Derive Approdi

Paolo Ferrero

1969: the year the workers shook the world

The contemporary significance of the Italian workers' struggles during the historic *autunno caldo*

transform! europe

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The contemporary significance of the Italian workers' struggles during the historic *autunno caldo*

dedicated to

Alle compagne e ai compagni Kurdi

Introduction

The year 1969 was almost as much of a worldwide phenomenon as the 'student' year of 1968, to which it is inextricably linked. In the second half of the 1960s, young people rebelled in schools as well as in factories. The protests were the expression of a universal sentiment: the demand for general change. The desire to modify existing power relationships and to reorganize society did not end in 1969; it continued to be a motivating factor in the following years, giving rise to a further cycle of struggles at the start of the 1970s.

It is clear that not all countries experienced the struggles of 1969 to the same degree. In this book, the events of 1969 will mostly be examined from an Italian perspective.

The Italian workers shook the world in 1969. It was the year of the workers' revolt against the inhumane exploitation of the assembly line, the military-style discipline of the factories, the feudal paternalism of the agricultural industry, and the repression of the police.

Following on the heels of the 1968 student protests, and addressing many of the same issues as the student movement, 1969 was characterized by a prolonged series of revolts, uprisings and demonstrations; it was not an isolated flare-up. By the time 1969 was over, it had changed the country profoundly. The powerful and liberating rebellion of hundreds of thousands of workers was an event which generated many memorable and historic episodes, and one which initiated a number of social processes. From the peasant struggles in southern Italy to the experiences of the trade unions and left-wing political cadres, from the student meetings of 1968 to the increased awareness of the importance of non-violent resistance in the catholic world, the events gave Italian society a new direction in many respects. Above all, it was the end of an inhumane situation in which exploitation, unjustified discipline and unreasonable wage conditions challenged the workers' dignity. Workers of both sexes rebelled, managing to change not only themselves, but also the world around them.

It was a revolt that radically changed the face of the country, and it happened against the will of the ruling classes. It is no coincidence that the *autunno caldo* (the "hot autumn", as Italians refer to it) ended with bombs in Piazza Fontana in Milan, giving rise to the so-called "strategy of tension" which followed. During that period, fear was used as a tool by those in power to eliminate and dominate their enemies – a strategy which continues to be implemented by the dominant classes in our contemporary context.

The rebellion continued and became a fixture of workers' lives over the following years, because their collective activism was stronger than fear.

The book that you have in your hands is not an exhaustive history of 1969. Rather, it attempts to reconstruct the social climate of that period, concentrating on the fundamental elements which made it so memorable. Beyond that, the book tries to extrapolate the historical lessons and other

valuable experiences from that epic revolutionary, social, political and cultural process.
Fifty years after the fact, I believe it is still important to speak about 1969 for two reasons.
First of all, 1969 was the most important year in the history of our country. It literally changed the course of history in Italy, leading to a transformation of Italian society by radically questioning widespread exploitation and existing hierarchies. This is also one of the reasons why the movement is no longer spoken about today. It has become a greatly repressed subject in the history of the country, because it opens the door to so many questions. The events in that year are not so easily explained: 1969 was a radical questioning of the dominant classes, of their privileges, and of the inhumane methods those classes used to exploit the work of others. That is why the dominant classes, those who have power and control the mass media, have done and continue to do everything they can to make people forget about 1969. And if it is discussed, they immediately demonize it by describing it as the starting point of terrorist activities.
The dominant classes are afraid of 1969 because it was a successful rebellion against their power.
Secondly, it is completely evident that 1969 and all that it stood for is still highly relevant today. The ruling classes spend considerable time asserting that the world today has nothing to do with the world of 1969, i.e. that there are no more factories, workers, or exploitation of the same type as in the past. The events of 1969 are currently evoked as historical accounts of the distant past, of antiquity, of other times, and yet it is completely clear that, although the forms have changed somewhat, the substance has not changed at all.
Yesterday the workers were on the assembly line. Today, workers put the chains on themselves, figuratively speaking, when they are compelled to coordinate three precarious mini-jobs in order to make a living.
Yesterday, workers were forced to work an unreasonable amount just to earn starvation wages. These days, younger people – and also many workers in their prime – still have to work incredibly hard for a starvation wage. Yesterday the problem of finding housing was enormous and today that same problem is almost insurmountable for many people. Yesterday, factory workers suffered the consequences of high toxicity levels in the workplace; today we are all suffering from the fallout of environmental disasters. Yesterday, the marginalized workers were the migrants from southern Italy; today they are the immigrants from poorer countries throughout the rest of the world.
The ruling classes are afraid of 1969 because the negative aspects of today's world, though they may appear in different forms, are still alarmingly similar to the situation the workers rebelled against in 1969.
It took the ruling classes a dozen years to defeat that cycle of struggles, and to take back most of the gains which the movement had made, but for them the fear of a similar uprising remains. In the intervening fifty years, they

have done nothing but try to demolish, piece by piece, the subjectivity, the culture, the politics, and the social practices that were associated with 1969 and its memory. In those 50 years, the "masters of Italy" have not sought the development of their country, but rather the complete destruction of every expression of subjectivity related to the world of work. They do this because, while they know that 1969 may have been defeated once, it cannot be disregarded as a failed rebellion. Indeed, they know very well that another uprising in the spirit of 1969 is always possible. It can occur at any moment, when those who feel isolated and powerless discover that, by joining forces with their peers, they can become invincible.

This book is intended to re-awaken the memory of 1969 and of the events and circumstances that led to those historic struggles. It is written especially with younger generations in mind, in the conviction that 1969 is still in front of us, and not behind us in the past.

Chapter 1
1969: a worldwide phenomenon

One of the most common misconceptions about 1969 is that it was only an Italian phenomenon. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, 1969 and the years preceding it and following it were characterized by a peak of workers' struggles in Western countries in particular, and especially in the main European manufacturing countries (France, Germany, England and Italy). As the table below shows, the working class of the Fordist-style (1) manufacturing industry experienced a very high level of conflict in those years. There were significant parallels among the different countries.

Year(s) of significant worker conflict during the period 1948-1973 (2)
(Shalev, 1977: 325; Davoli, 2003: 300-301)

United States	1970
Italy	1969
Ireland	1969
Canada	1969-1970
Australia	1970-1971
Japan	1971-1972
France	1968
Great Britain	1971-1972
Belgium	1970-1971
Finland	1971
New Zealand	1970
Denmark	1970
Norway	1970
Netherlands	1970
West Germany	1971
Sweden	1971
Switzerland	1971
Czechoslovakia	1968
Poland	1970-1971
Yugoslavia	1969
India	1968-1973
China	1969-1972
Peru	1972
Argentina	1969
Morocco	1971-1972
Kenya	1971-1972
Zambia	1971-1972
Ghana	1971
Uganda	1971-1972
Nigeria	1971

It is interesting to see that, beyond any quantitative measures, it was the particular qualitative nature of the workers' demands and the way the conflicts were navigated that characterized 1969 as a transnational phenomenon. On the one hand, there was generalized opposition to Fordist-type factories; on the other, there was the emergence of a certain class subjectivity with significant common characteristics. In this context, the workers' demands and struggles always started from their base, even when the trade unions were involved in the struggle. Secondly, it should be stressed that the role of young workers was fundamental in every country. If 1968 was the year of young students, 1969 was the year of young workers. These individuals had become disenchanted with both company hierarchies and trade union hierarchies; they were determined to assert their opinions and to go beyond the experiences of the "older generation". Their main demands were relatively straightforward: better pay and improved working conditions.

It was in 1969 that the term *wildcat strikes* (3) came into general use. These sudden strikes, aimed at inflicting maximum damage on the company, were frequently announced directly by the workers without any formal permission from the trade unions. Another example of such independent action was when the workers directly targeted a whole series of "cooling" clauses which had been put in place over the years by the owners – and even by some social-democratic organizations – to keep any conflicts from getting out of hand. These clauses, which severely constrained the workers' actions, had been created either by contract or by direct legislation, and had often been accepted in exchange for giving formal recognition to the trade union.

The English disease

An emblematic case of wildcat strikes was Great Britain. Besides a general increase in the sheer number of strikes in those years, it was an unnerving fact that 95% of those strikes were declared without respecting normal trade union procedures. At the time, it was no coincidence that wildcat strikes were referred to as "the English disease". The political context in which this increase in conflict developed was characterized by the presence of a Labour government (which would subsequently lose the elections in 1970). That government had been ruling for years by leveraging income policy and trying to secure the union's institutional role in exchange for a regulation of the right to strike.

