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Review Copy

# TAKE OVER THE CITY



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## community struggle in italy

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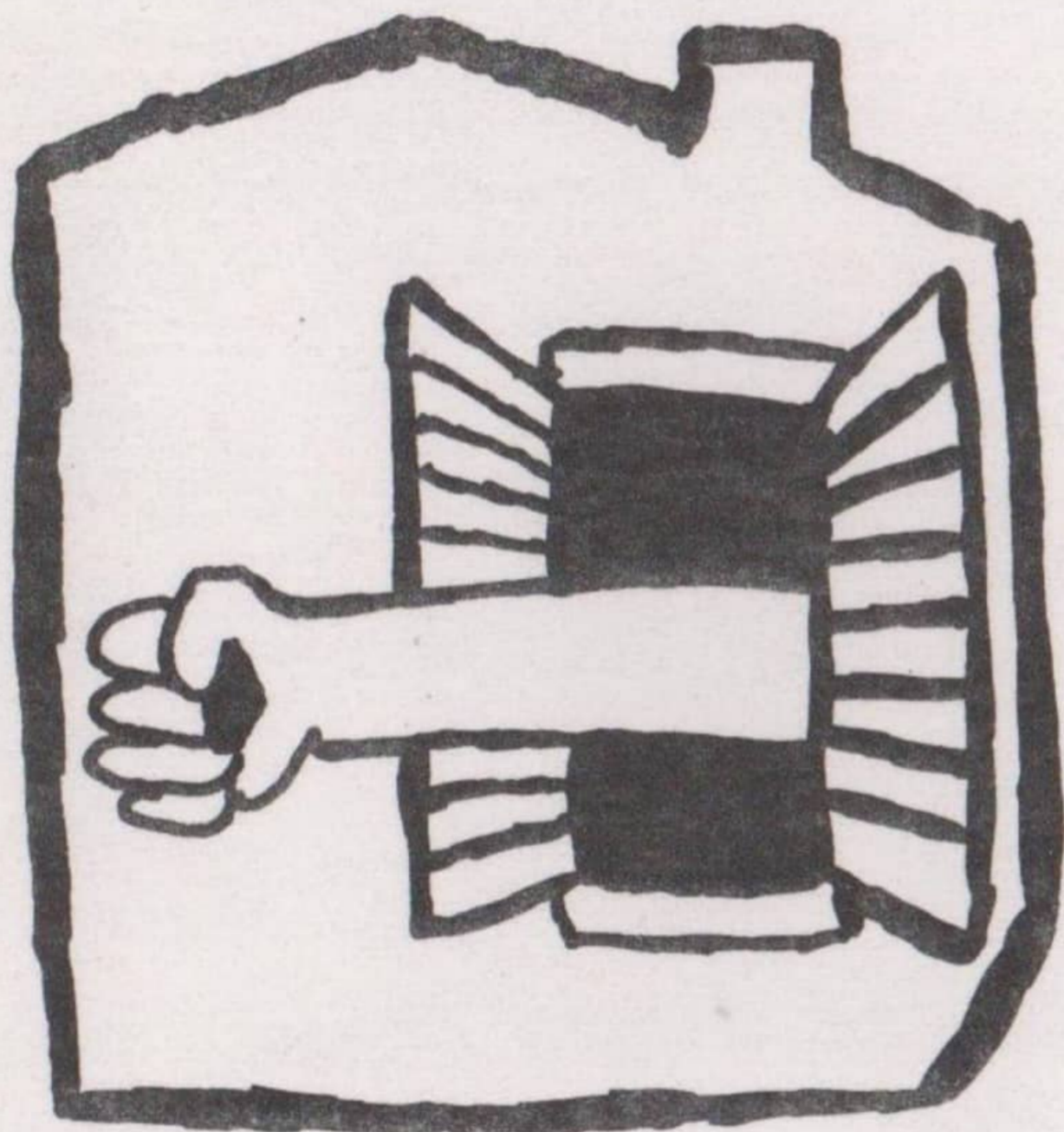
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# **PREFACE**

## **'69~'73: four years of struggle**

Since the Autumn of '69 the class struggle in Italy has spread from the factories to every area of people's lives. The working class has fought against their housing conditions, with widespread and prolonged rent strikes and mass occupations of empty flats, and against rising food prices, expensive transport, inadequate schools and nurseries, and lousy medical facilities. They have begun to create within their communities a new way of life, outside the control of the bosses. What's more Italian immigrants have taken the germ of this struggle beyond their national frontiers to other major European cities.

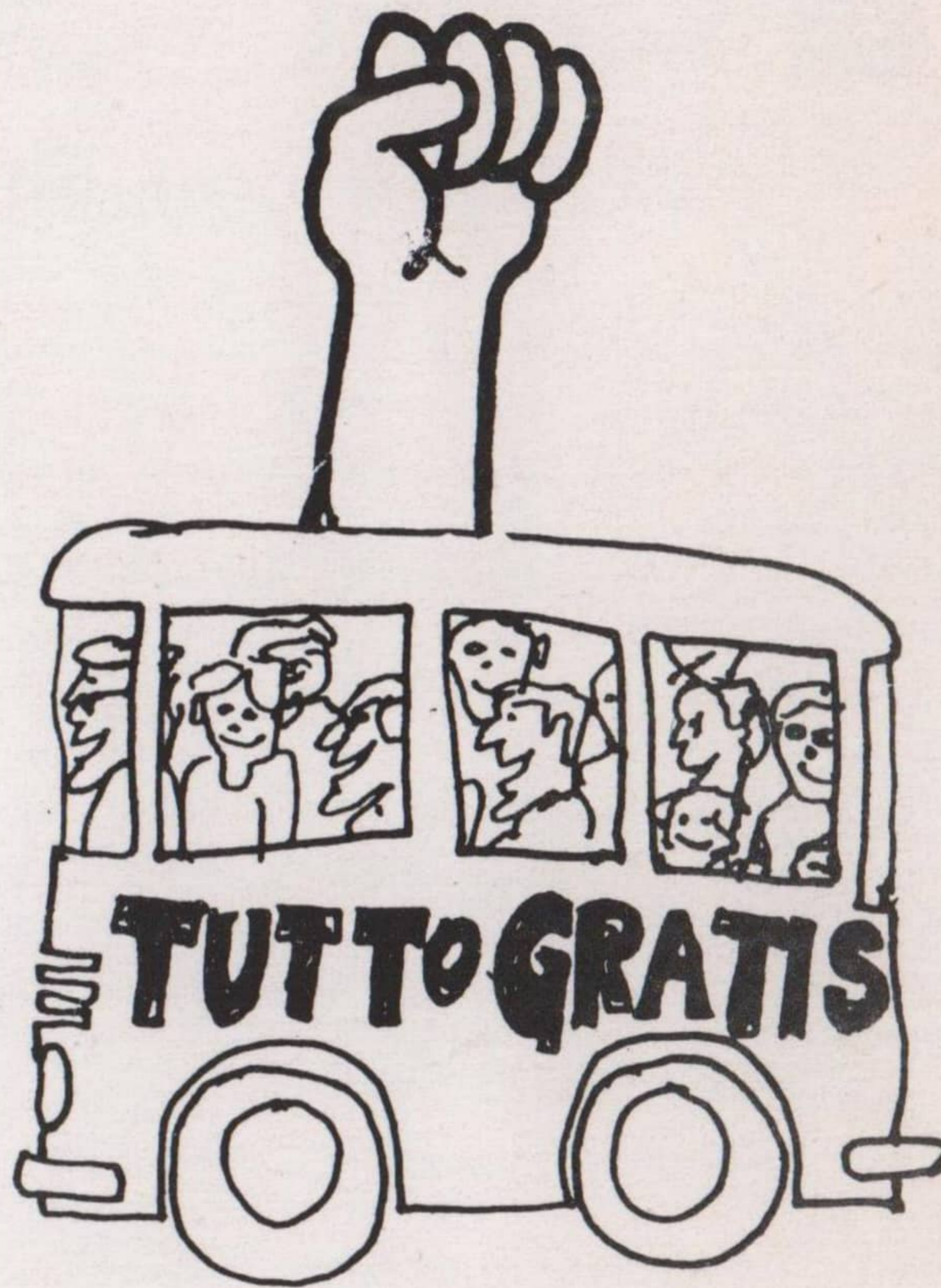
Rents : throughout the country thousands of tenants have been on rent strikes, some lasting for several years. Tenants' slogans have been "The only fair rent is no rent!" and "Housing is a right - why pay rent?" Autonomous organisations such as the Tenants Union, make sure that control of the struggle stays in the hands of the tenants themselves.



Occupations of flats : hundreds of people have been involved in the taking over of empty buildings. In Milan, during one series of occupations, 30,000 marched in a revolutionary demonstration through the city. In Taranto (Feb '73) 182 families occupied council flats; the police came to throw the families out but were forced to leave when the squatters were joined by hundreds of workers from Italsider, the steel plant, some of whom were squatting themselves.

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

Transport : In Spinea and Mirano (suburbs of Porto Marghera, Venice) workers and students stopped all the buses running as part of a campaign against high fares and bad services. They took some of them over and drove them all over the Mestre. In Trento, workers commuting to factories refused to pay fares saying that their wages were low enough.



Schools : there have been strikes and occupations of primary and secondary schools and universities in every major city. Since Autumn '69 when worker/student assemblies were formed, there have been many occasions when students and workers have fought alongside each other. In the schools, the kids have fought for free books, free transport, an end to exams, an end to the class bias in education, the opening of schools to the community, etc.

Health : Rome - A Red Health Centre was set up to provide free medical treatment. It became a centre for organising struggles around living and working conditions, the real causes of ill health. Throughout the country, left-wing doctors have become involved in fighting class-based medicine e.g. they have given evidence in court cases where workers have been harmed by working in a factory; their evidence is essential in combating the evidence of the bosses' doctors.

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



## Factory, school, community - one struggle

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

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

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

*Occupations in Italy have been mass, collective actions involving hundreds of people. There has never been any question of legal rights (like squatters' rights in this country) and there have been many violent clashes with the police,*

*with people defending themselves from behind barricades. The buildings taken over have often been modern blocks of flats, left empty by speculators. In some cases, the workers building the flats have joined in the occupation. Control of the flats and decisions about how the struggle should be fought are in the hands of general meetings. In the course of the struggle new, collective ways of living - nurseries, communal canteens, people's health centres - are developed. In this way people begin to live in the flats in a way which is totally opposed to the idea of isolated, private units for which the architects designed them.*

*Unlike Great Britain where there has often been a separation between 'tenants' and 'squatters', in Italy people have recognised that both rent strikes and occupations are part of the same struggle. "A house is a right - don't pay rent" has been a common slogan for both, and in a number of instances, e.g. in Milan, the same organisation has been used to build the rent strike and to prepare for the occupations. This unified struggle around housing has been the precondition of the extension of the fight into other areas such as transport, health and prices.*

*All these struggles have relied on direct action: 'legal' channels for registering protest or demanding reforms are seen for what they are - delaying tactics used by the ruling class to divide people and buy off their leaders. Appeals to MPs, petitions to Parliament, etc have been rejected as irrelevant if people are prepared to fight to take now the things that they need. In the modern city the traditional working class way of life has been increasingly destroyed and replaced by the anonymity of life on the housing estates. In the course of their struggles the Italian working class have begun to create for themselves a new identity, a way of life which is more and more out of control of the bosses. In defining and fighting for their own interest as a class, working people have begun to take back everything that has been stolen from them, taking control of their lives, taking the city.*

# HISTORY

## 'Reconstruction' & 'economic growth'

After the war the Italian ruling class (helped by 'Marshall Aid') began the reconstruction of a capitalist economy. The parties of the left, including the Communists, cooperated with them. The revolutionary hopes of the workers who had fought against Fascism were traded in in exchange for a seat in the government. Anti-fascist groups, all over the country, who had been armed since the time of the resistance and were now preparing to combat the presence of the US were persuaded to lay down their weapons. Once the threat of armed insurrection was out of the way the bourgeoisie swiftly ousted the Communists from government and set about a programme of suppressing working class organisations. The trade unions, particularly the militant **FIOM at Fiat, were broken up.**



FIAT occupied - armed workers guard the gate

Conditions were now ripe for the exceptional growth of Italian industry which lasted from 1948 to 1962. During this period, with considerable financial backing from the State, massive investment occurred, especially in export-based industries and in car production.

Industry was streamlined and the most modern methods were introduced into the factories. This growth, far from benefiting the workers, was, in fact, largely paid for by them through the low wages and lousy living conditions which they endured. Since the new industry was highly automated it only very slowly created jobs, and unemployment remained high throughout the period.

