

# LA POLITICA IN PRIMA PERSONA!

(POLITICS IN THE FIRST PERSON).

THE AUTONOMOUS WORKERS  
MOVEMENT IN ITALY

By WICKED  
MESSENGERS (1974)

REVOLUTION AND COUNTER  
-REVOLUTION IN ITALY

By CLAUDIO  
ALBERTANI (1978)



**RISING  
FREE  
REPRINT**



Again and again over the last decade, moments in the Italian class struggle have acted as an inspiration to revolutionaries and leftists in this country. Be it the workers struggles of 1969-71, the student movements of 1977, Autonomia Operaia, the 'creative' autonomia, the extra-parliamentary groups, the feminist or gay movements, the armed parties. Whatever your 'category' it's been possible to find a model in Italy. Even professors can look at their Italian counterparts and dream of secret lives and martyrdom. Part of this is rightly a tribute to the intensity and imagination displayed in these moments of refusal - an intensity and imagination often in marked contrast to similar reactions in Britain. But equally in the lefts interest in Italy can be seen more negative ambitions. Italian capitalism has always been a great exporter of 'style'. The fascination of Italian leftism for many so called revolutionaries is the stylish gloss that can be given to the same useless illusions, the modish new bottles for the same sour grapes. This is nothing new. Leninists have regularly turned to the history of the Italian C.P (whether the sophisticated jesuitry of a Gramsci or the obsessive organisational fetishism of a Bordiga) in efforts to refurbish their bankruptcy. Today a similarly illusory source of renewal is sought in the various organisational reactions to the nakedly anti-proletarian C.P. Of particular fascination have been the 57 varieties of neo-leninism - both soft : the extra-parliamentary rackets (eg. Lotta Continua), and hard : the post-maoist tendencies within the area of Autonomy ('diffuse party', 'party-process', non-party parties). The source of this fascination here is clearly the same 'crisis of militancy' that has produced, for example, "Beyond the Fragments". Its critique of the left and its failure is similarly based on purely structural grounds (critique of hierarchy, lack of democracy, 'betrayal' etc.) not of function (as ideological wing of capital). (Alternatively, critique of the lefts failure to respond to : read instrumentalise : new movements). Behind the interest in class composition and the 'new class subject' all too often lies the same old despair at the failure of the working class to shape up. Behind the sophisticated analyses of capitalist restructuring we discover the same old productivist horrors: "self-management" or "workers control" (sic.). Fetishising the superficially new forms of capitalist attack or proletarian defence provides radical camouflage for the same old leftist project - channeling struggle into reformism, into the restyling of capitalism. The effect of this embrace of death has been to obscure much of what has been genuinely inspirational and subversive in the Italian struggles.

We're reprinting these articles because we've found them useful and interesting. Of course no solutions to anything can be found in texts (except perhaps how to console the failure to be subversive). But we hope that they'll at least provide food for thought.

Rising Free April 1981.

# Politics in the First Person

## the autonomous workers'

## movement in Italy

(This article first appeared as a supplement to the paper Wildcat - No. 4 December 1974 - and was written by the group Wicked Messengers.)

**Autonomy:** the state of independent self-organisation. 'Workers' autonomy' has become a crucial concept in the Italian revolutionary movement. It refers to workers' independence from all capitalist structures and social relations - including the relations of dominance reproduced in the unions, parties, and ultra-left groups.

The Autonomia Operaia tendency had its birth in the resentment of revolutionary workers towards the control exercised within the organisations by 'outside militants' - intellectuals and students. The bitterness is shown very clearly in the minutes of a meeting held in Turin in 1971, one of a series of meetings of industrial workers involved in various left groups or rank and file organisations.

**The situation within our organisation**

We asked ourselves who holds the political direction of our organisation, and how this is used, both nationally and locally. In our opinion there has always been a difference of political weight between the 'outside' militants and the workers. Up till now it has always been the former who decided the political line and have imposed it in the assemblies, thanks to their greater preparation and the greater amount of time at their disposal.

The workers have been merely the 'shit-workers' of the revolution, and this is perhaps why we have lost some very good militants. We do not share the attitude of anyone who leaves, or of those who stay and limit themselves to getting angry, and criticising comrades on an individual level. However, we cannot ignore the fact that this situation has brought about considerable confusion and uncertainty in our work.

Objectives have been proposed, which involved the whole of the organisation, and then they have been suddenly abandoned. So the workers could only be the passive recipients of decisions, because they were never able to understand the basic meaning of a particular line, when new ones kept popping up.

Official documents were prepared without giving the workers time to participate in their drafting.

With the centralisation of certain functions, general propaganda has improved, but at the expense of the decentralised work.

There has been a tremendous lack of information, about both local and national struggles. Consequently, economic and political analyses have been the fruit of individual work by comrades stepping into the gap.

This has brought about a lagging-behind in the formation of new cadres, people able to participate in decision-making and who can be sent to where struggles are happening. **The Role of Outside Militants** Who are the outside militants? They are the non-worker comrades in our organisation. It's wrong to call them 'students' because they are in fact working full-time for the organisation.

The outside militant can have little appreciation of what's happening inside the factory, compared with the workers.

Many of them have a harmful effect on the class struggle, because they stifle debate among the workers, or are always handing them down ready-made solutions. It's not a matter of bad faith. We must give these comrades a role, and must discuss the matter collectively.

If the workers organise themselves better in the nuclei, the outside militants are going to be left with only the centralised work (coordination, handling information) which must always be under the control of the workers.

These are among the early rumblings of discontent on the part of veteran militant workers in the Northern cities. This sense of not being in control of one's own politics is what led to the formation in many factories of autonomous workers' groups, the next stage in a process which had begun when these militants saw through the unions, with a critique like this one by the Autonomous Assembly of Alfa Romeo in Milan, headed 'The Union Defends You But Controls You':

This is how, in the present 'crisis', the union maintains its function of defending the working class:

1. Putting forward defensive, fragmentary and in effect "symbolic" struggles (especially in the sectors hit by unemployment).

2. Reinforcing union unity, which gives it more weight in bargaining over its own power relative to the boss's; and reinforcing the union power in the factory (the regulation of the shop stewards' organisation and the factory councils, trying to make them the mouthpiece for an-

nouncing to the base the decisions of the union high-ups). The attempt to shift everything to the top, manipulating the decisions of the base, came out clearly at Alfa; every time the factory council changed its line towards more advanced forms of struggle, the union seized its decision-making power.

3. Trying to prevent precontractual struggles from getting started, for fear that they spread to other smouldering factories. Instead, allowing them to spread only when they might for a 'precedent' for the national contract - or only when the thrust of the base was too strong to control.

The defensive function of the union becomes least adequate when the demands of the working class, though still fitted into a union platform, express aspirations of a political character. The Alfa platform is a typical example. Born in economic struggle, it expressed the more general political needs of the masses, bound up with their social conditions of existence. The union won't pull together these demands making them a source of political growth; nor will it embody them in demands which don't either distort the fundamental aspirations, or openly combat them, or leave them to die abandoned.

The document goes on to show how the union 'tries generally to recuperate all these needs into the pay-demand struggle and to emasculate their political potential'. **The need for Workers Democracy, an organisation in which the will of the workers has real weight in the decisions taken: the union picks up this need so as not to lose the masses, but then wins back its lost ground through bureaucratic control.**

**The need for the Political Dimension of Demands, cutting into new aspects of work conditions formerly under the boss's will: from struggles over work-speeds and piecework to egalitarian demands against pay differentials and grades. The union tries to recuperate these demands into the system and, for example, inserts into statements on automatic promotion through grades the principle of 'craft status'.**

The Autonomous Assembly goes on to summarise its reasons for not working within the union. Before 1960 it was impossible to be in touch with the working class without working in the unions. Today it's no longer so, because many workers not only in Italy but throughout the

world (from Poland to France, the United States to Sweden) have seen that the union, in whatever guise it presents itself, is above all a major means of control over the working class. So if we really want to 'put politics first', we can't work in the unions who put the economy first instead. Of course they talk about politics, but only when it's a question of making the workers' needs agree with the boss's; and they speak of the 'power' of the working class, which for them is only the 'power to sign pay agreements', in other words slavery.

For us, on the contrary, the objective remains the taking of power by the proletariat. To reach this goal, we know the economic struggle is important; but only insofar as it reinforces the workers' capacity for autonomous struggle, develops to the limit of their political needs and hence leads them to organise around objectives which are not in the nature of demands. To take up the political needs of the working class within the union means to increase the union's capacity for political control.

Such was the political biography of many Italian industrial workers. Having reached the point of breaking with the Communist Party and the unions, 'caught between the anvil of government force and the hammer of workers' forward thrust', large numbers of militants moved towards the extra-parliamentary groups - Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio.

But here, too, they found the aspiration for 'politics in the first person' unfulfilled. The slogan was in fact used by Lotta Continua at one point, as a move in its process of self-distinction from the straight left; but as we've tried to show such groups failed, so far as many workers were concerned, to place the revolution in the present. Around this slogan has crystallised a revolutionary consciousness in the here and now, which sets out from experience oppression, experienced needs and desires, to create forms of struggle which embody rather than represent the self-management on which a communist society must be founded.

The distinction between reality and illusion in revolutionary politics - between big words and big living - is hard to articulate. Inside a group, one tends to be mesmerised by a language which may have died

long ago, so far as everyday life within the organisation is concerned. Yet the language is still there; and capitalism teaches us to take appearance for reality. The Alfa workers, like many others, felt the dead hand of the old world in the comradely grip of Lotta Continua; they managed to articulate and act upon this awareness.

The Autonomous Assembly has also run up against some 'external groups' which aren't rooted in the factory, and thus fatally end up in giving huge abstract directions, making their political line fall from on high. At Alfa, the 'groups' all intervene, and are often a confusing element for the workers at the base. There are mornings when one is given five or six different leaflets. The decision to exclude from the Autonomous Assembly all militants who aren't Alfa workers was inevitable if the meetings weren't to be turned into a platform for various external groups aspiring to the political direction of the Assembly.

We reaffirm, then, our autonomy from the groups, and reject those external comrades who, with a superficial revolutionary practice, feel themselves leaders of the working class just because they sometimes come and stand outside the factory gates.

Having seen through the unions, Workers' Autonomy has come to see through vanguardism. But the tendency has found it harder to produce a theoretical language which is not contaminated by hierarchical formulations. The quotation above continues: 'The moment has come for the working class to choose its own leaders.' An improvement on leadership imposed from the outside, certainly; but don't any leaders gravitate irresistibly to a position 'outside' those who are led? There will always be people who say or do first what others are moving towards. It is only when such early swallows try to annex authority from this historical chance that they become dangerous, encouraging the 'masses' to sink their own initiative into a spectacle of other people's creativity.

Without having seen how the Autonomous Assemblies operate in practice, it's difficult to evaluate the rags and bones of Leninist ideology scattered through their texts. But it seems clear to us that the thrust of the movement is towards a more and more radical rejection of hierarchy; a replacement of ideas of leadership with a concept of the autonomous groups as 'a constant point of political reference' for practical struggles.