The first signs of conflict came with the strike of 187 women workers at the Ford Motor Co. plant in Dagenham during the summer of 1968. The women were protesting against the unequal treatment they were experiencing compared to their male colleagues. In the end, the women's strike in Dagenham completely stopped production and aroused great interest throughout the country.

Although the trade union initially did not support the women's struggle, women were given equal pay in the company; it was a step forward even

though wages remained below regulation levels for all workers. Their struggle paved the way for the law on equal pay for men and women. That law, which was eventually passed by the UK Parliament in 1970, made it illegal to have separate pay scales for men and women based on their gender. (4)

Just a few months later, in February 1969, the movement made another decisive leap forward. Despite the fact that their employment contracts had not yet expired, and although they had been divided into 22 different labour contracts (which in turn were represented by 22 different trade unions), 45,000 Ford workers went on strike, spontaneously and simultaneously. For all intents and purposes, the strike was illegal. After a few days, the two most militant unions of the 22 trade unions involved – the transport trade union and the metalworkers' union – claimed responsibility for the strike, risking prosecution for breaking the law. Despite this, although the law of 1966 – which committed the social partners to strict compliance with contractual deadlines – had not been respected, and although the strike had caused damages of £2 million each day, the authorities could do nothing against the strikers. In the words of the judge to whom the Ford owners had turned, demanding the application of the relevant legal penalties: "How can you reasonably expect me to arrest 45,000 workers?".

The impact of that strike was such that it led to a debate in the British Parliament. The majority of parliamentarians – Labour included – supported the need to introduce regulations that would make the procedures for cooling down the strikes more binding.

The workers' protests continued, however, and on 1 May there was a wildcat strike involving more than 300,000 workers against the bill, significantly entitled "In Place of Strife", which had been put forward by Barbara Castle, Labour's Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity.

It should be noted that in England, spontaneous protests were often organized by the over 200,000 *shop stewards*, i.e. departmental delegates elected by the workers. The struggles would therefore arise without the participation of trade union hierarchies. Instead, the protests would often be organized by militants from the general ranks of the trade union. This intertwining of independent workers' action with grassroots unionism is something which characterized the wider 1969 workers' movement at the European level. So although we speak of "spontaneous" or "wildcat" strikes, the reality in most cases is that those actions were frequently planned on an informal basis by a workers' organization acting beyond the directives of the official trade union.

It is therefore not surprising that the issue of regulating strikes started to figure prominently in British political and trade union debates.

In June, at an extraordinary meeting held in Croydon, the TUC (Trade Union Congress) rejected Barbara Castle's bill after facing pressure from its base. In September, at the Trade Union Congress held in Portsmouth, the legislative regulation of income policy and the legal regulation of the right

to strike were both rejected. Labour Prime Minister Wilson had explicitly said in his speech to Congress that it was the responsibility of the trade unions to prevent wildcat strikes. Jack Jones, head of TGWU, the powerful transport union, responded that they were not prepared to start policing the workers.

The clash was repeated a month later at the Labour Party Congress in Brighton, where 40% of the members, solidarizing with the transport and metalworkers' unions, rejected the main document of the Congress because it referred to income policy. "This is the first time that such a major rift has occurred in the Labour Party (...) on such a vital issue as trade union policy. It's an area in which the decisions taken by the party have a real practical impact." (5)

At the same time, in the context of the fight against low wages, the transport trade union had launched a "dispute for social justice", which aimed to achieve equal wage increases for all. The main goal of this was to determine a minimum wage that would allow decent living conditions. (6)

The struggles of the workers in the automotive industry led the way, but they were not fighting in isolation. Other groups were involved in the struggle as well.

The strike of the British coal miners was even more emblematic. In autumn, at the time of the strike, wage negotiations were under way between the NCB (National Coal Board) and the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers). The mines were public property because they were nationalized, and the more militant faction of the miner's union felt that the NUM leadership was a weak bargaining partner and too submissive to the Labour government.

On 11 October, Arthur Scargill (who later became the legendary chairman of the miners' union) led a group of Yorkshire miners to the union's local council, requesting that the union intervene on the workers' behalf. The Yorkshire president of the NUM tried to prevent Scargill's actions, but the area council delegates responded by voting for the president's resignation, while also declaring a strike by a vote of 85 to 3.

In other coalfields which had a militant trade union, such as Kent, South Wales and Scotland, strikes followed shortly afterwards. By contrast, the coalfields in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were more conservative and were thus targeted by Yorkshire pickets when they did not respond to the call to strike. During that struggle, "flying pickets" were extensively used for the first time, with miners traveling from other cities to lend their support in picketing the mines intensively. That strike was illegal because it had been called outside of normal procedures, and the clash within the trade union was correspondingly intense. NUM officials in Nottinghamshire complained about the "hooliganism" of the flying pickets and even requested a police presence to ensure that the strikebreaking efforts were successful.

Obviously, many of the workers who had taken part in the unofficial strikes began to make demands for a change in the NUM's leadership. They also

set up strike committees in order to bypass official trade union organizations. Arthur Scargill, the leader of the NUM's left wing, became the NUM's national president in 1981.
In Britain, the struggles continued in the years that followed. Those struggles were marked by very radical forms of protest such as the occupation of factories (starting with the Upper Clyde shipyards) as well as the introduction of political mobilization into trade union practice, leading to political strikes against the government itself.

German workers, wake up!
In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the workers' movement also experienced an awakening that was destined to last for several years.
During the years of economic recovery, the trade unions had pursued a policy of keeping wages at a low level. This led to the development of a large, spontaneous strike movement which culminated in the autumn of 1969, a moment of general prosperity when the economy was performing very well. Over a period of just three weeks, some 140,000 workers in approximately 70 companies took part in spontaneous strikes at the company level. The workers' wage demands were aimed at rectifying contractual agreements that had just been concluded, and which the protesters considered inadequate. Paralyzing key sectors of the economy, the strikes took place in the steel industry, the shipyards, the metal industry and the coal mines of the Ruhr district and Saarland. There were also sporadic protests in the textile industry and the public sector. (7)
The struggles, which were centered on egalitarian wage claims, continued in subsequent years and frequently followed a similar pattern: the protests would begin after the signing of a contract which the workers considered inadequate.
The very fact that the struggles succeeded in reopening discussions on newly concluded contracts created a certain "ripple effect" in the country, which in turn led to further protests. The autonomous actions of the workers increased visibly in the FRG, culminating in two large spontaneous movements in 1969 and 1973. (8)
Although German workers were at the centre of the conflict, those spontaneous struggles also saw the participation of immigrant workers. These individuals frequently had even worse contracts than their German counterparts; in some cases, wages for the immigrants were up to 20% less. Many of the immigrant workers lived in narrow rooms in prefabricated houses which were usually built on the outskirts of cities and near factories. The local residents called them Gastarbeiter*, i.e. guest workers (9)".*
The German workers had to overcome certain internal class divisions in their struggles. This is something that happened not only in Germany, but also in other countries.
Luciana Castellina was reporting live on the concrete development of the struggles for *Il Manifesto* magazine in 1969:

On 1 September, in the morning, a first group of 2000 workers from the Hoesch steelworks in Dortmund suddenly went on strike. By the afternoon, that number had already increased to 7000. The next day, all 23,000 workers in the company walked off the job. The strike had not been declared by the union. Willi Michels, one of IG-Metall's secretaries, learned of the news over the phone. He sent one of his deputies to try to get the workers out of the fight. But his representative was booed out: the strikers yelled at him "you've been asleep for three years, now get out of our way". And instead of stopping their strike, the workers brought the protest into the streets, something which was unprecedented in Germany. A procession of them paraded through the streets of the city, accompanied by signs saying "German workers, wake up!" (...). At the next assembly meeting, a workers' committee of 18 members was elected, and there was not even a single trade unionist among them. The committee attempted to obtain a wage increase by negotiating with the management. The immediate cause of the uprising was the news that Hoesch had decided to increase dividends by 10%. But that was only one factor – in reality, the other reasons for that revolt were to be found much further in the past.