## The South

This industrial growth was concentrated in the Northern cities, and was, in fact, based on a policy of keeping the South poor and underdeveloped. Southern Italy's position in relation to the North is very like that of Ireland (North and South) to the rest of the UK. Predominantly an area of agricultural work it has a long history of a client system based on the large landowners. Jobs, homes, schools, everything depended on the patronage of the local boss. This system was maintained after 1945, with the difference that control was no longer in the hands of the landlords, but of government officials who handled public money. Agriculture was 'rationalised' into larger units and mechanised; millions of people were driven off the land into the cities. (especially Naples and Rome). Between 1950 and 1967, 17 million Italians (more than 1/3 of the population) moved from one district to another! Although a certain amount of small industry and construction work did come to the South it was not enough to prevent a massive migration to the North. This constant reserve of labour was exactly what the Italian bosses needed. It helped to keep wages down, even when the demand for workers began to grow.

1962 brought the first halt to this murderous progression. The workers at Fiat came out on strike and demonstrated in the streets of Turin. The demand for workers, caused by the boom of 1959, was beginning to push wages up, and unemployment was falling. Italian bosses began to find it more and more difficult to make the massive profits to which the boom years had accustomed them. Investment began to tail off, and more and more money went abroad or into other more lucrative areas, such as property speculation. Now, instead of pushing up productivity by the introduction of new machinery, as they had been doing, they began to put the squeeze on workers to work harder.

Speeds on the production lines were pushed up and up, to become the highest in any European country. The years during which their organisations had been smashed gave the Italian workers no chance, for the time being, of resisting this process.

## Conditions in the cities

The bosses managed to retain the upper hand. Conditions for the workers grew worse - unemployment rose once more and prices of food, housing and transport shot up, in an ever-growing inflationary spiral. Life in the cities became unbearable. The growth of Italian capitalism had involved a massive influx of people into the towns. From 1951 to 1961, the



Rooftops of a shantytown

four largest urban districts (Milan, Rome, Turin and Naples) and their outlying districts had a population increase of 2 millions, which was 2/3 of the total national increase in population. From '51 to '69 the population of Turin and its suburbs alone grew from 868,000 to 1,528,000.

The bosses and their State did nothing to make this forced migration less painful. The programme of public house-building was minute. The main state agency, GESCAL, built 390,000 flats between 1949 and 1971, which is the same number as were built privately in one year. In 1971, GESCAL built 3,254 flats and had a waiting list of 138,931 families. GESCAL gets its money from workers and employers; the workers' contribution is 0.6 of 1% of wages, the bosses' is double (1.2%).\* A lot of this money disappears through corruption; the rest is invested in industry or abroad and will remain there since it takes years for GESCAL to get planning permission for its projects and, anyway, like British Councils, it usually gets outbid for the little land that becomes available by private developers. Workers had to find accommodation where they could. People had to sleep 6 - 8 to a room, and around the large cities shanty-towns spread. Rents for flats, when they could be found, cost up to 30 - 40% of a person's wages.

\*For more details about public housing authorities in Italy see Note, p.36

## Bosses' crisis - workers' struggle

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

In 1969 many of the important three-yearly labour contracts in the engineering industry were due to expire. Many of the large firms were eager to negotiate new terms and settle with the Unions as peacefully as possible, thereby avoiding large-scale disruptions of production. For their part the Trade Unions and the CP, the their parliamentary spokesmen, were prepared to do a deal. They were hoping to strengthen their own position, to have their importance recognised officially; the CP had dreams of once more entering government. They were also

worried by the existence of several unofficial workers committees and base committees which had emerged during the previous year. In exchange for industrial peace they would ask for higher wages and the promise of social reforms. But to ensure their bargaining position they had to mobilise the workers, at least enough to show their strength. And this was their big mistake, because the workers had had enough. They weren't going to play the game of token gestures.

## 'Hot Autumn'

Before the Unions could call them out the workers were on the move. And they soon went far beyond the control of the Unions. For instance, when workers at Fiat were called out on a one-day token strike in protest against the killing of a Southern worker during the rioting at Battipaglia, they refused to leave the factory and started to take it over instead.

Very quickly people began to develop aims, tactics and organisation which had nothing to do with what the Unions were after. They didn't just want a wage rise: they wanted an abolition of the system of grading, equal pay rises for all and a drastic reduction in the pace at which they were being forced to work. Rather than passively come out on strike, like the Unions wanted them to, they began to organise a struggle inside the factories, with mass meetings on the job, rotating strikes in different sections which brought production to a standstill, marches through the factory, involving a lot of damage to the plant, and direct confrontation with the management. New organisations began to take control of the struggle - Base Committees at Pirelli (Milan), and at the chemical works in Porto Marghera, the worker-student assembly at Fiat Mirafiori (Turin), and factory newspapers began to appear. Links were established with groups of students, and meetings were were held regularly at the factory gates.

The scene inside a factory after a militant march by the workers





'Workers won't pay for the bosses' crisis!'

This explosion inside the factories demonstrated decisively that the 'economic partnership' which the bosses and the Unions were interested in was not on. The growing use by Italian firms of assembly-line production techniques had drastically changed the nature of work and the work-force. The older, skilled workers, with a pride in their work, who had been the backbone of the Trade Unions and the CP had no place among a newer generation of workers whose individual skills were unimportant and who didn't give a damn about the 'Dignity of Labour'. Many of these young workers had come from the South, from

agricultural communities with a long history of direct and violent struggle; where the burning down of the local Town Hall or the occupation of the lands were common happenings. They were part of a militant tradition but not part of a Trade Union tradition, so that when the militancy of the workers came into the open the Unions were not able (as the French Unions did in '68) to channel the struggle into demands for higher wages and reforms. In the hope of buying peace the bosses desperately made big concessions on wages. Between 1969 and 1970 wages went up by 23.4% compared with an average annual increase of only 9% over the previous ten years.

The signing of the contracts was concluded only a few weeks after sixteen people were killed by fascist bombings in the centre of Milan\*. The ruling class were developing two tactics for dealing with the militancy of the workers - concessions and reforms, on the one hand, and open repression, on the other. The continuation of the struggle inside the factories and its extension into the communities meant that the ruling class increasingly chose the second option. In the factories militants were sacked or moved onto other jobs, fascists were planted to spy on militant workers, and many small firms closed down. At the same time unemployment rose and huge price increases took place. This attack has not stopped the workers from carrying on the struggle. In industry they have refused to accept the demands for increased productivity. In their communities they have responded with mass rent strikes, occupations, struggles against fares and rising prices.

## Abbreviations

### Political parties

DC - Christian Democrats (governing party)  
 CP - Communist Party (has a large membership in Italy. Influential inside the Trade Unions and local government. Newspaper - 'Unita')  
 PSI - Socialist Party of Italy (like Labour Party)  
 PSIUP - Socialist Party of Italy for Working Class Unity (left-wing, split from PSI in 1964)

### Trade Unions

(Italian Trade Unions are organised not on a trade basis, but on a political basis).

CGIL - General Confederation of Italian Workers (main Union in which the CP, PSI and PSIUP are

involved. The CP is the most influential).

CISL - Italian Confederation of Free Unions

UIL - Italian Union of Workers

FIM - Italian Federation of Metalworkers

### Housing Authorities

GESCAL - principle State housing authority

IACP - Autonomous Institute for Popular Housing (main State building authority).

(see Note on p.36)

### Other groups

Unione Inquilini - Tenants' Union

UNIA - National Union of Italian Tenants (similar to NATR)

ACLI - Action Group of Italian Catholic Workers

Most of the material in this pamphlet is based on articles in the newspaper of the revolutionary group, Lotta Continua (Fight On). The group emerged from the worker/student alliance formed during the factory struggles of '68 - '69. Lotta Continua has been flexible enough to adapt to the development of the struggle outside the factories. The title of this pamphlet is taken from the title of their political programme. They currently publish a daily newspaper and a special paper for the South. Their London address is 36a Queensgate Terrace, London SW 7.



# Take Over The City

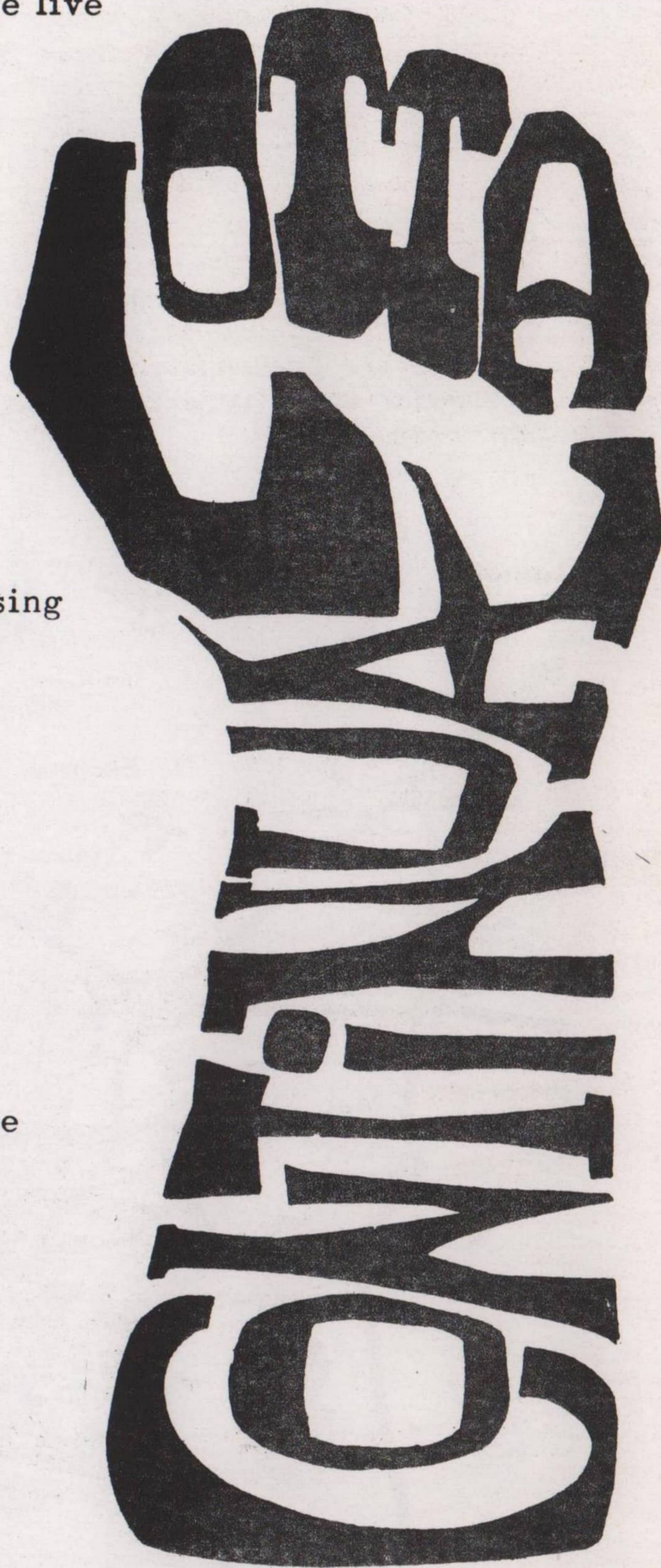
Our struggle involves everyone  
Who doesn't want to be a slave any more  
Who's conscious of their strength  
Who's not afraid of the bosses any more  
Who wants to change the world in which we live  
    into the world that we want  
Who knows that the time to fight is NOW  
    that there's no time to wait

If we don't have a house we take one  
In our communities we fight against rent  
We defend ourselves from evictions  
We want justice for the people  
And to be free to live a communal life  
  
Together, we, the working class, are rising  
We know that the barracks we live in  
    are a weapon used by the bosses  
From the estates to the shanty towns  
From the factories to the schools  
There's only one struggle

We've turned the bosses' schools  
    into Red Bases  
Bourgeois culture can't touch us any more  
There's a revolt in the prisons too  
Soon they'll be empty  
To make room for the bosses

## Refrain

A red wind is blowing  
Over the factories and estates  
It unites everyone of us  
Who've decided to fight  
For revolution  
For freedom  
Let's take over the city



(A Lotta Continua song)

# MILAN

Milan is Italy's largest industrial city. As well as large numbers of medium-sized factories there are several huge industrial plants - O.M. (trucks), Pirelli (tyres), Sit Siemens (electrical goods), Alfa-Romeo (cars). Together with Turin it 'attracts' 2,000 workers a month from the South. During the 'Hot Autumn' struggles of '69 these migrant workers were very militant. The most important point of these struggles was the lesson they gave people in how to organise on their own behalf and in their own way. At Pirelli, for instance, the fight was organised through the United Base Committee, set up with the support of students. It was this kind of experience which was the precondition of the more general struggles which were to develop outside the factories.