The document from which we have been quoting dates from 1972. A more radical expression of the theoretical position can be seen in the following extract from a discussion document issued in 1973 by the Alfa Assembly and the Committee of Struggle in the Sit-Siemens plant. Characterisation of the organisation of Workers' Autonomy

The correct development of workers autonomy must move on three lines:

1. The always anti-capitalist and anti-productivist nature — that is, attacking the structure of work — of the objectives put forward.
2. The non-legalistic terrain, linked to the necessities of struggle which our goals demand, and conditioned only

by the awareness of our balance of forces.

3. Continual development of the capacity for self-management in struggle, in all its aspects, conducted directly by the exploited masses.

In this sense the autonomous organs must not assume a role of bureaucratic representation of workers autonomy, but must develop a dialectical function of constant, totalised political definition, and of organisational experience in relation to the movement.

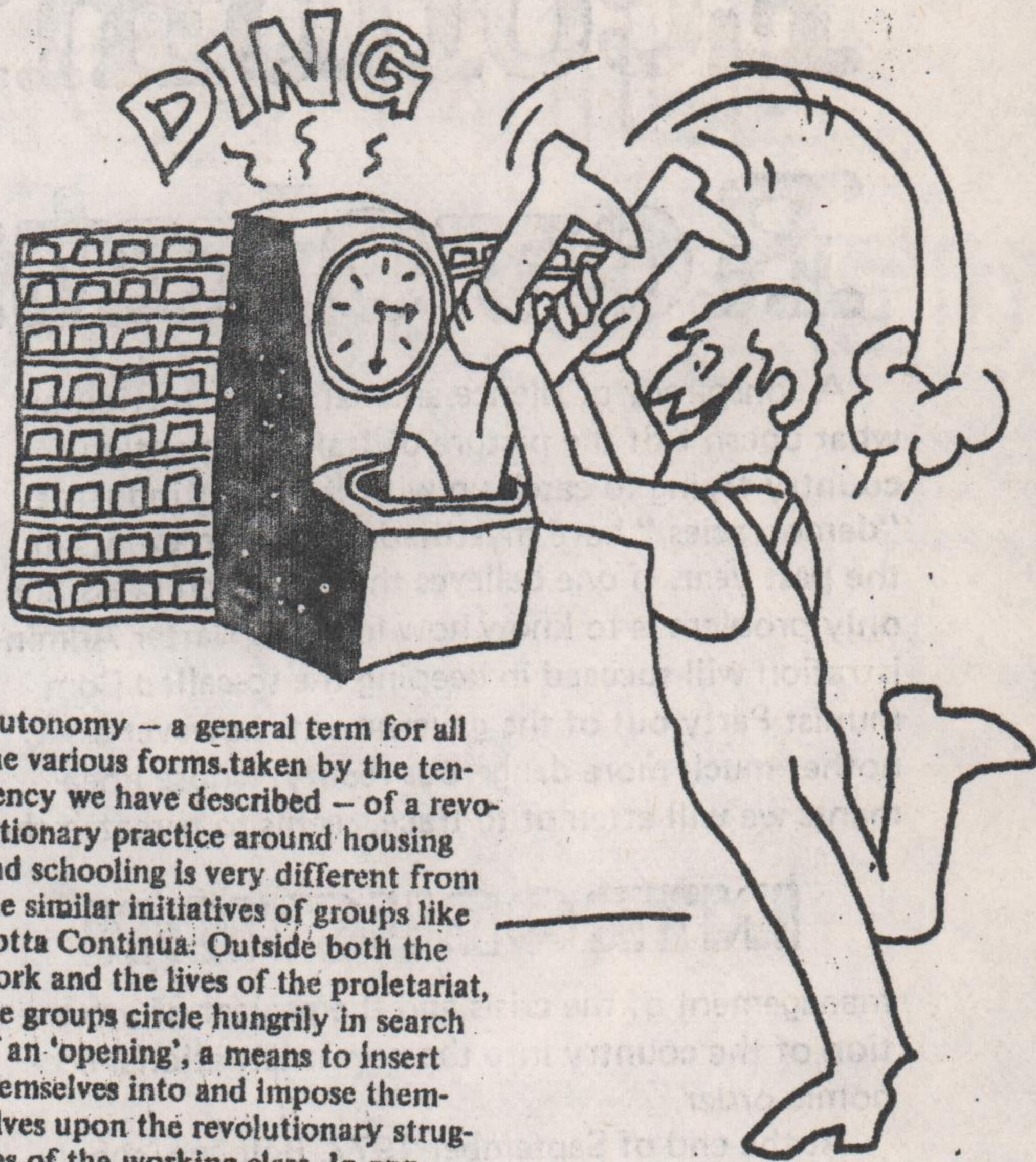
The language is still dull and dusty; but the thrust towards a generalisation of the concept of autonomy is clear. It is a good deal clearer in the political practice of the Workers Autonomy nuclei; beginning with a radical generalisation of the critique of the organisation of work, which expresses the development of mass consciousness among industrial workers.

The important thing is that, through this struggle (against grades) the worker has learnt a little more about that principle of the 'division of labour' which rules not just the factory but the whole of society. He knows very well that 'the new way of making cars' is a big package in a society like this, and that for the moment, it is necessary to fight strongly to make the work-place a little less exhausting and a little more rewarding. But he is also very aware that the struggle over grades puts in crisis the factory's hierarchical structure; that no-one is born a labourer or a skilled worker, to serve the boss and fill his pockets.

In this society, you're born and immediately 'sorted out'. It's already settled if you're going to university and becoming a director, or just doing the statutory schooling so as to be better at holding a hammer or drudging on the line. The aim of nursery-school is to teach you to obey: discipline, order, subordination. The elementary schools become a school in individualism, the most anti-worker school in existence (everyone must occupy the position allotted to him; a rebel is a villain). One learns the importance of a career, of being cleverer than others, that is, more of a scoundrel and toady. When a kid reaches middle school and begins to think what great things he can do, he is already assigned his place in society. He can still go on studying, but if he's not 'clever' enough, or hasn't got a rich family behind him — he'll always be a mug.

In Milan, Turin, Rome, Venice, even Naples, Workers' Autonomy has moved more and more towards the generalisation of its revolutionary perspectives into the whole social existence; most notably, into housing and education. It is important to make the point that, because of the very different organisation of capitalism in Italy, initiatives which would here be more of less reformist (free schools, squatting) have there a much greater revolutionary content. To squat is illegal, and frequently turns into a pitched battle with the cops; alternative forms of education have far more directly political content. Italian capitalism has not developed the subtler forms of recuperation that exist in Britain.

The development by Worker



Autonomy — a general term for all the various forms taken by the tendency we have described — of a revolutionary practice around housing and schooling is very different from the similar initiatives of groups like Lotta Continua: Outside both the work and the lives of the proletariat, the groups circle hungrily in search of an 'opening', a means to insert themselves into and impose themselves upon the revolutionary struggles of the working class. In contrast, Workers' Autonomy is an advanced expression of what the working class is doing; far from inserting itself into autonomous struggles, it emerges from them.

There has been an amazing upsurge of illegality in Italy in recent years. Workers take over buses and refuse to pay fares; take over housing estates and refuse to pay rent; take over supermarkets and refuse to pay (groups, on the other hand, take over supermarkets and charge half price!). What is illegality on a small scale becomes communist legality on a mass scale. Workers' Autonomy is not some small freakish bubble of ultrism; it rides the wave of living revolution in the Italian working class.

One of the most striking developments is the creation in Milan of the *Comuna Operaia*: the workers' collective. This is the practice of 'politics in the first person': a realisation that the future starts now, that a collective practice in the factory must be matched at home. There are three main collectives in Milan, housing perhaps 200 people, many of whom are part of the Autonomous Assemblies; a number are young Southern workers faced with the rackrenting of the Northern cities.

It's clear that revolutionary workers find collective living no easier than revolutionary intellectuals. There is a resistance in the collectives to explicit discussion of personal and sexual interactions. Here, as in the family, the development of the women's and gay movements has threatened the lifestyle of many male militants. The recognition that these, too, are expressions of 'politics in the first person' doesn't come easy; but we hope it will come.

Our description of Workers' Autonomy is based largely on documents; also on extensive discussions with revolutionaries, from a student milieu rather than a working-class one, who have lived and collaborated with members of the Autonomous Assemblies. Because we have no direct personal experience of the tendency, our conclusions can only be tentative.

But it seems clear that this movement, rather than the far better-known vanguardist groups like Lotta Continua, marks the genuinely revolutionary thrust of the Italian working class. Formed spontaneously in several cities at once out of the communist aspirations of militant workers, Workers' Autonomy now has a thriving network of groups; mainly in the large factories — Alfa, Sit-Siemens, Pirelli, the Portomarghera oil refinery — but also in small and middle-sized factories. It seems capable of generalising and articulating the swell of revolutionary consciousness without seeking to impose an authoritarian vanguard upon it.

But perhaps the most immediately relevant aspect for us in Britain is the critique of left vanguardism. Groups like Big Flame and Fight On talk of 'autonomous working class struggle', mainly because they see here an opening for them to break the stranglehold of the established vanguards. But the workers will gain nothing from substituting a 'liberal' vanguard for an avowedly Leninist one.

Most British workers express their practical understanding of this by ignoring all the earnest angels leafleting at the gate. The difference in Italy is that some workers have found it possible to organise towards self-management by themselves. The historical reasons for this are probably highly complex; their discovery would be an interesting intellectual exercise. But the main point is clear: if and when the British working class develop 'politics in the first person', no-one else can do it for them. The contemptible pretence of groups like Big Flame to speak for the workers of Ford must be seen for what it is: the same mystified opportunism which Workers' Autonomy has rejected in Italy.

# Economic Crisis & Revolution. Or,

A conspiracy of silence and careful distortion of what doesn't fit the picture of Italy as a panting country trying to catch up with the other industrial "democracies," have mystified the Italian events in the past year. If one believes the American press, the only problem is to know how long the Carter Administration will succeed in keeping the so-called Communist Party out of the government: however another much more dangerous reality, whose lineaments we will attempt to trace, seems to threaten the

## INTRODUCTION

management of the crisis and the project of integration of the country into the new international economic order.

At the end of September 1977, Bologna, showplace of the Communist Administration that has ruled it for the past 30 years, was the site of an uncommon gathering. More than 50,000 youths in multicolored dress had arranged to meet there and to discuss not the law concerning youth unemployment, not university reform, but—scandal!—how to change their lives *practically* and how to get out of the tiger cage in which humanity is imprisoned by the dictatorship of capital. One of the main questions to be discussed at the meeting was the leading role played by the PCI (Italian Communist Party) in the repression of the movement that had begun to raise its voice since the end of 1976 and not only in Bologna.

What are the characteristics of this movement? Which is its social composition? What is the significance of the events that are convulsing the country? In fact, what is happening in Italy can be understood if considered in context of the situation that defines the present phase of capital domination. The ruling class necessity is now basically that of *planning* the crisis through further centralization of the economy and a generalized production of consensus. Inside the international strategy of intensifying accumulation, Italy represents a trouble spot: there is an overlapping of contradictions which are at the same time the outcome of the backwardness of the country and of the global unrealizability of the project as such.