On 4 September the turmoil spread, this time prominently taking hold in the North Rhine-Westphalian coal and metal industries. It was a tremendous blow for the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) because it was precisely there that the party had introduced, by law, a new form of management called Mitbestimmung*, which was hailed as a means of proactively involving the workers in determining company policy. This new policy was the pride and glory of the SPD (the head of personnel and some members of the board of directors were trustees of the union), and it was supposed to have immunized companies from protests just like these.*

And so, despite the policy of Mitbestimmung*, strikes began to happen all around: 12,000 workers from the Mannesmann companies in Duisburg, the Rheinische Stahlwerke (steelworks), and the Neunkircher Eisenwerk (ironworks) in Saarland; 20,000 miners in the Saar, with a good part of the miners from the Ruhr; 6000 from the Klöckner steelworks in Bremen; the metalworkers in Osnabrück and those at the Schalker Verein in Gelsenkirchen. By the end of the week, the strike had affected 40 companies with a total of 78,000 metalworkers. Shortly thereafter, as an add-on from another sector, the 7200 employees at the Howaldt shipyard in Kiel joined in as well. All in all, in a single week, more hours of strike action were carried out in Germany than in the entire calendar year of 1968. They had all been spontaneous wildcat strikes, and within just a few short days the workers attained most of their demands in terms of wages (...). Finally, the unions decided to intervene, demanding the revision of the collective bargaining agreements for coal and steel. The contract for the 256,000 miners was signed in a hurry, leading to an average increase in wages of 14%, in addition to what had already been achieved by previous supplementary agreements. The 230,000 steelworkers achieved an increase*

of 11% in addition to supplementary agreements which varied from company to company. (...)
After that first wild week, the demand for wage increases was booming. Civil servants like urban train and bus drivers, railroad workers, postmen, garbage collectors, gas technicians and electricians, as well as insurers, bankers, papermakers, tanners, and those working in petrochemicals and textiles – it seemed like practically everyone was starting to protest. (...) Some companies (including Volkswagen) were rushing to grant wage increases to prevent rebellion. Finally, on 21 September, the powerful Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (ÖTV)(10) and the large German Salaried Employees Union (DAG) (11) intervened in the conflict, demanding new contracts and threatening to officially proclaim a strike if their request was not granted. The law that made it mandatory to comply with established contractual deadlines was completely disregarded in this case. (12)
And the disputes did not stop there. By the end of September, as many as 4 million workers were involved in negotiations for major wage increases in both the private and the public sector. In the face of these events, the German ruling classes could only watch from the sidelines, taking note that the *Friedenspflicht*, the commitment to social peace, was no longer guaranteed. The weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* wrote: "the wonderful world based on social symmetry, created by Ludwig Erhard (13) and orchestrated by Schiller (the Social Democratic Minister for the Economy) is now falling to pieces". The magazine went on to say, "it was believed that the German trade unions were immune to the 'English disease' of the wildcat strikes, and yet they still happened".
The wave of struggles in Germany in 1969, strongly linked to the demand for wage increases in an economic context of great development and great profits, did not seem to lead to a significant political radicalization. The events in Saarbrücken, where the red flags of the students who joined the workers' march were burned, were not an isolated case. It was in this social framework – disjointed but not destabilized – that the strength of the movement nevertheless pushed the union to reflect. The newly appointed DGB (14) secretary Heinz Oskar Vetter, who recognized the union's difficulties in its relationship with the workers, commented: "Our fingertips are slightly atrophied, we need to revitalize them. I come from the mine, and I remember that before 1950 there were many communists among the departmental delegates. To neutralize them, we centralized the union management. But in doing so, we also lost contact with the factories. Since 1963, after we had regained our strength, we had thought of creating a new body of trustees to work alongside the members of the Works Councils. But that is not enough. In this situation, we need to create the relevant company trade union sections, which are currently prohibited by law. (...) Only in this way will it be possible to know the workers' feelings and exercise greater influence over them." This reflection clearly shows that it is not the social model based on consultation which is being called into question. Rather, it

speaks to the issue of making the instruments of mediation and integration more flexible. It is a discussion that is still going on today: some people continue to question the social model while others push for more fluid social integration mechanisms.

The appointment after the holidays

In France, the peak of the struggles undoubtedly occurred in May 1968, when the student movement and the workers' movement launched an impressive social revolt. The struggles of May '68 led to the Grenelle agreements, which were characterized by equal wage increases for all, the abolition of *wage cages* (15), the reduction of working hours, and a significant extension of trade union rights in the workplace. Despite the importance of the achievements, the first of the Grenelle agreements was rejected by the workers' assemblies at Renault, and this was understood as a warning to the CGT (16) about the need to consult workers before signing agreements. After the student and workers' protests and the resulting agreements, the government reacted very strongly on a political level with Gaullist mobilization. It employed various strategies to reach its goals on a social level as well, not stopping short of manipulation. For example, the government had let inflation increase in order to recover the wage increases granted in 1968. Then, after having devalued the franc in the summer of 1969, it presented a deflationary economic programme aimed at reducing the power of the workers' movement and blocking wage increases for a long period. In this context, the trade union movement in France prepared itself carefully for the fall of 1969. There were several predictions that a social uprising would occur during the upcoming "hot autumn", with some people referring to it as "the appointment after the holidays". The close collaboration between the French workers and their trade unions (particularly the communist trade unions) was an aspect which made the French situation similar to the Italian one. It differed from England and Germany for example, where there seemed to be a complete disconnect and even conflict between the workers and their trade unions.

And so, against this backdrop, a series of strikes began; these were largely initiated by the workers at the grassroots level, with the union joining in immediately after the strikes were called. For example, on 10 September 1969, train crews from the Avignon, Nice and Archères depots went on strike, demanding better regulation of working hours. By the evening of 10 September, the strike had already been extended, and all train lines to and from Paris had been blocked. Over the week that followed, both the struggles and the negotiations intensified. At a certain point, half of the workers, who had already approved the signed agreement, resumed their work. At Nantes station, however, a large majority rejected it and opted not to return to work. In Avignon and at the Gare St. Lazare in Paris, the agreement was also rejected, and it was only after repeated requests from the trade unions that the workers' assembly reconvened and decided to end the strike. On the morning of 19 September, the main trade unions (CGT,

CFDT (17) and FO (18)) launched an appeal for a resumption of work by all and so, after ten days, regular rail traffic resumed. To summarize, it was a situation where strikes began, expanded and ended not on the basis of trade union decisions, but rather on the basis of workers' decisions in relation to what the trade unions were proposing. Strikes in particular were a frequent method of choice for the workers; apart from being sudden and lasting longer, they were more effective vis-à-vis the owners. In France, these strikes were called *grèves-bouchons* ("cork strikes", i.e. strategic strikes) because they blocked production at the nerve centres of the production cycle and caused considerable economic damage. This was a common practice in the strikes that took place at Fiat and more generally in whole cycle of struggles of 1969. The goal was to inflict the most possible financial damage on the owners while suffering the smallest possible wage losses for the workers.

In addition to the strikes carried out by the railway workers and the urban transport workers, the post office strike also witnessed the use of alternative strike tactics to catch their opponents off guard. Prior to the post office strike, the CGT and CFDT had announced a week of strike mobilization from 29 September to 4 October. For many workers, that plan did not go far enough; they wanted to take more immediate and decisive action. Taking matters into their own hands, 600 telegraphers from the "Paris 1" office autonomously decided to skip the week of mobilization, going on strike directly instead. In the same way, during the working week, the calendar of planned strike events was repeatedly disrupted by the decisions of the individual post offices, which decided when they should strike and when they should not. To keep owners on their toes, the contrary was also practiced, for example on 2 October, when various post offices simply continued to work when a 24-hour strike had been planned. It is in this context that the newspaper Le Monde *published an article entitled "The foot soldiers take command"* ("Les fantassins ont commencé à commander")*(19).*

The French struggles of 1969 were mainly the struggles of civil servants in the public service; the employees of private industries were less involved in the movement. Nonetheless, the protesters in France were frequently young workers, often coming from vocational schools, who

believed they were entering the industry of tomorrow, but found themselves in a sort of industrial jail, under the autocratic control of department heads less qualified than themselves, where their performance was measured with a stopwatch (20).

Other European countries

In January 1969, a sharp increase in direct taxes in **Denmark** caused a relative fall in wages and unleashed a series of uprisings in shipyards, metalworking factories and in the printing industry.