## Structure of the city

Milan can be divided into four areas:-

a) The city centre - banks, businesses, shops, hotels and luxury flats.

b) Old working class areas from which the working classes are being pushed out (eg Porto Garibaldi). These areas are lived in by the traditional Milanese working class, O.A.P.s, small shopkeepers, and post-war migrants from the South: most of these people are eligible for the municipal housing waiting list. The housing in these areas is a mixture of early municipal housing (pre-war) and very old privately-owned houses which have no amenities. Private owners - the biggest is Ceschini - collect millions in rent. These old working class neighbourhoods have traditions, history and a local community life which make them very different places to live in from the new working class neighbourhoods. Here the struggle



over housing has developed around making the old flats liveable, rent reductions and the fight against the eviction of tenants, which landlords are keen to do in order to be able to tart the flats up and flog them off to someone with cash. In other cases, the landlord takes in rents and service charges for years without doing any repairs. He lets the flats become so run down that he can get permission to knock them down and build luxury flats in their place.

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

d) Outlying areas. These are places like Bollate, Novate, Desio, Sesto, Cinisella which have grown up round factories such as Snia, Autobianchi, Alfa, Innocenti. They exist only to provide a place for factory workers to sleep. Even here rents are high (£5 a week for one-bedroomed flat, £6.50 a week for a two-bedroomed flat) and there are no schools, hospitals, shops or public transport. The housing here is either cooperatively owned flats, or shanty-town huts which are usually the only accommodation for recently arrived Southerners.

## The housing struggle

Housing struggles in Milan have centred around municipal housing. To get a municipal flat you have to show that you have a steady job, and the waiting period is at least five years. (Plus a year's residence in Milan before you can get on the waiting list). This immediately excludes recently arrived Southerners, workers whose work is seasonal (eg building workers), the underemployed, the unemployed and the thousands who don't know how to fill in the forms.

In 1964 5% of families in municipal housing were in rent arrears, by 1971 this had risen to 18%: in this period the housing authorities lost £3½ million: 10,000 families received warnings: there were 750 evictions. At the height of the struggle, 25% of families in Galaratese were in rent arrears, 45% in Quarto Oggiaro, 50% in Rodzano.

The struggle began in 1968 in Quarto Oggiaro when 30,000 families in municipal housing were faced with a 30% rent rise: a Tenants Union was created. In that year it made door to door contacts and organised public meetings. June '68 - 700 families on total rent strike. The Tenants Union spread the struggle with the demand that rent be no more

than 10% of wages. September '68 four people arrested during eviction: kids attack police cars: women block steps leading to the flats. The Union expands and the brutality of the police makes people more angry. May '70 500 police needed to evict one family.

## Rent strike

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

### An elderly woman from the area

"The struggle of us tenants began in January, 1968. I was one of the first women to stop paying rent. Despite the many difficulties our struggle has developed. The young people of the area have had a lot of trouble, day and night. But our minds are made up. If anyone goes on rent strike, nobody's going to be able to evict them. Every time the bailiffs come we'll be there, all together, in front of the door, stopping them from getting in."

"Not long ago 500 police were sent down from the Viale Romagna. 500 police to throw the family of one poor worker out onto the street. How come, when hundreds of evictions used to be carried out with only a bailiff there, it now takes a whole army?"

"It's because here in Quarto Oggiaro people have got together to fight. Because here in Quarto Oggiaro there's the Tenants Union. We're using a new type of weapon to fight against the rising cost of living, against the bosses' exploitation of us in our homes. It's something really effective - a rent strike."

"I'm not speaking now to the young people, to those youths in the area who have been in the forefront of our struggle. I want to say something to the women who live here. Many of them still aren't involved and haven't realised the importance of this strike."

"In the two years and five months that I've been on strike, I've saved a lot of money. I feel healthier. I've had more money to give to the children, to the ones who really need it. I've had some money to give to a few old age pensioners. I'm not saying all this to give you big ideas about myself. But just think for a minute. Rather than

your money to the bosses, keep it for yourself. Give it to the children. Give it to the workers who are struggling in the factories, who're exploited year in and year out."

"People talk about the Autumn factory contracts. What did the workers gain? Nothing - absolutely nothing! I know what my family's finances are like. If you do the shopping, you see prices rising everyday. I'd say we've lost out badly. They can laugh - the clever ones, the reformists, all those male politicians. But we're getting near election time, and we'll give our vote to those who deserve it - and that's none of them!"

"Eat sirloin steaks...don't go handing your hard-earned money over to the thieves in the Viale Romagna!"

"After those 500 police came to Quarto Oggiaro our struggle expanded a hundred times. Even the very next day. Anybody who's still paying rent just remember this. You won't get a penny of it back from the authorities.

Follow the example of the young people. Even if you don't give them responsibilities a lot of the time, seeing as they're so young. But they're much tougher and braver than us. Because after fifty years of struggle we can't get the same results we used to."

"Personally, I can say this. Since the time I first went on rent strike things have gone better for me."

"Long live the working class! And long live the struggle of the tenants!"

## A woman worker from Fiar

"After four months of strikes in the factories I was in trouble trying to live on a wage that just wasn't enough. I have three children, all of them very young and dear to me. And I just couldn't afford the rent I was paying to this private landlord. So they had me evicted. I didn't get help from anyone."

"Then I heard there was a flat empty in Quarto Oggiaro, and I decided to squat in it. Now the

authorities have told me I'll have to get out in ten days time. Well, the authorities had better learn this. I love my kids and I'm going to make sure that they've got somewhere to live. And I can show them a thing or two."

"A home is a right, and, in the name of that right I've taken one!"

## A worker from Quarto Oggiaro

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

"Now, the Council, those public-spirited men, have summoned the families to the Town Hall to tell them they've got to get out in the next ten days. We haven't come here just to have a march to celebrate May Day. The sister who's just spoken mustn't be driven from her home. Because if we can come here

today in such numbers, then the next time there'll be more of us. And we'll place ourselves in front of this house. The police won't kick them out because they won't have the strength to do it."

"Today, May 1st, has been decreed by the middle-class politicians as a day to be celebrated. But for us there's no cause for celebration, because we're still exploited, because they still kick us out of our homes, and because we want a festival that's really ours. All the people here



*'The only Fair Rent is no Rent !'*

know what I'm trying to say, what festival I'm talking about."

"We're the ones who build the houses. We're the ones who work in the factories. Without the working class there'd be nothing. Who is it that makes the goods? Who is it that does all the work? Who is that makes it possible for everyone to benefit? Us!"

"Houses are ours because we build them, because we need them, and for that reason we're going to

have them!"

## Speaker from the Tenants Union

"In June there will be the elections. Before long all the parliamentary vermin will be putting a show on, even in this area. You'll see them come making a heap of promises, trying to buy our votes! Even though during ordinary times they treat us as second class citizens, calling the police in on us, when our vote is worth as much as the big boss Pirelli's, and they need it to boost their power, lo and behold they arrive here in person. What a nerve these gentlemen have got to come here looking for votes. Look them straight in the face and you'll see that they're the same ones who order the evictions, and who pretend to be indignant when the evictions actually happen."



— 'Extremists, pay your rent or you'll all end up inside!'

"In our area there are hundreds of people who have had rent reductions only because they've jumped on the bandwagon of this or that political party. Do we have to do the same? No! We say that housing is a right, built with our money and sweat. So we're going to continue the rent strike until we've beaten the bosses and the false friends who try to wreck our struggle. The bosses are doing everything in their power to break our will to fight - intimidation, attempted corruption, violence. There's nothing they won't stoop to to try and regain control. They've even given reductions in rent and rent rebates on houses built after 1963. But not one of these manoeuvres has worked. Our struggle is still going strong."

"What the Tenants Union is aiming at is to link the struggles in the local factories with those in the community. But, though a link-up of this sort would make us unbeatable, it's being obstructed right down the line by the unions. Because they're afraid of losing control over the people, afraid that they won't be able to check the thrust of the

exploited to develop their own power."

"To make this clearer let's look at one very concrete example. In February the Office of the Judiciary, together with the police, took advantage of the absence of one tenant to load his furniture out onto the street. Some local women told several comrades who then began to mobilise. They went and told the workers in a nearby factory, who immediately downed tools, and left the factory to protect this man's right to a house. In the space of an hour all the worker's furniture was back in place, the door was closed again, and new padlocks put on, right before the bailiff's eyes."

"So far, with the exception of the last time, when there were five hundred police on the spot, not one eviction has succeeded. Because the people here are mobilised and united. In the morning when the man from the Office of the Judiciary comes round, and most of the workers are at work, the principal role is played by the women and children. Once they slashed the tyres of a panda car, and the cops had to go home on foot!"

"Comrades, let's carry the message of the rent strike into the factories, let's bring together the struggle in the factory and the struggle in the community. In that way we'll be able to realise our strength and our power - people's power!"

*Now it became necessary to see the struggle in Quarto Oggiaro as part of the total working class struggle, and extend it to all other aspects of social oppression - prices, health, education, transport. This led to picketing of local supermarkets (The UPIM) and the strike of secondary-school kids over the price of books.*

*The people of Quarto Oggiaro have refused to allow their struggle to be diverted or taken over by political parties or other so-called 'representatives' of the working class. The Tenants Union is a mass organisation independent of any party or trade union. The CP which wanted to send a petition to Parliament was seen as a joke. What's more people have recognised that the housing struggle cannot be limited to the struggle of tenants and the rent' issue. Relying on their own initiatives, they have brought together people on rent strike, people facing eviction, squatters and homeless families. After a number of isolated squats in Quarto Oggiaro and nearby Galaratese (September '70 10 families squat), people began to prepare, through the Tenants Union, for the mass occupations which emerged at the beginning of '71.*

# Occupations

On Friday, 22nd January, 1971, 25 families occupied a modern block of flats owned and left empty by IACP in Via Mac Mahon. All victims of previous evictions, they had been living in special centres set up for 'Homeless Families'. At the centres anything from 5 to 11 people live, sleep and cook in one or two rooms. Lavatories consist of cramped cupboards, too small even to stand up in. Vermin and disease are rife. Because local bosses regard people housed at the centres as 'unreliable' the rate of unemployment is very high. Those that do have work have to travel miles to get it.

The flats that the families moved into were supposedly built for working class people. They cost 14m Lire (£9,240) in cash, or 22m Lire (£14,520) paid on an instalment basis (£2,310 down and just under £47 monthly) - obviously way beyond the means of any worker, employed or not.

Once inside the flats the families began to build barricades, to hang out red flags and to string up banners. Across the end of the street was a banner reading 'All Power to the People'. It wasn't long before groups of journalists arrived on the scene, and long arguments started between them and the squatters.



The next morning more families arrived. Collections to buy essentials were organised. Other people set out to gain support in the area, touring it with loudspeaker vans and stopping to hold street-corner meetings.

At 2.30 the police arrived, about 2,000 of them, armed to the teeth. They immediately surrounded the building and began to attack it from the rear, so as not to be seen from the street. They were very vicious. Cannisters of tear gas were fired directly at the people squatting. (This is common police practice nowadays). 66 people were

eventually taken in for questioning, and 25 of them arrested. Those that remained were offered transport back to the 'Homeless Families' centre. This they scornfully refused - 'I came on foot and I'll leave on foot.'

Outside a big crowd began to gather. People were forming up to march in protest when the police charged again, using yet more tear gas. Despite this the march managed to form up, and people set off through the neighbourhood to the local market. Here the families decided to occupy the Social Centre in Quarto Oggiaro, rather than go back to the 'Homeless Families' centre. 'Let the bosses go and live in the centre, we're not going back.'



Over the next few weeks the Council offered the families a few houses right away, and the rest as soon as possible. The families rejected this sop, and stuck together until they were all rehoused. When the people arrested during the eviction came to trial the courtroom was packed, and the 'case' against them was laughed out of court.

## Via Tibaldi

*This occupation was a great step forward; a whole neighbourhood was involved in it; schools, factories, estates took part in the organizing of the struggle. There was a victory at Via Tibaldi because everyone there was fully aware of the issues; there were 70 immigrant families who had been promised a place by the council - they had to be rehoused.*

When the confrontation came, it was clear who was on what side; it was homeless families, workers, students against the bosses, the unions, housing officials and the police. In the 6 days of violence the people occupied everything - houses, the streets, the town-hall, police wagons, the Architecture Faculty at the University. Thousands of police were mobilized against those involved in the occupations; in one day there were 2 attempts to evict everyone; the forces of repression attacked with teargas, clubbing whoever got in their way; twice they were beaten back. After the third attempt to shift them, the occupiers agreed to be rehoused temporarily by a charity; this was a tactical retreat.

The mayor and his mob were forced to give in; houses were allocated to the families who had squatted and to 140 other families who had been evicted and were 'living' in hostels waiting to be rehoused. The alliance of workers, students and tenants forged before and during 'the taking of Via Tibaldi' shows how strong the working-class is when it fights together; with this alliance the working-class went on the offensive and won a famous victory.

June '71

The occupation began on Tuesday morning. The squatters are nearly all Southerners - workers at Pirelli and other, smaller factories, building workers and unemployed people. Some of the people have been involved in other struggles: before this occupation the families from Crescenzo were on rent strike.