The movement that in these months has been toiling for an identity expresses then the *refusal* of waged and unwaged people to submit to the new strategy of capital and tendentially the *affirmation* of communism. Though clearly connected to the revolutionary whirlwind that swept the globe in the 60s, this movement marks at the same time an important break with the organizational forms that emerged then. The importance it has for revolutionaries the world over extends far beyond the specific situation in Italy; before more closely examining the facts, let us cast an eye on the international struggle, and the place within it occupied by Italy . . .

Contrary to what is claimed in the world press, and echoed in Italy by a good part of the "oppositionist" press, the crisis aggravating the country, far from be-

ing simply the fruit of irrational management practices or economic "retardation," is a surprisingly homogeneous part of a crisis of worldwide dimensions—the most profound, the most disruptive and, it must be concluded, the gravest since 1929. This crisis, which could be described as the end and failure of the "Keynesian Revolution" originated among the *most developed* blocks of capital, and subsequently involved the weaker countries of the European Economic Community—EEC (Italy and Great Britain first, followed closely by France), then those nations euphemistically called "developing" (these include also the oil-producing countries, today, despite appearances subordinated more than ever to the big powers), and last but not least the countries immersed in the economic mush and political lethargy of the so-called socialist bloc. The Bretton Woods era, starting just after W.W.II and characterized by a relatively continuous accumulation under the hegemony of the U.S., has thus come to an end, opening a period of uncertainty and conflict. While the economists of opposing ideologies are busy cutting each other's throats in the hopeless attempt to find the recipe for the crisis, we face a worldwide development of a new cycle of proletarian struggles (Portugal 75, Poland 76, Spain, France, U.S. wildcat coal strikes, etc.) whose important aspect is *the refusal of work as wage labor*, and the demand for non-institutionalizable expression.

It is necessary to begin with an analysis of capital, of its characteristics as a specific mode of production, and of the laws which regulate its *historical becoming*, in order to be able to grasp, in its shifting vicissitudes, the emergence of the communist movement.

Capital, value in process, is a contradictory being (1), its foundation and its *raison d'être* being the production of surplus value, the valorization of anticipated value. In the course of its development it is negated and creates devalorization—the impossibility of continuing the process indefinitely. The marxist theory of accumulation expresses such contradiction (valorization/devalorization) as the *tendency of the rate of profit to fall*, a tendency which expresses in every aspect "the most important law of modern political economy" (2) and which accounts in the last instance for every capitalist crisis. A crisis represents nothing but an interruption of the accumulation process.

Because of market relations it can assume the guise of an overproduction crisis: the commodities produced lie unsold and thus their value is not realized. Overproduction, of course, is always in relation to capital and not to society as a whole. In fact "it must be said that there is constant *under-production* in this sense. The limits to the production are set by the profits of the capitalists and in no way by the needs of the producer. Over-production of products and over-production of commodities are two entirely different things" (3). The roots of the crisis are not found *in* the inability of capital to *realize* value, but in the impossibility of *producing* it anew. Precisely by reason of the

fall in the rate of profit (4), money capital finds no space for investment and therefore remains inert or else is used for speculation, which can be lucrative from the standpoint of a single capitalist, but is counterproductive from the standpoint of capital as a whole. Valorization indeed ceases when the capital accumulated has outgrown its new base, and a situation is created wherein there is at once too much capital in the form of capital of circulation (5), but not enough to permit new investment, i.e. recapitalization, or conversion of such capital into productive forms.

ital needed to be "humanized" and to seem attentive to the needs of human beings. Valorization could no longer be limited to the sphere of "classical" commodities, but *had* to penetrate each moment, each aspect of life. The production of mystification and of false consciousness proved essential in allowing capital to survive and accomplish the final transition towards its *real domination* (8).

Real domination, on the other hand, doesn't mean that capital succeeded in transcending its inherent barriers as a historical mode of production: a process of fictitious socialization is engendered, the capital/labor

# Apropos of Capital and its Contradictions.

Naturally this tendency toward breakdown presents itself in a more or less mystified fashion every time, and assumes different guises according to the particular historical circumstances. It is normally fragmented into a series of apparently independent cycles and is moreover powerfully opposed by a series of counter-tendencies, which Marx analyzes in Volume III of *Capital*. In brief, to escape the crisis, capital can only compensate for the falling rate of profit by increasing the mass of profit and the rate of exploitation (6).

Given the poor work habits of the masses and their rising combativity, it would appear difficult (although not impossible) in a "democratic" society to affect such an increase through the forcible extrication of absolute surplus value (that is through an indiscriminate increase in working hours or reduction of wages to a level beneath the value of labor power. Consequently an increase in the rate of exploitation can only mean an increase in labor productivity, that is, an increase in the organic composition of capital (7). This means the elimination of living labor (human labor-power) in favor of dead labor (means of production)—in other words, elimination of a great number of workers from the production process.

It is important to note at this point how this "natural selection" affects in the concrete those individuals most untamed politically, most precarious legally, most feeble psychologically, most defenseless socially—women, immigrants, youths, ethnic minorities—or, finally, those who are simply the most ill-disposed toward work discipline, the "laziest," those who love best their humanity and can threaten in any way the already unstable functioning of the economy. Historically capital has met this situation by absorbing excess workers in a broadening of the productive base, the destruction of small enterprises, and intensive conquest of internal and foreign markets.

However after WWI and the defeat of the revolution first in Europe and then in Russia, a qualitative change became necessary to integrate the labor-force and make it the active subject of its own exploitation. Cap-

contradiction now *seems* soluble in labor's favor, even with the old relations of production intact. Revolution is presented as a "superseded," "infantile" phase of the labor movement, and no effort is spared in psychiatrizing and criminalizing revolutionaries.

Without pretending to furnish a detailed analysis of the ongoing crisis, we will recall certain features which make it extremely significant. The first that meets the eye in contemplating the development of the postwar international economy is that, although labor productivity has increased enormously, the index of industrial production has simultaneously slackened off. (cf. data collected in *Programme Communiste* No. 72). The conjuncture of these two elements can only lead to relative "overpopulation," that is, mass unemployment. According to the *London Financial Times* (4/2/77), voice of the British bourgeoisie, such unemployment has hit youth especially. Representing 20% of the work force, youths under 25 form 40% of the jobless in the OECD countries, or 7 million of a total of 16 million unemployed. According to the same source, this tendency has existed in Europe since at least 1970—that is *before* the crisis became manifest in all its force (9).

Just as American capital (in the past) has understood how to use the racial question to its own advantage, pitting the employed against the unemployed (ethnic minorities), so in Europe the same thing is now being promoted between the generations, a conflict produced by the social dislocation of the 60s. In the course of the crisis it has been ascertained that those who already have work are to some extent protected by their union contracts, which at least make layoffs more difficult. In contrast the labor which presents itself for the first time on the market finds itself handicapped by the reluctance of many contractors to take on young people, since they cost more than older workers and their productivity is initially lower. (According to one Italian estimate it costs 20% more to employ a youth rather than a qualified adult).

As far as Italy is concerned, it is interesting to note

how the *institutional* function of the unions clashes with their *historical* function as instruments of capital's rationalization. Vigorously defending any occupation whatever, they hinder the mobility of labor and demand the preservation of unproductive complexes which the process of competition should long since have condemned beyond appeal. Such a function, though for capital it has the undoubtedly positive side-effect of nourishing the working population's illusion of well-being, does not, on the other hand, take into consideration any of the elementary needs of other growing strata and creates insuperable obstacles to social peace (10). Economists, furthermore, anticipate that the growth of unemployment, far from slowing, is destined continually to increase in the coming decade.

These observations allow us to consider the second interesting aspect of the crisis: despite the fact that in the past year profits in almost all the industrialized countries have resumed an upward course, *unemployment has continued to rise*, as much in Europe as in the US. This means that capital is less and less able to reabsorb excluded labor via new investments: the production of *relative* overpopulation tends to become *absolute* (11).

From the standpoint of communist revolution this is immensely important, for two reasons: a) the factory working class, once comprising a majority, is now shrinking in relation to other social strata, thus increasing the number of those who rather than producing surplus value, simply live off it (the new middle class); and b) huge strata are arising which are excluded both from activity directly connected to the production of surplus value (the working class) and from its circulation (precisely the new middle classes). These strata constitute a tremendous drag on modern society, a permanent reservoir of social antagonism. If powers like the U.S. are rich enough to support these marginal strata, guaranteeing their survival in return for social peace (i.e. welfare system), in Italy, where the capitalist mode of production has encountered great obstacles and has never experienced harmonious development, there does not exist such a system capable of feeding all these people, and the state is confronted by masses of individuals with literally nothing to lose and everything to gain from the system's collapse. Nor is it a matter of mechanistically counterposing, as has often been tried, these marginal strata (dubbed "the new proletariat") to the supposedly "bourgeoisified" working class; the very experience of struggle of these past few years in Italy loudly refutes such falsely extremist theories. Some of the most radical moments of the anticapitalist struggle took place in the factories and in the milieux of work: wildcat strikes, generalized absenteeism, sabotage, ridicule of union bureaucrats and the "priest of dissent," etc. Many concrete examples of this come to mind; a few will serve our purpose here.

We can recall the situation of permanent tension at the FIAT factory of Turin where several sabotages and fires occurred, at the UNIDAL of Milan where massive layoffs were met by continuous strikes and eventually by the occupation of the factory: recent news (Corriere della Sera, January 23, 1978) tell that some union bureaucrats were insulted and seized by the rank and file for having accepted an agreement considered unfavorable. Analogous struggles, whose point of departure is the right to a wage regardless of work performed, have been fought also at the Innocenti, Fargas, Magneti Marelli in the industrial area of Milan, at the Italsider, Breda, Montedison in

Mestre (Venice) and practically all the way through the peninsula. Especially attacked have been the centers of the so-called "lavoro nero" (black market labor), that is to say labor accomplished outside the official market in which there is no protection whatever for the worker and exploitation has no legal limits. In the past year also the struggles of the white collar workers have been extremely combative, particularly at Montedison and IBM (Milan), where electronic calculators are continually sabotaged and managers beaten.

Once more it is necessary to start from the dynamics of capital to comprehend these events: in fact we are faced with a process which tends evermore toward the production of what Marx in the German Ideology defined as the "universal class." This class, produced by the spread of wage labor and the separation of the majority from the means of production, includes not only workers in the traditional sense, but the vast numbers of all who have no power over their own lives and are reduced to mere appendages of the valorization process.

If in the increasingly rare periods of economic prosperity, the enormous capacities developed by the so-called consumer society rivet the individual to his miseries without allowing him to become conscious or to achieve subversive expression, the ineluctable crises, due to the simple fact that they prevent the system from satisfying the needs it itself has created, cause contradictions which have *apparently* been overcome, to return explosively. The capitalist machine thus runs across a multiplicity of subversive currents which are not limited to the workplace or wage labor, but invest the social totality and express in everyday life the most radical of all needs: the need for communism. Now it is important to understand that the subject of the new critique is no longer solely the working class, but *must* be extended to all those who in one way or the other refuse to recognize the fictitious community of capital. The distinction between productive and unproductive labor that is the basis for the theory of the working class as the exclusive subject of human emancipation, is valid only as an internal contradiction of capital, at this point. All work appears by now as work for capital; although it may not contribute directly to the creation of value, it has become an indispensable moment of value's circulation or realization.

