are attacked with a shower of rocks and bricks by the people who have stayed outside.

Outside, the violence of the police onslaught and the violence of the rock-throwing increase. The battle spreads out of the courtyard into the street, into the arcades and the surrounding side-streets: there is tear-gas, hand-to-hand fighting, and some arrests.

*6:30 pm:* The majority of the comrades set off once again for Corso Traiano, which by now is totally in the hands of the demonstrators. People are still arriving. You can hear the steady rhythm of falling rocks. The police have regrouped at the end of Corso Traiano. It’s hard for them to surround and comb the whole area, what with the building sites, the factories, and people’s houses.

*7:00 pm:* The sheer volume of the tear-gas forces the workers and students to withdraw. The police slowly regain Corso Traiano, but barricades are being built in all the side streets. People who are caught are beaten up and loaded onto Black Marias. Many police take a beating too.

*8:00 pm:* The battle spreads. The most violent fighting is in front of the FIAT administrative offices in Corso Traiano, in Corso Agnelli, in all the side-streets, and in Piazza Bengasi, where the police are making absurd, insanely violent charges. The comrades respond to the charges by building barricades one after another. Three cars are set on fire, and they manage to halt a car-transporter loaded with FIAT cars, which become the target for well-aimed rocks. Meanwhile the behavior of the police becomes still more bestial: they are firing their tear-gas right into people’s houses. Voria appears brandishing a grenade-launcher and telling people to get back from their windows or else.

*10:00 pm:* In Piazza Bengasi the attacks and the rock-throwing go on. The police surround the square, enter apartment blocks, and even drag people out of their own apartments. Sporadic fighting goes on till way after midnight, with people shouting “Pigs!” and “Nazis!” as police drag people out of their houses.

Meanwhile in Nichelino, a working-class suburb of Turin some miles away from Corso Traiano, street-fighting has also been going on all afternoon. Concrete sewer pipes are used to build barricades across the streets. Via Sestriere, the big street that runs across Nichelino is blocked by more than ten barricades, made from burning cars and trailers, with road signs, rocks, and timber. During the night they burn huge piles of wood and rubber tires, starting a fire on a nearby building site which lights up the whole area.

*4:00 am:* The fighting is still going on. The police are slowly winning back the ground they lost, and begin house-to-house searches utilizing methods which are cruel and vicious. But still the people don’t go away. By now the workers and the people of the neighborhood are used to the tear-gas, and they ignore it, taking it in turns to build the barricades. By now a hundred people have been stopped by the police, and thirty of these arrested. Every one of these thirty was a worker.

Meanwhile, police reinforcements are converging on Turin from 80 miles away in Genoa, from Alessandria and Asti. The local police are just not able to cope. At FIAT the struggle has been moving ahead. People are refusing to accept the conditions under which they work and live, both inside the factory and out. They are refusing the unions and the political parties any control over their movement and are organizing autonomously to fight for objectives that they themselves have decided on. Added to this they are coming out onto the streets. It's been twenty years since the workers of FIAT have been able to show themselves in the streets fighting hand-to-hand with the police and coming away victorious. Once again the bosses and their minions have provided us with a chance to generalize the struggle. The police intervention meant that the inhabitants of Turin-South were ready to come down and join the workers and the students in their fight. But the struggle also spread to many other areas of Turin, involving many other workers in a way that a routine union demonstration would never have done.

## **CULTURAL REVOLUTION**

*This article describes some of the changes that took place in the late 60's. It comes from Lotta Continua #18, November 1970.*

At this moment there are five million workers fighting in factories all over Italy. The struggle is becoming harder, and something important starts to happen in the minds of the workers, in their ways of seeing themselves and seeing the world. They are slowly beginning to free themselves. They are destroying constituted authority in the factory. They are taking apart the mechanisms that the bosses use to divide and control them, and are freeing themselves from the taboos that till now have kept them slaves. People are discovering that the power of their bosses is based on their own complicity, on the fact that, from fear or ignorance, or from lack of interest, the workers have up till now accepted as normal and necessary something which, in fact, they as workers have the power and the ability to destroy.

### **The Struggle Against Hierarchy in the Factory**

One means of control is the respect people have for their superiors, but now it's the foremen and the higher-ups who are beginning to be afraid of the workers. This began when we started what we call the internal struggles. Traditionally workers have been kept isolated in the face of their superiors. But now that we are fighting inside the factory, it's the foremen who find themselves isolated in the face of a mass of workers who are strong and confident in their own strength and the strength of an anger that has been nurtured for years. The workers are losing their fear. There

Eighty workers, women, and young people met with the doctors in the main hall of the center. A long banner was hung up with the slogan which sums up the way people feel: "The only way to get anything is through struggle."

At this meeting the role of the clinic was defined. As one woman said, "This clinic is more than something which responds to the real needs of the people here. It is a first step toward ending our exploitation."

The People's Clinic is run by doctors who lend their services to everyone free of charge, giving out free medicine and medical attention, particularly to the kids who are forced to play in the streets, which are full of broken glass and rubbish. The clinic is also a center for political discussion and for organizing other struggles which are being waged in the area, whether to the fight against the fascists and the police, or the running of the rent strike and the squatting. The task of the doctors is not just limited to lending their "services", in fact, but extends to participating in all the struggles in the area and to passing on their specialized knowledge so the people can start to control their own health.

### **San Basilio**

San Basilio is a small working-class city outside Rome. A wave of housing struggles began here in April 1971. The local politicians attempted to contain the struggle by channeling it back into safe ways: upcoming elections. On Tuesday, May 6, the first clash between squatting tenants and politicians erupted. From 9 pm to midnight the local population of San Basilio was mobilized against an election meeting held by the Christian Democrat mayor, Darida. The meeting had been called unexpectedly, without even so much as a poster on the wall. Obviously the idea was to wrap everything up in the space of half an hour. Just a visit, an appearance, and then a quick getaway from this area which could certainly not be expected to be friendly to a unionist who, only a few days before, had shaken hands with the leader of the Fascists, Almirante. At the time fixed for the meeting there were already 100 to 150 people in the market place. The enormous number of police standing around was a sure sign that the Christian Democrats who were coming to speak were hostile.

So, this is what happened: Under the rostrum, an immense and pompous affair, there were roughly 15 electoral agents. Just behind was everyone else, all the working-class people, women, and young people of the area, as well as a few people from the CP. Groups formed, and people started to talk about the past 20 years of promises...the promises of all the mayors... the promises of this mayor. People decided to interrupt the speech and get a woman and a worker from the area to speak. At last it got under way. But the Mayor hadn't had the nerve to come. Instead it was Medi, the professor, the one who's been so active in the anti-divorce campaign, the guy that the whole of Italy have had the chance to "admire" on their TV screens as a brilliant commentator on the, space exploits of the Americans.

Right from the start he began spouting a load of bullshit: "How fortunate you are to be living outside the city, in an unpolluted atmosphere." There was an immediate barrage of catcalls and slogans shouted at the top of people's voices. Medi reacted stupidly in front of this group of workers: "You're all barbarians, and the city of Rome will wipe you out. . . . You've got no brains and can't understand what I'm



### **The Peoples' Clinic: June 1971**

In San Basilio, one of Rome's outlying ghetto areas, a movement has been developing of people fighting against their lousy, inhuman living conditions. There are 40,000 people trapped in this slum district. In the past few months about 100 families have been on rent strike. This started as a spontaneous protest, and now it's becoming more organized. A real confrontation is building up with the IACP over exorbitant rents, arrears, and threats of eviction. The rent strike is becoming a major issue for the whole community, with mass meetings, protest marches, and demonstrations. Last weekend there was a meeting to integrate the results of a large number of staircase meetings. About 800 families have been involved in these meetings, which were organized by the San Basilio Collective, a group of women and workers from the area, along with a number of students.

At this central meeting there was a discussion of new plans of action and ideas which had been put forward by local people. There was very heavy criticism of the lack of medical facilities in the area; no first-aid station and no clinic, with the nearest medical center being the clinic at the hospital in Rome. It was decided to start a fight to set up a clinic and a decent medical center in the area.

On Wednesday, after a deputation had gone to the Council for the nth time and still had not been received, a decision was made to occupy the neighborhood Ises Center. The occupation took place after a meeting and demonstration which had gone right around the neighborhood. The involvement of women, workers, and young people and the support expressed by local residents prevented any action or attempts at intimidation by the police.

The people who took over the Center formed themselves into a permanent assembly which stayed there all night. They sent out an appeal to all Left-wing doctors to get in touch with them. Meanwhile people talked about the inhuman conditions under which they live, which are the cause of many of their illnesses. They realized that if you're going to get rid of sickness you have to do away with exploitation in the factories where people breathe in smog and break their backs on the production lines, and at the construction sites, where people work in rain, dust, and mud. For years now people have been lining up at the health-insurance clinics only to be given the usual pill and then told not to be a pest. They're fed up with taking pills and drugs which do nothing but make drug manufacturers rich. They're tired of doctors and others who live off their illnesses. They're sick and tired of being patched up so that they can carry on working and producing for the boss, then falling ill again and having to go back for further repairs.

People also want decent places to live where typhus and hepatitis aren't rampant because of bad drainage and sewers. And they want enough money to buy decent food. There aren't enough green spaces in the area, and as someone said: "These apartments were built for getting sick in, not for living in." San Basilio wasn't built to cater to people's needs; it was built to satisfy the plans of the bosses. "San Basilio is like FIAT'S shanty towns in Turin", said one construction worker. "At least it has the same function, to keep the workers out of the way."

On Sunday there was a huge meeting of all the people in San Basilio, and a festival to inaugurate the "People's Clinic", which is by now fully operational.

are thousands of stories that bear this out. Workers are beginning to feel confident enough to tell their foremen what they think of them, to refuse orders, to challenge foremen to carry out threats that they make. But they are going even further than this. At Mirafiori the foremen came out on strike demanding bodyguards during working hours! Some of them have been forced to walk at the head of internal marches, carrying red flags, and sometimes they're forced to stand up and make revolutionary speeches. In a lot of the shops, when a bit of tension brews the foremen don't dare start up the line, but run off to hide, saying that they have something else to do. In such a situation, the possibility of giving people harder work as a punishment, of transferring people to other parts of the factory speed-ups on the line and the whole system of fines and penalties have all become impossible to operate.

### **The Struggle Against the Factory Managers**

But the workers' anger has exploded with greatest ferocity against the factory managers. At PIRELLI in Milan the decision to strike has usually gone hand in hand with a none-too-polite invitation to managers to leave their offices. They are not usually too willing, but in the event of hesitation the decision is often helped by judicious application of the boot, one form of struggle that Mr. Donat Cattin does not approve of. In FIAT the managers took a long time to learn obedience, and were several times forced to run the gauntlet between two lines of furious workers. Onto their bald heads, beaded with sweat and spattered with gobs of spit, the workers showered five lire coins, which sparkled like confetti in the sun. At the end of this cycle of struggle it would be hard to count the managers who ended up in hospital (even if they only went there so as to have their injuries examined with a view to reporting workers to the police, as happened at FIAT Lingotto in Turin).

At INNOCENTI of Milan the workers don't soil their hands. Instead they pulled up a birch tree from one of the factory avenues, and used the trunk as a battering ram to smash one of the glass doors of the administrative offices in which managers had barricaded themselves. They sent in the Works Committee as a legal pretext, and then chased one senior manager out of the factory, ramming him up the ass with the tree-trunk as he went.

At BREDA in Milan the managers live on the "qui vive", literally with one ear to the wind. When the workers stage a walkout, they do it by surprise, marching through the various shops ringing a bell. For the managers this bell is the sign that it's time for them to run. But they can never tell in advance just when the bell is going to ring.

To fight managers is to fight the whole way the capitalist factory functions and workers know this. Managers are part and parcel of the factory system, the means that link up the machines, the shops, the different sectors of the productive process. To chase them out means bringing production to a standstill and intimidating them means reducing efficiency. Slowly, as the struggle grows, the factory system ceases to be an alien and mysterious force in the eyes of the worker. Its mechanisms are uncovered, attacked, and hindered in their internal workings. Workers discover that they are only slaves to their machines insofar as they are bound to their managers.