The occupation is strengthened by a continual coming and going of workers (many of them from OM, a large factory only 150 yards away), students and local people who support the action people are taking. They offer help, bring useful materials, and work alongside the squatters. The workers engaged on building this block of flats are also sympathetic. The firm they work for is about to close down.

Because of the two months of organisation which had led up to the occupation the whole of Milan knows about it. Aniasi, the mayor, and the officials of the IACP know about it too. Almost at the same time they both start denying responsibility.

Tuesday and Thursday. Barricades are built in the streets, particularly by the women and children.

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

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

Friday afternoon. Catalano arrives, sent by the Town Hall and IACP. This official has a reputation for cramming workers into shanty towns after having promised them homes. Catalano wants a list of the families involved. He gets it, but he's also tried by a genuine People's Tribunal. People tell him what they think of him, - that he's nothing but



'The houses belong to us - the whole city belongs to us!'

a lackey of the bosses, a rat and an exploiter. A crowd of workers surround him, shouting, 'We're going to have the flats, and you can get stuffed for the rents!' He was really swaggering when he arrived, but, by the time he leaves, several hours later, he's pale and trembling. And he's had to give the squatters some solid commitments.

Saturday. The mobilisation continues. In the afternoon another barricade is built in the streets.

On Sunday morning at 5 o'clock two thousand cops arrive to clear out the Via Tibaldi. The Town Hall and the bosses had decided that they had to put down these people who, in six days of struggle, had become a reference point and an organisational centre for the whole working class of Milan. All the squatters knew that they had a right to defend what they had taken and what was rightfully their's. But it's more a question of building your strength and using it at the right time. On Sunday morning we were still too weak.

enough to do it. And the cops are going to pay for the eviction from Via Tibaldi.

Once again all the organisation comes from the squatting families. Women and children on the upper floors, all the men down below behind the gates, facing the riot squad. At 11 pm the cops charge. But they get their fingers burned. They hadn't expected the fierce and powerful reaction that comes from the people inside the building, nor an attack from behind by people who hadn't managed to get inside. When they eventually manage to force their way into the building, the police find no one there. Everyone had managed to get out, and were regrouping in the streets, ready to carry on with the fight. Having run out of tear gas, the riot squad retreats, completely disoriented, charged by the squatters. We lost count of the jeeps demolished by stones. The whole thing lasted until two in the morning.

Monday, 9 am. Members of all the families meet up on the university campus. They are all there.

This, in itself, is a victory. People decide to go along to a meeting of the architecture students. Here, in the afternoon, some of the squatters are chosen to explain the struggle in Via Tibaldi. A proposal is made that closer links should be created between the students' struggle and that of the 'homeless'. On the basis of this, the meeting decides that the families should occupy the Architecture Faculty again later that day. As for the Faculty Board, they decide to initiate a permanent seminar on the housing problem, with the people from the Via Tibaldi who are 'experts' on the subject.



After long arguments with the police the squatters decided to leave the flats and move to the Architecture Faculty of the University, at the invitation of the students.

On Sunday evening three thousand police arrived to throw everyone out of the Architecture Faculty. They thought it would be as easy as it had been in the morning. They couldn't have been more mistaken. While the police squads take up position, a meeting of all the families decides that this time they have to defend themselves, that they're strong





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

Wednesday - 5 o'clock in the morning. The police surround the whole university precinct in three huge circles. Traffic is completely at a standstill. It's a trial of strength. 250 students are arrested, plus a dozen lecturers, and even the Dean of the Faculty! The families are carried off once more in Black Marias. A few hours later, a general assembly held at the polytechnic, is also broken up by the police. Vittoria, The Chief of Police, De Peppo, The General Procurator of the Republic, and Aniasi, the Mayor, think they have finally beaten what was, originally, no more than a few dozen families, but which became the symbol of Milan's working class. They couldn't have been more mistaken!

Wednesday dinnertime. All the families eat at the canteen of the ACLI where they have been given shelter. From now on no one can avoid the struggle in Via Tibaldi. The ruling class are caught in enormous contradiction trying to reconcile the demands which are coming from every direction - from a section of the PSI and local councillors, from the CP and the ACLI, which they'd always thought were under their thumb, from the FIM (the engineering union whose members are particularly militant). Orders are coming from Rome and others from the local employers. The greatest danger is that the struggle will spread. This is what is giving them nightmares. And the families do everything in their power to make it happen. By

organising Saturday's demonstration, by the men going to the factory gates with placards and leaflets, by sending a delegation to the congress of the ACLI and to the general assembly of the students movement, where they are given a tumultuous reception. And, before every action is taken, the assembly of families decides what should be said, what line to take, and what proposals to put forward.

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

Before the 31st, July the Council will allocate 200 flats, not only to the families from the Via Tibaldi, but also to another 140 others in a similar situation. Each family will receive 100,000 lire compensation, plus 15,000 lire for each member of the family. There's no stipulation of three months deposit, before moving into the flats. All evictions and all rent arrears are frozen by the Council.

During this fortnight of struggle none of the squatters had ever imagined that the workers' fight about housing would end at Via Tibaldi, nor that the only problem was how to get a new home. This struggle is only a beginning. Now the families want to help organise the struggle against rents, fares, prices. A lot of work needs to be done putting information around local factories. For this reason the assembly of families from Via Tibaldi has become permanent, involving people from every district in Milan.



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There were over 100 children in the flats in Via Tibaldi. Somehow or other a creche was organised in which mothers and other squatters took it in turns. The kids felt better and so did their mothers who stopped seeing them as a burden, keeping them from joining the struggle. The kids joined in the fight too - demonstrating in the streets, building barricades, and making posters. A canteen and a surgery were also organised. In this way people begin to learn what communism really means. Things are shared after collective decisions, and the people most in need are put first. The flats were built to isolate each family, cut them off from their neighbours. In the struggle all this is changed. A home becomes a centre of organisation where collective existence becomes real and important.

# ROME

Rome is one of the first stages on the route which takes people forced off the land on to the industrial cities of the North. Between 1951 and 1969 the population of the city grew by an average of 60,000 a year. There are few regular jobs for these migrants, since apart from service industries and building, most of the work there is clerical, and is handed out as a 'favour' on the say-so of local politicians. There are 40,000 people unemployed, many of them young people.

Since it is ruling-class policy to make workers move to the industrial jobs in the North, hardly any low-rent municipal housing is built in Rome. There are 100,000 families living in the outlying 'borghetti' (slums). Building-workers, newly-arrived immigrants, unemployed, pensioners they

live either in shanty-towns or in flats shared by several families. A further 62,000 families live in private rented accomodation, paying rents of between 40,000 and 80,000 lire (£26 - 52) a month.

The struggle for cheaper housing began in 1969 when people started to occupy luxury apartments in the city centre left empty by speculators (Tufello : 125 families / Celio : 225 families / Via Pigafetta : 155 families / Via Prati : 290 families). The struggle soon spread to families living in tenement-blocks, who went on rent strikes and developed collective ways of fighting evictions.

Since the people from the shanty-towns have nothing to lose, their struggles have often been direct and violent. Before leaving their huts they have often burned them to the ground, determined never to return. In recent struggles building workers have played an important role. At Via Alboccione building workers joined 305 families to occupy the houses they had just built.



## Shark eaten by a Thousand Herrings

In March, 1971, members of Lotta Continua started to make contact with 120 families living in the Alessandrina district of Rome. The families were living in flats owned by a private landlord, called Schiattini. A lawyer with a large circle of contacts in high places, including a Christian Democrat M. P., Schiattini acted as if he was 'above the law'. His tenants were completely under his thumb. They were forced to accept the extortionate rents which he demanded and say nothing. They could be evicted whenever this landlord felt like it.

A leaflet was distributed around the 77 flats. Meetings were called and people started talking about a rent strike. It wasn't long before Schiattini reacted. He called in the police, hired thugs and started giving orders to the local authorities and other officials. The work of organising was made harder by the presence among the tenants of a few arse-lickers who had been bought out with the promise of jobs. But all this only had the effect of slowing down the development of the struggle.

The most determined of the tenants stuck together and stopped paying their rents. Regular meetings began to take place, attended by people from other areas who were out of work. It soon became clear that a rent strike was the only effective way of organising to beat this shark of a landlord. People began putting out their own publicity, and held demonstrations. In this way they made the whole community aware of the way in which they were being exploited.



Early in May the tenants organised a demonstration to the rent tribunal. It was led by the women and children. The banners on the march read: 'The only fair rent is no rent!' and 'Rent strike against property sharks!' When they reached the tribunal the judge and the police wanted to throw them out. But they soon changed their minds when they were

faced with a bunch of the kids shouting slogans and causing havoc in the tribunal's rooms. In the event the tenants won the day and came away with drastic reductions in rents, as well as greater security of tenure.

The struggle doesn't end there. People want to take back everything that has been stolen from them over the years. It's not just a question of money, but of everything they need, especially for the kids.

For instance, the local park, the only place where kids could play without being run over, had been closed down. On Sunday, 9th May, the tenants held a 'village festival'. They circled the park, singing and playing games. Then they opened the gates and the kids took over the park. Schiattini, of course, called in the police. But, with the kids making him look a fool, and because he was afraid of a massive reaction from the people of the area, he soon gave up trying to have them thrown out. Now the park belongs to the people and kids can go there everyday.

## How to Organise an Occupation

Notes from a meeting in Alessandrino

We discussed among ourselves the problems of housing, work and unemployment; we wanted to avoid a 'traditional' squat. We decided that this would mean creating an organisation within the community, uniting with people living in the slums, and overcoming the division between working people who have houses and those who don't. We realised that organisation must serve not only to take houses over but also for self-defence, for preventing evictions and stopping the paying of rent.

Having understood this we hope to be able to refuse any kind of compromise.

Another important point discussed was the need for a group of people who would look into :-

- where and when to squat
- the finding of suitable buildings

In future meetings we will talk about rising prices, unemployment and the guaranteed income.

At our first meeting we also discussed :

- 1) Whether to occupy municipal houses or houses belonging to private owners.
- 2) Whether men should take part in the occupations?
- 3) The necessity of uniting with other struggles.

We need to see the housing struggle as one of a number of struggles which together express the desire of working people to take back the things which are rightfully theirs.

# Red week in Rome

April '71

The occupation of Diego Angeli (in Tiburtino/Casalbruciato) began on the night of Friday/Saturday, 27th April. The squatters were about thirty families from the Tiburtino district, who had organised themselves autonomously. Quite a few people had an idea that this occupation of Council flats was going to take place. In fact the San Basilio group of Lotta Continua had been discussing it with people in the Alessandrina district for over a week.

Saturday, 27th. More families join the original squatters. News that these flats in Casalbruciato have been occupied begins to get around in the working class areas. 3 pm - a meeting at Quarticciole with a group of families: they were to have begun squatting on the following Monday, but as things are under way... At about the same time dozens of similar events are taking place. 9 am - almost a hundred families are squatting.

People light a fire in the middle of the street and prepare posters. One banner reads: 'Workers don't need reforms. Houses - we'll take them!'

With the arrival of the comrades from San Basilio people begin to organise, staircase by staircase, while other families continue to arrive. In the afternoon there's a festive mood about the place: a turntable with loudspeakers has been installed on the balcony of one block, and all the other balconies are crowded with people who've come to take a look around, or to see friends and families who are squatting. The first assembly takes place with a hundred squatters present. There's a general consensus of opinion: 'If the flats are private, then the Council should buy them and give them to us.' The first police begin to arrive. But nobody takes any notice. The bunch from the CP and UNIA come back. They'd already turned up once this morning, but the rain and the squatters had driven them away. They keep harping on about the need to leave the flats and petition the Council. 'Petitions! We've been making 'em for years. If you want one why don't you shove off and do it. We're not leaving!' Workers from other areas arrive to talk about the problems they're having. They promise to do the same, and encourage people not to give in. By about 8 pm every block (about 400 flats) in the Via Angeli is occupied. And as other families arrive they occupy neighbouring blocks of flats (owned by the EMPADAI).



Sunday, 28th. Very early in the morning a group of families from San Basilio take over another block of flats. Nobody knows yet whether they belong to the Council or not. (We won't find out until a week later). But everybody's mind is made up. Council or private, it's all the same. If the cops come, they'll come for everybody.

People arrive with frying pans, mattresses, cookers - they mean to stay. 10 pm - a meeting of staircase representatives (there'd been an assembly on each staircase during the afternoon). We decide to make posters for other districts, to produce a leaflet for local students, to get up a delegation to go to the Council the next day, and to organise pickets for the night.



Monday, 29th. Some nearby building workers arrive. The squatters do a wall newspaper and talk to the building workers. It's a common struggle - one says that he'll come back in the afternoon with his family. The builders take the day off work, to stay and talk with the squatters.

There's a kind of permanent assembly in the street, between the buildings, in which the problems which are cropping up are thrashed out. Comrades come to talk about the struggle against unemployment. The massive influx of families continues. The papers, Unita included, haven't said a word about our struggle. Or, if they have written a couple of lines, it's been to say that it's only a matter of thirty families, and to emphasise that the block of flats are private.