In its most complete phase capital tends to free itself from its material base (commodity production) and tends to create fictitious value (12): from this moment on it aims to transform everything into capital, to colonize the daily lives of men and women. The attack on working conditions, however necessary is no longer sufficient: on the barricades of the coming revolution, the rebels against factory enslavement must encounter the guerrillas of the quotidian.

Though manifesting a high degree of homogeneity with the rest of the advanced countries, the Italian crisis possesses several peculiarities which render it particularly explosive. In order to dispense with all ideologies which tend to present the situation as a sort of "Latin Americanization," it is well at this point to recall some features that have from the beginning distinguished Italian capital.

While in other European countries the great bourgeois revolutions of the modern age created either a concentrated productive unity under the direction of rentier capitalists (Britain) or a stratum of free and independent proprietors (France),

These two articles were the two halves of a single article written between November 1977 and January 1978. This translation originally appeared in *Fifth Estate* (Vol 13 No. 5 & 6) and the first part reprinted in *Authority* No. 2. To both groups our thanks for supplying artwork.

*in Italy there was no grand and simultaneous liberation from feudal serfdom, which was never the dominant social form. According to the data from diverse areas, every type of rural industry dwelt in relative liberty, from the small to the medium-large, from those based on intensive cultivation to those cultivated extensively, and conjoining all forms of private property, small, middling and large, in communal demesnes and rural communities. A great battle to relieve rural industries and classes of the burden of seigneurial control was not necessary and did not occur; should such forces have raised their heads, they would have been faced with the Towns, the Seigneurs, the Monarchy and the same from beyond the borders.*

(Bordiga, *Property and Capital*)

The rather unique situation in the Italian agriculture, beyond showing the grave error of treating the country as feudal, accounts for the stunted development of the past 100 years. Since the Risorgimento (the aborted bourgeois revolution), Italy has experienced a highly contradictory growth, where modern technologies have been associated with absolute unproductivity. The dynamic is not between an advanced North and an underdeveloped South supposedly dragging behind, but is inherent in the very structure of Italian capital whose expansion is based on the permanent looting of the South.

In its turn, having neither a solid revolutionary tradition nor any particular entrepreneurial capabilities to back it up, the Italian bourgeoisie has always been inclined toward compromise and reformism, remaining forcibly subservient to finance capital and special protected ("clientelari") interests. It has always striven for monopoly profits rather than increased productivity, and the governments that succeeded one another under various labels have taken care not to meddle in things. From the days of Agostino Depretis (the 1870s) and "transformismo" (an antedeluvian version of the historical compromise), (13) the Italian economy has been characterized by this protected capitalism, which presently represents its interests via the governing party (the Christian Democrats—DC—30 years in power, with 38% of the vote in the June '76 elections). The DC is firmly tied to the great holdings of the state—Montedison, ENI, IRI, etc.—which can indulge in any sort of unproductive speculative activity, being able to count on obliging rescues by the executive. This incredible waste of productive forces contributes, through the leveling mechanisms of the rate of profit, to a diminution of capital's average profitability (e.g. causing a 20% inflation rate, notably higher than that of other industrial countries, which hovers around 8%). This provokes the indignation of those sectors of capital unprotected by the state, who see themselves thereby deprived of a fat slice of the cake. Some of these sectors (among whom may be included Gianni Agnelli former president of the employers' organization—Confindustria—and president of FIAT) are coming to realize more and more how in this phase the PCI can better defend their interests, and are revising, albeit with great caution their traditional anti-communism.

As for the PCI and the various factions of the "New Left" (Manifesto—PDUP, Avanguardia Operaia, Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo—MLS, Lotta Continua, Re Nudo, etc.) that are returning to its protective fold it is not exact to dwell as many people do upon the be-





trayal of these forces because they have long operated on the terrain of capital. The present Euro-communist policy of the party is the logic outcome of a longtime strategy aiming to salvage the Italian capital in cooperation with the national bourgeoisie. This goes back to the Popular Front period when Togliatti collaborated with the DC and the Americans to smash any proletarian insurrection. Having in mind that every time the working class attempted to fight not for a bit higher wage but against the wage system *as such*, the PCI stood for the capitalist camp, it can be conceded that in some sense the PCI has defended the interests of the class in whose name it speaks and acts, but this defense supposing the preservation of wage-labor and commodity production, could only result in an apology for *living labor*, i.e. the glorification of the working class from the point of view of capital. Moreover, "the general interest is only the generality of individual egotistical interests" (Grundrisse): namely the bourgeois notion of the interests of one man delimited by those of another which amounts only to democratic equality under the dictatorship of value (14).

What is new is that now even this kind of mild defense has come to an end and the present PCI and union policy aims to an immediate attack against the working class and to a protection of the new middle classes even if this is still disguised by populist phraseology. From the dustbin of history the most stinking political platitudes are dredged up. Lucio Magri the stalino-reformist leader of PDUP joins Cossiga (former Minister of Interior) and Zangheri (Communist mayor of Bologna) in boldly declaring that "Italy is the country in the world with the most real democracy" (*Socialist Revolution* No. 36, p. 117), the Communist Amendola revives the "alliance of wage and profit against rent", that miserable utopia of Ricardian socialist ridiculed by Marx 100 years ago, Trentin (union leader) writes a book "*Da Sfruttati a Produttori*" (From Exploited to Producers) which attempts to demonstrate that the "transition" to socialism is a matter of giving more power to the unions. Manipulating the still attractive notion of democracy, and playing cleverly on anti-fascist ideology (15) the PCI and the official Left have created a Pirandelloesque climate in which every case of genuine anticapitalism turns into its opposite and every step toward rationalization of exploitation is passed off as a "victory for labor".

Once the ideological aura is removed, what remains of the Italian political scene is only a conflict among *gangs* all operating *within* the logic of capital. One side tries to defend the existing protected profits, and in this difficult task seems willing to spare no effort. Another, composed of "enlightened" industrialist and various progressionists, would like to undertake the famous project of rationalization and match the country to a "European standard". A third led by the Communist Party, dredges up the old leninist dream of "a bourgeois state without bourgeoisie", this time in a reformist vein (which means being pluralistic and democratic with its capitalist competitor and stalinist with the proletariat). The last gang, unquestionably the loser, —which extends from the worshippers of the Peking bureaucracy to the supporters of the "Partito combattente", pursues the same leninist dream but criticizes reformism and promises true bolshevik tactics and proletarian toughness.

While it is difficult and relatively unrewarding to forecast which racket will prevail, it is vital for revolutionaries to know how to recognize their enemies and to divest themselves of all dangerous illusions. It is

interesting, in this regard, to note how the recent (January 78) declarations of the Carter Administration vetoing direct Communist participation to government have with a single blow destroyed the myth of the possibility of choosing a path independent of Washington and Moscow. On this occasion it came out clearly how Carter is actually maneuvered by the technocrats of the IMF (International Monetary Fund), to which the Italian government is deeply in debt. The IMF, though little worried about possible Communist threats to democracy, care a lot about the economic reliability of the country and are persuaded that a Communist government, though maintaining the domination of capital would be ready, perhaps under the pressure from below, to declare the state bankrupt thus causing a chain reaction involving other indebted countries (Great Britain, France . . .). This would certainly mean the collapse of the already precarious international credit system, of the IMF and of its scarcity strategy.

Though we don't share the IMF paranoid vision and even credit the PCI as the only political force having the actual ability to impose scarcity (see declaration of Lama, note 10), we know well enough that the only capitalist way out of the crisis is to increase exploitation and, in this phase, to expand the base of *consent*. This means to increase the output of ideology i.e. mystification and false consciousness. Ideology becomes a powerful countertendency to the falling rate of profit and is more and more subject to the same laws that regulate the production and circulation of classical commodities. Normalization and ossified behavioral models are its tools. If in moments of harmonious development, recourse is made to the strategy of repressive tolerance, in crisis periods it becomes vital to *block* the expression of all truly radical opposition, and to pass directly to cannibalization and slaughter (16). The Germanization of the state, so feared in the parlors of "intellectual" dissent, is *already* an effective reality.

Claudio Albertani

## footnotes

1. "Capital is the moving contradiction, (in) that it presses to reduce labor time to a minimum, while it posits labor time on the other side, as the sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labor time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form, hence it posits the superfluous, in growing measure as a condition—a question of life and death—for the necessary." (GRUNDRISSE p.706, trans. M. Nicolaus)
2. GRUNDRISSE, op. cit., p.748
3. THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE, Progress Publishers, Part II p.527.
4. "Capital invested in the means of production advances relatively faster than capital invested in labor power. Because surplus value is surplus-labor time, the reduction of labor time relative to the growing mass of unproductive capital leads to a fall in the rate of profit since this rate is measured on total capital, i.e. on both the capital invested in means of production or constant capital, and that invested in labor-power or variable capital. The tendential fall of the rate of profit is just another expression for the accumulation of capital and the increasing productivity of labor." (Paul Mattick, MARXISM AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL, Root and Branch pamphlet p.5)
5. "I (...) call capital of circulation, capital pertinent to the process of circulation, to a change of form by means of exchange (a change of substance and a change of hands), hence commodity-capital and money capital, as distinguished from its form pertinent to the process of production, that of productive capital." (CAPITAL, II, p.192—International Pub.)
6. The rate of exploitation or rate of surplus value is measured by the relation between surplus value and variable capital (wages):  $s/v$ .

7. The relation between constant capital (c) and variable capital (v). Measures growth in productivity of labor.

8. In the section of CAPITAL relative to the "results of the immediate process of production," Marx talks about two different periods of capitalist domination: "the form based on absolute surplus value is what I call the formal subsumption of labor under capital. I do so because it is only formally distinct from earlier modes of production on whose foundations it arises spontaneously (...), on this foundation it now arises a technologically and otherwise specific mode of production—capitalist production—which transforms the nature of the labor process and its actual conditions. Only when that happens we witness the real subsumption of labor under capital (which is developed in all the forms evolved by relative as opposed to absolute surplus value. With the real subsumption of labor under capital a complete revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between the workers and capitalists." (CAPITAL, pp. 1025 & 1034, Vintage Books). For a further examination of these concepts, see: Jacques Camatte, IL CAPITALE TOTALE, DEDALO LIBRI (Bari 1976) and Gianni Collu, "Transizione" in Cesarano Collu, APOCALISSE e RIVOLUZIONE (Bari, 1974).

9. In the yearly LE MONDE report on the world economy we read that at the end of 1977 in the OECD countries there have been some 700,000 unemployed more than at the beginning of the year. (SUPPLEMENTS AUX DOSSIERS ET DOCUMENTS DU MONDE—January 1978)

10. This has been lately observed by Lama himself (secretary of the CGIL—the Communist controlled union) who in a recent radio broadcast, talking about the end of marginal sacrifices and beginning of the real ones (I), supported the necessity of relaunching capitalist accumulation and re-establishing some kind of mobility of labor. (see CORRIERE DELLA SERA, January 27, 1978). Lama is thus supporting the positions of Agnelli an Confindustria (an employers union).