### **Refusal of Wage Differentials and Material Incentives**

The first way that workers express their autonomy is in recognizing and attacking the means the bosses use to divide workers, to oppose the interests of one section to those of another so as to maintain their control over all. The workers, having freed themselves from the control of the unions, are refusing to be divided into organizational categories, refusing wage differentials, refusing incentives and every other attempt to involve them jointly in production.

### **Relations Between Workers and White Collar Staff**

The workers want equality. Not because they are good Christians and see themselves as “all God’s creatures” but because they know that the differences that divide them can be of use to the bosses. So they are trying to establish relations with white collar workers, not on the basis of a vague solidarity, but against the differences in the way they are treated, and against the idea that the staff is somehow more “valuable” than workers. Encounters between workers and staff have not always been peaceful affairs, but where there has been a clear perspective; initial misunderstandings have been easily overcome. On the day that the scab tires were brought in from Greece, the workers at PIRELLI wreaked havoc in the salaried staff canteen (to the extent of using a pneumatic drill to break down a door that was in their way), attacking what they saw as a symbol of divisive prestige.

FIAT was the same. At first there was violence. The white collar staff who were scabbing (all of them) were forced to run the gauntlet between lines of furious workers, just like the managers before them. The FIAT staff, at the mere mention that there were 5,000 workers in boiler suits approaching the offices, could be seen running like rabbits through a little hole between lines of four guards, scooting down the slope and out of the gates. They ran down the street in total panic for hundreds of yards. This really is emancipation. This is the capacity to re-establish a correct scale of values between social categories. But following this we began to see white collar staff coming to the Internal Assemblies of their own accord, joining in the marches that went round the factory hunting for scabs, attending workers’ meetings and so on.

Throughout FIAT, as well as at PETROLCHIMICA (Porto Marghera), PIRELLI, and many other factories, the unions have manipulated white collar staff in Assemblies, trying to play them off against the intention of the workers to intensify the struggle. But in places where workers have come to understand their own position as regards the crucial matter of wage differentials, this maneuver has totally failed. There was one white collar worker, who came to a meeting at FIAT and tried to justify wage differentials between the staff on the grounds that he had spent more than 250 pounds a year on his studies, and thus entitled to some benefit from his investment, but the workers said NO. He was already once privileged because he had a chance to study, the sort of chance that workers don’t get and therefore it was not right that he should be privileged twice over by earning more money than a worker, who has the same, if not greater, needs as an white collar worker. The problem of parity in wages and fringe benefits with white collar workers and the refusal of categories and “merit” bonuses are beginning to be faced as a fundamental political

the congress of the ACLI and to the general assembly of the student movement, where they are given a tumultuous reception. And before every action is taken, the assembly of families decides what should be said, what line to take, and what proposals to put forward.

As for Aniasi and Company, their goose is cooked. Catalano, the same messenger boy who’d come so arrogantly to the Via Tibaldi, now hurries to the ACLI with an offer. “Too vague”, say the families. “Your words and promises won’t be enough to solve the housing problem now. We want an agreement written and signed by Aniasi and the Council.” Two hours later the agreement is there.

Before July 31, the Council will allocate 200 apartments, not only to the families from the Via Tibaldi, but also to 140 others in a similar situation. Each family will receive 100,000 lira (\$1,665) compensation, plus 15,000 lira (\$250) for each member of the family. There’s no stipulation of three months’ deposit before moving into the apartments. All evictions and all rent arrears are frozen by the Council. During this fortnight of struggle none of the squatters has ever imagined that the workers’ fight about housing would end at Via Tibaldi, or that the only problem is how to get a new home. This struggle is only a beginning. Now the families want to help organize the struggle against rents, fares, and prices. A lot of work needs to be done circulating information around local factories. For this reason the assembly of families from Via Tibaldi has become permanent, involving people from every district in Milan.

### **ROME**

Rome is one of the first stops on the route which takes people forced off the land in the South on to the Industrial cities of the North. Between 1951 and 1969 the population of the city grew by an average of 60,000 a year. There are few regular jobs for these migrants, since apart from service industries and construction most of the work there is clerical and is handed out as a “favor” on the say-so of local politicians. There are 40,000 people unemployed, many of them young people. Since it is ruling class policy to make workers move to the industrial jobs in the North, hardly any low-rent municipal housing is built in Rome. There are 100,000 families living in the outlying slums. Construction workers, newly arrived immigrants, unemployed workers, pensioners; they live either in shanty towns or in apartments shared by several families. Another 62,000 families live in private accommodations, paying rents of between 40,000 and 80,000 lira (\$650 to \$1300 a month). The struggle for cheaper housing began in 1969 when people started to occupy luxury apartments in the city center left empty by speculators (Tufello: 125 families Celio: 225 families; Via Pigafetta 155 families; Via Prati: 290 families). The struggle soon spread to families living in tenements, who went on rent strikes and developed collective ways of fighting evictions. Since the people from the shanty towns have nothing to lose, their struggles have often been direct and violent. Before leaving their huts they have often burned them to the ground, determined never to return. In recent struggles construction workers have played an important role. At Via Albociclorle construction workers joined 205 families to occupy the houses they had just built.

decides that this time they have to defend themselves, and that they're strong enough to do it and the cops are going to pay for the eviction from Via Tibaldi. Once again all the organization comes from the squatting families; women and children on the upper floors, all the men down below behind the gates, facing the riot squad. At 11 pm the cops charge. But they get their fingers burned. They hadn't expected the fierce and powerful reaction from the people inside the building, or the attack from behind by people who haven't managed to get inside. When they eventually manage to force their way into the building, the police find no one there. Everyone has managed to get out and is regrouping in the streets, ready to carry on the fight. Having run out of tear gas, the riot squad retreats, completely disoriented, and charged by the squatters. We lose count of the jeeps demolished by stones. The whole thing lasts until two in the morning.

**Monday morning:** Members of all the families meet up on the university campus. They are all there; people decide to go along to a meeting of the architecture students. Here, in the afternoon, some of the squatters are chosen to explain the struggle in Via Tibaldi. A proposal is made that closer links be created between the students' struggle and that of the homeless. On the basis of this proposal the meeting decides that the families should occupy the Architecture Faculty again later that day. As for the Faculty Board, they decide to initiate a permanent seminar on the housing problem with the people from Via Tibaldi who are "experts" on the subject.

At the Architecture Faculty, as always, decisions about how to carry on the struggle are made solely by the assembly of families, which meets twice a day. During one of these meetings a huge demonstration is suggested for the following Saturday. This will help to bring home the meaning of the struggle to those who aren't directly involved. This demonstration is to mobilize 30,000 people!

**Wednesday:** Five o'clock in the morning the police surround the whole university precinct in three huge circles. Traffic is at a complete standstill. It's a trial of strength. 250 students are arrested plus a dozen lecturers and even the Dean of the Faculty! The families are carried off once more in police vans. A few hours later, a general assembly held at the Polytechnic also is broken up by the police. Vittoria, the Chief of Police, De Peppo, the General Procurator of the Republic, and Aniasi, the Mayor, think they have finally beaten what was originally no more than a few dozen families, but what became the symbol of Milan's working class. They couldn't have been more mistaken!

**Wednesday dinnertime:** All the families eat at the canteen of the ACLI (Action Group of Italian Catholic Workers), where they have been given shelter. From now on no one can avoid the struggle in Via Tibaldi. The ruling class are caught in enormous contradictions trying to reconcile the demands which are coming from every direction from a section of the PSI and local councilors; from the CP and the ACLI, which they'd always thought were under their thumb; from the FIM (one of the metal workers' unions whose members are particularly militant). Some orders are coming from Rome and others from local employers. The greatest danger is that the struggle will spread. This is what is giving them nightmares. And the families do everything in their power to make it happen by organizing Saturday's demonstration, by going to the factory gates with placards and leaflets, by sending a delegation to

fact. They bring the whole factory hierarchy into question and challenge the ideas of career, promotion, and merit which employers have always played on to tie their own employees to the wheels of exploitation.

### **Relations Between Workers and Students**

Armed with the confidence they have gained from their own struggles the workers have begun an attack on the education system. The unions and Communist Party have been driven by the course of the struggle into proposing mass meetings of students and workers, and suggesting that workers march or send delegations to invade universities and schools. But there's no hope of lasting political links being made at these encounters, because the Party controls everything. They are usually reduced to exchanges of information: the workers talk about the latest union platform, and the students about the problems of their education. Then everybody goes home, and the only people who really profit from these get-togethers are the Party and the unions, outside of any control from the mass of the people. However things are different when workers do such things of their own initiative, as they've done in Turin, Trento, Venice, and other places. Here the workers have attacked the school system directly, as the root of the divisions that weaken the working class, that divide workers from white collar staff, and that fragment the staff among themselves. In this way the workers' struggle has bound itself to the students' struggle, against a system of class selection and education, and the workers' point of view has helped give a better orientation to the student struggles.

### **The Struggle Against Production**

Nowadays a worker is just an appendage of a machine or production line: The only way people relate is via the flow of production. So that important indication of the relative strength reached by the workers and the weakness of their employers is the extent to which workers have been re-establishing real links of solidarity. In the course of the recent struggles the factory has changed from being a place where the isolation and the weakness of the workers are at their strongest, and instead is becoming a place where the strength of the working class is being reconstituted, and where the links that are established can be used directly to organize and fight. This is the main meaning of the internal struggle, as the situation in which the workers can use their numbers as a source of strength, to isolate their foremen and overcome the fear of their superiors. And this goes, above all, for the internal marches, the assemblies, and the informal meetings and discussions both inside the factory and outside at the gates. As long as they're not dominated or taken over by the unions. Capitalist production is based on the silence of its workers, on the systematic repression of their creativity and of their need to express themselves. When this silence is broken, workers begin to liberate themselves from their own chains and discover that the center of the factory is them and their own needs: their interest, and not the interests of the boss (machines, production...). This discovery has been at the root of forms of struggle that have been developing with a view to reducing production, like the go-slow. These tactics have been very successful in some cases, as at PIRELLI, where in some shops the workers have reduced unit output to such

an extent as to bring the production almost to a standstill. This form of struggle sometimes costs the workers a lot, but it represents a fundamental conquest since it hits directly at 'productivity' and can be practiced right where people work.

### **The Struggle Against "Things"**

Another way in which this is expressed is in innumerable episodes of violence against machines and production, from the destruction of the scab Greek tires at PIRELLI to the systematic way in which the FIAT workers have been damaging productive machinery. The workers have transformed mute sabotage at an everyday level into a liberatory act performed collectively and consciously by all the workers against that production that keeps them everyday screwed under the rule of the boss. The same is happening with the leaflets, posters, and graffiti that are beginning to cover the walls of Italian factories; these are beginning to spread from the toilets to the cloakrooms, and from there onto the shop floor, where they are put up right under the foremen's noses. The workers of PIRELLI do not forget that the truncheons the police use against the Italian people are made by them, and that they can always make them for their own use. In many factories the internal telephones that the foremen use to transmit orders between different parts of the factory are being used by workers to organize and communicate the struggle to the different shops.

### **The Struggle Against the Unions**

The unions were born a hundred years ago, and claim to be free associations of the workers to defend themselves against the bosses. But today, in every country in the world, they have become one of the main instruments that the bosses have to maintain their control over the working class, to keep workers in a state of mutual isolation and disorganization in a subordinate position which finds a voice only through union delegates. They have become the principal obstacle to the emancipation and the autonomy of the working class. For this reason, whatever factory you may care to choose, you can say with certainty that the unions are strong when the workers are weak, and that they are weak when the workers are strong. The more isolated the workers are, the more they are divided and impotent, the more they have to take a stand against bodies which put themselves forward, or at least function in real life, as their collective representatives, the "guardians of their interests." As the workers gradually begin to emancipate themselves, getting together and overcoming their isolation, any attempt to define their interests from outside the development of the struggle comes to be seen for what it really is: an obstacle to the development of their own autonomy, a means of oppression in the hands of the bourgeoisie

### **The Struggle Against Authority**

The stories about the ways people have been fighting the unions in factories all over Italy are too numerous to mention. They go from people trying to grab the union megaphone at factory-gate meetings (as at FIAT Rivalta) to full-scale punch-ups. At mass meetings inside factories the union leaders have been booed and jeered at, and often refused the right to speak. Once at FIAT Mirafiori the entire Central Committee of FIM, the Catholic metalworkers' union, was isolated and attacked

which had led up to the occupation the whole of Milan knows about it. Aniasi, the mayor, and the officials of the IACP (the State building authority) know about it too. Almost at the same time they both start denying responsibility. Barricades are built in the streets, particularly by the women and children.