It would be too dangerous for the whole town to

know that workers have begun to take over flats, just like that, without the help of parties or ballot boxes! But, despite the silence of the newspapers, what's happening in Casalbruciato is common knowledge throughout the working class districts of Rome. By whatever means, networks of family, village, birthplace, through the fact of having belonged to the CP several years before, by way of the cafes or groups of friends, everyone knows that an occupation is taking place. There exist channels of communication outside those of the parties, the Council and the parishes, all the organisations of the exploiters. There are ways by which workers can recognise their struggle, gain information, hold discussions.

To cope with the problems posed by this influx of people a commission of the families is organised to take control of the flats.

3 pm - the delegation which had gone to see the Council were not received. One hour later the general assembly meets. There are about 400 squatters and a large contingent of students. The tension is unbearable.

People decide to produce a press statement and to prepare for the arrival of the police. We are going to defend the flats to the bitter end. At the same time other flats nearby are being occupied.

In the evening there's another packed meeting of staircase representatives. We decide to resist the police and to do it all together in the street. The bunch from the CP and UNIA (Gozzi, Tozzetti, et al) try to come back. But this time they have to run for their lives. The squatters have had enough of their sabotage! During the night barricades are built.



Tuesday, 31st. 6 am - the military parade begins. The police and the riot squad arrive from all sides. There are at least 3,000 of them! The disproportion in forces is obvious. Gathered behind the barricades people shout: 'The flats are ours - we're going to keep them!' People sing revolutionary songs. Women crowded on the balconies chant slogans at the police, who are surrounding the area. They

are armed and are preparing to charge the barricades.

But it's clear to everybody that to have a confrontation now would be suicidal. We're outnumbered ten to one. Two characters from the CP and PSIUP turn up. They give us assurances that we could negotiate, and that the cops are prepared to give us the time we need to hold a general assembly. We decide that this time is important. The squatters say, 'Take up a few planks.' But they've hardly begun when the riot squads advance and charge. The mediators from the CP and PSIUP have to take to their heels, pursued by a few squatters. Their role as go-betweens for the Police and the State has never been so clear. In a minute the barricade has been rebuilt, stronger than before. But it's impossible to defend. The thousands of riot squad men dismantle it and begin to chuck people out.

The women on the balcony show exceptional courage. Some of them have barricaded themselves in so well that it takes the cops hours to beat down the door. About 8 am - the riot squad try to disperse the people who have formed up behind them. The reaction is immediate: several times the police are charged and sent running. The clashes last until 10 am, and involve local workers, especially young workers and people from the nearby market. 20 people are picked up. The cops throw teargas at headheight and try to scare people by throwing it into the market place.

The mopping up operation lasts until 12 am. Many families begin to set up camp below the flats, determined not to give in. The police remain in large numbers and disperse any small groups of people. In the afternoon a meeting is held in the market place and we decide to stay in the area.

Wednesday, 31st. The whole neighbourhood sides with the squatters. Discussions take place in all the cafes. The general opinion is that the police will have to leave. About 5 pm - a group of women go back into the flats and occupy them, even though a large group of cops are still on guard. They're thrown out immediately, but people react. There are fierce clashes: cars and Black Marias are surrounded. The drivers are forced to run. Not long afterwards reinforcements arrive from the city centre.

This time the cops bring spotlights with them: the whole area of Casalbruciato is lit up as if it was daytime. The streets are cleared. It's a real military occupation. Many people are arrested.

Thursday, 1st. Squads of police stay in the area. What they're afraid of is the reaction of the workers. Groups of young workers wander by constantly: they won't put up with this military occupation for much longer. There are discussions going on everywhere. People are particularly incensed about the role played by the CP. After sabotaging the struggle, after surrounding it with a wall of silence, they are now passing on to

provocation and informing. In the afternoon, a demonstration passing by the CP's front door was provoked and attacked by the bureaucrats inside. Then the police intervened and arrested more people.

Friday, 2nd. At a meeting of groups of families a decision is taken to let a few days pass before beginning the occupation again. It's vital now to make contact with the people of the area, if we are to rebuild our strength.

Saturday, 3rd. At the university there is a worker/student assembly. We try to clarify the content and aims of the occupations. People suggest ways in which to organise.

In the evening, at Centocelle, in a meeting with other families, a decision is reached to begin the occupation immediately in a new part of Centocelle, Carpineto Romano.

During the night there are approximately fifty families there. The police try to intervene but, faced with barricades and the risk of the struggle escalating, they withdraw.

On Sunday some of the experiences of Casalbruciato are repeated - meetings of staircase representatives, the extension of the occupation to other blocks. The police intervene en masse on Monday morning at 6 am. There are violent clashes, but people manage to hold out.

## **Elections in San Basilio**

May, 1971.

From 9 pm to midnight, on Tuesday, the local population of San Basilio was mobilised against an election meeting held by the Christian Democrat Mayor, Darida. The meeting had been called without much ceremony, unexpectedly, without so much as a poster on the wall. Obviously the idea was to wrap everything up in the space of half an hour. Just a visit, an appearance and then a quiet getaway from this area which could certainly not be expected to be friendly to a unionist who, only a few days before, had shaken hands with the Fascist leader, Almirante.

At the time fixed for the meeting there were already 100 to 150 people in the market place. The enormous number of police standing around is a sure sign that the Christian Democrats who are coming to speak are hostile.

So, this is what happened. Under the rostrum, an immense and pompous affair, there were roughly 15 electoral agents. Just behind were everyone else, all the working-class people, women and young people of the area, as well as a few bods from the CP. Groups form - people start to talk

about the past twenty years of promises, the promises of all the mayors, the promises made by this mayor.

People decide that they're going to interrupt the speech and get a woman and a worker from the area to speak. At last it gets under way. But, the Mayor hasn't had the nerve to come. Instead it's Medi, the professor, the bloke who's been so active in the anti-divorce campaign, the guy that the whole of Italy has had the chance to 'admire' on their TV screens as a brilliant commentator on the space exploits of the Americans.

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

It carries on like this for an hour, until 10 pm, with women pressing against the rostrum, and the police in confusion, not knowing how to control dozens of kids who are going round and round the orator in a line, howling into jam jars and making one hell of a din. And the professor? He's still at it, shouting insults. 'You're liek donkeys.... it's easy to see that you've never been to school.' This remark is followed by a volley of eggs. Medi turns to the police and demands that they take control of the situation. The cops put on their gas masks. People retreat. The police throw the first tear gas. End of meeting. 'Rome will sort you lot out, you barbarians - we'll win, don't you worry.' People come down from the blocks of flats. By now there are more than a thousand people. The police have remained grouped on the market place and continue to hurl tear gas at the windows, at women. One moment people see a bloke setting off on a bike. the next the reinforcements have arrived. About 40 lorry-loads, more than 700 police in riot gear. Provenza, the Vice-Commissioner of Police, also arrives, to take command of the operation. The area is beseiged. The police, foolishly, decide to go into a block of flats and start beating people up. They are met by a continuous and very violent volley of plates, bottles and anything else that people can lay their hands on.

The police withdraw, and finally leave the area. It's a little after midnight. In the market-place people set fire to the rostrum.

Groups form. People work out who has been arrested, and who has been injured. People try to find out news about those who have been arrested.



# Don't vote ~ occupy!

June, 1971.

With regional elections only a few days away, all the political parties talk about is 'law and order'. The CP is making vague promises about housing reforms; something people are very preoccupied with.

Saturday, 5th. After an assembly in San Basilio 20 families decide to occupy a block of flats. The occupation is a failure since the flats are privately owned and impossible to defend. The families decide to turn back and wait for a few days.

Wednesday, 9th. There are occupations at Centocelle and Pietralate. At Centocelle, the police respond immediately: they try to arrest an isolated comrade. The squatters react immediately and manage to free him: a panda car is smashed up, another six or seven show up with their sirens wailing. We wake up the neighbourhood with megaphones, denouncing the police's attack. People come out of their houses, shouting to the police 'This is our area - get the hell out of it!' The police are forced to leave.

Meanwhile at Pietralate the occupation has gone off successfully, so we decide to go there and have one large squat. At the beginning there are 70 families; during the night 30 more arrive. The occupation gets more organised: doctors are found, staircase assemblies are arranged and people appointed to take charge of each staircase. During the night our assembly decides that if the police come to evict we will all stick together and regroup somewhere else to continue the struggle.

Thursday, 10th. Early in the morning the CP officials arrive. At first they try to persuade us to go back home (where to?), then they turn to insulting us by saying we are gypsies and thieves. In the meantime, the police have arrived and surrounded the block. When they enter the courtyard, we all come down trying to stay together. Twelve of us are separated off and threatened with arrest. At this point the women attack furiously. They start pushing against the police cordons and demand the immediate release of everyone. It's a great moment: the police don't know how to react - they're being attacked by women and kids. At first they try to push them away violently, but in the end they are forced to release everyone. We all shout and cheer loudly.

At an assembly in the afternoon people have a go at the CP and all other reformists: we decide to occupy again so that the struggle won't lose its momentum. That evening we occupy in the Magliana district - 70 families and their friends. A police car that gets in the way is smashed: the police fire in the air: a panda car that comes towards us is stoned. At three in the morning the whole area is surrounded by riot police - we hold an assembly in the courtyard and decide to march from the houses towards the police lines. This decision is not unanimous; some of us want to stay and defend the flats. In the end we all march out, shouting slogans. People come to the windows. When we get to Via Magliana the police charge. Fighting is violent: there are sixty arrests. Many of us are kept in jail for hours.

After this eviction, we decide to hold meetings in different neighbourhoods of the city. Many people decide not to take part in the elections and to make sure that the struggle goes on.



# People's surgery

June '71

Lately in San Basilio, one of Rome's outlying ghetto areas, there's been a movement developing of people fighting against their lousy, inhuman living conditions. There are 40,000 people trapped in this slum district. In the past few months about 100 families have been on rent strike. This started as a spontaneous protest and now it's becoming more organised. A real confrontation is building up with the IACP over exorbitant rents, over arrears and threats of eviction. The rent strike is becoming a major issue for the whole community, with mass meetings, protest marches and demonstrations.

Last weekend there was a meeting to gather in the results of a large number of staircase meetings. About 800 families have been involved in these meetings which were organised by the San Basilio Collective, a group of women and workers from the area along with a number of students.

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

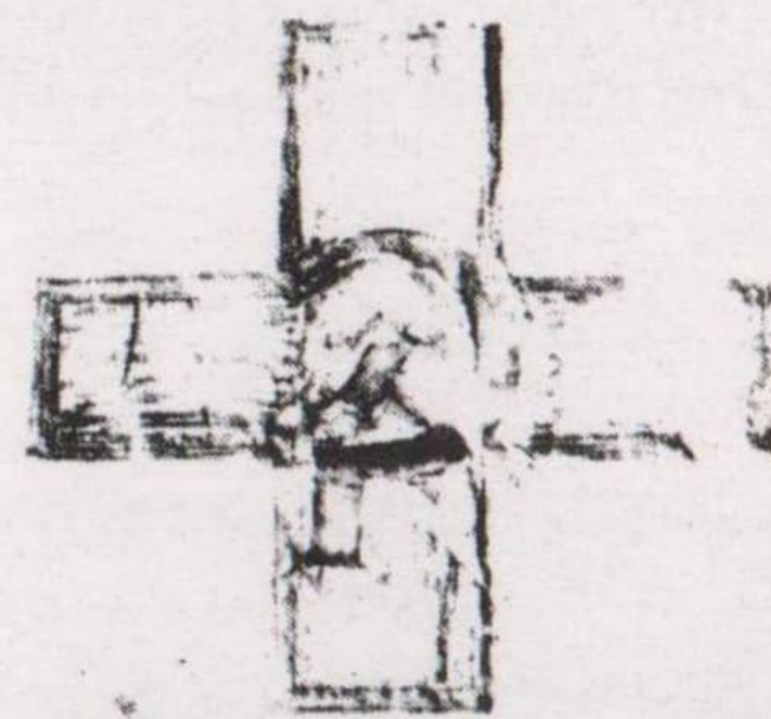
On Wednesday, after a deputation had gone for the nth time to the Council and still not been received, a decision was taken to occupy the Social Centre, called the Ises Centre. The occupation took place after a meeting and demonstration which had gone right round the neighbourhood. The involvement of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

The people who took over the Centre formed themselves into a permanent assembly which stayed there all night. They sent out an appeal to all left-wing doctors to get in contact with them. Meanwhile people talked about the inhuman living conditions under which they live which are the cause of many of their illnesses. They realised that if you're going to get rid of sickness you have to do away with exploitation in the factories where people breathe in smog and break their backs on the production lines, or on the building sites where people work in rain, dust and mud. For years now people have been queueing up at the Mutua clinic (Mutua - health insurance schemes) only to be given the usual pill and then told not to pester. They are fed up with taking pills and drugs which do nothing but make the drug manufacturers rich. They're tired of the doctors and other services

which live off their illnesses. They're sick and tired of being patched up so that they can carry on working and producing for the boss, then of falling ill again and having to go back for further repairs.