11. The ensemble of phenomena which the economists call "stagflation" (stagnation plus inflation, the simultaneous rise of prices and unemployment and the decline of production) is an involuted way of expressing the perennial difficulty capital has in reproducing itself on a larger scale, and another way of expressing the fall in the rate of profit. These data represent the theoretical

12. "With the development of interest bearing capital and the credit system, all capital seems to double itself and sometimes to treble itself, by the various modes in which the same capital or perhaps even the same claim on a debt, appears in different forms, in different hands. The greater portion of this "money-capital" is purely fictitious." (CAPITAL III, p.470—International Pub.). "The actual process of production (...) gives rise to new formations in which the vein of internal connections is increasingly lost, the production relations are rendered independent of one another." (p.828)—my emphasis.

13. Amendola himself, the most outspoken PCI member, in a recent interview (CORRIERE DELLA SERA, Jan. 4, 1978) talked about the continuity between the PCI policy and the Risorgimento.

14. "In reality the system of exchange value, and better still, the monetary system, is the system of freedom and equality. The contradictions that arise in its later development are immanent to it; they are implications of this property, this freedom, and this equality. In actual fact, the latter are transformed, here and there into their opposite. To imagine that exchange value does not develop, from commodities to money, into capital, or that work that produces exchange values does not result in wage labor, is wishful thinking and foolish besides. (Marx, Urtext GRUNDRISSSE pp. 1111-12 Italian edition).

15. This is not the place to broach in any profound manner in a critique of democracy. Others in the old workers movement have done radically enough already: for instance the Italian left (Sinistra Comunista) and also to some extent the German left. Here it suffices to note that democracy along with its system of representation is the political expression of commodity alienation: as such it is an historical category bound to be suppressed with the suppression of capital. As for antifascism the history has proved it to be a trap, thanks to which capital has been able to cannibalize hundreds of thousands of revolutionaries.

Regarding this, Bordiga was to declare: "The worst product of fascism is antifascism." To demand democracy means to demand the process of value's autonomization; fascism and democracy are only different political forms for the same content: the dictatorship of capital.

16. Referring to this, consider the recent massacre of the remainders of the "Baader—Meinhof" group (Red Army Fraction—RAF).

17. While the cop-like practice of the PCI is generally acknowledged, less well known is the similar attitude of these groups toward anybody who takes his/her stand to the left of them. The old stalinist habit is in such cases quickly rediscovered: slander and the club.

18. For a detailed analysis of some of those experiences in the period 1974-75, see ZEROWORK. The arguments put forward in this review are very close to those of the Autonomia Operaia in Italy.

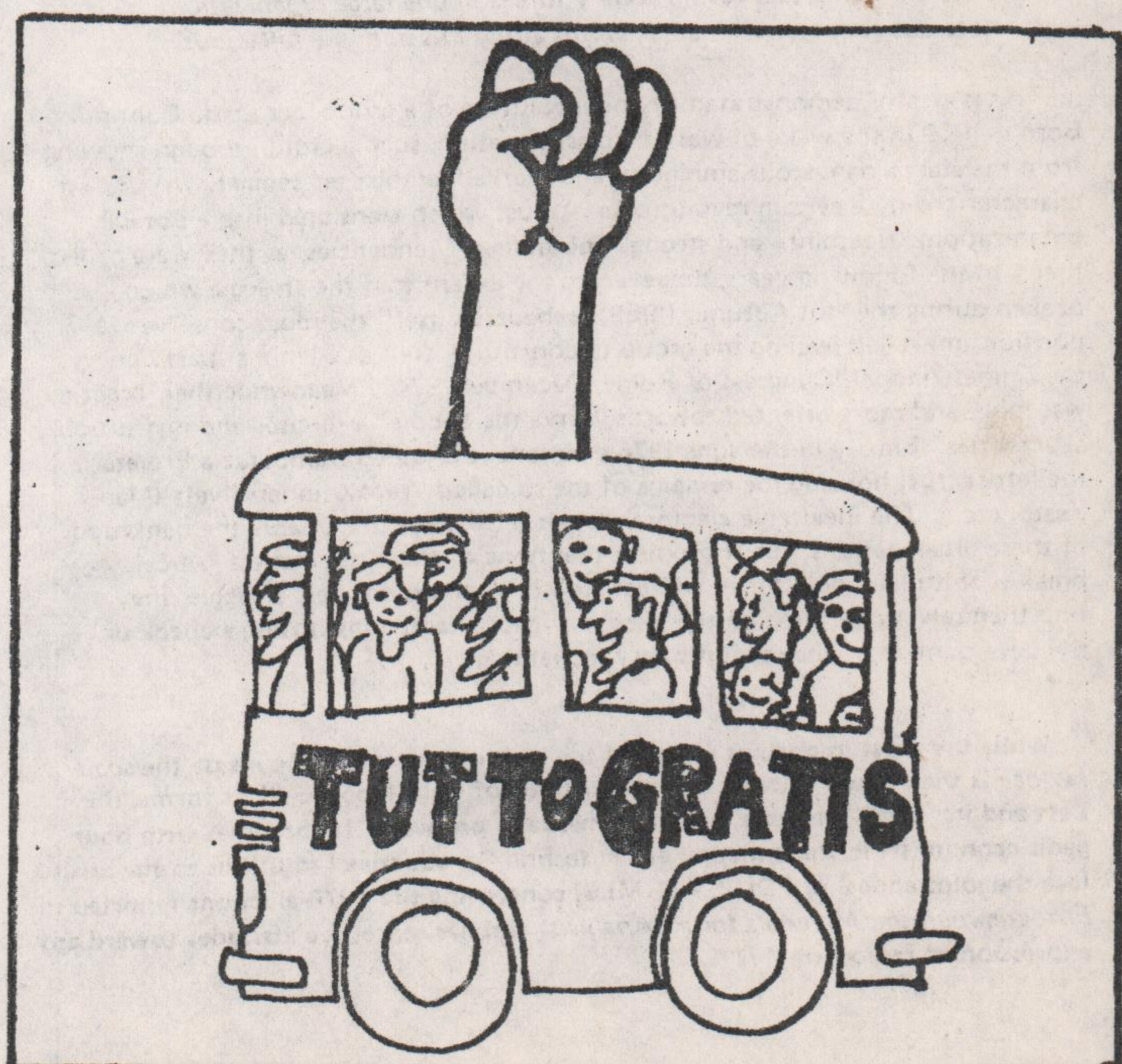
19. Another occupation with similar purposes that is still alive is run by a homosexual revolutionary collective in via Morigi (Milan).

20. We can mention a few here: Zut, La Congiura de' Pazzi, Viola, Il Piccolo, Il Cerchio di Gesso, Poco, La Scimmia, Insurrezione, etc. Interesting too is the phenomena of free radio with strong revolutionary contents such as Radio Alice in Bologna and Radio Onda Rossa in Rome.

21. On the February events in Rome, see the documents gathered in the book LE RADICI DI UNA RIVOLTA, Feltrinelli 1977.

22. On the March events in Bologna, see the book BOLOGNA FATTI NOSTRI, Bertani 1977. Account and comments by the staff of Radio Alice.

23. Manifesto handed out in Bologna, Sept. 23, 1977, signed "Associazione per l'epidemia della rabbia contagiosa" (Association for the propagation of the epidemic of contagious rage).



# The Return of the Social Revolution. Or, Well Dug, Old Mole!

For all those who, due to opportunism or congenital idiocy, believe it impossible that the communist movement should ever reappear, the Italian events of the past year have demonstrated that the capitalist project of domesticating humanity has encountered insoluble contradictions. If after the days of May the Situationists could write of the *mouvement des occupations* that it was "the refusal of all authority, of all specialization, of all hierarchical alienation; the refusal of the state and thus of parties and unions as well as sociologists and professors, of repressive morality and of medicine" (*Internationale Situationniste* No. 12, September 1969), we perceive in the 1977 riots of the "Italian Spring" a continuity with the modern revolutionary project contra the real domination of capital, a project which, having announced itself near the end of the '60s, having been suppressed and recuperated afterwards, is now returning to express itself with renewed radicalism in one of the weakest spots in the whole precarious world economy.

1968 took place however, in a phase of relative stability and the spread of the myths of prosperity and consumption. It was rather easy to reduce it to some "crisis of affluence" in a society whose development was fundamentally harmonious and which could still allow a few jokes at its own expense and co-opt the "democratic" and "constructive" thrust of the movement (as the sociologist put it). The process of organizing an effective anticapitalist opposition was thereby partially interrupted: the dissent that flowed for a moment out onto the street and piazzas and laid bare *new forms* of communications went back to the straitjacket of traditional militancy. Shattering a once unified critique into partial demands, capital achieved a double aim: ridding itself of this nightmare, and at the same time draining revolutionaries of energy with which capital could extend the frontiers of its domination. The movement lapsed in the reassuring mode of politics and contributed, without realizing it, to its own destruction. As the numerical strength of the organizations born in 1968 grew, their revolutionary character diminished. Paul Mattick stressed as early as 1949:

*To gain social leverage, organizations must become opportunistic, if they want to attain their goals. "Realism" clearly coincides with opportunism, and the latter cannot be defeated by a revolutionary ideology counterposing itself to the entire complex of the existing social relations. It is not possible to regroup revolutionary forces in one large organization ready to act opportunely: all attempts along this path are fallacious.*

This is clearly demonstrated by the involution of a group like Lotta Continua. Born in 1969 in the wake of working class agitation, such a group, though showing from the start a dangerous ambiguity and marked leninist tendencies, was at first characterized by a certain revolutionary thrust which translated into a notable organizational flexibility and strong "spontaneist" tendencies, as they were called then. In the following years, however, to the extent that the struggle which peaked during the Hot Autumn (1969), exhausted itself, the most conservative positions prevailed leading the group to constitute itself as a leninist party on the Chinese model (Congress of Rome, December 1974). Meanwhile their practice was more and more oriented towards "serve the people" exercises and institutional activities. Finally in the June 1976 elections, LC joined Democrazia Proletaria, the leftist trust housing the remains of the so called "revolutionary" left (Manifesto, etc.). The inevitable electoral defeat only made undeniable the bankruptcy of these organizations. To the extent that none of them has made a radical break with the old bolshevik-leninist stew of running the class struggle, they find themselves operating on the terrain of capital and constituting a check on the development of the revolutionary movement.

While the most important aspect of the revolutionary struggle inside the social factory is the refusal to work and the critique of wage labor in all its forms, the Left and its "New" variants, are fundamentally pro-work. It competes with bourgeois economists in the unhappy effort to find "productive" solutions to the crisis (see the joint appeal of PDUP, AO, MLS, concerning the 1976 elections reported in *Eurocommunism, Materials for an Analysis*) and has repressive attitudes toward any expression of radicalism (17).

"Bread and roses."

(Paterson, N.J., 1912, slogan of the revolutionary women)

"Molotov, Champagne!"

(Milan, 1977)

To underline the repressive role of the New Left, it is important to understand in what way the events of 1977 are a critique of post-60s militancy. Since 1974-75, the demand for a break with these organizations has spread and we see the emergence of new tendencies. It was realized that all these groups would be reabsorbed in the mystificatory politics of the PCI (Italian Communist Party), and to the extent that the crisis gave rise to radical needs, a terrain was sought wherein the movement could express itself *autonomously*, i.e. outside traditional institutions. A series of groups appeared (Via dei Volsci Collective, Rome—Radio Alice, A/Traverso, Bologna—Rosso, Proletari Autonomi, Senza Traguardo, Milan, etc.) whose common matrix was the attempt to deepen the level of the conflict. In this period there also spread new forms of struggle such as "autoriduzione" (self-reduction) and housing occupations. Indiscriminate price rises were simply met with a refusal to pay the bill or with the payment of a reduced amount; the housing crisis was met with the occupation of buildings left vacant by real estate speculation (18).