**Wednesday:** A demonstration is organized to go to Porta Ticinese. It's the Festival of the Navigilo, and people figure Aniasi will be there. The families want to have a few words with him and let him know that they're ready for anything. The march is headed by a banner that reads "Homes Occupied ". There are dozens of red flags. The marchers move off shouting "We want houses NOW", "Free houses for workers!", and "Long live Communism!" When they reach Porta Ticinese they find that Aniasi has left. So everyone climbs up onto the rostrum and occupies it for a while. Then, with more and more people joining in, they set off back to the apartment building.

**Thursday:** The families decide that the struggle must become more militant. Twenty or so people go to the Marino Palace, to a meeting of the Council. Once again they refuse to listen. A room in the Town Hall is occupied from 5 pm till midnight. When they get back to the Via Tibaldi there's a meeting of heads of families which decides that the struggle must continue to the bitter end. Nobody so much as mentions the idea of abandoning the building. By now the whole of Milan knows that we are in the Via Tibaldi, and new families continue to arrive. The people who occupied and won the apartments in Mac Mahon come to give us support. There's also a lot of discussion about new forms of struggle. Over the next few days a huge demonstration is organized to show that we have no intention of giving in.

**Friday:** after Catalano arrives, sent by the Town Hall and IACP. This official has a reputation for cramming workers into shanty towns after having promised them homes. Catalano wants a list of the families involved. He gets it, but he's also tried by a genuine People's Tribunal. People tell him what they think of him, that he's nothing but a lackey of the bosses, a rat and an exploiter. A crowd of workers surround him, shouting: "We're going to have the apartments, and you can get stuffed for the rents!" He was really swaggering when he arrived; but by the time he leaves, several hours later, he's pale and trembling. And he's had to give the squatters some solid commitments.

**Saturday:** The mobilization continues. In the afternoon another barricade is built in the streets.

**Sunday morning:** Two thousand cops arrive to clear out the Via Tibaldi. The Town Hall and the bosses have decided that they have to put down these people who, in six days of struggle, have become a reference point and an organization center for the whole working class of Milan. All the squatters know that they had a right to defend what they had taken and what was rightfully theirs. But it's more a question of building our strength and using it at the right time. On Sunday morning we are still too weak. After long arguments with the police the squatters decide to leave the building and move to the Architecture Faculty of the University, at the invitation of the students.

**Sunday evening:** 3,000 police arrive to throw everyone out of the Architecture Faculty. They think it will be as easy as it was in the morning. They couldn't be more mistaken. While the police take up their positions, a meeting of all the families

directly at the people squatting. (This is common police practice nowadays.) About 65 people were eventually taken in for questioning, and 25 of them were arrested. Those who remained were offered transportation back to the “Homeless Families” center. This they scornfully refused: “I came on foot and I’ll leave on foot.” Outside a big crowd began to gather. People were forming up to march in protest when the police charged again, using still more tear gas. In spite of this, the march managed to form up, and people set off through the neighborhood to the local market. Here the families decided to occupy the Social Center in Quarto Oggiaro rather than go back to the “Homeless Families” center. “Let the bosses go and live in the center; we’re not going back.” Over the next few weeks the Council offered the families a few houses right away and the rest as soon as possible. The families rejected this offer and stuck together until they were all re-housed. When the people arrested during the eviction came to trial, the courtroom was packed and the “case” against them was laughed out of court.

### **Via Tibaldi**

The occupation at Via Tibaldi was a great step forward. A whole neighborhood was involved in it : factories, schools, housing projects took part in the organizing of the struggle. There was a victory at Via Tibaldi because everyone there was fully aware of the issue: There were 70 immigrant families who had been promised a place by the Council and had to be re-housed.

When the confrontation came, it was clear who was on which side: It was homeless families, workers, and students against the bosses, the unions, the housing officials, and the police. In the six days of violence the people occupied everything; houses, the streets, the town hall, police wagons, and the Architecture Faculty at the University. Thousands of police were mobilized against those involved in the occupations. In one day there were two attempts to evict everyone. The forces of repression attacked with tear gas, clubbing everyone who got in their way. Twice they were beaten back and after the third attempt to shift them, the occupiers agreed to be re-housed temporarily by a charity. This was a tactical retreat. The mayor and his mob were forced to give in. Houses were allocated to the families who had squatted and to 140 other families who had been evicted and were “living” in hostels waiting to be re-housed. The alliance of workers, students, and tenants forged before and during “the taking of Via Tibaldi” shows how strong the working class is when it fights together. With this alliance the working class went on the offensive and won a famous victory in June of 1971.

The occupation begins on Tuesday morning squatters are nearly all Southerners, workers at Pirelli and other smaller factories, building workers, and unemployed people. Some of them have been involved in other struggles: Before this occupation the families from Crescenzago were on rent strike. The occupation is strengthened by a continual coming and going of workers (many of them from OM, a large factory only 150 yards away), students, and local people who support the action. They offer help, bring useful materials, and work alongside the squatters. The workers engaged in building this block of apartments also are sympathetic. The firm they work for is about to close down. Because of the two months of organization

verbally and physically by workers who were coming out of the gates after one shift, and who demolished every argument they put up. The tactics that these gentlemen usually come up with consist of agreeing with everyone and never taking up fixed positions on anything. They are consistently attacked for this. In other factories, the main obstacle that the workers have come up against is the argument “We are all the union.” As one worker from PIRELLI put it; “That’s well and good, we might all be the union. But when it comes to it, all the decisions are really made in Rome.”

### **The Struggle Against Delegation**

The unions, however, have tried to make a comeback, and it’s not yet clear how this will turn out, particularly the attempt to introduce line delegates and delegates’ committees into the factory. When delegates were proposed to FIAT workers, they replied “we are all delegates.” By this they meant two things: First, they refused to accept the unions’ position on piecework, on rates and transferals, et cetera, and the instrument (the delegates) by which the unions were trying to impose their position, because the workers’ position on these things is radically different from that of the union. Workers say these things are non-negotiable. Second, the discovery that the only point of strength that workers have in their dealings with employers or unions is when they don’t have representatives, but rely on their own strength exclusively, on their own numbers, their own unity, and their own ingenuity. The workers have always refused to speak of the formal and abstract “need for organization”, counter posing the content of organization, the reasons why they feel they need organization, is to decide the form and objectives of struggle. The unions say that we need delegates. Why? All formal discussions about delegates are, and have proved to be, blank checks to be signed by the union. A worker from one of the most militant plants at PIRELLI said at a national meeting: “I would like all the workers of Italy to be on their guard against this trap of the Delegates’ Committee. With these committees they’re trying to turn vanguard militants into union activists, and when they’re not doing that they are turning what could be an instrument of shop-floor co-ordination into a little parliament where the workers, instead of coming to say what their comrades on the shop floor feel, merely stay to hear what the union has to say, then report back to their comrades. Here the representatives of the more militant shops are drowned in the swamp of the more indecisive (or passive) delegates. And situations that could well develop into hard struggles all too often peter out into useless argument.”

### **The New Organization**

The union bureaucrats and the spontaneists are going round saying that all we are describing represents a total refusal of organization. But this is not true. It is a refusal of the unions which is by definition the organizer of the particular interests of workers, in the factory, in their category, in their sector. In other words it is the organization of those interests through which workers are isolated, divided, and kept as slaves. But workers in Italy today are demanding a new organization, a general and political organization which will link every aspect of social life.

## AN INTERVIEW

*Three Workers from FIAT Mirafiori describe the experiences of the Southern immigrant coming to work in the industrial cities of the North. The conversation was recorded in Turin during December 1970.*

**Q. It was only after the summer of 1969 that people in Britain began to hear of the struggles at FIAT. Was there a tradition of struggle before the middle of 1969, or were these clashes the beginning of the revolutionary movement of FIAT?**

**LUIGI:** You mean was it that they broke the lethargy of the last 20 years here? ‘Yes, it was. Of course, there were struggles before this time, but all were dominated by the Unions. And they were struggles that came around at fixed intervals when the unions set them. So every two or three years, when the contracts were about to expire, we would have the classic sort of struggle you know, two or three days of strikes, all kept within union channels, and then the boss’s repression would begin all over again. And the little politicization achieved through those two or three days would be blocked for the next three years of boss’s rule.

But then, in about 1966, the immigrants from the South began to arrive. And the whole social situation in Turin blew up, what with (the shortage of housing, lightning price increases, building speculation and so on, All of a sudden there were 10 to 15 thousand people arriving in the city, and quite apart from the way the Prices rocketed. there were not the facilities to cope with them.

**Q. When did the three of you arrive in FIAT?**

**LUIGI:** These two are young. For my part, I’ve been at FIAT for twenty years. This lot is the new generation who’ve broken with everything that we’ve become used to.

**TONI:** I’ve been here for two years and I joined FIAT right at the time that the struggles started.

**Q. When you two arrived in Turin, what was it like for you?**

**NINO:** I’ve been here for a couple of years now. For most of the time I’ve worked in small places you know, sweatshops, always inside Turin, and then I was taken on at FIAT, in the beginning I didn’t know anything about anything. But the political work there was already well underway, and there were students doing leafleting at the factory, explaining a few things to people, like what the union was all about. Then we had that whole big explosion during 1969. Everything went up. Boom!

**TONI:** I’d never seen anything like this in all my life. Because, as you know, I come from Calabria and my town’s a pretty small place. It’s ruled by God, you might say: Three or four priests, who were all a bunch of shits, brought us up to be boy scouts and the like, and told us all about what they thought democracy was. Then there were the four or five Communists and the seven or eight fascists, and that’s it. Really Calabria is still a region that’s in the hands of the counts and barons that ran the place in the time of Mussolini, and who did very well out of him, what with their power,

because the people here are mobilized and united. In the morning, when the man from the Office of the Judiciary comes around and most of the workers are at work, the chief role is played by the women and children. Once they slashed the tires of a police car, and the cops had to go home on foot! Comrades let’s carry the message of the rent strike into the factories; let’s bring together the struggle in the factory and the struggle in the community. In that way we’ll be able to realize our strength and our power, people’s power!”

### Occupations

It now became necessary to see the struggle in Quarto Oggiaro as part of the total working—class struggle, and to extend it to all other aspects of social oppression; prices, health, education, transportation. This led to the picketing of local supermarkets (the UPIM) and the strike of secondary-school kids over the price of books. The people of Quarto Oggiaro have refused to allow their struggle to be diverted or taken over by political parties or other so-called “representatives” of the working class. The Tenants’ Union is a mass organization independent of any party or trade union. The CP which wanted to send a petition to Parliament was seen as a joke. What’s more, people have recognized that the housing struggle cannot be limited to the struggle of tenants and the rent issue. Relying on their own initiatives, they have brought together people on rent strike, people facing eviction, squatters and homeless families. After a number of isolated squats in Quarto Oggiaro and nearby Galaratese, where 10 families occupied a building in September 1970, people began to prepare, through the Tenants’ Union, for the mass occupations which emerged at the beginning of 1971.

On Friday, January 22, 1971, 25 families occupied a modern block of apartments owned and left empty by IACP in via Mac Mahon. All victims of previous evictions, they had been living in special centers set up for “Homeless Families”. At the centers anywhere from 5 to 11 people live, sleep, and cook in one or two rooms. Lavatories consist of cramped cupboards, too small even to stand up in. Vermin and disease are rife. Because local bosses regard people housed at the centers as “unreliable”, the rate of unemployment is very high. Those who do have work have to travel miles to get it. The apartments that the families moved into were supposedly built for working-class people. They cost 14,000,000 lira (\$23,330) in cash, or 22,000,000 lira (\$36,660) in installments (\$5800 down and just under \$120 monthly), obviously way beyond the means of any worker, employed or not. Once inside the apartments the families began to build barricades, hang out red flags, and string up banners. Across the end of the Street was a banner reading “All Power to the People”. It wasn’t long before groups of journalists arrived on the scene, and long arguments started between them and the squatters. The next morning more families arrived. Collections to buy essentials were organized. Other people set out to gain support in the area, touring it with loudspeaker vans and stopping to hold street corner meetings.