People also want decent places to live in where typhus and hepatitis aren't rampant because of the bad drainage and sewers. And they want enough money to buy decent food. There aren't enough green spaces in the area, and, as someone said, 'these flats were built for falling ill in, not for living'. San Basilio wasn't built to cater for people's needs, it was built to satisfy the plans of the bosses. San Basilio is like Agnelli's shanty towns in Turin, said one building worker, 'at least it has the same function - to keep the workers out of the way.'

ALL  
OCCUPATE



L'AMBULATORIO  
DEI PROLETARI

On Sunday there was a huge meeting of all the people in San Basilio, and a festival to inaugurate the 'People's Surgery' which is by now fully operational. Eighty workers, women and young people met with the doctors in the main hall of the centre. A long banner was hung up with the slogan which sums up the way people feel - 'The only way to get anything is through struggle!'

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

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

# PISA

## The Red Market

July '71

In the CEP area, a suburb of Pisa, there's a general and united feeling of anger against shopkeepers. Every working class person knows that they're being robbed whenever they go to buy something that they need. Working people are sick to death of this never-ending robbery from their wage packets which forces them to half-kill themselves at work just to be able to survive, and forces their families to make thousands of sacrifices. But, normally there's not enough faith, not enough conviction that by fighting together, united, people could be stronger than all the thieves and exploiters that get fat, feeding off them.

But last Saturday the working people of CEP saw something new in their district, something important: they saw a market stall set up in the market place, where things cost less than half what they usually cost, a stall with red flags and banners. That day there was an attempt to take the area into the hands of working people, and make it a centre of discussion and organisation. This action was taken by the local group of Lotta Continua and their friends in the area, people they had contacted during their months of political work. Many of the people involved had taken part in the occupation of houses owned by IACP, the previous year.

People had gone and bought food direct from the peasants. It was sold at cost price, so that no one would make a profit and no one would make a loss. When the police came to ask for the licence, the workers told them that this was their market and dared anyone to touch it. Dozens of them put their names down as the people responsible for the stall. The response to the market was great. Everywhere, in the town and the countryside, people are talking about it, wondering what it could lead to. People

have started discussing the whole question of rents, fares, and the fact that it's no longer enough just to ask for things, that you've got to take them. It has been an occasion for political unification among the working class.

From now on the Red Market will be run entirely by working people, with a worked-out framework of organisation, built street by street, area by area. In future this organisation will exist for the development of struggles around all the needs of the working class people of the area.

### Clash with the police

November '71

An open letter to the people of Pisa

Last Saturday there was a clash between the Red Market and the police. But we were not beaten!

Instead the clash was a defeat for the Council and its futile attempts to close the Red Market down, with the fine they recently imposed of 300,000 lire. The police were defeated too. They came to the area with three wagons full of police and lorries packed with men from the riot squad. They were sent out by the bosses on the pretext that we didn't have a licence! But their real aim was to crush a group of working people who were taking steps to fight the high prices in the shops, and the crisis that the bosses are heaping on our backs.

When the police charged the first time, one person, Daniel Sbrana, was arrested. But soon they were forced to withdraw, and we went back to the market place again. The Red Market won because, at the time this fight was going on and afterwards, we continued to operate, shifting the stall from street to street.

But we won above all because this market was never just an initiative by a few people. Right from the start it was supported by the people of the area, who were united not only by the fact that the Market was bringing in food at lower prices, but also because they valued it as a political initiative - because this struggle against rising prices has taught us that we can fight the bosses, and above all, that we can win.



# THE SOUTH

*Since its beginning, Italy's economic development has been uneven - the North growing faster than the South. High unemployment and low wages have forced millions to migrate. During the boom years, 1959 to 1963, almost one million people travelled North. This process has been accelerated by the mechanisation of agriculture. Between 1951 and 1970 the number of people working the land fell from 7,200,000 to 3,800,000. As in other Common Market countries only the large farmers prospered.*

*To stop this migration, the Government set up the 'Cassa del Mezzogiorno', a state-run body, similar to a Regional Development Council. Initially its function was to provide subsidies to agriculture and help create social infrastructures (houses, roads, schools, hospitals). Its failure to make any significant change, led to its role being more and more to provide investment for factories. The factories that were built were all state-owned - Alfa-Romeo in Naples, Italsider (steel) in Taranto, chemical plants in Bari and Porto Torres (Sardinia). The building of these factories provided the first job for many of the workers coming off the land. But, since it takes many less workers to run these ultra-modern factories than to build them, in recent years the unemployment in these Southern cities has risen quickly, and will remain high since no other industries can develop complementary to the few existing factories.*

*Very little has been done to build enough schools, houses and hospitals to cope with the growing population of these cities. The working class is controlled by a mixture of overt repression and political corruption (the only hope of a place to live is by becoming a member of a political organisation). Frustration erupts in angry, violent outbursts - for instance Battipaglia where days of rioting followed the closure of a local factory.*

## Africo Nuovo

In November, 1972 the town of Africo Nuovo (near Reggio Calabria) was taken over by the local people. It started when schoolkids occupied the railway station, demanding free books and transport - several hundred of them have to travel each day to schools in Reggio or Messina. After four days of rioting the police moved in and suppressed the uprising with extreme violence.

## A town in struggle for twenty years

A local person explains the background to the events.

"We, the people of Africo are habitual revolutionaries. I first took part in an occupation at the age of four after the floods of 1951 in which six people were killed. We all went, women and children, carrying red flags, and occupied the police station. The story of Africo started that Autumn in 1951. At that time there wasn't a town, as it is today, on the seacoast. Instead it was nestled in the hills of the Asperomonte. In August we'd finally finished the street and the first mail coach had come. It made three trips. Up until then someone had come on foot or on muleback from Nazionale, thirty kilometres away. The mailcoach came three times and then the water took everything - man and beast."

"From then on the people of Africo became permanent refugees. We stayed in schools in Bora or at Lazaretto in Reggio. But we weren't the sheep they thought we were. At that time the CP was still OK and taught us our rights. We left with all the families, carrying red flags and went en masse to Reggio. We were all afraid. But the actual building of houses didn't start until eight years ago. In the meantime all the men of the town had emigrated. In Old Africo, before the flood, people used to work for a few days a week in the Forstale yards, harvesting chestnuts, and then they'd raise sheep, pigs, rabbits and goats."

"In the new town, because it was built by the sea, there are even fewer jobs. The pastures are gone, but even so families have gone back to the hills, to the houses partially destroyed by water twenty years ago. Because, as they say, at least there they have something to eat. No new jobs were created for the people of Africo: the only activity that goes on is scholarly - the private school run by Don Stilo. There have been many struggles against him. A group of local anarchists were arrested after they had been beaten up by this priest's henchmen. A familiar story nowadays in Italy."

"Once before the railway station was taken over by the townspeople. When the authorities retaliated by threatening to reduce the number of trains each day, people walked out onto the tracks and stopped any trains moving along the Ionian coast. The Trade Unions wanted us to go home for lunch, but we said no. We stuck it out until we got what we wanted."

## Occupation of the railway

Monday morning - the struggle began when the 7 o'clock train which takes students from all over the Ionian Coast to school in Locri and Siderno was stopped. A leaflet prepared by the student/worker committee of Africo was distributed calling for a

general strike in support of free books and transport for schoolkids and jobs for all the unemployed in the town.

This first occupation of the station lasted for nine hours. The whole town took part in the struggle. Trade Union leaders from Reggio were arrested when a contingent from the Riot Squad showed up. The Mafioso Mayor was pushed around by the townspeople. The strike lasted all day long. Two delegations went off, to Reggio and Catanzaro. In Reggio the police were guarding the city. Nevertheless workers managed to prevent officials from going about their business. When the delegations arrived back with the replies of various Councillors the workers gathered en masse in the Union Hall discussed what decision to make.

The whole town was there to talk about the Authorities' proposals - free books and transport for the schoolkids and 100 jobs to be created (but with no details about how long they would last and no definite undertakings). The feeling is that these offers are crazy, an attempt to divide people which would change nothing. The mood of the meeting became more and more angry, and it was decided to turn this offer down and continue the struggle.

So on Wednesday morning, as the 7 o'clock train arrived it was halted again. The schoolkids left the train and marched to the Town Hall and occup-

ied it. More young people arrived and took over the Town Hall steps. Gradually women and young children arrived and joined in. Soon the whole of the local working class is in the town square. People shout: "This struggle for free books and transport and jobs is everyone's struggle." "It shows the solidarity of the students because they're here even though they've won their demands. The workers have decided to carry on the struggle because we don't want handouts - we want guarantees - jobs without shifts and no divisions between different groups of workers. From now on there's no turning back. Even jobs aren't enough - we want decent housing as well."

The Mayor arrived in the morning saying that he had to get inside to do his work. The women formed a cordon and turned him away. Groups of children went around putting up posters. They took over the streets and forced motorists out of their cars.

## Battle with the police

Thursday. At 8 o'clock several dozen workers gather in the square. The students have gone to Locri for a demo in support of Africo. The town is brought to a standstill again. Schoolkids from the junior and secondary schools go on strike again and gather in the square at 9 o'clock.



Then the police provocation starts. Someone is stopped by the riot squad. Within seconds people go to his rescue. In the confusion a policeman fires a pistol shot. He refuses to move and the people angrily grab hold of him and shove him out of the way.

400 - 500 people gathered in the streets, including women, children and old people. There's a meeting at which the aims of the struggle are clarified - it is vital not to stay trapped inside the town. A march wound through the city streets and stopped everyone from working. The procession halted on the state motorway, holding up the traffic. By this time it was 10 o'clock. The road was blocked for about an hour. At around 11 o'clock four lorry-loads of police arrived. They jumped out, put on their helmets and riot equipment and charged. The crowd, taken unawares, scatters. Women, children and even old people were beaten mercilessly. At the first volley of stones the police fired tear gas at body level. An old man was hit in the calf of the leg.

At 12 o'clock the crowd gathered again. Seven people have been arrested. A discussion about how to continue was going on when the riot squad showed up again. The officer in charge provokes people with snide remarks, while four of his men stand at his side pale-faced and trembling. The crowd shouted back angrily and started to surround him. 100 to 150 of the riot squad appeared from behind the Town Hall and started beating people up with their rifle butts. The townspeople did what they could, but they couldn't hold out against police who were arriving from every direction. Cannisters of tear gas were raining down and one crashed into the local nursery school.

The townspeople were angry but helpless. There was a total military occupation of the town. 1,000 policemen for a town of 3,000 inhabitants! Nevertheless young people clashed with the police for over an hour.

*Over the past few years there have been a growing number of occupations - Salerno (80 families), Torre Del Greco, Messina (328 families), Carbonia (130 families). In Syracuse, where houses are usually allocated to the 'clients' of local bosses, people's anger was so great that new tenants had to take possession under a heavy police guard. Other blocks of flats which had been walled up before they were finished had their entrances smashed down by angry demonstrators.*

# Taranto

## Occupation of GESCAL flats

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

"We have abandoned all faith in politicians, people who come round every five years asking us to vote for them. They say they'll give us work and homes, but every time they just leave us where we are, in the cold and damp. We hate them all, because they live off our slavery. And they do everything in their power to make sure people don't rebel and take what is rightfully theirs."

"Because we've behaved ourselves, because we've listened to their promises, dozens of children have died in the slums where we live. We have all had illnesses, and we have all suffered. We shall bear these marks within us for ever. The people who have our suffering on their consciences will be made to pay dearly - pay the whole price."

"We organised the occupation in the evening of December 2nd. Within a few hours the slums were empty, but the GESCAL flats were full. Now the flats are OURS. We haven't got water or electricity yet, but we're already getting water from down in the courtyard, and we're trying to organise supplies into every flat. And as far as the electricity is concerned, we'll see about that too."

"Meanwhile, we've begun clearing the place up. It's never very nice wearing yourself out with this sort of work, but at least it's a bit more satisfying than sweeping out the ratholes we were living in before. We're happy. We're confident in ourselves and our own strength. We've organised in each block of flats and made links between blocks. We intend to keep these flats and we need to organise to keep the police out."

"We've had a couple of meetings every day to talk over any problems, to get our ideas clearer, and decide what has to be done. We're keeping in contact with other people in the area, and trying to spread the word to people in the factories. On Sunday, 6th December, we had our first general meeting. This was important because it meant that we could all get together, and we could also talk to workers, women and children, and unemployed people from different parts of the city."

"It wasn't just the people from the slums who organised this occupation. The initiative came from there, but it quickly spread to other parts of the city. The people in the old part of the city, the streetcleaners, the fishermen and the unemployed were particularly quick to act. Today there's not one flat left empty in all these blocks. But we know that there are many other blocks empty around here and in other parts of the city. We've got to find out where they are, because the whole city is in ferment, and all the working class people want to occupy houses."