These experiences, important insofar as they extend the conflict to social domains such as the kitchen, which are usually left undisturbed, and insofar as they were symptomatic of a more profound struggle for a different quality of life, were nevertheless bound to be quickly recuperated not only by the New Left groups (especially Lotta Continua), but even by the unions, which did all they could to institutionalize the movement. And it is significant that occupations not run by formal organizations and with strong revolutionary content, receiving no support from any bureaucracy were short lived and brutally suppressed. Such was the case of the 1976 occupation of a palace on the Via Meravigli in Milan. This occupation was not carried out under the ideology of "serve the people" (the organization takes care of everything on behalf of the proletarians who eventually, passively, enter the scene), but by the people most directly concerned. Moreover, instead of splitting into nuclear families having little contact with one another, those comrades tried to socialize their life through various sort of agitational activities (leaflets, meetings, a theater inside the occupied building, etc.), thus making clear that they were not just concerned with having a roof over their heads (19).

At the same time new forms of armed struggle sprung up and upsurged: the cryptostalinist sects, which for years already had established on that terrain their specialization (Brigate Rosse, NAP), in the form of dozens of spontaneous nuclei appearing everywhere. Bombing and sabotage multiplied, while the practice of severely penalizing factory managers and other servants of capital spread. The new groups, referred to as *autonomi* (not belonging to any of the New Left organizations), undoubtedly brought a breath of fresh air into the stifling atmosphere of left militancy, but still remained more or less captive of a virulent workerism which prevented them, in the end, from grasping the unfolding of the revolutionary movement which overruns the New Left scene. The latter was not criticized for its *structure*, which is capitalist, but for its lack of toughness and its tendency to be recuperated by the politics of the PCI. The reasons for such objective convergence had neither been understood nor analyzed.

Since the summer of 1976, the first signs of a different reality have been in evidence. While the sphere of "Autonomia" grows, and the experience of worker's self-organization is enriched, the so-called Circoli Del Proletariato Giovanile (Circles of Proletarian Youth) have begun to gain new strength, above all in the slums of the large northern cities. These circles arose largely out of the need to invent some minimal basis for communication in the squalid urban jungle. Their members frequent abandoned schools or factories that were occupied or were seized by the city-hall, under the pretext of cultural projects, or else rooms and cellars taken by groups who feel the need to be together outside the classroom or the work place. The contacts between the circles are quite informal. Composed mainly of high school students, young workers and kids still living the alienation of the family, these organisms express even in their limitations a qualitative deepening of the struggle. They pose the problem of the critique of daily life and the immediate need to begin subverting interpersonal relationships; to *live* now, the revolution banished to some mythical future by the militants. Certainly the initiatives taken have been halting, not gaining full command of the situation, but what is important here is not so much the scope of this or that particular action, as the aggregate tension expressed therein.

In June 1976 a Woodstock type of festival organized in Milan by the ideologists of "counter-culture" (Re Nudo) turned into a massive confrontation with the police (looting of several supermarkets), and no less with the leftist bureaucrats. This was probably the first mass episode in which the role of the "gruppi" (the leftist groups) was violently questioned, although in a rather confused way.

In July it was the turn of a meeting of the PCI youth association (FGCI) in Ravenna. The town was literally invaded by a number of *autonomi*, gathered to sabotage the Communists' intention of recuperating the rising movement. These events are important insofar as they represent a moment of discontinuity with 68. Whereas a first critique of politics was, at that time undertaken by declaring that "everything is political", 77 starts with the assumption that a revolutionary movement must be critical of politics *as such*, that is, as a specific form of social alienation, if it is to be at all.

In October 1976, massive acts of self-reduction at cinemas and theatre began in Milan, they were organized by the Circoli and culminated in the violent confrontation on La Scala's opening night (December 7), that traditional and mindless parade of the remains of the Milanese bourgeoisie. Once again the treacherous machinery of recuperation ground into motion: Avanguardia Operaia and the Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo, two of the most counterrevolutionary groups of the New Left, seized the unexpected opportunity to recoup their political virginity, and lined up unhesitatingly behind the confrontation. The qualitative weight of these people, however, was not long in making itself felt: under the pretext of the right to working class leisure, they started organizing self-reduction at some of the weirdest spectacles of Hollywood (such as Bertolucci's "1900"), and stalinist horrors like "popular culture", etc. reappeared.

January and February 1977 were crucial to the movement's development. As the atmosphere at the universities (especially Rome and Bologna) and in the factories became ever more incandescent, the need to express oneself *publicly* grew general. Almost everywhere — and significantly, even in the small provincial towns — a myriad of journals were founded, more or less of local distribution in which all things were discussed: the concrete possibility of escaping the paranoid rhythms of everyday life, the critique of wage slavery, the rediscovery of great subversives of the past (from Marx to Fourier, from Sade to Dada). The mode of expression tended more toward poetry and farce than toward systematic critique (20). On the other hand, this corresponded well enough to the actual phase of the movement, which was more one of negative criticism and dismantling myths than of staking out a precise territory. The favorite target of this criticism was the stereotype of the rigid militant, all party and ideology, unaware that others go on living the things of which he only speaks. But if the critique of politics is certainly characteristic of the post-68 revolutionary movement, it is nonetheless important to stress that many of these experiences tended to slip into an ideology of "freaking out" which in the final analysis leads to self-destruction or to various mysticism imported from the US and easily integrated into the culture industry. Revolutionary theory seeks resolutely but joyously to combat both political and neoreligious recuperations: it cannot afford too much self-indulgence.

In Rome (February), the leader of the CGIL (Generale Italiana Dilavoro, Communist Party controlled trade union confederation), Luciano Lama, was chased from the occupied university. Having to propose that the movement jump on the bandwagon of reformism in order to cement its "alliance with the working class," this union bureaucrat had to depend on the apes of his security squad and on the cops to get him home in one piece. The same day, Mimmo Pinto, the DP deputy, who found himself by chance in the neighborhood, was recognized by a group of Metropolitan Indians and forced to paint his face and participate in the happening against his will. These events and the following days of continuous debates and assemblies inside the universities, high schools and factories, are extremely important because they measure the widespread consciousness that the PCI and the unions are not simply following the wrong ("revisionist") line, but represent a specific faction of capital to be fought. Thus the violent attack against the PCI professors is also clarified. The dean of the University of Rome who called the cops to clear it out, Ruperti, is a Communist. With few exceptions all the "philosophers" of historic compromise and of collaboration, who had found precisely in the university their center of power, have been ridiculed there and often prevented entirely from peddling their ideologies.

Far from constituting an "assault against culture," these acts represent a refreshing try to reappropriate critical thinking. Equally significant were the instruments of this critique: humor and irony, these very sharp weapons, replaced the old sacrificial jargon of militantism. As Radio Alice put it: "Militantism is the locus of the separation between politics and life, it is a voluntaristic substitute for the subject." Pressured by the material situation into becoming revolutionaries, individuals experiment with a new, exhilarating sociability and little by little invent the necessary organiza-

tional vehicles. In numerous demonstrations that have added color to the grayness of urban life, slogans have given way to a mordant and violent *detournement* of any and all rationalization projects. Sacrifice and austerity are extolled with irony, and people shout "down with wages, up with work." The dadaists' habit of twisting the language of power and stamping it with radical subjectivity has been rediscovered (21).

Following the shooting of a Lotta Continua member in March, Bologna was almost entirely in the hands of the demonstrators for three days. Downtown, numerous restaurants and luxury shops were looted: side by side with young proletarians, old pensioners could be seen fleeing happily, pushing handcarts brimful of delicacies. For once in those streets and squares people were *communicating*. Only armored trucks ordered in by the government with the Communist Administration's approval could restore order to the city. Over the next few days, police found scores of guns and rifles hidden in improbable places, the fruit of an armory raid... Similar episodes recurred in April and May in Rome, Milan and Turin. Not one aspect of the old world was overlooked: "black labor," establishment journalists, factories, universities, the supermarkets of ideology as well as traditional ones.

If in '68 the various little marxist-leninist parties were able to dismiss May as a movement of petty-bourgeois students (a label with which these unfortunates hope to forget their own stupidity), the social position of high school and college students in 1977 was radically different. Their situation now is often closer to that of the revolutionary unemployed than to the student in its sociological definition. The fact is that the university, an institution in itself problematic for all industrial societies, has become in Italy the crossing point of explosive conflicts, a parking lot for all those who, expelled from production, have no idea what to do with themselves. Having few illusions about getting into the "first society," most of these "students" rarely set foot in the university, and when they do, it is not exactly to take classes.

Because of its troublesome connotation within the network, the university has become the gathering place for the various tendencies expressing the emerging revolutionary subject. The eternal problem of worker/student unity which tormented the steep of post-'60s militants has been swept aside by the dynamics of the real movement: this remains a problem only in the empty-heads of gramscian intellectuals.

#### BOLOGNA, SEPTEMBER 1977. A NIGHTMARE FOR CAPITAL AND ITS SERVANTS.

*Cospirare vuol dire respirare insieme.*

(Conspiracy, that means breathing together)

—Flyer distributed at the University of Bologna.

We have mentioned some significant events that marked this year of struggle in Italy. We have tried to bring out their significance. Meanwhile capital has sharpened its knives: terror on the one side, cultural recuperation on the other. The Germanization of the state, like the various versions of the democratic mystification from the historic compromise to the government of the left is simply a *moment* of the same repressive strategy: "rights" and "culture" for those who acquiesce, the Gulag and extermination for the others. This is no exaggeration. Besides the assassination of a number of underground militants, new laws against terrorism have been enacted, most of all the ill-famed *Legge Reale* (see *Aldo No Moro*, Fifth Estate—June 19, 1978) that allows the police to search houses and people without warrant and legalizes wire-tapping. There is also growing use of the "confino," and old fascist law through which people considered socially dangerous can be confined to restricted areas—generally a small island—even if there is no formal charge against them. Confronted by the waves of escapes and prison revolts, the state has put forward a new plan which attempts to separate revolutionaries from other prisoners. The former are kept in special ultra-secure prisons and are often prevented from reading newspapers or receiving visitors, even from their lawyers.

Countering this project of normalization, a reality is emerging *different* from and *alien* to the theater of politics. The movement has overflowed language and politics, this is most feared. Language is a factory for the reproduction of power: the desire to speak out is a moment of its dismantling. Discipline and punish: the simplest and most vulgar operation is to assign guilt. Power, in its infinite paranoia, tries to combat that which is *identical* to itself: it seeks leaders. But the movement is the product of no conspiratorial vanguard either armed or pacifist, its *Isirs*, pursued by the sick minds of the judiciary and police cannot be closed simply because they have no doors. These "Isirs" are none other than the reality of hundreds of thousands of workers who hate work, unemployed who refuse wage-labor, students and professors who subvert culture, marginals, madmen, homosexuals, feminists, prisoners.