At 2:30 the police arrived, about 2,000 of them, armed to the teeth. They immediately surrounded the building and began to attack it from the rear, so as not to be seen from the street. They were very vicious. Canisters of tear gas were fired

the Council, those public-spirited men, have summoned the families to the Town Hall to tell them they've got to get out in the next 10 days. We haven't come here just to have a march to celebrate May Day. The sister who's just spoken mustn't be driven from her home because if we can come here today in such numbers, then the next time there'll be more of us. And we'll place ourselves in front of this house. The police won't kick them out because they won't have the strength to do it. Today, May 1st, has been decreed by the middle-class politicians as a day to be celebrated. But for us there's no cause for celebration, because we're still exploited, because they still kick us out of our homes, and because we want a festival that's really ours. All the people here know what I'm trying to say, what festival I'm talking about. We're the ones who build the houses. We're the ones who work in the factories. Without the working class there'd be nothing. Who is it who makes the goods? Who is it who does all the work? Who is it who makes it possible for everyone to benefit? Us! Houses are ours because we build them and need them, and for that reason we're going to have them!"

A speaker from the Tenants' Union said, "In June there will be the elections. Before long all the parliamentary vermin will be putting a show on, even in this area. You'll see them come making a heap of promises, trying to buy our votes! Even though during ordinary times they treat us as second-class citizens and call the police in on us, when our vote is worth as much as Big Boss Pirelli's and they need it to boost their power, what a surprise, they arrive here in person. What a nerve these gentlemen have to come here looking for votes! Look them straight in the face and you'll see that they're the same ones who order the evictions and who pretend to be indignant when the evictions actually happen. In our area there are hundreds of people who have had rent reductions only because they've jumped on the band wagon of this or that political party. Do we have to do the same? No! We say that housing is a right, built with our money and sweat. So we're going to continue the rent strike until we've beaten the bosses and the false friends who try to wreck our struggle. The bosses are doing everything in their power to break our will to fight; intimidation, attempted corruption, violence, etc. There's nothing they won't stoop to, to try and regain control. They've even given reductions in rent and rent rebates on houses built after 1963. But not one of these maneuvers has worked. Our struggle is still going strong. What the Tenants' Union is aiming at is to link the struggles in the local factories with those in the community. But, though a link-up of this sort would make us unbeatable, it's being obstructed right down the line by the unions because they're afraid of losing control over the people, afraid that they won't be able to check the thrust of the exploited to develop their own power. To make this clearer, let's look at one very concrete example. In February the Office of the Judiciary, together with the police, took advantage of the absence of one tenant to load his furniture out onto the street. Some local women told several comrades, who then began to mobilize. They told the workers in a nearby factory, who immediately downed tools and left the factory to protect this man's right to a house. In the space of an hour, all the worker's furniture was put back in place, the door was closed again, and a new padlock was put on, right before the officer's eyes. So far, with the exception of the last time, when there were 500 pigs on the spot, not one eviction has succeeded

their villas, and so on. That's the way Calabria is.

Anyway, down there, even if I only had 50 lire I could always buy myself a cheese roll or something. But I come up to Turin and fuck it: I find I'm paying out 200! It was all crazy to me. Then I began to pick up on the politics that Lotta Continua were into. At first, you know, I really didn't understand too much, I used to read their leaflets, but only in a sort of informative way, so as to know what they were saying. One day one of the student comrades from Lotta Continua hunted me out and began talking to me. He really attacked me because I was still in the union. Before I worked at FIAT I'd worked for a few months at other little factories, and all that I'd heard was that the unions were there to defend the workers. Of course, down in Calabria we don't even know what a union is; people don't know that they exist! But gradually I began to understand what they really are. There are so many things I've learned that I didn't know before, and I hope to be able to pass them on to all my workmates in the factory, and help them understand for themselves what I've learned.

At the beginning, when we were few, we started our struggles going round the factory in huge processions that you would think were never going to end. We used to call them "Snakes". One time there were three hours of official union strike called. This was about the time that all the big strikes were happening, in autumn 1969. A few of us got together with other militants and asked ourselves what we were going to do. We decided that the best thing would be to have a Snake a big march round the factory, pulling out everyone we could. So there we were, with the three-hour union strike, and the two of us got together with five or six other comrades and contacted a few people from Lotta Continua. Then we set off; just the seven of us. And by the time we got to the head offices where all the staff hung out, there were about seven thousand of us! Bloody beautiful it was. The staff were all looking out of the windows, and saw us down below. They didn't know what to do. And the few guards on the doors were terrified. It was beautiful. Now when the next lot of contracts comes along, well, this year we started with seven of us and ended up with seven thousand. Next time we'll start with seven thousand and end up with seventy thousand, and that'll be the end of FIAT. Goodbye, Agnelli.

There's another time that I remember was really fine. We'd been in and out on strikes for a couple of days, and then we were having one of those marches inside the factory. And people started saying: 'Let's kick out the supervisors, they've been around giving orders for about a hundred years now, and we've had enough!' So we went down and started muting them out. People were looking at them, jeering, spitting on them, and they looked back as if they wanted to kill us, but there wasn't a thing they could do. They just didn't know what was happening. There's them who've worked their asses off to become supervisors, and there we were treating them like shit.

**LUIGI:** It was these young people who began the fight, spontaneously and we logically found that this was a sort of alternative to the usual Union struggles, an alternative which went along with the contacts growing at the same time with the students. As you know, from 1967 the university movement joined up with the struggles of the workers.

**Q. What has been the relationship between the revolutionary workers and the militants from the student movement?**

**LUIGI:** It's been a sort of team effort really, them outside and us inside. At the start we would work on all the antagonisms inside the factory, using them as a lever. For example, say FIAT hadn't provided some work clothes. We would kick up a fuss, and the students would support us from the outside with loud hailers, gate meetings, leaflets, big posters, and so on.

Usually what we do is find out the facts of the situation, write them out in rough form, and give them to the external militants to print because they're good at that sort of thing and they have more time than we do to work right through the night. We hope that later on we shall begin to do the leaflets ourselves, and already we are starting to do more of the work like typing and so on, as well as some of the distribution outside the gates. Once upon a time it was the ex-students that held the leading role in Lotta Continua, and we were the ones that carried out programs. Now we are beginning to take the leadership. There's a bit of confusion about this at the present, as to whether we should have the leadership of the organization, because they still control a lot of the apparatus, like the national newspaper, the duplicators, poster printing facilities, and so on. However I'd say that by now there's really joint leadership.

**Q. So you can really say that the new wave of struggle arrived with the immigrants and the students?**

**LUIGI:** Yes. Italian students understood very early on, first with the Movimento Studentesco (Student Movement), and then with the ultra-left groups, that the only way they could expect to have any life at all was by allying themselves with the struggles of the workers. So that was really how it all started. Apart from very early factory leafleting in isolated areas, like Pisa from 1964, it was in 1967 that the really massive work began in front of the factory gates. And this was exactly when all the new workers began to be signed on, all the workers from the South, cut off from their own roots who had burned their bridges behind them and come here to Turin to find themselves without houses fit to live in, with sky-high prices and so on. Add to that the students outside, who were focusing on these problems, pushing them toward eruption, and of course everything exploded. But it exploded in ways that were sometimes very disorganized, very unconnected, sometimes a real mess.

Now the spontaneous struggles are over. I'm convinced of it. Now, when the struggles start again, they're going to have to be struggles for organization. Last year we were fighting seven or eight at a time, limited to single shops, all of us at Mirafiori linked through Lotta Continua because we'd had enough of the unions. But now we're moving toward a situation in which we'll have the factory coordinated shop by shop. When we decide at a certain point to launch a strike, we'll start with an assembly in one shop, say Shop 55. Then we'll begin the roundup, setting off in a Snake toward, say, the Varnish Shop, before we used to waste two or three hours getting everyone together. And by that time, as we were going round collecting the comrades, the anger would somehow melt away. To coordinate the struggle inside the factory means that when we decide on a Snake, it no longer takes half an hour to get it moving. Every group, every shop moves together. And when we start, we can

going to be able to evict them. Every time the police come we'll be there, all together, in front of the door, to stop them from getting in. Not long ago 500 police were sent down from the Viale Romagna, 500 police to throw the family of one poor worker out onto the street. How come, when hundreds of evictions used to be carried out with only one officer there, it now takes a whole army? It's because here in Quarto Oggiaro people have got together to fight because here in Quarto Oggiaro there's the Tenants' Union. We're using a new type of weapon to fight against the rising cost of living, against the bosses' exploitation of us in our homes. It's something really effective, a rent strike. I'm not speaking now to the young people, to those youths in the area who have been in the forefront of our struggle. I want to say something to the women who live here. Many of them still aren't involved and haven't realized the importance of this strike. In the two years and five months that I've been on strike, I've saved a lot of money. I feel healthier. I've had more money to give to the children, to the ones who really need it. I've had some money to give to a few old-age pensioners. I'm not saying all this to give you big ideas about myself. But just think for a minute. Rather than give your money to the bosses, keep it for yourself. Give it to the children. Give it to the workers who are struggling in the factories and who are exploited, year in and year out. People talk about the Hot Autumn factory contracts. What did the workers gain? Nothing, absolutely nothing I know what my family's finances are like. If you do the shopping, you see prices rising every day. I'd say we've lost out badly. They can laugh, the clever ones, the reformists, all those male politicians. But we're getting near election time, and we'll give our vote to those who deserve it, and that's none of them. Eat sirloin steaks... don't go handing your hard-earned money over to the thieves in the Viale Romagna After those 500 police came to Quarto Oggiaro our struggle expanded a hundred times, even the very next day. Anybody who's still paying rent just remember this: You won't get a penny of it back from the authorities. Follow the example of the young people, even if you don't give them responsibilities a lot of the time, seeing as they're so young. They're much tougher and braver than we are, because after 50 years of struggle we can't get the same results we used to. Personally, I can say this. Since the time I first went on rent strike things have gone better for me. Long live the working class! And long live the struggle of the tenants!"

A woman worker from Fiar said, "After four months of strikes in the factories I was in trouble trying to live on a wage that just wasn't enough. I have three children, all of them very young and dear to me. And I just couldn't afford the rent I was paying to this private landlord. So they had me evicted. I didn't get help from anyone. Then I heard there was a flat empty in Quarto Oggiaro, and I decided to squat in it. Now the authorities have told me I'll have to get out in ten days' time. Well, the authorities had better learn this: I love my kids and I'm going to make sure that they've got somewhere to live. And I can show them a thing or two. A home is a right, and in the name of that right I've taken one!"

A worker from Quarto Oggiaro said, "Comrades, the woman from Fiar who's just spoken. . . I think the gist of what she said is quite clear. Here in Quarto Oggiaro, there are dozens of families, apart from those on rent strike, who were in need of a home and have started squatting, without crying or begging for it. Now,



**(c) Areas of municipal housing** where the working classes expelled from the inner-urban area are being re-housed; Quarto Oggiaro, Galaratese, Rodzano, and so on. Also living in these projects are migrant workers with children born in Milan, and a group of scabs, petty-bourgeois, police, civil servants, city guards put there to spy on militant tenants and break down tenants' solidarity. Municipal housing areas are the heart of housing struggles in Milan.

**(d) Outlying areas:** these are places like Bollage, Novate, Desio, Sesto, and Cinisella which have grown up around factories such as Snia, Autobianci, Alfa, and Innocenti. They exist only to provide a place for factory workers to sleep. Even here rents are high (\$12.50 a week for a one bedroom apartment, \$15.50 a week for a two bedroom apartment), and there are no schools, hospitals, shops, or public transport. The housing here is either co-operatively owned apartments or shanty-town huts which are usually the only accommodation for recently-arrived Southerners.

Housing struggles in Milan have centered on municipal housing. To get a municipal apartment you have to show that you have a steady job, and the waiting period is at least five years. A year's residence in Milan is also required before you can get on the waiting list. This immediately excludes recently-arrived Southerners, workers whose work is seasonal (for example, construction workers), the under-employed, the unemployed, and the thousands who don't know how to fill in the forms.