Those struggles culminated in a national strike, which was called against the views of the trade unions, although several individual trade union

delegates lent their support to the movement. In total, 300,000 workers took part in the protests (21).
In northern **Sweden**, in December 1969, a spontaneous strike began among a group of miners. They were heavily opposed by their trade union, which declared their actions illegal. Despite this, the strike was extended and eventually gained the participation of all 4800 employees of the state mining group LKAB. A strike committee was set up which met on a daily basis. The miners, against the union's advice, managed to force the negotiations to take place locally (in Kiruna, in the remote northern part of the country) instead of in Stockholm. They also managed to send one of their delegations to participate in the negotiations. The protests lasted 55 days (22).
In connection with the miners' strike, the workers in the automobile industry – from Saab to Volvo – also went on strike. They organized random protests and elected delegates outside the ranks of the trade unions.
Two years later, in 1971, neighbouring **Finland** was shaken by workers' struggles in the metal industry and in the construction industry.
In **Switzerland**, too, a contribution was made to the workers' struggle. In particular, immigrant workers protested against the treatment they were receiving. Immigrant workers made up almost a third of the labour force; they earned low wages and their working conditions were substandard. They were also subjected to inhumane treatment with regard to housing: overcrowded barracks were often the norm for Italian and Spanish immigrants.
In **Portugal** there were struggles, particularly in the automobile industry. In **Spain**, despite the Franco dictatorship, the movement to create *Comisiones Obreras* (Worker's Commissions, a type of trade union), using the legal gaps made possible by the official trade unions, gave rise to important struggles over a two-year period in 1968-1969. As a consequence, there was mass repression which included the imprisonment of hundreds of militants.
In the final months between 1969 and 1970, there were contractual negotiations which affected about three million workers. In Asturias, about 35,000 workers stopped working, and 10,000 agricultural workers went on strike in the region of Cadiz. Other workers started protests at Philips in Madrid, at the shipyards of Seville, and at Fiat in Barcelona. (23)

The Polish case

In Eastern Europe, in addition to the struggles that took place in **Yugoslavia**, and the development of the workers' councils in **Czechoslovakia** (later abolished by the pro-Soviet government in 1970), it was in **Poland** that a cycle of large-scale struggles began and developed. In December 1970, worker protests started immediately when the government announced price increases for food and consumer goods.
The protests started at the Baltic shipyards, where, along with outrage over the price increases, there was intense concern among the workers over rumours concerning upcoming wage revisions. In the absence of substantial

increases in productivity, such revisions would inevitably lead to pay cuts. Another element of the protests was the contribution of political cadres working in the factory who were part of an internal clash within the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party). These activists were pressing hard for a change in party leadership, actively working towards the marginalization of Gomułka (24). *The workers' revolt broke out in Gdansk on the morning of 15 December and it had two distinct phases. In the first phase, which was primarily in Gdansk, but also in Gdynia, Sopot in Elblag, and then in Szczecin, the workers left their shipyards and, with the support of many people, they attacked the seats of power, those of the party and other institutions, repeatedly clashing with the police and leaving many dead along the way. The shipyards were occupied everywhere and, for a few days, the workers continued to come out and challenge the police and the army, who were permanently present in front of the hot spots with armoured tanks.* (25)

Following the struggles of the Baltic shipyards – the most proletarian and populous part of the country – Gomułka resigned and, on 20 December 1970, he was replaced by Gierek (26) as party secretary general. It was a huge achievement for the movement, and following this first success, the shipyard struggles resumed at the beginning of January 1971 with the formation of strike committees. On 22 January in Szczecin, at the Warski shipyards, the idea *of radically changing the workers' strategy was launched: no more demonstrations outside, which mostly led to unproductive clashes, and no more delegations sent in vain to the regime's palaces. Instead, the workers would occupy the shipyards, until such time as the government (in this case Gierek) came to the shipyards for negotiations. At the time, this strategy seemed like a risky gambit, but it would go down in history as a lesson for all the workers' struggles in Poland in the future.* (27)

On 24 January, in a sudden move which took everyone by surprise, Gierek arrived at the Warski shipyards and an exhausting 9-hour round of preliminary negotiations took place in front of the workers' assembly. The government only withdrew its price increases for food and consumer goods after the textile complex in Lodz went on strike at the beginning of February. That textile complex was home to the oldest and most glorious working class in Poland, which had raised the first barricades during an insurrection in 1905 (28). The protests in Poland were one of the great episodes in that larger cycle of struggles due to their size, the radical nature of the conflict, the concrete political and economic results, and the construction of structures for the workers' self-organization.

A transcript exists of the assembly at the Szczecin shipyards during the meeting with Gierek. It is an extraordinary document, and I would like to quote some passages from it concerning the actions of a worker named Urbański who was one of the movement's leaders.

Urbański made no secret of the fact that he was a communist, mentioning it right away. He began his speech with two statements of power: first, he

made it clear that the vanguard, and the only vanguard, was the one that was gathered right there, at that moment, in the assembly. Second, he asserted that the government needed to give accounts for its actions. Then he started questioning the government leaders with dry, brief questions, one by one, without allowing them to use loopholes. If the Minister of the Interior tried to answer instead of the Defense Minister, Urbański would shut him up. Then he turned to the Central Committee: did they know, or did they not know, what the Warski shipyard workers were demanding? If they didn't know, he said, they were going to find out right then and there. And then he turned to Gierek: would he, or would he not, make any sort of commitment? At one point, Gierek managed to avoid answering the question by saying that he couldn't make commitments for the whole Central Committee. Urbański nodded with a hint of irony, and said: "Bravo, now we know for sure that the cult of personality is really over". Finally, he demanded that the shipyard manager come and apologize to the workers immediately, and that's exactly what happened, right in the middle of his speech (29).

Imagine the pride of the workers' leader who was in a position to demand an apology from the shipyard manager in front of the entire assembly, or to speak to the Secretary General of the Communist Party, in an ironic way, about the end of the cult of personality. In a very particular manner, these events show us elements which are common to workers' struggles in every country: dignity, the sense of liberation, and the awareness of one's own strength.

Across the Atlantic

On the other side of the ocean, 1969 was also a turbulent year. *Business Insider* has an article entitled "The most expensive strikes in history". Of those, one of the most expensive was the 1969 strike at General Electric, in the **United States**. The strike lasted 14 weeks and cost the company 79 million dollars.

In the fall of 1969, General Electric's unionized workers decided to go on a coordinated strike involving their entire membership, with pickets at the various workplaces. It was a mobilization that some historians refer to as a key event in the history of the American labour movement.

To end the strike, General Electric's negotiators eventually gave in to the demands of the unions. Those demands weighed heavily on the company's balance sheet with a 22% drop in profits.

Prior to the General Electric strike, there had been various mobilizations at American automobile assembly plants that intertwined social class membership with the "color line". For example, in May 1968, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), an organization of African American workers, was founded at the Dodge assembly plant in Detroit. At the time, the vast majority of the workers at the plant were black, while the local union (UAW Local 3) and the democratic administration of the city of Hamtramck were dominated by older Polish-American workers.

DRUM attempted to organize the black workers in order to obtain concessions, not only from the Chrysler management, but also from United Auto Workers union (UAW). On 8 July 1968, DRUM led a wildcat strike in protest against the working conditions at the Hamtramck plant. While the strike only lasted a couple of days, it involved about 4000 workers and resulted in a production loss of 3000 cars. In the following general trade union elections, DRUM ran as an alternative slate, backing a group of its candidates. Although it did not win those elections, the new organization still attracted considerable attention for its militancy and willingness to challenge the UAW hierarchy.

The "Revolutionary Union Movement" format of organization soon spread to other assembly plants in Detroit. This included FRUM (Ford Revolutionary Union Movement) at the Ford River Rouge plant and ELRUM (Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement) at the Chrysler Eldon Avenue plant. These and other organizations were consolidated in June of 1969 to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

As it grew, DRUM faced a crisis because its militants were divided into two camps. Some believed it should continue as a reform movement within UAW, while others thought DRUM should try to replace UAW and become its own independent union. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers eventually experienced a split between those who wanted to stay focused on the auto industry and those who wanted to expand the League into a national political organization. The latter, nationally oriented movement retained the organizational name of the League and DRUM, and came to be associated with the New Communist Movement. By 1975, however, the organization at the assembly plant level was largely defunct. Several members were dismissed, and those who remained joined other currents of the union reform movement, such as the United National Caucus.

Argentina was also the scene of various workers' protests and popular uprisings in 1969, particularly in the city of Cordoba, which at the time was the centre of automobile production in the country. First, there was a revolt in Rosario in reaction to an incident in which a worker had been killed by the police. The trade unions of Cordoba had proclaimed a general strike for 30 May, but the workers of Cordoba

decided to begin the strike a day early. And so, on 29 May, thousands of workers left their jobs and headed for the city centre. A strike procession started its march at the IKA-Renault auto factory, and the participants were soon joined by workers from other factories. When the large group of protesters entered the city, it was blocked by the police (...) The first barricades went up while several police detachments withdrew to their barracks. The detachments which remained on the street opened fire on the demonstrators, but they were soon overwhelmed by the mass of people on the street. With the crowd mixing and multiplying, the police were soon isolated. The first casualty was a 27-year-old metalworker. (...) A number of public buildings were occupied, along with police barracks and police stations, department stores, supermarkets and the car dealerships of the big

auto companies. The dealerships were set on fire and the cars were used to create makeshift barricades. The protesters burned the Fiat building, the gas company building, the military clubs, the luxurious meeting places of the bourgeoisie, and also the banks (30).