Nonetheless, these rudimentary tactics maintain the old efficacy of every repressive apparatus: the assassination and arrest of activists (or those deemed to be such) circulate further paranoia, sow suspicion, and retard the movement, even if they cannot wreck it.

Since March 1977 there had been bitter persecution of the staff of *Radio Alice*, the Bologna station which during the revolt performed an interesting function of sub-communication and asserted itself as one voice of the movement. The role they played in the insurrectionary days was exciting. Broadcasting the communications of the people directly involved in the fights, *Radio Alice* had a function of diffusion and amplification of information. Knowing the movement of the cops the demonstrators were able to avoid dangerous places and to defend effectively the liberated zones. When on March 13 the police broke into the headquarters of the radio, the people who managed to escape arrest went on broadcasting from a car moving through the city (22).

From April on there was an orgy of searching, closing, arresting, and checking. The PCI, becoming, so to speak, "more royalist than the king," recovers its stalinist tradition and criticizes the government for being inept at repression, loudly demanding more summary measures. Amendola states at a CP Central Committee meeting: "The young people of the movement may be of good faith, but they objectively represent an enemy to be fought against resolutely. The young fascists of the Salò Republic were also honest and sincere, but we had to execute them." In a speech in Modena, Enrico Berlinguer (Party chief) treats them as "untori" (untore: a carrier of plague).

Now lawyers are declared wrong to defend "terrorists," now journals that disseminate counterinformation are shut down, now radio stations. When the lairs are not found, revolutionaries are picked up at the factories, at school, or in the streets. Catonotti, a PCI judge most diligent in pursuing movement activists, and Zangheri—the afore mentioned mayor of Bologna—became the favorite targets of devastating slogans and a symbol of the active function of the PCI in repressing any left opposition.

In such a climate, in the midst of a wave of savage repression, the Bologna meeting was concluded. The situation was paradoxical in that the meeting was organized principally by Lotta Continua, the group that best personified the legacy of the old militancy, that militancy the movement had rejected in the course of the Spring actions. On second thought this is more comprehensible. First of all the break was not sudden, but developed slowly and conflictually: as we have shown, the phase we are in is one in which the movement is outgrowing the organizations traditionally repressing it, but this fact, though extremely significant, is only manifest in *tendential* form and is unrecognized throughout part of the movement. Secondly, Lotta Continua is perhaps the only established group that has in any way understood what is going on and has gone from the beginning all out to tail the movement and sap its vitality. These people who right up to the end of 1976 dreamed about the wretched "government of the left," and were by that time no more than organized corpses, have swerved unexpectedly nimbly realizing it was their last chance to avoid being swept away by events.

Taking into account the enormous historical differences, the present position of Lotta Continua recalls that of the Maximalists of the Italian Socialist Party in 1919-21, when they cried out demagogically for insurrection while at the same time repressing any such initiative. Today, more than then, absolute clarity is vital to unmask the counterrevolutionary positions masquerading behind fine phrases. At any rate, from the beginning it was clear that at Bologna, the different tendencies of the movement would confront one another, and that the meeting would not just be monopolized by political recuperators. Of these tendencies, one of the most important was, of course, the so-called Autonomia Organizzata (Organized Autonomy); in the form of groups like Rosso, Senza Tregua, Addaveni, Collettivo di via dei Volsci (Volsciuchi), and so forth. Some more, some less, they all urged a radicalization of the conflict in the direction of armed struggle.

At this point a few remarks are required. If we demand the wealth of revolutionary violence and the arming of the movement (collective expropriation, the intensification of street fighting, sabotage, etc.) we are equally convinced that violence is not a moment that can as such characterize the new revolution.

Today's impatience to take up arms at any cost in reality retards the process by which the proletariat as a whole will turn to arms in anticipation of repression. Those who are so smug about their stupid use of weapons are not the "hardest" or most advanced of the present revolutionary movement, but the rearguard of its theoretical and strategic consciousness (23).

In our opinion it is precisely social decomposition which, enjoining mutually-exclusive choices—armed struggle as separate, specialized sphere—and reducing the complexity of the ongoing struggle to a feud between gangs, allows capital to go on exploiting the situation to its profit. If, as far as the Brigade Rosse are concerned, for example, we cannot suppress a bit of sympathy for their occasional success in

ridiculing and assaulting the state, neither do we forget that their neostalinist and militarist program, has nothing in common with the modern revolutionary project.

It is on the basis of the failure of the '68 movement that one has to understand the current terrorism. When by the early '70s the perspective of a total revolution seemed to have faded away, a few groups thought it possible to "smash the state" in a military confrontation. The incapacity to realize that no armed or pacific voluntarism can surpass the pace of the real movement, gave birth to an ideology blending naive rebellion with ultra-bolshevism in a horrid pot-pourri. At the beginning the armed groups achieved at least the goal of showing the vulnerability of the state. With the increasing repression and rationalization of the police apparatus however, their practice was transformed into a personal war soon autonomized from any real struggle. Moreover their typical slogan, "carry the struggle to the heart of the state," conceals the real target, capital, of which the state is only a *phenomenal manifestation*. By 1977 the armed groups (Brigate Rosse, NAP) had become a *hindrance* to the development of the movement, which they denounced for its spontaneism and adventurism (!). Ironically enough, these critiques, diffused through periodic communiques, recall the laments of the reformist left of which they are nothing but the radical wing. As for the insurrectionary moments in which arms can effectively be taken up, their hollow specialization is of little use because they deal more with gangster actions than with spontaneous mass violence.

Independent of the intentions and revolutionary ardor of particular individuals, we see in terrorism the seeds of recuperation. Not only in the sense of police cannibalization, but in the reduction—we repeat of absolute utility of the state—of revolution to a mere military question. To this we oppose the "true war," war that cuts across all of social reality and doesn't let itself be reduced to armed confrontation.

It is true that groups of the Autonomia don't identify with the Brigade Rosse, but the fact remains that their uncritical pushing toward the militarization of the movement presents pretty much the same problems.

Two dangerous tendencies thus encountered at the opposite *ideological* poles in Bologna: on one side, the old *gauchisme* revisited and tinted with creativity for the occasion (Lotta Continua); on the other the new tough *gauchisme* represented by the groups of the Autonomia. Poor attention was given to the paladin of "intellectual dissent" who drone on about the role of the gramscian intellectual who ought no longer to serve the party but the movement (!).

Beyond the formal political groups, however, a majority of participants had no rigid organizational ties and expressed a network of different local struggles. These included Proletarian Circles, Factory Committees, Feminist and Homosexual groups, squatters, free radio exponents and many others. The importance of the meeting lies precisely in the fact that such different situations sought in Bologna a first moment of encounter, while preserving their specificity. This constellation of needs, wants and desires contributed to the creation of a vivid social atmosphere. Alongside the official debates, there was everywhere a proliferation of confrontations, encounters, and moments of love, socialized at last. For the first time in years, many people felt the desire and the possibility of talking about their lives and the necessity of changing them in concert with others. And it was this atmosphere, perhaps more than the communiques of the militaristic sects, that the authorities feared. The day after the meetings end, the press breathed a sigh of relief to ascertain that the city was still in tact. Zangheri declared: "Bologna won, the PCI won." Behind this cheap triumphalism however lay perplexity and dismay: no one said it, but everyone understood that Bologna had convened forces whose aim is nothing less than the destruction of capital and the liberation of desire.

#### ITALY DOES NOT STAND MIDWAY BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE THIRD WORLD

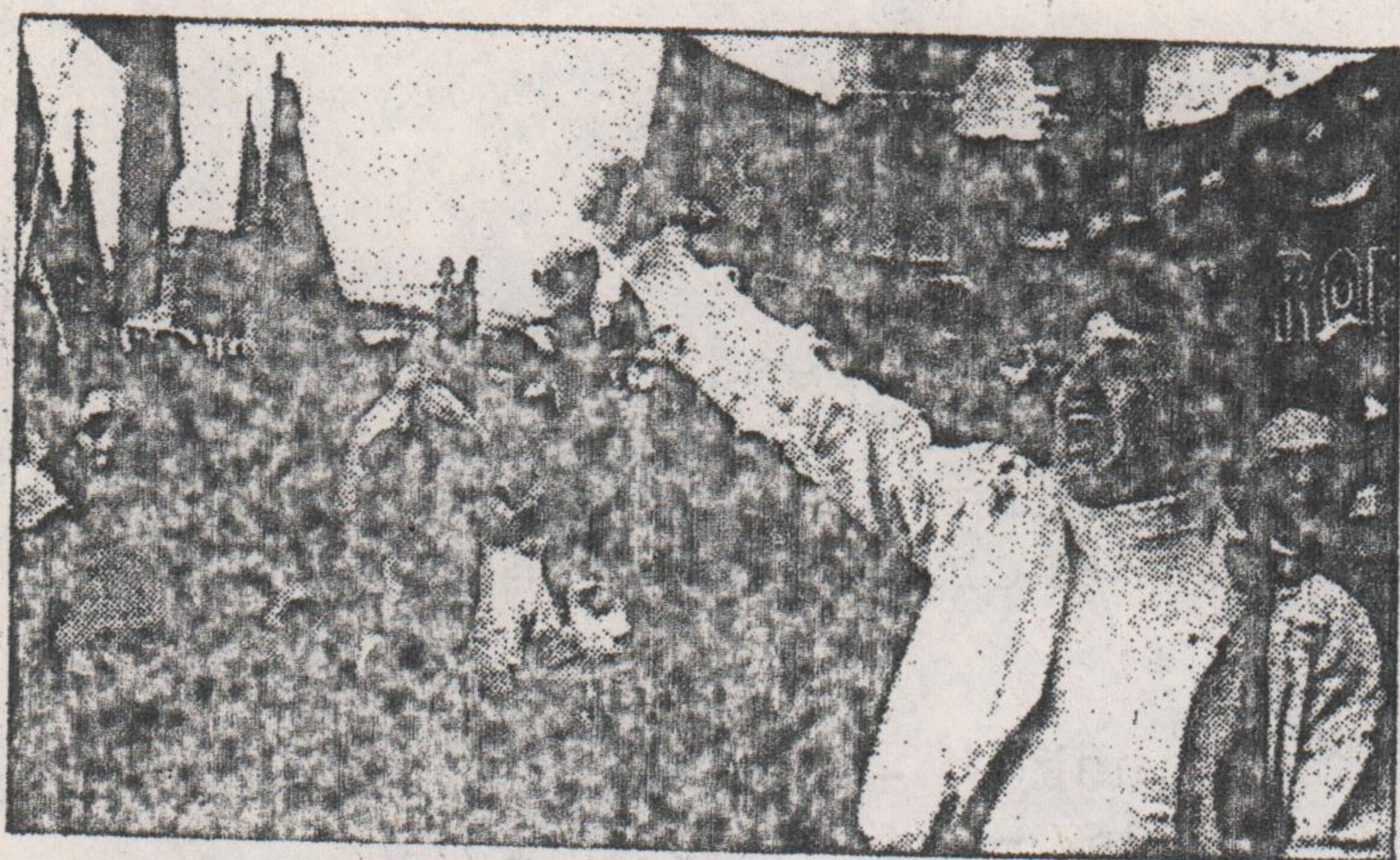
*The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such a period of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past.*

(Karl Marx)

The events we have examined show that any attempt to revive past organizational forms is destined to be swallowed up by capital.