In 1964, 5% of the families in municipal housing were in rent arrears. By 1971 this had risen to 18%. During this period the housing authorities lost \$8,750,000. Ten thousand families received warnings, and there were 750 evictions. At the height of the struggle, 25% of the families in Galaratese were in rent arrears, 45% of those in Quarto Oggiaro, and 50% of those in Rodzano.

The struggle began in 1968. In Quarto Oggiaro, when 30,000 families in municipal housing were faced with a 30% rent increase, a Tenants' Union was created. In that year it made door to door contacts and organized public meetings. By June 1968, 700 families were on total rent strike. The Tenants' Union spread the struggle with the demand that rent be no more than 10% of wages. In September 1968 four people were arrested during eviction. Kids attacked police cars, and women blocked steps leading to apartments. The Union expanded, and the brutality of the police made people angrier. In April 1970, 500 police were needed to evict one family.

### **Rent Strike**

On May Day 1970 about 2,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Quarto Oggiaro. This was a positive break with the tradition of "public processions" organized by the political parties and the trade unions. People were coming onto the streets of their own community. The march was an occasion for people to realize their growing strength and unity and to further develop their struggle. It culminated in a mass meeting held in a square in the center of the district, where a large number of people spoke about their experiences:

An elderly woman from the area: "We tenants began our struggle in January 1968. I was one of the first women to stop paying rent. Despite the many difficulties, our struggle has developed. The young people of the area have had a lot of trouble, day and night. But our minds are made up. If anyone goes on rent strike, nobody's

come to a certain point where we can decide on what objective we are going to be heading for. We can decide to leave the factory grounds and tie up with other area factories, radicalizing the struggle outside the factory so as to involve other places.

### **Q. What has been the role of the unions during these struggles?**

**LUIGI:** The unions are there to make sure that workers are kept inside the system, and have less possibility of beginning to challenge it. The unions are the political extensions of the sicknesses that exist inside the government; the "long arm inside the factories" of political parties. Every group, every political party has a little hand inside the factory. The Christian Democrats have CISL, the Communists have the CGIL, SIDA are the Fascists, UIL is the Social Democrats, even some Republicans. . . every one of them has a certain presence inside the factory to control the situation. Now a lot of workers understand this. However they don't as yet have an alternative. Inside FIAT the unions don't count for anything, and everyone's well aware of where they stand. But at the moment they are the only organization with a voice, they are the only ones that can say anything when it comes to dealing with management. So what's really necessary at the moment is that we begin to create inside the factory agitational nuclei, or revolutionary committees, that are so strong and so well-rooted among the workers that they are an alternative to the internal commissions and the delegates that the unions have set up. Thus we can begin to create a point of reference in the factory to which the less politicized workers can look, so that they can escape from the control of the unions, can talk together, and can politicize themselves further. That is exactly what we're engaged in at the moment: to form nuclei, to come to some agreement among ourselves, to study and understand the situation, and to provide inside the factory a focal point. These agitational nuclei are composed of normal workers inside the factory, but the best of them, the activists. It must be said that these nuclei are being formed not only from members of Lotta Continua, but also from workers who are not members but who have understood this need and who come along with us because of that.

### **Q. What are your aims with these agitational nuclei inside of the factories?**

**LUIGI:** With the nuclei and with the revolutionary committees if we manage to create them, we are trying, not to be another union, but to provide a political, revolutionary perspective for the workers. We must not fall into economism, into parochialism. We must not say "Look, we must fight for five lire more, or for ten lire more, or to work one or two hours less." We are fighting and of course we are not going to achieve it tomorrow, for power, because the working class without power isn't worth a thing. Of course we won't dissociate ourselves from the economic struggles, because for most workers the economic struggles are the beginning. However, the economic struggles must go hand in hand with a revolutionary development of understanding, of politicization, of awareness on the part of the mass of workers. Only then can we hope for the taking of power, because that's what we're aiming at. The point is to take the factory, because it's the factory that creates value, and it's us that should have it, and not them.

# Against the State as Boss by the Autonomous Assembly of Alfa Romeo

*Translated by Bruno and Judy Ramirez. From Radical America, vol. 7, #2. March-April, 1973.*

## INTRODUCTION

This is the day-to-day account of a struggle carried out by the Alfa Romeo workers from November 1971 to February 1972 on the occasion of contract renewal. The struggles narrated in this document took place in two of the five Alfa Romeo plants in Italy, the Portello and Arese plants, both located in the Milan area. Together, both plants employ 19,000 workers (including office employees), and a new Contract is negotiated every three years. The Portello plant is the older of the two and has few production departments left. Soon most of its operations will be shifted to Arese. The majority of its workers are older people, still bound to trade-unionism by a long tradition of struggle. Arese is the newer plant, still in the process of completion. It houses most of the production departments, and most of its workers are young and without a union tradition. Moreover, 65% of the workers on the assembly lines (as opposed to 25% in the non-production departments) are immigrants from the southern regions of Italy, and this element of the working class has been in the forefront of the struggles since '68. For this reason the level of militancy and mass mobilization was greater at the Arese plant.

The document was produced by a group of militants which calls itself "Autonomous Assembly" (AA) which defines itself as "a rank-and file organization, born as a communist cell with the aim of becoming a reference point for all the workers within the plant, and of contributing to the building of the future revolutionary party [obviously a waste of time]. The goal of the AA during the four months of struggle was to become a permanent political reference point for all the workers, to take away from the union officials and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) the control of the struggles, and in this way to be in a position to "talk to the masses."

The value of this document lies in the many faceted nature of the struggle it describes. The workers were fighting against a form of state capitalism, in that Alfa Romeo, although officially classified as a corporation with "state participation", is in reality completely state owned. This point is important because it explains the pressure felt by the PCI to act "responsibly through FIOM (the PCI and Left-wing Social Democrat metal workers' union) in view of its possible future participation in a new Center-Left coalition in the Government. It also explains the co-optive strategy adopted by the union officials, their attempts to water down the more radical demands advanced by the workers, and in particular, their determination to turn the councils of shop-floor delegates into channels of control over the ranks. The date of the struggle is of special importance. Taking place less than a year before the renewal of national contracts of 1972, it served as a testing ground for the bosses and the unions to help gauge the level of militancy of the workers and what might be in store during the new wave of struggles only a few months off.

have been used to build rent strikes and to prepare for occupations. This unified struggle around housing has been the pre-condition of the extension of the fight into other areas, such as transportation, health, and prices. All these struggles have relied on direct action: "Legal" channels for registering protest or demanding reforms are seen for what they are: delaying tactics used by the ruling class to divide people and buy off their leaders. Appeals to politicians, petitions to Parliament, and the like have been rejected as irrelevant if people are prepared to fight to take now the things that they need. In the modern city the traditional working-class way of life has been increasingly destroyed and replaced by the anonymity of life in the housing project. In the course of their struggles the Italian working class has begun to create for themselves a new identity, a way of life which is more and more outside the control of the bosses. In defining and fighting for their own interests as a class working people have begun to take back everything that has been stolen from them, taking control of their own lives and taking over their cities.

## MILAN

Milan is Italy's largest industrial city. In addition to large numbers of medium-size factories, there are several huge industrial plants; OM (trucks), Pirelli (tires), Sit Siemens (electrical goods), Alfa-Romeo (cars). Together with Turin it "attracts" 2,000 workers a month from the South. During the "Hot Autumn" struggles of 1969, these migrant workers were very militant. The most important aspect of these struggles was the lesson they gave people in how to organize on their own behalf and in their own way. At Pirelli, for instance, the fight was organized through the United Base Committee, set up with the support of students. It was this kind of experience which was the pre-condition of the more general struggles which were to develop outside the factories.

*Milan can be divided into four areas:*

- (a) The City Center:** banks, businesses, shops, hotels, and luxury apartments.
- (b) Old working-class areas:** from which the workers are being pushed out. These areas are lived in by the traditional Milanese working class, pensioners, small shopkeepers and post-war migrants from the South. Most of these people are eligible for the municipal-housing waiting list. The housing in these areas is a mixture of early, pre-war municipal housing, and very old privately-owned houses which have no amenities. Private owners, the biggest is Ceschini, collect millions in rent. These old working-class neighborhoods have traditions, history, and local community life which make them very different places to live in from the new working-class neighborhoods. In the older neighborhoods, the struggle over housing has developed around making the old apartments livable, rent reduction, and the fight against eviction of tenants, which landlords are keen to attempt in order to be able to renovate the apartments and sell them off to someone with cash. In other cases landlords take in rents and service charges for years without doing any repairs. They let apartments become so run down that they can get permission to knock them down and build luxury apartments in their place.

# Take Over the City by Lotta Continua

*Translated and edited by Ernest Dowson. Taken From Radical America, vol. 7, #2.*

## Translator's Preface

Community struggle in Italy has gone beyond the trade-union tradition which limits the class struggle to the fight for higher wages. The Italian working class has recognized that their needs for a freer and happier life cannot be realized by increasing the spending power of individual groups of workers. Any gains made inside the factories have been countered by the bosses' use of inflation and property speculation. Social services (housing, hospitals, schools, and so on) are determined solely by the needs of the large firms. In this situation the struggle in the community becomes crucial and working-class people are forced to discover new forms of self-organization, tactics, and demands.

The rent strikes have developed not as symbolic acts of protest against government policies, but as a direct response to the tyranny of rent. Thousands of families, finding that they can't afford the rent or not being able to see why they should pay it when they are living in run-down tenements or in projects where there are no amenities, fall into arrears and are threatened with eviction. The rent strike binds them together and makes an active weapon out of a series of isolated protests.

The strikes are organized block by block, staircase by staircase, with regular meetings, newsletters, wall newspapers, leaflets, and demonstrations. In the course of the struggle people begin to take control of their project or building, asking themselves why they should pay rent, how much they should pay, if any, and what it should be used for. At the same time they make sure that the rent collector and the police can't carry out their jobs. Anti-eviction squads are set up, and contacts are established with workers in nearby factories who can be brought out immediately. Women play an essential role in the organization of the rent strike. During the day, along with their kids, they guard the project against the police.

Occupations in Italy have been mass collective actions involving hundreds of people. There has never been any question of legal rights, and there have been many violent clashes with the police, with people defending themselves from behind barricades. The buildings taken over have often been modern blocks of apartments left empty by speculators. In some cases the workers building the apartments have joined in the occupation. Control of the apartments and decisions about how the struggle should be fought are in the hands of general meetings. In the course of the struggle new, collective ways of living have developed; daycare centers, communal kitchens, and people's health centers are developed. In this way people begin to live in the buildings in a way which is totally opposed to the idea of isolated, private units for which the architects designed them.

In Italy people have recognized that rent strikes and occupations are part of the same struggle. "A house is a right, don't pay rent!" has been a common slogan for both; and in a number of instances, for example in Milan, the same organizations

The key objective for the militants at Alfa Romeo was that of mobilizing the workers for an attack against the company's structure of job classification, to force management to alter it to correspond to the objective process of massification occurring in auto production. It also meant attacking the capitalist rationale underlying the whole system of job classification with its built-in mechanisms of selection based not on the actual expertise of the workers (which in any case is being undermined by the massification process), but rather on the workers' submission to managerial authority, goals, and values. (As the AA puts it: "You will be 'selected' not on the basis of what you know or are able to do, but on the basis of your willingness to lick ass.")

The militants proposed, therefore, that the six categories which made up the company's job-classification structure be replaced with four levels of "classification" with automatic passage from one level to another (on the basis of workers' seniority and consent), under the supervision of the delegates' council. A similar proposal was advanced for the office employees. These demands, as the document shows, were only partially secured. The notion of "levels" was introduced, and automatic passage from the second to the third level was granted, but with management still firmly in control of the process of "promotion". However, even if the actual gains were meager, the struggles around this central demand served to mobilize the mass of workers and carry forward the attack against the capitalist ideology of work. Finally, the value of this document lies in showing the concrete forms of struggle which the workers created from day to day, their ability to anticipate the bosses' and the Unions' next move, and their success in analyzing their Struggle in terms of its wider political significance. [Just ignore the Leninist rhetoric.]