1. Fordist (*Fordista*): refers to a type of standardized mass production using special purpose machinery and unskilled labor.
2. Diego Giachetti, *L'autunno caldo* (Rome: Ediesse, 2013), 60.
3. Wildcat strikes (*scioperi selvaggi)* are sudden, unofficial strikes implemented in such a way as to inflict the maximum possible damage to the company with a minimum loss of pay for the workers.
4. A film, *Made in Dagenham*, released in 2010, was made about this struggle for equal rights.
5. Luciana Castellina, *Europa selvaggia* in "il Manifesto" 5/6 October-November 1969, 2.
6. C. Crouch, *L'intensificazione dei conflitti di lavoro in Gran Bretagna 1968/1976 in Conflitti in Europa. Lotte di classe e sindacato dopo il '68*, edited by Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, (Milan: Etas libri, 1977), 103.
7. Muller, Hans, Sperling, *Sviluppo economico e relazioni industriali nella RFT dal 1966 al 1974*, in *Conflitti in Europa. Lotta di classe, sindacati e Stato dopo il '68*, edited by Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno (Milan: Etas libri, 1977), 210.
8. Aa.Vv. *Sviluppo economico, conflitti di lavoro e relazioni industriali nella RFT dal 1966 a 1974.* In Crouch e Pizzorno, 224.
9. Giachetti, *L'autunno caldo*, 60.
10. The Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (*Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste Transport und Verkehr,* abbreviated as ÖTV) is a union which merged with 4 other public sector unions in 2001 to create the German United Services Trade Union (*Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft*, abbreviated as Ver.Di), which is the current unitary public employment union in Germany.
11. DAG: *Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft*, the German Salaried Employees' Union.
12. Luciana Castellina, *Europa selvaggia*, 18.
13. Ludwig Erhard, CDU politician and second chancellor of the FRG, was famous for his postwar economic reforms and for being the architect of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the so-called "economic miracle" in Germany.
14. DGB: *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, the German Trade Union Confederation.
15. Wage cages: different wage levels that correspond to different areas of the country, resulting in unfair wage inequality for the workers.
16. CGT: *Confédération Générale du Travail*, the main French trade union, affiliated with the Communist Party.
17. CFDT: *Confédération française démocratique du travail*, one of the major French trade unions.
18. FO: *Force ouvrière*, the third largest French trade union.
19. Castellina, 23.
20. Serge Mallet, *La nuova classe operaia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 19.
21. Giachetti, 74.
22. Giachetti, 77.

23. Giachetti, 80.
24. Władysław Gomułka: First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party from 21 October 1956 to 20 December 1970.
25. Piero Bernocchi, *L'autorganizzazione operaia attraverso le rivolte (1956-1980)*, in *Capire Danzica* (Rome: Edizioni Quotidiano dei lavoratori, 1980), 23.
26. Edward Gierek: First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party from 20 December 1970 to 6 September 1980.
27. Bernocchi, 25.
28. The insurrection in Lodz was part of the Polish Revolution of 1905. In Lodz, a strike in the textile factories turned into a three-day clash (22-24 June 1905) resulting in the death and injury of about two thousand people. In the violence that accompanied the uprising, 55 Poles, 79 Jews and 17 Germans died within a single week. The uprising was put down by General Shuttleworth as the Russian Tsar imposed martial law. The unrest continued for many months (…). (In: Norman Davies: *Boze Igrzysko*. Znak: Cracovia, 841).
29. Rossana Rossanda, *Presentazione*, in *Gierek e gli operai polacchi – registrazione del dibattito a Stettino* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1973), 29.
30. Giachetti, 99.

Chapter 2
1969 in Italy: a revolutionary process

It is worth remembering that the 1969 workers' movement began in 1968. The movement was not a bolt of lightning from the sky, but rather the culmination of a longer cycle of struggles which had its roots in the early sixties. The constitutive and distinctive elements of the struggles of 1969, which became generalized in that year, had already become visible over the course of the preceding year. I would particularly like to point out how the 1968 workers' movement flourished during certain general struggles – for example regarding the issue of pensions and the so-called *wage cages* (1). This set the tone for a change of era. We will now explore these changes and their context in some detail.

To begin with, CGIL (2), CISL (3) and UIL (4) had already been involved in a long-running dispute with the government over pensions, and on the night between 26-27 February 1968, they had signed an agreement. However, the CGIL secretariat had reserved the right to consult the Chambers of Labour (*Camere del Lavoro*) and the trade federations. Within a few hours, those organizations decided to reject the government's proposals. The national secretariat of CGIL took note of this, and the parties who had tentatively signed the agreement then returned to the Ministry and withdrew their signatures. An event of this nature had not happened since the end of the Second World War; it signaled a profound change in tactics as trade union organizations showed that they were prepared to change – even radically – their positions in the name of democracy and listening to their base.

As Vittorio Foa, an authoritative member of the CGIL national secretariat and leader of the trade union's left-wing, commented:

At last! What happened with the pensions was a great test of democracy, an event of which the entire CGIL organization can be rightfully proud. A consultation with the directors of the Chambers of Labour throughout Italy and all the trade federations has corrected the position of the CGIL national secretariat, which has taken note of the will of the organization [...]. It is now abundantly clear that when consulting the locally organized subgroups of CGIL, and therefore the base, the solutions are not moderate but advanced, more advanced than those developed at the confederal centre. It's a precious lesson for the future! (5)

Although certainly contradictory and conflictual, the ability to modify positions based on pressure coming from the base is one of the fundamental characteristics that Italian trade unions had in 1969, and one which differentiated them from the majority of trade unions in other countries. For better or for worse, with all its opportunisms and contradictions, that attitude – which will go down in history as "riding the tiger" – was a fundamental characteristic of the Italian experience in 1969.

With the withdrawal of its signature on the agreement, CGIL unilaterally declared a general strike on 7 March. It was at this point that another

incredible event occurred: instead of allowing CGIL to act in isolation, other groups such as the national FIM (6), the national UILM (7), and a series of local federations of CISL and UIL gave freedom to their members to join the strike or even promoted it. The issue of pensions was so strong that even Fiat went on strike. Indeed, even pro-owner trade unions like SIDA (8) joined the strike declared by CGIL. This was an absolute novelty after the Second World War, because it was the first time that the workers had united around a specific issue. In this context, it was possible to create an element of solidarity among the national secretariats which went beyond existing political divisions. Somehow, the principle that the unity of all trade unions must derive from class unity – and not against class unity – was enshrined in that very moment.
The pension affair was therefore a first sign of thawing, both in terms of class conflict and regarding the internal dynamics of the trade unions.

North and South united in struggle

The years before 1969 were years of trade union struggles to overcome wage cages, a discriminatory practice which divided the country into areas where different wage categories applied. It was first and foremost a division between northern and southern Italy, but there were also divisions within the South itself, at times even subdivisions within the same province. Struggles against wage cages were fought throughout the country, but obviously especially in the South, where there was a very strong peasant, day labourer and construction worker component.
Those struggles faced harsh repression as police forces were often strongly imbued with a reactionary mentality. In many instances, local law enforcement officials were also controlled by landowners in a manner reminiscent of feudal times. The struggles in the South therefore had the value of a class conflict in overcoming social relations which had preserved certain traits of pre-capitalist servitude.
Significantly, that path of struggle had its positive epilogue with a national general strike on 12 February 1969, which included significant participation from the factories of northern Italy. That strike led to an agreement on 18 March 1969 in which INTERSIND (9) and later also the Confindustria (10) accepted the abolition of wage cages.
The cycle of struggles in 1969 was not limited to northern Italy and the large factories there. It is undoubtedly true that the great factories of the North set the general tone, but 1969 was a national phenomenon and it unified the country as much as any other struggle in the history of Italy. It must be remembered that a large part of the unskilled labour force – which had the function of cannon fodder in the northern factories – was composed of young southerners. For this reason, the fact that the car painting section at the Turin Mirafiori factory was a living hell was something probably better understood in southern Italy, for example in Sicilian or Apulian villages. Paradoxically, such accounts did not “hit home” in the same way in the nearby localities of the high Piedmontese valleys.