# Palermo

## Red flags over the IACP April '71

The NEZ (Northern Expansion Zone) is an IACP estate about ten miles outside Palermo. About 1,000 families live there, mostly building workers unemployed, clerical workers who occasionally work on the land, and fishermen. These families are mostly earthquake victims from the Western Sicily earthquake disaster of June, '68. They took possession of the houses after they had been requisitioned by the Prefect; many people simply squatted in them. Of course the IACP regards this occupation as 'illegal', and has started sending out injunctions for the payment of arrears: 30,000 Lire per flat.

On Thursday, March 27th, there was an occupation of a block of flats that were still being built. The police came to evict people, but the houses were occupied again, and this time the people stayed there.

Since the building was still not finished, the squatters themselves organised to get the drains

working and set up electricity supplies, etc. On Sunday there was a mass meeting to discuss the problem of the injunction. There were 300 people there, mostly women, who are the most active and determined people in this fight. A strike of the whole area was declared to begin the next day, and a platform was approved :-

- flats to be provided officially for everyone
- cancellation of all arrears (the 300,000 Lire)
- building of roads, schools, all the amenities which are totally lacking in the area
- self-determination of contributions (the people of the NEZ area don't want to talk in terms of rent, because they don't agree with the idea of paying rent. But they are prepared to provide a small contribution, according to what they can afford, for the building of new homes.)

The next day (Monday) from 4.30 in the morning the whole area was at a standstill. There were pickets on the street corners, as well as a large contingent of police. People gathered in the Central Square, and at 8.30 in the morning a march set off in the direction of Palermo: women and children in cars and lorries, and the men on foot. Throughout the march the police continually provoked people. The march arrived in Palermo, in front of the IACP offices. The police set up a cordon across the road. But the marchers broke through the lines and about 50 demonstrators managed to get into the building. Others got in over balconies and through windows. Inside the IACP there's a huge commotion - for once the tables are turned on the people who govern our lives.

When the women come into the building all the officials beat a hasty retreat. The President of the IACP appears, pale and trembling, and agrees to speak to some sort of 'delegation'. He tries to evade their questions and give nothing away. But the demonstrators decide to occupy the



Institute. Meanwhile the people who had stayed outside began to mobilise other people in Palermo. The Base Committee from the shipyards arrives, and a number of working people from other parts of the town.

This struggle becomes a reference point for everyone.

For the bosses and bureaucrats things are getting too hot. Two hours later the President returns and announces that he's going to withdraw the injunctions for rent arrears. For the time being people decide to leave the Institute (by now it's 6.00 p.m.) but the struggle for these objectives will go on.

The most active of all the people were the women, the true militants of this day of struggle and clashes with the police - among other things they succeeded in freeing a comrade who had been arrested by the police.

### Palermo

*In 1973 building workers take over a block of luxury flats they have just finished building. They move in there with their families and other working class people. Police are called by the local CP administration but cannot gain access to the barricaded block of flats.*

## Naples

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

February '70

Secondiglio is an Ina Casa estate on the outskirts of Naples. It's one of the many dormitory suburbs into which the bosses shove all the people that they don't want around the city centre. Go back ten years and it wasn't so bad ... on the map, at least. But it wasn't long before it became clear that the map was only for show. Noone had any intention of making it a reality, of making the area a pleasure for people to live in. A dump of a flat was enough - there were no decent streets, no services, no schools, no parks ... these things aren't profitable for the investors. There are about 14,000 people here. About 2,000 of them are people who,

having waited 10, 20 or even 30 years in a hovel have now been rehoused in flats without adequate windows, without water, without drains, without furniture, without light.

The first struggle in Secondiglio was for a primary school. People wanted a prefabricated building to hold 1,000 children and the promise of a proper building before too long. 40% of children attending school are at least a year behind normal. A further 30% are two years behind normal. About three months after the beginning of the school year at least one in ten of the kids is browned off and stops coming. And then comes the 'motherly' advice of the schoolmistress: 'School's not for you, why don't you get a job?'

The worst crime of all is the way that the kids are made to believe that school only runs up to the 6th class, primary level. Local industry couldn't supply itself with cheap labour otherwise. As a result 90% of the 'educated' have only a primary school certificate, 30% are illiterate. What's more the children are very vulnerable to all kinds of illnesses. Large numbers of kids have rheumatic fever, heart conditions, pneumonia or bronchial pneumonia. School is a place to catch diseases - just one more reason for not going.

The kids spend the whole day dossing around in the area, in a freaked out state. But they're still not too young to learn how to hustle ... so many families have someone in Poggioreale prison or Filangeri juvenile prison.

After nine years of demands, a miniature school was opened. From the outside it looked beautiful, but inside there was no electricity or heating, and the children shivered with cold. They had to go to school wearing hats and scarves. After two weeks the new school was closed. The kids went back to the shanty hut of a school. But now there were too many of them, so the school had to be run in two shifts. The results are exactly the same as before. Few kids go to school, there's a high turnover of teachers, noone studies, noone does anything.

It wasn't long before people had had enough. So they began to organise and prepare for a fight. They held a meeting and organised marches in the neighbourhood. The kids came out on strike. They felt that they had to carry the struggle beyond the area. So groups of parents went to the centre of Naples to the Department of Education and to the Town Hall. They shook up the bureaucracy. 'We've had enough of rubber stamps and promises - we want the school reopened immediately, with the electricity turned on.'

The various officials responsible were really scared ... but it still wasn't enough to get them off their backsides and make them finish the building. People realised that they were in for another swindle and immediately began organising again.

They cordoned off the school with chains, and a large number of people went to the TownHall to put pressure on the officials. They forced the authorities to come to the area the next day so that they could see for themselves what things were like. The headmaster and the teachers joined in

what was going on, though they'd accepted shoddy treatment for years. From now on the school will be run on different lines, because the community is taking direct control over every aspect of its running.





# IMMI- GRANTS

Many of the workers who are forced to leave the South in search of work don't settle in Turin or Milan. Many of them move on to work in other European countries, especially France, Switzerland and West Germany. In 1968, there were 585,880 Italian workers in France. German firms have been recruiting Italian labour for over 15 years. There are now well over 400,000 Italian workers there.

Most of these immigrant workers do unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in manufacturing or construction. "A quarter of all unskilled male, blue-collar jobs in West Germany are occupied by foreigners, but only 10 per cent of the semi-skilled and 3 per cent of the skilled positions are so occupied. They represent 7.9 per cent of the total labour force; a sub-proletariat." (The Guardian : 12/9/72)

Most foreign workers (called 'guest workers') come to work in Germany with 1 or 2 year contracts; at the end of that period they are sent home and a new lot of 'guest workers' hired. Since there are no jobs in their home countries nearly half have settled in Germany. Although there are restrictions on the entry of their families, many of the married workers are joined by their wives, many of whom gain entry by coming to work themselves.

Because they are Common Market nationals Italian workers have more rights than 'guest workers' from other countries. This fact, together with their militancy, has made them less 'desirable' for the bosses. Over the past few years Turkey, Spain and Yugoslavia have taken the place of Italy as the most popular areas for recruiting labour.

This policy of having workers come to Germany for short periods has meant that the German capitalists have not had to provide for the social needs of the immigrants. Such services as do exist have been set up by the bosses, the unions and semi-public and private welfare organisations. Immigrants have been treated and kept as social outcasts. As one judge put it: "Guest workers cannot be regarded as part of the population."

'Housing' is largely provided by the bosses. In 1968, 44 per cent of men workers and 28 per cent of women workers were living in accommodation owned by their boss. (usually barrack-like huts, very similar to slave camps). About 15 per cent

of foreign families also live in this type of accommodation. Families with children have the most difficult time. More often than not they end up in ghettos, living in large pre-war houses in the inner-city, in areas abandoned by West Germans. Even here they are exploited by the bosses who have invested in property. Since 1962 rents have increased by 75 per cent. The cost of living has gone up sharply.

The government and the unions have promised reforms and progress. Meanwhile the bosses are taking back the wage increases they have been forced to give, by putting up prices of food and rents. After every wage increase working people are left in the same position they were in before. In many German towns immigrant workers are showing their anger by occupying houses, going on rent strike and other actions. Against this rising militancy the German ruling class has had to pass vicious legislation against immigrants: 'The Foreigners Laws'. These laws make illegal political organisation among foreigners in the factories and elsewhere, they also make illegal any meeting at night of more than 3 people (this can include parties. These laws were first used after the Munich action of Black September. Thousands of Palestinian workers and students were rounded up in the early morning and flown out of the country. In many cases their families did not know what had happened to them until, weeks later, they received letters from Tripoli, Damascus, Cairo, etc. These laws will, of course, be used against the extra-parliamentary left who, in many towns, are working with immigrant workers.)

## Letter

from an immigrant Winter '70 - '71

There are 10,000 Italian workers at the Wolfsburg factory of Volkswagen. They live in a company camp, surrounded by barbed wire! Recently they have begun to organise and fight back. This letter from one of them describes the way in which the struggle started.

"I came back from the Christmas holidays a week early. There weren't many people around, but ten of us got together and started talking to the others. We wanted to talk out the problems we face in the Berliner Brücke (the camp we live in)."

"We did the same thing the next evening, and got a good response. At the end of the meeting we drew up a leaflet which we distributed (see below). On Sunday we had a meeting with about two hundred people, all of them totally pissed off. The only disagreement came from three individuals. These were the sort of people you find anywhere, the ones who put a damper on your anger and try to hold the struggle back. We managed to get them



aside and find out what they were up to. They were out to cause trouble and make the meeting fold up. They were all right-wingers. Once they'd been shown up for what they are they had to beat it fast, because some people wanted to sort them out there and then! A few Volkswagen officials turned up as well - when people asked them what the hell they were doing there they decided it was wiser to beat a hasty retreat. "

"The leaflet was distributed to every Italian worker - it went down very well. But it wasn't an end in itself. It was only the beginning, something which tried to describe people's immediate needs and which could be understood by everybody."

"At Sunday's meeting there was a natural climax to the discussion about the Berliner Brücke. We got on to talking about relations between Italian and German workers, the problems of unemployment in Italy, exploitation in the factory and outside, the cost of living. With a bit of arithmetic we came to the conclusion that the camp was a good proposition from the point of view of the individual (rent there is low compared to the cost of a room in town). But from a collective point of view it's a real con (with three in a room you end up paying much more than the price of a room in town). But to understand what we mean by the demand '...single rooms for bachelors, flats for married people' (see leaflet), we have to go back to the very nature of immigration and the immigrant."

"The immigrant is an isolated individual, living on his own like a dog. Usually he has no technical training. He goes straight from working on the land or in some small workshop, to work on a production line. He's exploited not only by the boss of the particular factory he works in, but by all the employers and their organisation - the State."

"The German government hasn't spent a penny on immigrants. They are recruited at age 18 and over when they are already fully-grown and educated. They are in a position to enter immediately into production. Just think about it. Every family spends on average 5 - 6 million Lire (£3,300 - £3,960) in bringing up a child. What's more interesting is the German Government's declared refusal to do anything for the immigrants. Even when they are involved in production, in the creation of wealth, they are relegated to camps like the Berliner Brücke, and, therefore, forced to live without their families. In this way the government saves the expense of providing those social facilities which would be needed if everyone brought their families with them. No need to build schools, houses, services..."

"It's significant that here in Wolfsburg - with 10,000 Italians - that there are no schools where immigrants can learn German. And knowing the language is the prerequisite for taking part in the life of German society. To tell the truth it can be done. But there

are so many obstacles that it's only a theoretical possibility. You can study German at the Volkshochschule ('People's University'). But the arrangement is that lessons are held for one hour on Wednesdays. Bearing in mind that the factory is organised on a shift basis (mornings for two weeks afternoons for two weeks), it turns out that an immigrant can study German for two hours a month. If he's lucky he'll learn to say 'I'm dying', because in the mean time he'll have been exploited enough for it to be true!"

For the people here in Wolfsburg the problem of organising our struggle and making links with other workers is becoming increasingly important. At the moment we are trying to reinforce what we have built up in the camp. We are trying to make contact with people who can carry on the work, either as individuals or collectively. The kind of political work we are doing isn't what you might call 'official', like holding assemblies, but is more general propaganda work inside the camp. This is really necessary at the moment. We reckon there will be a lot of people coming to work with us soon, either of their own choice, or because they've been picked on and sacked."

"However our perspective isn't limited to the conditions of the Italian workers. We are trying to make contacts in other areas which might seem extraneous to the life of Italian immigrants. We are now holding meetings with Tunisian workers who live in brick-built houses at Kastorf and with German apprentices, trying to work out with them programmes of action which bring together all workers against the common enemy - the bosses."