## NOVEMBER 12 (Friday)

The delegates' council decided today on six to seven hours of strike for the coming week. There was a struggle between two lines: that of the unions and that of the militant vanguards. The unions wanted to give the executive the power to decide how many hours to strike and in what way. Though this line was rejected, the unions were able to limit the duration of the strikes to six hours. The line taken by the militant vanguards called for at least nine or ten hours and a more incisive way of conducting the strikes, such as picket lines, marches inside the factory, and so on. The union line is founded on the conviction that at present the will to struggle on the part of the working class is at a low ebb: "Reality is what it is; we may as well adjust to it, try not to run ahead of ourselves ... (The unions "firemen" have gotten so used to throwing water on the flames that they now throw it even when there is no fire.) We of the Autonomous Assembly are not much more optimistic, but we feel that if reality is indeed what it is we must first of all try to analyze and understand this state of affairs and then try to change it by pushing for a broader and stronger mobilization.

## NOVEMBER 15 (Monday)

Today there's a one and a half hour strike.

At the Portello plant, a general assembly is held in the cafeteria. An official of the UILM (the Right-wing Social Democrat metal workers union) speaks for over 45

minutes. No one can figure out what he is trying to say, and he is loudly booed. As the workers begin to rule out an official from the FIOM arrives and makes an announcement that explodes in the assembly like a bomb: "The management," he says, "due to technical difficulties, was unable to complete the paychecks, and as a result, Instead of receiving a regular bi-weekly check, each worker will receive \$50." Immediately a comrade seizes the microphone and yells "Let's go visit the management." A procession immediately forms and begins making its way toward the building which houses the executive offices. A group marches into the president's office shouting "Luraghi, you fascist, you're the first one on the list!" As the word spreads that the strike will continue, the procession makes its way through each department and office, pulling everybody out. Even the workers who usually scab walk off the job when they find out that instead of their usual paychecks they'll be getting only \$50. Union "firemen" are trying to put out the flames by appealing for a "democratic decision", but no one is listening. Many departments stay shut all day, and scores of workers go home, including those who arrived for the second shift.

At the Arese plant, another FIOM official brings the news of the reduced paychecks, and all hell breaks loose in the general assembly. Amid shouts and jeers and total bedlam the official tries to explain: "Comrades, this is a calculated move on the company's part; let's not accept provocation. I propose that a delegation be formed and sent to...." To Management, he no doubt wanted to say; but we're already on our way, all of us together en masse. To hell with a delegation! The long procession of workers making their way to the executive offices with raised fists gives me the feeling of being in Saint Petersburg during the October Revolution. About 500 of us crowd around one of the executives stating our demand: "We want the money, all of it now." In the meantime, under the window outside, an assembly is being held to decide how to carry on the struggle: "Let's all march to Milan!" "Let's continue the strike all day!" But once again a union (FIOM) proposal passes: "Let's be calm, comrades; the struggle won't end today. Let's show some good sense...." Moral: The strike ends at 1 pm. Luckily this decision is followed only in part. The upholstery and waxing departments strike for the rest of the day, and many workers, even those from the second shift, sit in front of their machines with arms folded. I have been in the factory many years, but I've never seen such good assemblies where everyone feels free to speak and where we're finally beginning to discuss political situations.

### **NOVEMBER 16 (Tuesday)**

At the Portello plant: Internal processions form, and for the first time a group of office personnel (about a hundred of them) enter all the departments, combing them for scabs. In the engine department some of the workers can't believe their eyes: "How is it possible?" they say. "Now the office personnel come to pull out the workers!" The strong participation of the office employees is one of the most important features of this struggle: Some of them, who until yesterday would leave the factory for the local cafe, are right here beside us in the plant-wide procession. The slow and painstaking work, person by person, is beginning to yield fruit. The first signs of raised consciousness begin to show; even the office employees and technicians begin to understand that they are exploited: They are starting to rebel

dissatisfaction, but the unions are saying that we can't go on with the struggle, that the working class is tired, and that therefore the agreement should be accepted as it stands. Even we of the AA know very well that after 150 hours of strike the struggle has come to an end, but we are not afraid to say that the agreement, far from being a great victory, is a bitter disappointment, especially for the office personnel.

### **FEBRUARY 21 (Monday)**

**Portello:** There is a general assembly in the cafeteria from 10 to 11 am. Everyone is there; workers, office employees, about 3,000 people. The FIM official goes over the main points of the agreement. He goes on and on for over half an hour and soon mumbling and restless whispering can be heard all over the hall. Finally he says: "Now we will vote, a mere formality, but let's see: Who's In favor of the agreement?" About 60% raise their hands amid shouts and jeers. People are yelling "Sellouts, clowns..." For a further demonstration of support the union official asks slyly: "Those who favor continuing the struggle raise your hands." Despite this formulation (many of course object to the agreement but prefer not to continue the strike) about 40% raise their hands. The shouting grows more insistent, but the official declares with a perfectly straight face "The overwhelming majority approves of ending the struggle!" and then makes a quick exit. The shouting and hissing continues as members of the CP brass stand there at a loss for words. They don't have the courage to engage the workers in conversation as the assembly breaks up into smaller groups to discuss the agreement and the manner in which the assembly was held. Many ask why no separate department meetings were held. Others say that if the automatic passage isn't reached with this agreement, the struggle will go on and set off a chain of wildcats in every department. These who are talking are not from the ranks of the vanguards, but just ordinary workers from the base. Especially among the office employees dissatisfaction is high, and it will be important to avoid a swing to the right. We'll have to push hard for autonomous organizing at the level of the base. After the meeting is closed, a group of office employees come over and ask if they can join the AA because they've decided not to renew their union membership. We explain that the AA has no formal membership, but that they are welcome to the AA meetings any time.

situation. (Even a CP senator showed up, but after looking around a few minutes, he left.) A comrade from Quarto Oggiaro had phoned everyone from his home phone, and by some strange coincidence the police blocked all the roads leaving Quarto Oggiaro. His phone was clearly being tapped. But our chief pre-occupation is the train: Now that the tracks are in good repair, it won't be so easy to stop it. At about 3:30 am all the police take their positions, and after opening the gates they let out 10 trucks carrying about 75 cars. The police are brandishing their rifles and using them to keep back the workers who are pressing forward and yelling "Fascists, fascists!" to the passing truck drivers. A few of the cops look stoned and unsteady, and their faces are angry and full of hate. There are too few of us to resist effectively, but we manage to put it over on the pigs anyway. While a large group of us create an incident to cause commotion and keep the police busy, a smaller group quietly sneak over to an area where the trucks will be passing to leave the grounds. They succeed in damaging nearly all the cars on the last five trucks by throwing stones. The police are really embarrassed, and the truck drivers who had remained outside now realize that it would be impossible to drive out with undamaged cars for the rest of the night. The policemen who escorted the truck drivers out of the factory gates are now clashing with a group of comrades near the exit. They wait for one of the trucks to barely inch forward, and then charge the workers. We return to the drivers to warn them that if they don't clear out, the responsibility for what might happen will be on their shoulders. After about five minutes they leave, and not long after the police leave also. With 30 trucks and a train, they could have carried off about 500 vehicles. As things turned out, they took out only 75, and more than half of them were damaged. Despite the grand display of police power, out of all proportion to our meager numbers, we managed to win a victory (a) because we were able to persuade the truck drivers to come over to our side, and (b) because the police never thought that we could get so many comrades over to the Arese plant on such short notice.

### **FEBRUARY 18 (Friday)**

**Portello:** This morning the delegates' council held a meeting at which the FIOM official explained the text of the agreement finally reached this week in Rome. The "automatic passage" is there, but in name only. Strong limitations are built into it: There are more than four levels, because within the first level there are those who never go on to the second, and within the second and third there are discriminatory criteria between workers, not to mention the fourth level, which retains a coefficient amounting to another level.

For the office employees, there is precious little of what they wanted. The union talks about "areas to be delimited" in connection with passage from the second to the third, perhaps with the help of a special commission which, when translated, as we all know, means: postpone the problem until there is no more mass mobilization, so that the company has a chance to maneuver however and whenever it wishes. The only new thing: a \$72 bonus for everyone, including the scabs. The PCI, with a triumphant tone, celebrates the contract by declaring it "a great victory", but then someone points out that the automatic passage is a farce, that the levels are more than four, and that the office employees have gained nothing. There is an air of general

against their supervisors and bosses; they refuse to put in overtime. In short, they are discovering the class struggle and looking to the workers' vanguard for a reference point. Today, when with great excitement they went to pull out the scabs from each department, a technician approached me and said: "You know, until now I only came in here to see the machines; but today I've understood that there are men in here too. From now on it will be different for me."

At the Arese plant, this morning at 6 am, we of the AA passed out a leaflet about the rent strike in a Milan district where a number of Alfa workers live, then, on Strike between 9:30 and 10:30. Even though one hour is too brief, we didn't pass up the chance for an in-plant procession: We marched along together, pulling out all the scabs. At the Computer Center everyone was working: We forced them all out and started discussing the contract proposals, how to carry on the struggle, how the bosses eat up our salaries outside the factory, and how we must respond, namely with rent strikes, neighborhood struggles, and the like, and not by sitting in front of the TV all night like morons, because this is just what the bosses want. The discussion is prolonged because the workers want to voice their criticisms of the way the struggle is being handled, that is, with only one hour of strike at a time.

### **NOVEMBER 17 (Wednesday)**

We found out that a meeting was held last night by management personnel. All of them are really pissed off because they can't work undisturbed in the factory. Well, we had a meeting too, and decided to form a picket line at the Portello plant until 10 o'clock, and this time the "firemen" could not pull back. The picket line turned out to be really tough. The usual scabs who hang around the entrance are rather pathetic; they just stand there and don't have the guts to come forward, not even to talk. They form little groups, like bigots outside a church; they whisper, shake their heads, deplore, and so on. But they don't move; they wait for someone else to cross the picket line for them. As always when a picket line is formed, the comrades use the occasion to discuss political questions, to clear up doubts and encourage those who waver. The results of these discussions aren't always immediate, but in the long run they leave their mark; you find people beside you in later struggles that you'd never expect.

At the Arese plant, a strike is on from 9:30 to 11 am. There is no picket line, but a massive procession is held. There are more than 3,000 workers, and they make the rounds and clean out the whole factory. Leading the march is a giant banner with the three metal-worker union names (FIOM, FIM, and UILM) and the phrase underneath "the delegates' council". Leading is also our Armstrong, a comrade who plays the trumpet and can belt out favorite proletarian songs like *The Internationale*. Suddenly in the distance we hear a deafening noise: A few comrades have managed to open up some vehicles in the last phase of production and are honking all the horns in unison! For the trade unionists the most important thing is that this "long walk" in the factory be "orderly and responsible," but the comrades don't forget that their duty is to drive out the scabs, and at intervals they leave the procession and, forming separate groups, make their way into the departments.

### **NOVEMBER 19 (Friday)**

At the Portello plant, the office workers strike from 3 pm on. They meet together and decide to comb the entire plant for scabs, because “It isn’t right to just go to the same few offices.” A number of offices are already empty because the managers, eyes of the boss, are absent. But scabs are not lacking. Those beginning their strike at 4 pm join the procession. To take the scabs by surprise we climb the stairs quietly, and then we open the door with a start, yelling and whistling in unison. The most common thing shouted, distinctly and with feeling, is “Vultures!” In a few offices, hoping to remain hidden, the employees are in the dark, but one blow from our whistles is enough to scatter them like roaches discovered in the light. They congregate in small groups in front of the main door where two police commissioners are standing. We are all singing the “Ballad of Pinelli” (an anarchist murdered by the police in ‘69) and “Calabresi Assassin” (the police chief accused of killing him).

### **DECEMBER 5 (Friday)**

Yesterday the police attacked the picket line in Milan, and here at Arese the response is slow in coming and inadequate. Today the workers read in the paper that some one at the Portello plant was hit in the face with a police rifle during an attack, and as they enter the plant angered by this news, they see a huge union sign announcing “two hours of strike with a march around the cafeteria”. By now the union has shown clearly that it prefers the in-plant processions to be “just walks” and not “scab hunting,” some tactic! The police are attacking and we’re walking around the cafeteria like asses! At 9 o’clock, when the two-hour strike begins, only two comrades from AA need step out of the procession that more than a hundred workers immediately follow suit and go hunting for scabs in even the smallest and most remote departments in the factory. During the afternoon, a few of us find out that in one of our departments five workers are scabbing. A special issue of Pasquino is prepared identifying the five scabs and promising “Pasquino will strike again!” (Pasquino is a news sheet which appears on the walls all over the plant, in the most unlikely places: the departments, the toilets, the cafeteria, and so on — and always when least expected. No one knows who writes it, but everyone fears it, and in this struggle it has become like the sign of Zorro. The Pasquino which named the five scabs had a devastating effect: For two hours they were booed and hissed at, and they didn’t even have the guts to walk away; they were overcome with shame.