The events of 1969 constituted the true unification of proletarian Italy, roughly one hundred years after the historical unification introduced by the ruling classes of the North under the hegemony of the Savoys.
In the build-up to 1969, an incident occurred in the Sicilian town of Avola which soon became sadly emblematic of the workers' struggle: two labourers were murdered by the police on 2 December 1968. This incident deserves to be examined in some detail. Leading up to the event, the labourers in the surrounding province of Syracuse had been protesting since 24 November and had claimed an increase in daily pay. Up to that point, the province of Syracuse had been subdivided into two areas; the workers had managed to eliminate the wage cages and the discrepancies in working hours which had been instituted in those areas. They had also managed to introduce regulations guaranteeing that their contracts would be respected, setting up joint control commissions in order to overcome the interference of middlemen and other illegal manpower brokers.
The labourers (farmworkers in this case) had even refused to negotiate with local officials about timetables and commissions, not showing up at the various appointments and thus prolonging the strike in a climate of increasing tension. On 2 December, Avola took part en masse in the general strike; the farmworkers set up roadblocks on the main road to Noto, with factory workers at their side. In the early afternoon the police ordered the protesters to clear the road, but the protesters refused. The beatings began and a revolt broke out. The police opened fire on the crowd, killing two men: Giuseppe Scibilia, age forty-seven, from Avola, and Angelo Sigona, age twenty-nine, from Cassibile. Another 48 people were wounded, five of them seriously. The clashes (police armed with machine guns and handguns, the demonstrators with stones taken from the roadside walls) were very short, but very violent. After these events, a rapid negotiation was concluded in which the farmworkers agreed to sign on to the trade union platform. Antonino Piscitello, a parliamentarian from the PCI (Italian Communist Party) who was on site at the time of the clashes, collected over two kilos of shells fired by the police. In this context of police violence, it is not surprising that there were many voices calling for police disarmament – not only among the trade unions but also from leftist political groups ranging from the PCI to the PSIUP (11). Beyond this, the trade union demonstrations and the half-hour general strike against the Avola massacre coincided with ongoing student protests. In Milan, in December 1968, student demonstrators at the La Scala opera house threw eggs during the season opener and shouted: "The labourers of Avola wish you a good time". The opening of the opera season was contested everywhere in Italy by the student movement. Perfectly grasping the class boundary in Palermo (Sicily), a sign read: "You are the instigators of the massacre of Avola".
In addition to the struggles that marked the panorama of the great industries situated in the South – Bagnoli, Taranto, Brindisi, Gela, Porto Torres and Alfasud to name but a few – there was a mobilization of farm labourers that

intertwined with the struggles of construction workers and with important territorial struggles as well.

It was significant that the labour struggles of farmworkers and construction workers, starting from their own specificity, were not dissimilar to the industrial struggles. The groups faced many of the same obstacles and they had a similar political outlook with regard to trade unions. All groups wanted to eliminate the dehumanizing and servile aspects of the work. Construction workers were trying to eradicate the figure of the pieceworker (*cottimista*) in that sector – as it gave rise to a sort of intermediation of labour in some ways more odious than the figure of the manpower broker (*caporalato*) in agriculture. Ultimately, the workers expressed a demand for dignity and equality that was connected with a demand to increase wages. Wages in the agricultural sector had remained at remarkably low levels: between 1951 and 1960 the increase in gross national income for the industry sector was 104%, in the service sector 54%, while in the agricultural sector the increase was only 18% (12). In the context of generalized trade union defeat – and despite the economic miracle, with high rates of GDP growth in the five years around 1960 – the dire situation of workers' wages was not improving. In particular, workers in the agricultural and construction sectors were not able to raise themselves out of poverty and hunger.

During 1969 there were many struggles in the South, and those struggles were not only about the wage cages which penalized southern Italian workers of both sexes. The events of '69 marked the beginning of a much deeper consolidation of class unity, starting with the fact that many of the workers in the northern Italian factories – and the majority of unskilled workers – were southerners.

Four months after the Avola massacre, on 9 April 1969, the police opened fire again on demonstrators who were protesting in Battipaglia (province of Salerno) against the closure of a tobacco and sugar factory. Two people were killed in that incident.

A real revolt broke out in Battipaglia: two dead, hundreds injured, the town hall set on fire, the police station occupied, the state roads cut off, the highway blocked by tree trunks and iron beams. Hundreds of policemen on the run. Fifteen police cars were overturned and set on fire. The police left the city to avoid further clashes and the police station was occupied and set on fire. (13)

All day long, the crowd vented its resentment over yesterday's very serious events. It was only by a miracle that more serious consequences were avoided: rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers and boxes of ammunition and bombs had been left at the police station. The crowd entered the police station and smashed everything up with an impressive hatred. There were wrecks of burnt-out cars on the street. On top of a pile of scrap that had been collected in the square, the protesters had erected the figure of a policeman; it was dressed with parts of uniforms which had been taken

from the fleeing officers, with a burnt helmet on top, and the sash which had been torn off of commissioner De Masi (14).
In protest, the unions called a three-hour strike for 11 April. As it took effect, the country was paralyzed. In hundreds of demonstrations promoted by CGIL, workers expressed their outrage at what had happened in Battipaglia and against the activities of the police. In Lombardy, the strike had a participation rate of about 90% among the workers.
That general strike marked the beginning of the "hot autumn" of 1969.

The courage of the workers
On the occasion of the strike, something happened in the canteen of Fiat's Mirafiori factory in Turin that was destined to be remembered as a turning point. Francesco Morini, a militant PSIUP and FIM member who was employed in the auxiliary workshop, jumped up on a table and gave a speech in front of 1500 workers. He spoke about the unity between northern and southern workers and about the exploitative working conditions in the factory. It was the first assembly held in the Fiat factory since the mid-fifties. His speech broke a culture of silence and also breached a taboo.
PSIUP's provincial secretary in Turin, Pino Ferraris, who was very committed to building the mass political movement at Fiat, recalls the event as follows:
The "moderate" national strike which was declared by the trade unions, and which only lasted three hours, was transformed inside the Fiat factory into a "radical" strike: it essentially became the dress rehearsal of an "internal strike". The workers did not limit themselves to staying at home or walking the picket lines; instead, they directly organized the stoppage of work, department by department, in full view of the Fiat company hierarchy. On the occasion of this particular strike, an extraordinary event took place inside that factory which for more than three decades had been a sort of large barracks: the first workers' meeting took place, and it was completely improvised. Morini gets up on the canteen table and begins to explain the meaning of the struggle to 1500 workers. Morini is a professional worker of the auxiliary workshop (8000 workers). The next day he is transferred away by the management. Another comrade then repeats the assembly in the canteen, asking for the decision to be revoked. Fiat gives in and reveals its weakness. Shortly afterwards, the auxiliary workshop strike starts, during which the first "movement delegates" are named. In June, the "historic" appeal of the auxiliary workshop team delegates is issued, which defines the role of the assemblies, the figure of the group delegate, the powers of the assemblies and delegates, and puts forward, for the first time, the proposal "to convene a council of Fiat workers' delegates" (15).
This long quotation is a good reconstruction of the paradigm shift that took place. The transition from one era to another can be summarized in just a few frames. It all begins with a politicized worker who gets up on a table and starts talking, to the disbelief of his fellow workers, who nonetheless

are ready to listen. It continues as the internal strike succeeds, a step forward which is immediately followed by repression tactics from Fiat, as the company transfers that worker to another department where he does not know anyone. In the following days, another comrade from the same party challenges the company by repeating the same scene, climbing onto a table in the canteen and condemning the repression, breaking the loneliness and isolation of those who have been punished. The workers solidarize and Fiat – for the first time in 15 years – has to retreat. Analyzing the stages in this paradigm shift, we see that nothing was spontaneous or taken for granted. Instead, there was the individual courage of a political militant; there was an organization that understood the situation and which was betting on the possibility of a radical change in reality; and there was the positive response of the workers which led to an immediate change in power relations.

At its heart, the 1969 movement in the Fiat factory – and elsewhere – begins with the overthrow of the climate of fear, resignation and submission. The birth of mass struggle is studded with episodes of individual courage, many formal and informal gatherings, unbearable situations, and the psychological toughness of workers who, when faced with adversity, find the internal strength to resist and even to disobey.

I flew off the handle when I saw a colleague of mine shitting himself because they weren't giving him a break to go to the toilet. Seeing something like that moved me almost instinctively to push the button that stopped the production line. It was a prohibited operation, punishable by dismissal if it happened. I started screaming like an obsessed person; everyone came out from their stations and we all started to call the system into question (16).