*The old workers movement can do nothing but ripen along with capitalism and fall with it* (Paul Mattick).

Even forms of self-organization like Workers' Councils which confine social contradictions of the factory, are valid instruments of struggle in periods where capital still dominates the productive process only in *formal* terms. The moment the transition to its real domination is accomplished, new kinds of struggle and communications must be invented that question not this or that aspect of reality, but the *totality of the conditions of social life*. On the other hand, if today more than ever the intuition of revolutionaries in the '20s appears correct—that *Revolution is not a*



CP bureaucrat leading a demonstration condemning the kidnapping of Aldo Moro.

question of organizational forms—it is indeed true that the principal defect of the movement is precisely its failure to clearly define a basis for struggle adequate to the present needs.

This creates a situation in which none of the existing groups as such expresses the depth of what is going on: neither the groups of the *Autonomia Organizzata* which tend to be trapped specializing in armed struggle, nor the groups of the *Autonomia Creativa* which tend to fall into the ideology of everyday life and of counterculture. Yet, as the outcome of an explosive social situation places the problem of the communist revolution on the agenda, each of these groups is crossed by a multiplicity of tendencies which, for the time being, don't allow them to repeat the formulas of the left. In other words the movement poses the problem of the invention of non-recuperable forms of struggle, but still in a negative way failing so far to create the real autonomous terrain. Nevertheless such attempt does exist and the bare fact of its emergence is by far the most revolutionary event of recent years, not only in Italy.

Now it is important to stress how the needs of the Italian revolutionaries are essentially the same as those in the rest of the world: more or less openly they threaten social peace in every country where the advanced forms of capitalist domination are in force. As power attempts to isolate the revolution in Italy, depicting the country as the South American face of Europe, what the movement effectively lacks is the solidarity of revolutionaries worldwide. Not the solidarity of letters and telegrams and routine demonstrations, but the practical solidarity of generalized revolt. Only by linking Bologna up with Paris, Hamburg and Detroit will victory be possible.

The spring of 1977 has been followed almost everywhere with the rather pious interest reserved for struggles on another continent. . . . What most comrades have not understood is that Italy is not some midpoint between Europe and South America, but the vanguard of the class struggle in Europe. Spring 1977 was not a struggle of students and unemployed, backward strata tied to pre-industrial activities and cut off from the labor market, but the struggle of the proletarian layer that represents the social concretization of living time freed from work, and therefore the point expressing the greatest contradiction between the capitalist system and the post-industrial communist movement. Capital's interest is to subtract from the Italian class struggle its purposeful character. The movement's interest is to demonstrate once and for all the purposeful character of the Italian struggle, emphasizing that Italy is in any case, the future of France, Spain and Britain. (Manifesto circulated in France and Italy by A/Traverso—Radio Alice, June 1977) In the meantime (February '78), the movement seems to be ebbing. The reformists catch up: well known post-stalinists like Althusser and Colletti talk about the "crisis of marxism" (*L'Espresso* No.4, January 1978). The necessity of superseeding the experience of the workers' movement slips in an uncritical rejection not only of Lenin but also of Marx. At the same time the state delivers a quite unprecedented attack, concentrated mostly in Rome where the movement most strongly expressed itself at the end of 1977 and where all the demonstrations of *Autonomia* are now prohibited. On February 4, a demonstration was held in Rome to protest: the "confino." While the groups of *Democrazia Proletaria* bowed to the police prohibition, the *Autonomia* claimed their right to dissent and had to engage in furious street fights with cops. Barricades spread over several points of the city and use was made of guns and molotov cocktails.

Clearly the state is attempting to force a great number of people to go underground, in order to realize its aim of reducing the struggle to the military dimension: that is to say, were it can easily win, at least at this stage. In this repression the underground groups like the *Brigate Rosse*—still having a certain presence, mainly in the factories of the North—believe they found a confirmation of their strategy. And it's significant that the recent period characterized by growing confusion and by some kind of reconversion to traditional politics, has been marked by really stupid acts of terror: at the beginning of January, two young neofascists were killed and a third severely wounded in Rome, while in November the editor of a Turin newspaper, *La Stampa*, was executed. Politicians and journalists of all conformist tendencies are continuously harassed and sometimes severely wounded ("kneecapped"). It is evident that these underground groups are now playing on the ambiguity between crisis and revolution, between the neostalinist "armed vanguard" and radical transformation in a communist sense.

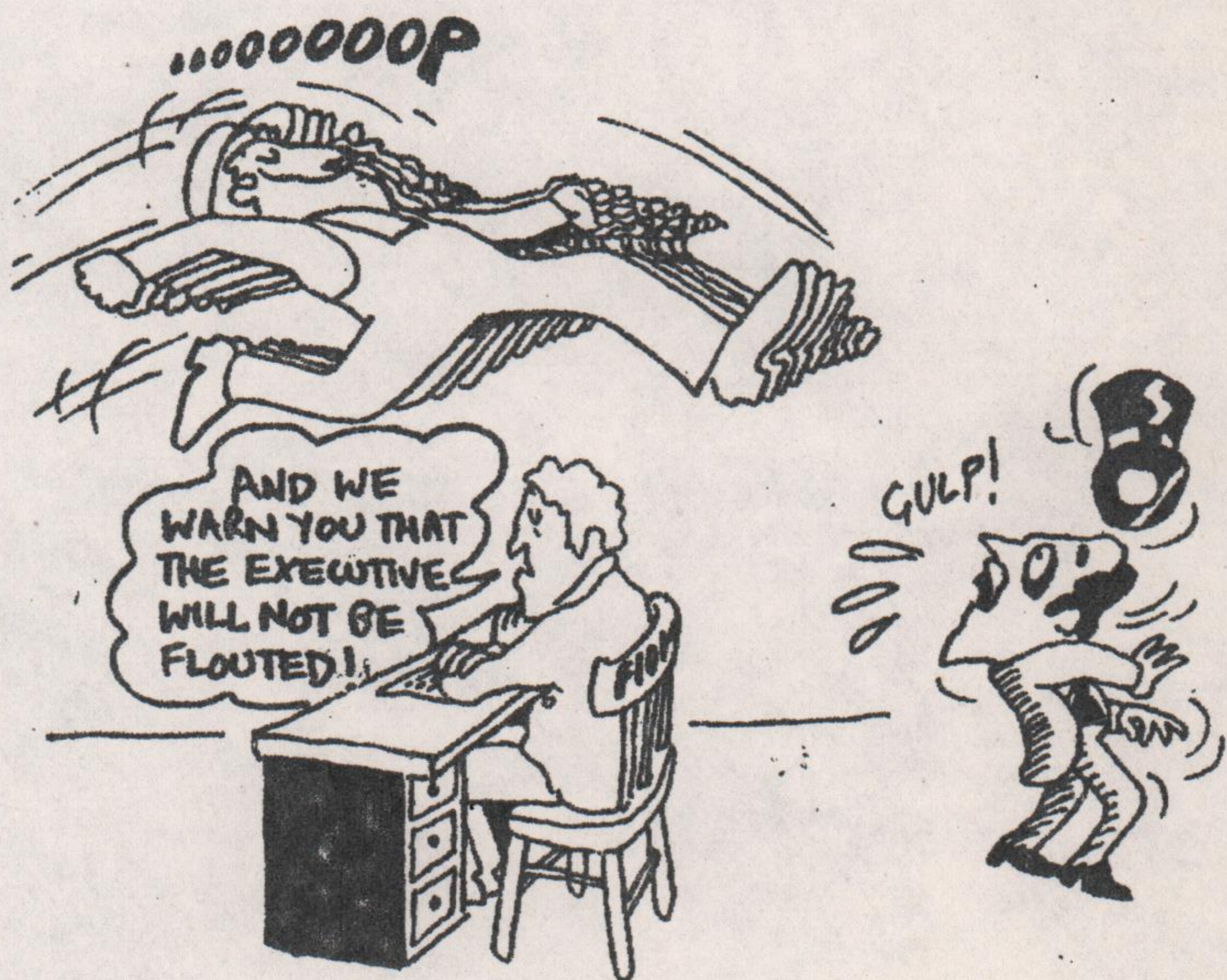
Finally we will try to draw some provisional conclusions. The '77 Italian events suggest the emergence of a new anticapitalist opposition. Its most important lineaments are: 1) the quest for new, non-recuperable forms of communication and class struggle, and 2) the violent attack against official and non official left. Several

aspects of the movement permit us to hazard the guess that its recuperation will be as easy as in the past: its irraducibility to some list of demands, the economic context it is embarked upon. In our effort to outline what is going on, we have made great use of the categories of the critique of political economy, in particular of the marxian theory of the falling rate of profit and of the key concepts of formal and real domination of capital. The mandarins of the PCI (& friends) have tried to put down the movement by appealing to the authority of an embalmed Marx. However, the appearance of a tendency reaffirming the communist program of the old workers' movement, but breaking with its forms of expression holds to the basic dialectical views of Marx himself.

Aware of not having the solutions to the problems in our pocket, we nevertheless thought it indispensable to draw attention also to the dangers peculiar to this phase of the Italian movement. The movement cannot accept the alliance with cryptostalinists and future bureaucrats, however they may display a tough attitude against the state. The history teaches that such alliances begin and end on the putrid terrain of "democracy" — the management of capital by the people.

Only from a broad attack on the organization of capital as a whole and against wage-labor as its reproductive mechanism, is it legitimate to expect the production of the still lacking revolutionary subjectivity. This is the task of the movement, everything else is ideology, the alternative administration of the same old shit.

Claudio Albertani



If you're not bored rigid with Italy already and/or you've not destroyed your eyesight reading the ridiculously tiny print, you might find the following of interest. Then again don't blame us if you don't. Asterix indicates still in print at time of writing.

Italy 1977-8 'Living With An Earthquake' - Red Notes 1978 \*(?)  
Working Class Autonomy And The Crisis - Red Notes 1979

(Red Notes also have an extensive archive of translated materials on Italy. For list write to them c/o BP 15  
2a St Pauls Rd. London N.1)

Ripening of Time No. 12 (Italy : Documents of Struggle) \*  
- Revolutionary Struggle (Dublin) 1980

(See also occasional **articles** in their paper Rebel)

Semiotexte (vol III no. 3) Autonomia: Post Political Politics. \*

Workers Autonomy - Bratach Dubh 1979 \*

Critique of Syndicalist Methods - Alfredo Bonnano - Bratach Dubh \*

Armed Struggle in Italy - Bratach Dubh \*

The Power Of Women And The Subversion Of The Community

M. Della Costa/S. James - Falling Wall Press 1973 \*

(See also Women, the Unions and Work - James, Wages Against  
Housework, - Federici, Counterplanning from the Kitchen -  
Federici/Cox)

Homosexuality and Liberation - Mario Mieli. Gay Mens Press \*

Dear Comrades - Readers Letter To Lotta Continua. Pluto Press \*

(Politically biased selection by Big Flame Hacks but still  
interesting)

Ancient Pamphlets still available from us:

Organising for Workers Power - Sofri (Potere Operaio)  
Rising Free 1973.

Take over the City : Community Struggles in Italy. 1973.

For Autonomia Operaia influenced theory see also :

Reading Capital Politically - Harry Cleaver. Harvester. \*  
1979.