### **DECEMBER 9 TO JANUARY 9**

As we look over our notes we see that between December 9 and January 9 the struggle remained even but uneventful. Among other things, this month has been full of holidays and the rate of absence in the plant has been very high. During the Christmas holiday, for example, many workers took special leave or sick days. There were days when the plant was operating with only 50% of the employees. The strikes continued at a steady but sluggish pace an hour or an hour and a half almost every day, like a drop in the bucket of the bosses’ profits preventing the re-launching of production, but at the same time demoralizing the workers. A number of workers (and not only we of the AA) have understood that to really resist means to break the

the demise of the present society. The show was widely understood and enthusiastically applauded by the workers. We sang songs of struggle led by Paul Ciarchi (also of *La Comune*) until 1:30 am. When revisionism was attacked throughout the evening, you could see the bureaucrats squirming in discomfort. Finally some of us went to sleep and others went to picket the finished-products gate. If asked for a general assessment of today’s occupation, we would have to say that it wasn’t all we had hoped it would be, but at the same time it did contain some very positive things. Above all it was a victory snatched from the unions by the workers at the base, and even in the way it was conducted, the unions were prevented from turning it into a platform for political parties and “big shots”. We were successful in bringing into the plant workers from other factories, students from many schools, and militants from a variety of political groups dealing with the unions from a position of power.

### **FEBRUARY 12-13 (Saturday and Sunday)**

Thursday night a few workers tore out the train tracks running through part of the factory grounds to prevent a train with 250 finished cars from leaving. The union issued a communiqué which was picked up by Saturday charging that forces “external” to the factory were responsible for this “typically fascist” action. It was the union’s way of attacking the workers who insist that the picket against the finished products must continue at all costs because it is the only form of struggle which is hitting the company in the guts. (The dealers, both domestic and foreign, are pressuring for cars.) Already, a few days ago, a contingent of 200 police managed to get eight trucks (carrying about 60 new cars) safely out of the plant gates, and the union said not a word. This evening (Saturday), while we of the AA are in a meeting, a few comrades arrive from Arese and explain that police reinforcements are on their way to the finished products picket area and are planning to help the train get by the picket lines, since the tracks have been repaired. We leave immediately for the Arese plant, where on arrival we find over 1,000 policemen. We’re not sure whether they’ll try to get the train out or whether they’ll use the trucks.

About 1:00 am, 30 trucks appear outside the gates. (At 7 pm about a dozen of them had entered through another gate, and the police themselves had loaded the cars onto them!) We start talking to the truck drivers: “Our struggle,” we say, “is your struggle too. You are exploited just like we are. If you go in, all our sacrifices to maintain the picket of the finished products day and night will go up in smoke. After more than an hour of discussion, they are persuaded, and refuse to enter the gates. A squad of policemen, stationed inside, went to the gates and tried to get rid of a group of comrades who are seated on the ground near the gates. They shout “Rauss just like the Nazis.” They say their job is to ensure respect for the law and the right to work, and that if we don’t move they will drag us away. One of them, who is asked by a comrade if he has the proper authorization, answers that he doesn’t give a damn about authorization, and that they themselves are the only necessary authority. They bellow orders to the truck drivers to come forward, but the drivers don’t move. The officers are foaming with anger as the drivers openly defy them. After 10 minutes they retreat into the plant, closing the gates behind them.

Meanwhile, other comrades arrive after being notified of the emergency

plant (isn't that what we wanted?), that Alfa had discontinued all services (cafeteria, guards, and so on), and that we must ask all students to leave immediately.

What is really bothering them is that many have by now left the general assembly to join small discussion groups. There is real mass participation on the part of workers and office personnel, and it is really an occupation now that all the executives have abandoned ship and the factory is in the hands of the workers, who are guarding the gates vigilantly to prevent any fascist attacks. Contrary to the bureaucrats' expectations, everyone has remained in the factory, preferring to participate in group discussions and aware that this new form of struggle is a demonstration of the strength of the working class. After a short break to grab a sandwich, the general assembly and the discussion groups reconvene for the afternoon. On the lower floor of the cafeteria a study group with about a hundred people is formed. Several issues are tackled from the special problems of office personnel to the repression inside and outside the plant to the line of the CP and the current move to the Right by the Government. This was a lesson for the CP and the unions which tried to de-emphasize the political value of the occupation and had brought in only those people they approved of. (In the morning, for example, they had refused to give the floor to a group of militants from "Il Manifesto".) Around 7 pm the union wants to close the plant to all outsiders, but the decision is made to allow workers from other factories to enter until 10 pm. Many people have gone home for the night, and the few hundred who remain are organizing the roster for guard duty throughout the night. While all the main gates continue to be picketed, inside the plant there is constant surveillance in all the departments, and outside there are groups of militants in cars controlling all people who look suspicious. At one point, two men in a car are stopped and asked for their IDs. They really look suspect, and turn out to be two cops who hang around the area until 5 am. A few of us go to sleep on desks, while others, better organized, have brought their sleeping bags. Even the back seat of a car is fine enough when you're really sleepy, and we're all dead tired and very cold. At the gates huge bon-fires are burning to keep those outside warm.

**Arese:** The day of occupation of the factory: The security arrangements are handed over to an FIOM official who is careful not to give us of the AA the red armbands identifying all those involved in keeping order. With or without armbands, we're on the picket lines. There is a happy atmosphere because the plant is in the hands of the workers, who are singing songs of struggle as they make the rounds in the various departments. Throughout the morning delegations from political parties, municipal governments, other factories, and student groups enter the plant. The cafeteria is not in service, and by 2 pm we're all starving. Many have left to have lunch at home or at a nearby restaurant, and will return later in the afternoon. The militants from "Red Rescue" bring some wine, and around 2:30 some 3,000 sandwiches arrive, compliments of various neighborhood co-operatives.

One of the most exciting parts of the day was the performance given by Dario Fo's *La Comune*, a radical theatre group. The mimic, Vidal, showed the alienation that workers undergo in capitalist society, and did a mimic drama about

plans of the State boss, to prevent 'Papa' IRI, the State holding company, from doing as it pleases. These workers were by our side as we hunted down the scabs, as we marched in the picket lines, as we held discussions and denounced the political line of the unions and the C P, for whom the workers' struggle is only a tool to blackmail the Government. For them, doing politics means telling the assholes in power: "You see, this little flame might become a big fire if we weren't here to control it, so you better give us what we're asking for." We in the plants are on to this little game and have had enough of their bullshit; more and more workers begin to understand and organize.

### **JANUARY 10 (Monday)**

Finally we have a breakthrough, like a reawakening after a long slumber. The in-plant processions at the Portello plant this morning were aggressive and combative. With renewed militance the marchers spilled over into the streets surrounding the plant and blocked traffic for miles. Inside the plant the second shift formed an internal procession to prevent overtime work from 5 pm on, and it too blocked incoming traffic at the factory's Gate Number 3.

At the Arese plant, a general assembly is held at 8:30 am. The union (FIOM) official speaks and proposes the usual two and a half hour strike. The entire company of Workers boos and hisses, and he is forced to step down. Then a comrade from AA takes the mike and calls on the workers to join hands and occupy the plant, urging that the situation is ripe for such action. Everyone applauds enthusiastically while the FIOM official tries in vain to regain control of the assembly. A comrade from the PCIs Communist Youth Federation who has co-operated closely with the AA takes the mike and proposes that the highway used to move the finished products from the plant be blocked until 3 pm. The assembly approves unanimously and as the workers begin filing out to plan the action the FIOM official manages to get hold of the mic. Amid the confusion, he starts his oration to the effect that we must stay within certain limits (Which?) not allow certain minorities to take over the struggle, and so on. But by now over half the workers are gone, and when only a fourth of them are left the "fireman (someone who clamps down on working class self-activity)" re-proposes the limited strike action with an in-plant procession. He asks for a show of hands, and about 30 votes "yes". Without any further ado he declares that the proposal has been accepted and closes the meeting with a historic phrase: "The workers' assembly is sovereign!"

In the meantime the workers from the second shift are blocking the highway, proving they don't give a damn about the union's directives. There are about 3,000 workers, and the line-up of stopped cars extends for many miles. The FIOM official is going around the plant saying that tomorrow we'll block the factory exits where the products are shipped out. (It's like saying: "Listen, boss, tomorrow I'm going to steal your cows." So he has the time to hide them. In fact during the nightmare, cars will be shipped out from the plant.) He is also saying that the night shift should go on strike, while Management is asking in all the departments who wants to work the night shift, emphasizing the overtime pay. This society leaves hundreds of workers at home, while in both big and small plants those who work are forced to put in

overtime, work night shifts, and tolerate speed-ups. It's a society based on profit, and therefore on exploitation. It's nothing new. But let's not just cry over it like the unions; let's get on with demolishing it.

### **JANUARY 12 (Wednesday)**

While at the Arese plant the blocking of all plant exits continues to prevent finished cars from leaving the production areas, at the Portello plant an assembly is called for 9 am in the cafeteria. The level of participation is high, not to say total. There are 2500 to 3,000 workers, and the level of militance is high. As soon as the FIOM official takes the mic, the hissing indicates that the workers want two things: the in-plant procession and the blocking of the highway traffic. The official tries to stall for time, proposing a simple strike until 11 am, but the hissing gets louder. He tries to explain that blocking traffic is a way of giving in to provocation, but they won't let him go on. Next he proposes a strike until 12, but the assembly shouts that that isn't long enough. At that point another FIOM official takes the mic and says that the nature of the strike action was decided yesterday by the executive: until 12 pm and with no outside procession, but if the assembly feels it is necessary, a brief march outside the plant can be held.

A huge procession forms, and after cleaning out the whole factory marches out the factory gates on to Viale Scarampo, one of the most deserted streets of Milan. As it moves along, already considerably dampened by the "fire men", it passes in front of the hospital for the terminally ill, where a funeral procession is forming. At that point the pace of the workers' march really slows down and looks like part of the funeral. As the procession cuts through a side street, the banner of the delegates' council which had been leading ends up in the rear. As we reach Via Trevino the police are waiting in a scissor formation. The workers begin chanting "Fascists, sellouts, servants of the boss!" while the scissor breaks in two under the impact of the forward-pressing procession. The police are forced to retreat as the workers continue shouting, while the trade unionists form a cordon to protect the police from the workers! A few punches fly between the more combative elements in the workers' ranks and the union "firemen" who accuse them of wanting confrontation and acting as provocateurs. (As if the police, parked in front of the factory gates every day, aren't a permanent provocation.) At any rate, the police get back on their trucks and the procession returns to the plant. Having forced the police to retreat is a major victory. And the unions have shown their true colors: The useless assembly which lasted over one hour, the procession at the rear of the factory, the fear of confrontation with the police as if the workers were the kamikaze attack against the vanguards, the constant appeal to the executive as the only seat of decision making power, the class struggle waged in white gloves, all these are different forms of the same coin, of the same old union tactic. It ignites the struggle just enough to maintain credibility, but is always ready to throw water on it as soon as the pressure from the base threatens to undermine its control of the situation.

compromise, and the occupation is scheduled to begin at 9 am tomorrow and last a full 24 hours. At 2:30, an assembly is held at the Arese plant to inform the workers of the decision. The FIOM official chooses his words with such skill that his climb up the union ladder is virtually assured. He says that the decisions of the delegates' council must be respected (the assembly is no longer sovereign) and that caution must be exercised not to allow lapses into spontaneism, adventurism, extremism, and so on. A comrade tries to interrupt, but the bureaucrats from the CP who are guarding the microphones say "Let him be; he's the usual extremist; a minority of one."