That was an eyewitness account from Bruno Canu, who was a newly hired employee at Fiat at the time, working on the line in the bodywork department. Canu was elected among the first 56 delegates recognized by Fiat with the agreement of 26-30 June 1969. He was also among the founders of the CUB (17) and of *Avanguardia operaia* (18) at Mirafiori.

Now let's hear from Luciano Parlanti, a militant member of *Lotta continua* (19), who joined Fiat in the 1950s. Here he speaks about the period immediately following the agreement of 26-30 June.

A few days later, we left workshop number 53 and, after passing through the paint shop, the procession was quite large: 5000 workers, well organized and focused, with the avant-garde members screaming "mechanics, mechanics!". We took them to the courtyard, and in front of us there was a descent leading down to a tunnel which connected to the mechanics department – it's a tunnel that passes under the whole Mirafiori factory. And there in the courtyard, under the open sky, everyone suddenly stopped, uncertain, because workers somehow feel lost when they are outside of their own workshop on such a large factory premises. Incidentally, we had never been there before, it was something new for us. I honestly didn't even know if the tunnel was open, and I had no idea what was on the other side. It took an incredible effort to convince the others to

continue on the march. There was a risk at that point that they wouldn't move any further, and that they would just give up and go home. I finally calmed down when they slowly started moving forward. A bit further down, you could already see the light, about 700 meters away, as the road began to go uphill again, and from there a guard was coming on his bike. He stopped and looked at us, not really understanding what was going on, and when he turned back to ride away from us, everyone started screaming and running after him. The workers caught up with him, because he was going uphill and his legs were shaking. They grabbed him from behind by the saddle and gave him a push that he will remember for the rest of his life.

But when we finally arrived outside, we didn't know where to go next. So we went to the mechanics' guardhouse and told the guard that we were not from that department. We explained that we did not want to waste time, and that he had to show us immediately where "there are a lot of workers", because we had to get there. He was the one who led us to the huge gate: he was on a bicycle and 5000 workers were behind him shouting slogans… what a scene it must have been! In the middle of that gate there was a small door and I just ran in, not thinking too much about it, because I was curious to see how the place looked. I opened the door and entered the room yelling "Stop, there's a strike!" and using the famous slogan "Agnelli, you have Indochina in your workshop!" (20), but all the others had remained outside, so I was alone in the middle of the workshop, with everyone looking at me, thinking I was crazy. When I realized the situation and started to turn back – I was also nervous because the bosses were coming for me – the door suddenly opened wide and everyone joined in. The mechanics immediately agreed to join the march. They had been waiting for us – they just needed an external impetus to take the first step. We saw some of our friends among the mechanics, and after a few brief salutations and a short celebration, all the mechanics joined us. Soon after that, there was an article which appeared in the press (La Stampa) *claiming that workers from the factory's bodywork department had knocked down the gates. But that's not true, because we actually knocked down the gates the next day, when we were on our way to the foundry. Just like the first time, we passed through the mechanics department, but this time we didn't go through the tunnel; instead, we went through the gates that fenced the factory. The first gate was opened for us because there was a lot of commotion and everything was shaking, and there were also people outside who joined us when we re-entered. Whereas with the second gate, the guard did not want to open it for us, so after pushing on it for a while, it eventually fell down together with the frame it was attached to.*

After those first two visits, the mechanics started protesting on their own, and once they even returned the favour and came to visit us in the bodywork department. To make all this happen, all they needed was that initial spark, the one that had always been missing in previous years. (21)

In Parlanti's story, a recurring theme emerges: without the courage of the most socially-conscious workers, many struggles would not have been

fought, many resistances would not have been won, and many gates would not have come down. Mass activism was only possible because there were people who had the courage to break the taboo of obedience by defying the established authority. Those individuals dared to carry out the seemingly unthinkable actions that so many have practiced in protest since then.

The revolt

Often when we think of revolts, we tend think of the nineteenth century, imagining for example a violent assault on a local town hall carried out during a peasant uprising in the South (22). In modern times, I think that the practice of revolt has been indispensable since 1969, because it is one of the forms of class struggle which was truly effective in the context of the workers' movement. Let's have a closer look at some of the important aspects of modern revolts.

There are revolts which take place outside the context of the factory. These are somehow territorial in nature: from Avola to Battipaglia, from Porto Marghera to Marzotto di Valdagno, to the revolt in Corso Traiano in Turin. These were not just small skirmishes; in all cases, the events lasted from a few hours up to several days, and the clash with the forces of law and order was fierce. The aim of such revolts is to question the exercise of power in its arbitrary forms, and to dispute the control of the territory. Obviously, in each of these episodes, relevant factors include the subjectivity present on the ground and the active forces in the field, but it seems clear to me that these episodes of revolt are rather independent of the political orientations of those who then claimed them, or who made them into their own origin story. The relevant point is that these episodes indicate a popular and proletarian willingness to engage in a struggle. They show a break in the mechanism of passivity and in the acceptance of authority. More than a political choice in the strict sense, it is a certain mental disposition that allowed '69 to happen.

First of all, the vast majority of revolts are in reaction to the violence of the police. In nearly all cases, the disproportionate actions of the forces of law and order, the arrogance, and the prohibition of completely legitimate demonstrations are at the origin of the revolt. Those who have presented and propagandized these revolts as the proletariat's choice to "raise the level of the clash" have invented something that didn't happen, blatantly mistaking their own imagination for reality. The real point is that the abuses of law enforcement officials are not passively accepted by the proletarians who suffer or who are otherwise involved in the events. The arbitrariness of the police is not considered just and is not considered tolerable – and the willingness to rebel against the authorities emanates from those ideas. To summarize the principle on which '69 was born: enough is enough!

Secondly, these uprisings are primarily non-violent: there is significant damage to property but very few people are injured. Witnesses will see barricades, stones, burnt cars and wagons, pickaxe handles and flower pots, even some scuffles, but in these uprisings, the essential dynamic is one of

resistance against the forces of law and order, not of aggression against people. This holds true for the whole cycle of struggles of 1969: hard fights, strikes, pickets, marches, slaps, spitting, but no deaths. Protesters face all kinds of politically-motivated denunciations from right-wing groups, and unproductive mysticism from certain left-wing fractions regarding the violence of 1969. In reality, however, the fundamental point of '69 is that the struggle should lead to some type of success. With that in mind, the tactics used should always have a functional aim, with a view towards consolidating the working class community in its struggle. There should be no other aims during a revolt. This is a decisive point to be taken into account, as it is something which politically divides these practices of class struggle from terrorism.

Thirdly, those who take part or find themselves otherwise involved in these uprisings know that the uprising itself is not the solution to the problem. It is correct to protest because one cannot accept injustice, but protesting is not enough. Protesters are not opposed to negotiation, nor to the modification of norms: they are two sides of the same coin, which both characterize 1969. To put the two faces of the coin in opposition to each other does not correspond to what happened in 1969. There was a certain pragmatism in play. From this point of view, the condemnations of the PCI and the exaltations of organizations like *Potere operaio* or *Lotta continua* are, for all intents and purposes, political comments which accompany a much less ideologized and polarized proletarian praxis. In 1969, the fundamental point is the construction of a collective social subject, and this can be expressed both in revolt and in negotiation – two different faces of a proletarian subjectivity that has become aware of itself.

In particular, this can be seen in certain "revolts" within the workplace. It is evident that the internal marches, the "purges" in workplace departments, and the attacks on office buildings to get the strike-breakers out from amidst the workers are elements that go completely beyond normal negotiation. Capable of unhinging hierarchies, such tactics have the elements of revolt, and they are very empowering for those who practice them. These strategies cannot be considered *jacquerie (23)*, in which the exploited parties merely vent their anger, only to return to work the next day more exploited than before. On the contrary: they are radical forms of social conflict aimed at making the strike succeed, to pillory the bosses, to undermine authority and hierarchical power, and to show the strength of the workers in order to counterbalance the power of bosses who have sowed terror for years.

We therefore have an "unconventional" conflict that serves to strengthen the workers' collective, the workers' community, and which breaks the internal boundaries between departments and workshops. It is a conflict that changes power relationships by making the strike succeed. It is a show of strength in order to secure control over a sphere of influence.

These forms of struggle make it clear that the factory not only produces the goods for which it was designed and built – it also produces antagonistic

social relations, which persist in the same workshops and in the same departments. The objective rationality embodied by modern technology is in constant contrast with the subjectivity of the workers, men and women of flesh and blood, who will not accept being reduced to just a labour force. A struggle is also a celebration of sorts; it produces its own rituals, behaviours that "confirm" the workers' community, but it is a struggle nonetheless.