**BERLINE BRUCKE  
SHOULD NOT EXIST**

**No fence**

**No guards**

**No shacks**

**WE WANT**

**Single rooms  
for bachelors**

**Flats for married  
people**

**MEETING**

**Sunday, 10th at 5.30  
in 'A' canteen**

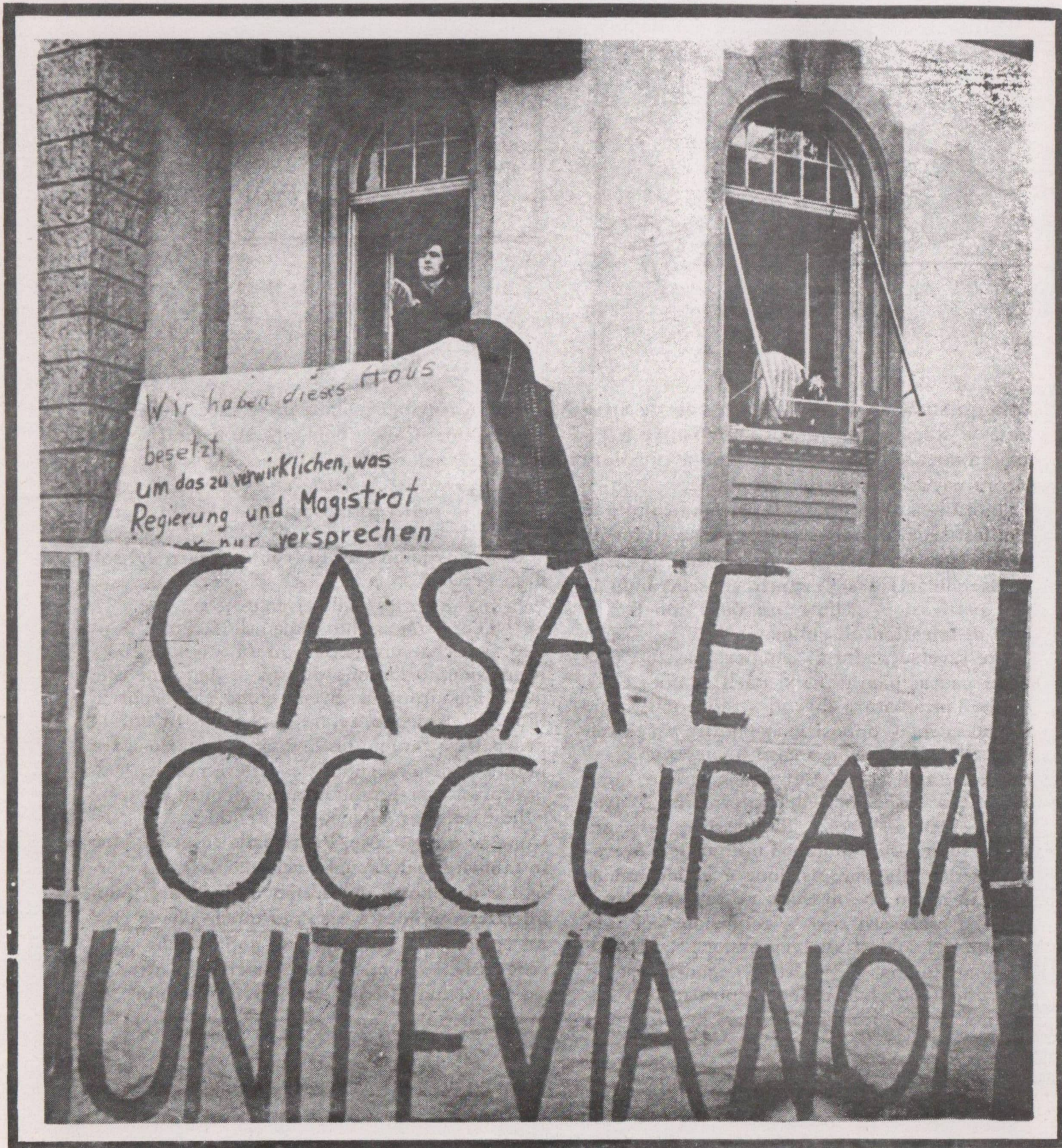
Throughout the country immigrant workers have been involved in occupations and rent strikes.

In Frankfurt there have been struggles over housing. At 17 Eppener St. wanted to evict tenants who were living there. He cut off the water but the people who lived there didn't care - they were lying down - THEY OCCUPIED THE HOUSE. They have links with German workers and students.

In Munich empty houses belonging to the American army have been occupied. The American imperialists had built so many flats; instead

of allowing working class families to live there they were keeping them empty. People rebelled and took over the houses they needed.

In Hamburg, where there is a housing shortage of 60,000 flats, people occupying houses offered to pay 10 per cent of the rent. The landlords tried to empty the houses, on the pretext that they were dangerous and that it was for the good of the occupiers themselves. Occupations continue: the working class has found a new and incisive way of struggle which costs a lot to the bosses and speculators.



# Frankfurt

## Women fight for a nursery

Autumn '72

Early in September a group of women who had been involved in occupations and rent strikes began meeting to discuss their problems. The rising cost of living and soaring taxes are cutting into their husbands' pay packets, forcing many women to look for jobs outside the home. They go cleaning toilets for three Deutschmarks an hour or work in factories where they are made fun of and insulted everyday.

The immigrants share one room to a whole family. The women come home from work exhausted and have to prepare supper while the children run around shouting and screaming. The smell of food permeates everything, even the blankets on the beds. There are frequent fights because there's not enough room to live in. The kids are particularly nervous and aggressive because they have nowhere to be alone and no space to play in. Just as there are no decent houses for immigrants to live in, so there are no schools or daycare centres for their children. Here you're only allowed to produce and be exploited; really living is forbidden! Children aren't productive so there's nothing for them, not even a barrack or a nursery.

The women's meeting decided to begin by fighting for a large multinational daycare centre as a first objective. Here children could learn to play and to struggle together. In their leaflets, which were printed in every language and distributed all over the city, the women said that they wanted to organise this centre for themselves, because they didn't trust paid professional people, with their military-type discipline. However this centre should be paid for by the City because the taxes taken from immigrants' wages (nearly one third of an average wage packet) would easily cover the



An immigrant 'home' - one room!

costs. The meeting decided to hold a demonstration on Saturday, November 4th, with the slogan: 'A decent house for all working class people and a multinational daycare centre for all immigrant children and German working class children!'

On Thursday, November 2nd, a delegation of immigrant women, about 30 of them with their kids, as well as a good number of immigrant workers and German women, met at the Town Hall, a beautiful old building with lots of windows, to announce Saturday's demo. In a statement to the press they accused the City of shirking its responsibilities for housing and child minding problems.

About 60 people went into the Town Hall, and, when they found the office of the Mayor, Social Democrat Rudi Arendt, they decided to pay him a visit. The children went in first and occupied all the chairs in the room and rolled around on the lovely soft carpets, while the women surrounded the Mayor. The Mayor tried to put on a good show despite the 'bad joke', and he listened to the first demand with a long-suffering but kindly attitude. The second speaker, a Spanish worker from Eppener Street, protested against the fascist decision of the courts which had ordered the eviction of a Yugoslav family for going on rent strike. At this point the Mayor, who was nervously thinking about the coming elections, began shouting 'Raus' 'Out!', and shouting at the women, 'If you're Communists why didn't you emigrate to Communist countries? The City of Frankfurt never asked you

to come here!' The women were furious and suddenly found that they could speak German like never before. They started to insult him back in return, shouting that they didn't choose to emigrate, and that German bosses need immigrant workers to get rich. When the Mayor tried to leave the room the women blocked the way while the kids took over his desk. The Mayor realised that things were going badly for him so he tried another dirty

trick. He tried to divide the women from one another by saying that the German women were extremists

and that he wanted to speak to the immigrant women alone. But this disgusting trick got him nowhere, because everyone shouted back, 'The German comrades struggle side by side with us - they're the only ones who care because they have the same problems with housing and childcare.' As the discussion went on it developed into a public popular trial of the Mayor.

Finally the women told him that he'd better meet them again when they'd clarified their demands and each side had their own interpreters.

The meeting was fixed for Monday, after the demonstration on Saturday. The German press gave the demonstration sensational coverage, implying that the immigrants were being manipulated by German extremists. The front page of Bild Zeitung, the reactionary newspaper, read by all German workers, carried this headline in large letters: 'Frankfurt - Mayor and Office Attacked!' They were out to use the women's protest in Frankfurt as propaganda for the election campaign.

Saturday's demonstration was due to start at 11 a.m. Police gathered in the square, used loudspeakers to announce that the demonstration was unauthorized and that the women and children should leave. They also gave out handouts emphasising the illegality of the demo. Instead the women and children stayed and went on shouting slogans about housing and playgroups.

Eventually there were about 1,000 people in the square, a mixture of immigrant women and children and some German students. A cordon of mostly Italian and Turkish children went to the head of the march and, followed by the women and other people they began marching around the square, forcing the police to keep moving. Then, with the children still at its head, the march set off down the street. The police tried to block the streets with lorries, but they still managed to march around the working class districts for 2 hours, with the police still shouting over the loudhailer that the demonstration was unauthorized. Finally they reached a park where they held an impromptu party.

By this time there were about 1,500 people on the demo. They started back to the centre of town where the march broke up into small groups, each one improvising its own demo. There was a big protest against the Mayor who had sent out the police. Then they headed for a house in the immigrant quarter where 10 Italian and Turkish families were on rent strike.

Here the demo ended after a decision that Monday's meeting with the Mayor would be a mass meeting.

## Note on Housing Authorities

The history of public housing authorities in Italy goes back to the late 19th Century when a number of 'Associations' (on a charitable basis) were set up backed by wealthy citizens to build 'houses with lavatories' for workers. In the early 1900's the Government intervened by setting up intermediary bodies using capital from savings banks and mutual insurance companies to finance the building of homes for sale or for rent. Another ten years later the Government intervened directly by setting up INCIS to build houses for public employees (civil servants, soldiers, etc). Later it also set up the IACP (Istituto Autonomo dei Case Popolari) to build homes for the lower classes.

In 1949 INA-CASA was founded to combine the functions of all pre-war welfare bodies (public and private). Its functions were a) to provide loans, b) to make direct capital expenditure on building, c) to build houses to let d) to build houses for mortgage e) to assist cooperative housing societies. INA-CASA established the practice of using funds drawn partly from workers' wages, partly from contributions paid by the employers. The State then added a direct subsidy equal to 4.30% + 3.2% of the cost of the flat would also be paid by the State over a period of 25 years (thereby helping to cut the cost of bank loans). INA-CASA must use 'contract companies' eg INA, INPS (for building homes for state employees), INCIS and especially IACP. An attempt was made to divide workers by making it possible for some of them to become owners of property on a mortgage.

1963 - After a fanfare of publicity GESCAL was founded. Proclaimed as 'a decisive turning-point in the solution to the housing problem', GESCAL is little different from INA-CASA. It is supposed to build houses, provide services and establish satellite towns, as well as promoting a 'study centre'.

GESCAL does not publish its accounts. 25% of its money goes to cooperatives. In Turin, 1963, GESCAL announced the building of 652 flats - at that time there were 3,953 applications. In '69, when 772 flats were announced there were 17,842 applications. From 1963 onwards GESCAL has received 697 billion lire in funds. The houses built in that time correspond to 273 billion lire. In other words 480 billion lire have gone unused. This money has been invested in banks, invested abroad and invested in private industry.

Between 1951 & 1965 3,500,000 rooms were built in the public sector. In the private sector the number was 22,000,000 ie public building equals 14% of the total. Between '61 and '65 the percentage of public building fell by 5%. The real cost borne by the State in 15 years is only 480 billion lire out a total of 18,730 billion lire invested in building ie about 2.6%.



Further copies of  
this pamphlet  
c/o Rising Free,  
197, King's Cross Rd,  
London, WC1

## Other material on Italy

Women and the Subversion of the Community - Mariarosa Dalla Costa

(The falling wall press, 79 Richmond Rd, Montpelier, Bristol. 25p)

The Italian State Massacre

(Libertaria books, c/o Anarchy collective, 29 Grosvenor Avenue, London, N.5.)

Italy 1969 - 1970

(Big Flame, 22 Woburn Hill, Liverpool 13)

Organising for Revolution

(c/o Lotta Continua, 36A Queensgate Terrace, London SW7. 10p)

Discussion on the situation in Italy - Factfolder No.2

(13 Clarendon Rd, Gravesend, Kent)



Via Tibaldi, dopo il primo sgombero. Si rimane tutti uniti: la lotta continua.

## COMMUNITY STRUGGLES IN ITALY

For four years the Italian working class has been on the offensive. Women, workers, children and students have come together to spread the struggle from the factories to the whole of society. With rent strikes, mass occupations, fights against rising prices, the fight for free transport, they have begun to challenge the power of the bosses over their daily lives. People have started to take control of their own communities and to create within them the basis of a freer way of life.