At the Arese plant, the FIOM official clarifies to the assembly that we are having not an "occupation" (God forbid!), but rather a "permanent assembly". Occupation or no occupation, the strong picket lines continue at the point of finished production, the most vulnerable place for the boss. The workers know what they're doing. In the evening the company advises the union brass that since they have behaved so "responsibly", tomorrow will be considered a regular work day and everyone will get paid. The game is fully within the rules: "I could kill you if I wanted to, but I'll only hurt you a little, and in return, boss, you'll give me a little something." This is the union, the champion of the march in reverse! It is so good at balancing the accelerator and the brakes that it always finds an "authorized parking" space. Born from the factory vanguards, the idea of the occupation was at first snubbed by the union, then fought against, and finally, because the mass of workers wanted it, approved, but only in order to immobilize it.

### **FEBRUARY 3-4 (Thursday and Friday)**

**Portello:** There is a general assembly at 9 am, and absolutely everyone is present, even those who have never been on strike before. It is the highest point of the struggle so far. Those participating in the assembly include politicians, trade unionists, and various political groups. There is even the CP, which as usual expresses its solidarity, leaves a \$160 check (disgusting!), and splits. Even a representative from the Italian Socialist Party arrives, says a few words, and leaves without even sitting down, a formality like cutting an inaugural ribbon. If this goes on much longer the assembly is going to become a nice little stage on which everyone, from revisionists to bosses, can parade before the workers.

At the gates there are workers who "guard the factory". In reality, all gates have been shut down except Gate 5, which the workers have blocked with huge metal barrels, and Gate 1, because the union said the executives have to come and go unmolested. The militants decide who enters and who leaves. The bureaucrats from the CP and the FIOM union try to let in only the people and the groups, they approve of, but we do exactly the same. As far as the students are concerned, the CP had tried to limit their participation to only three delegates from the student movement of Milan State University. We forced them, however, to admit three delegates from each factory. The morning is fast coming to an end, and we're getting fed up with all the big shots that speak and then leave. We propose that the assembly break up into smaller groups which can study specific issues more carefully, and proceed to form a group of about a hundred which sets up its own agenda. A few minutes later, a few bureaucrats arrive and with great alarm announce that all the executives have left the



official is losing his temper, but tries to regain control of the situation by proposing a regional strike, or even a national one, of all the metal workers, with a train ride to Rome, but the hissing continues, and he finally agrees to an occupation, but “just for one day”. The reaction of the workers, who immediately answer “two, two, three, three...” makes him realize that he’s fast losing his grip on things and losing face besides. He then says that meetings will be held in each department to consider the occupation further, with the results to be made known at the delegates’ council meeting tomorrow. At 10:15, an assembly is held which includes around 200 office workers, among whom are many habitual scabs. An FIOM official reviews the results of the Rome negotiations. A comrade from AA takes the occasion to clarify once again the strategic significance of the occupation: more militant struggle and a completely open factory. At 1:30 people are gathering in front of the cafeteria and talking about the way the meetings went in the departments. All the comrades are elated, on all the separate assemblies, including those of the office personnel; the occupation proposal has been accepted, in many cases unanimously. It seems that the idea has really caught fire, and everyone is discussing it as if it were an accomplished fact. Organizational details are being considered, such as constant vigilance against fascist reprisals, coordination of initiatives inside and outside the plant, and so on. It almost seems like something too big and too good to be true, but if the union tries again tomorrow to pull back it will be completely discredited in the eyes of the workers.

### **FEBRUARY 2 (Wednesday)**

At the Portello plant picket lines are set up from 7 to 10 am. At Arese strikes are on from 2:30 to 4:30. People are talking about the occupation as if it were starting today. Since 7:30 the commission nominated yesterday at the Portello plant has been meeting to study the details of the occupation. As soon as the discussion focuses on the length of the occupation there is immediate polarization: on one hand the bureaucracy of the CP and the unions who fear the difficulties which might arise if the “day of struggle” is prolonged throughout the night, and therefore propose that it run from 7 am to 11 pm; on the other hand the comrades from AA, other comrades, and the FIM, who want the occupation to begin today and end at 9 am the day after tomorrow. The discussion gets rather heated; the FIOM is even afraid of the word “occupation” and prefers to refer to the event as “a permanent assembly in control of the factory”. When one of the comrades says something about the workers becoming “owners of the factory”, the bureaucrats jump on him with words like “extremist” and “provocateur”.

The FIOM insists that the occupation can’t begin today because it would give the company a pretext for a lockout. In reality, it wants to keep itself within the rules of the Union-boss game; it only trusts top-level negotiations, and does not want to present itself at the bargaining table in Rome tomorrow with the factory already occupied. By 11:30 word arrives that many workers in the departments and offices want to occupy immediately! In many offices, the managers are going around asking the personnel to take holiday time or special leave for tomorrow. They also announce that all services in the plant will be suspended. The commission finally reaches a

### **JANUARY 14 (Friday)**

During the evening we receive news that Frank Atzeni, a comrade from AA, has been suspended indefinitely, and as usual the accusations against him have been brought by a certain Calabritto of the personnel office. Frank is one of the more active and dedicated comrades in the AA, and he has struggled hard in the past few days against the problem of the night shift. As soon as the word starts spreading that he has been suspended, his fellow workers spontaneously put down their tools. Later in the evening, a meeting is held in the office of the FIM (the Christian Democrat metal workers’ union), and a new orientation for the struggle emerges: occupation of the factory.

### **JANUARY 15 (Saturday)**

Even though it is Saturday and we’re not working today, picket lines form from 6 am on at both the Arese and Portello plants to prevent overtime work. At Arese, the 6 am picketers relieve those who have been there throughout the night making sure no finished vehicles leave the production area. Later in the morning we of the AA meet to examine the situation, and we decide to support the occupation proposal because of several new factors:

(1) During the past week the struggle has been more aggressive and incisive. Even though the union has been trying to “put out the fire”, several things have shown the willingness of the workers to fight: the clash with the police, the spontaneous strikes around the problem of the night shift initiated and conducted by the workers themselves, the immediate response to every attempt aimed at dividing the ranks. After two and a half months of struggle, the working class is very definitely off its knees.

(2) The union has had to recognize that it can’t impose light or diluted strikes, and that at this point we must take the bull by the horns. It is significant, for example, that the union (FIOM) official who has always clashed with Frank Atzeni is now openly in favor of the occupation.

(3) The struggle has shifted, now more than ever before, from the level of mere demands (the contract) to a more political level (the repression of “Papa” IRI and the renewed attempt to align those companies having partial State ownership with the Right—wing forces in power).

The occupation of the factory would function as a reference point for other struggles. Since 1947, there has been no occupations of major plants except in instances where bankruptcy was shutting them down. The union knows that in the face of badly stalled negotiations and the suspension of Frank Atzeni, the working class will act forcefully and autonomously. It therefore decides to take charge of the situation if only to avoid the embarrassment of being sidestepped. In fact, in the afternoon meeting of the executive, when the occupation is formally proposed, the FIOM official immediately comes out in support of it and urges a series of actions such as open dialogues with the democratic parties and other popular forces, meetings with municipal authorities, dialogues with other delegates’ councils and factories, and so on. Any decisions, however, are postponed until tomorrow, when the full factory executive will meet.

### **JANUARY 16 (Sunday)**

The delegation returns from Rome, where the negotiations between the Government, the unions, and the company have been stalled for some time. It explains in an “open” executive meeting that there have been no further negotiations, but only a “series of meetings” which apparently haven’t resolved a thing. The company insists that the proposed automatic passage from category to category would injure the workers in the higher categories, and will only agree to automatic passage from Category 1 to Category 2 in order to eliminate the most glaring cases of discrimination. On this point the company is intransigent. In Rome, therefore, nothing worth mentioning has happened, but the delegation insists that there hasn’t been a breakdown in negotiations, just a “postponement”. What, pray tell, is the difference, with the negotiations “postponed” now for over two months?

The problem remains about what to say and what to do in the factory tomorrow. As soon as the local FIOM official begins to summarize the consensus which emerged from yesterday’s executive meeting (occupation of the factory), the regional representative of the FIOM, who is higher up in the hierarchy, says: “The occupation of a factory is a serious thing not to be taken lightly. We can’t just improvise and risk falling into adventurism. We must be disciplined.” (Any discipline, it seems, is the responsibility of the working class.) “If we occupy, many of the workers who do not favor automatic passage will go home. Beware of spontaneism. We have no right to decide.” (False democratism, since when the base push for something in the delegates’ council, they are told that the final decision belongs to the executive.) “We must move gradually. Tomorrow we can begin with an extra few hours of strike, and then we’ll convene the delegates’ council, and after that, other meetings with the democratic parties, telegrams to . . . (etc., etc.)” This is a typical “fireman’s operation” from beginning to end. There is even one official from the FIOM who pretends not to know what the word “occupation” means. According to him, we’re all supposed to remain in the plant and work to show the bosses that we can work without them. Incredible! The local FIOM official who had come out in favor of the occupation does an about—face. The problem for the union is clearly not that of giving a militant outlet to the struggle, but rather that of holding it back so that it doesn’t explode and make a mess. What prevails, then, in the executive, is the idea of having a general assembly tomorrow morning, maybe an all day strike; then, Tuesday, the delegates’ council meeting, then the meetings with other factories with possible demonstrations, then maybe a quick trip to Rome with a lot of fanfare, then a demonstration in front of the mayor’s office, et cetera, et cetera. In short, there is just so much “political tourism.” At this point, however, we must simply wait and see what the workers think of it tomorrow.

### **JANUARY 19 (Wednesday)**

Today, with strikes between 9 and 11 am, several in-plant assemblies have been called for the office personnel at the Portello plant. In one of these, at which I am present, a comrade from AA takes the floor and insists on two themes which we consider crucial: the suspension of Frank Atzeni, and the occupation of the factory. Atzeni must be re-instated, says the comrade, because he has always been in the

forefront of the struggles. By striking him the company has struck all of us in the front lines. (Something a line comrade of Frank told me about him comes to mind: “Frank is worth more to us than a good agreement, and not just for reasons of friendship. We know that with him in the plant we’ve won; without him even the best agreement would be a defeat, because we would be more vulnerable: The bosses could strike us too the minute we raise our heads.”) The comrade then touches on the idea of the occupation as a “political moment which unites”. The occupation would help us feel more united and part of the same struggle. It would allow us to discuss general political questions, to meet with militants from other plants and hear about their own struggles firsthand. This assembly with the office personnel was really instructive. It showed that there are many people who are uninformed and never discuss political matters, but who as soon as they begin to form clear ideas, are right there with you in the struggles.

### **JANUARY 31 (Monday)**

The unions have been systematically downplaying the idea of an occupation, saying that at the most we should have a “symbolic” one which lasts only one day. Meanwhile Frank Atzeni has been re-instated, and this is no doubt a significant retreat for the company and is greeted by the workers as a great victory. This morning the AA distributed a leaflet at both the Portello and Arese plants. It tries to clarify the nature and importance of the proposed occupation, and celebrates the re-instatement of Frank Atzeni.

At the Arese plant the workers are really pissed off when they learn that there will be only one hour of strike to hold the general assembly. The assembly begins at 9 am, and there are tons of participants. When the FIOM official begins to speak you can sense the tension among the workers: The assembly feels like a bomb ready to burst. The official is explaining in minutest detail the negotiations in Rome; he obviously wants the whole hour to go by without giving the workers a chance to take the floor. But after half an hour a restless murmur can be heard which gets louder by the minute, and someone yells out that the meeting should be prolonged till 11. The official agrees, but rather haphazardly and with little conviction in his voice.

The workers insist that the meeting be officially prolonged, and as the official continues repeating himself, stalling for time, a comrade from the AA suddenly jumps up on the platform and yanks the mic away from the trade unionist. The bureaucrats immediately turn down the volume so no one can hear a thing. Hell breaks loose as the workers begin to boo and hiss and yell out insults. Another FIOM official intervenes and tries to throw water on the flames, but almost immediately a few comrades from the AA take the floor and the occupation proposal is accepted by the assembly. It will be discussed again tomorrow in the delegates’ council, but the occupation looks like a sure thing at this point.

Also at the Portello plant the general assembly is very stormy. At 9 am, as I enter the cafeteria, people are bargaining on the table with their silverware, shouting and jeering. Many have read the morning papers and know that the negotiations are still stalled. As soon as the union official starts talking about the Rome negotiations, the assembly explodes and everyone starts yelling “Occupation, occupation!” The