Fatigue and health

One point that certainly factored significantly in the workers' revolt was the exponential increase in worker exploitation.

That job was awful. Those eight hours never seemed to end. We were producing the Fiat 850 sport coupe models and we did three shifts. The work was very physically demanding and the body assembly was a very bad thing. There was a deafening noise as one person was passing the disc on the sheets; the sheet metal worker was doing the edges, and we stood there with our welding tongs sending sparks everywhere. You would leave the factory with your clothes all pierced, because those tiny balls of fire jumped everywhere and no matter what protective eyewear you used, no matter how much you covered yourself, they would still get in your face, on your wrists, on your ankles, up on your stomach... and they hurt. When I had to weld little details on the bodies, no matter which gloves I had on, I'd always end up "welding" my fingers and the damn fireballs would get under my fingernails. We also had to endure intense workloads. (24)

I couldn't take it physically: as soon as I got home, the first thing I would think of was the bed. Around that time I got married, and Fiat had conditioned me like a beast. I didn't have relations with my wife. I just came home and slept! (25)

Under the alarming conditions of low wages and increased exploitation, individual worker productivity after the Second World War continued to rise: in 1952, a Fiat worker produced an average of 2.01 cars per year. In 1960, the ratio was 5.71 cars per employee, 7.57 in 1963 and 9.16 in 1968. All this occurred with an increase in investment certainly not proportional to the increase in productivity, which therefore meant an enormous increase in individual workloads (26).

Fiat represented the extreme example of a trend that was typical of the entire manufacturing industry, from Pirelli to Borletti, from Indesit to Italsider: the tendency to increase the physical exploitation of every single worker to an improbable extent.

These workloads produced wear and tear and often disability, physically ruining the workers' health. One can only imagine the serious dangers faced by the workers in the chemical industries, which ranged from occupational diseases to high rates of cancer. The simple manufacturing industry was no less dangerous: the workloads were so heavy that the psychophysical integrity of the workers was jeopardized.

The work was hard. It wasn't complicated, it was just plain hard. And I left my health in there. The constant pressure of the machine against my liver

and kidney really wore me down. I spent six years working on the pedalboards; those six years ruined me (27).
(...) It was a terrible experience. You were in this cabin where the cars were sprayed and which was full of paint smoke. There was incessant noise and so much humidity, with water constantly passing under your feet. (...) There were six of us in the cabin and each person had a spray gun connected to pipes that came directly from the paint station. When the cars passed in front of us, the spray gun was used to apply the paint. (...) The level of toxicity was high and so were the workloads: we made 330 cars a day, 43 each hour. There were 75 of us along the line and, unlike other departments, you couldn't enter and exit because the cabin was a closed line. You couldn't move around and you had to maintain the rhythm that Fiat imposed. You lived constantly immersed in paint; when you had to paint a car from the inside, you ended up spraying a lot of paint on each other. In the evening you arrived at home exhausted, and during the day you couldn't do anything but work and sleep. You spent eight hours in the cabin with the canvas shoes they gave you, and when you came out your feet were bleeding, because your feet were always wet, you were sweating, you walked on iron grills and there was blood running between your toes (28).
It is no coincidence that one of the most popular forms of struggle in 1969 was the self-reduction of production. In some situations, the general idea was to financially damage the owner without losing too much in wages – that was certainly the case when both production levels and the level of piecework were reduced by workers at Pirelli's Bicocca factory in Milan. In that situation, the actions were principally a form of struggle, an induced conflict with the aim of changing existing power relations. In other cases, such as those just described at the Mirafiori bodyshops in Turin, the self-reduction of production had the objective of exposing oneself to less physical strain, of breathing less paint, and more generally of defending oneself as a human being. It was a strategy of self-preservation, used to defend one's own psychophysical integrity. It is no coincidence that, from these situations, two interconnected strands of negotiation were born. On the one hand, a series of demands were made regarding the control of the production line and the reduction of speed on the line; negotiations with employees were requested, and a general reduction of workloads was proposed. On the other hand, there were also demands to improve safety at the factory, for example by identifying sources of toxicity with the help of technicians from outside the factory, by constructing risk maps, and by identifying actions which could be taken to radically modify the working environment. An early form of environmentalism was set in motion there, in the factory, somewhere between the defence of the psychophysical integrity of the workers and the struggle to abolish the use of toxic substances in production cycles. In both these strands of negotiation, which were later defined and codified in 1970-1971, the delegates elected by the workers' group were able to set up a system under the workers' control

which – for the period in which the power relations held up – profoundly changed the conditions of life in the factory and the products themselves.

Dignity

Another fundamental point at the centre of the struggles of 1969 was dignity, respect for oneself and others, and overcoming the fear and military-style climate that characterized the workplace to a large extent. The collective struggle and the cultivation of working-class subjectivity were the necessary preconditions to be met so that the workers, men and women, could begin to exist as individuals within the factory.

I joined Fiat in 1959, and all those who were hired at that time were put under a beastly discipline: after clocking in, you went to work, you had no contact with your comrades, you couldn't have a conversation with more than three people at a time, and you weren't allowed to eat except in the designated ten-minute interval. On the production line, they should have provided a break so you could go to the toilet, but the bosses did not allow that. Rather, they would tell you to work faster, or to get the work done ahead of schedule, so that maybe instead of ten minutes you would get a quarter of an hour. There were employees who peed in the bodies of cars to save time because they couldn't hold it anymore. I've peed in car bodies many times. Then one day a boss called us in to tell us that the urine was oxidizing the car bodies, and that we could no longer proceed that way. At that point we started peeing inside Coca Cola bottles (29).

Inhumane workloads were accompanied by an iron discipline: that combination reached its apex at Fiat but it was a characteristic feature at many other large factories of the time. Working conditions developed this way because the choice had been made to increase workloads beyond any reasonable measure. The doors of the toilet stalls were cut 80 centimetres from the floor so that the guards could check if someone had stopped for too long – that was only one detail of everyday reality in manufacturing plants.

Intensive exploitation and military discipline produced great worker solitude, isolation, and atomization, an incredible fact considering that we are talking about factories with thousands of workers who were working "side by side".

Back then, everyone was sick; each worker was exploited and pushed to their limits, and yet there was no relationship between people, and everyone experienced their own reality individually. Even those who were members of the same trade union or party did not have any contact with each other in the factory. Everyone was alone to fend for themselves (30).

Among the workers there was mutual hatred and envy generated by the various categories and levels of work. The bosses knew about these internal divisions and exploited them. For example, the management would make 50 liras available to a boss, to be divided among the basic wages of his workers. The boss would then announce it to his team, and the classic war between the poorest of them would be unleashed. Especially in moments

when he had to increase his production, the boss would remind everyone that the money was up for grabs and would then ask for two more cars, three more radiators, four more transmissions... and among the workers there would then be a race for that money. The same thing happened for the annual prize, an extra month's pay, that was given only to the most deserving (31).

A loneliness emanating from fear accumulated in the 1950s during the years of anti-union and anti-communist repression. This was particularly true at Fiat, where thousands of workers were laid off and where trade union activists were relegated to confinement departments. Nonetheless, those years produced common sense and other positive side effects in the working class as a whole.

I was young at the time, and I used to ask the other workers: "Why don't we have a break to go to the toilet, why can't we even have coffee?" It was like talking to a rubber wall – the older workers just didn't dare to speak up about anything. They were afraid. Only on Mondays there was the freedom to talk: about football (32).

It was a loneliness that did not stop at the gates of the factory. Indeed, it went so far as to affect the personal lives of the workers, even in their free time. In fact, Fiat workers were aware that the company was collecting information about them, essentially putting them under surveillance. Any political activity, even if it took place outside the factory, was monitored and reported to the heads of personnel. In 1971, when Fiat was finally put on trial for monitoring its employees, the facts that emerged were striking: from 1949 to 1971, 354,077 people who worked for the company or had applied for employment had been monitored by Fiat. In the period between 1967 and 1971 alone, 150,655 people had been under surveillance. (33)

It was unbearable to endure a situation of exploitation characterized by abuse, harassment, fatigue, and low wages. What came to the fore in 1969 was the intolerability of class exploitation in its most elementary traits.

Wages

Another element characteristic of 1969 was egalitarianism, which included a strong wage drive. The situation was unendurable: awful living conditions for the poorest members of the working class in a context where companies were clearly accumulating huge profits. In Turin, migrants from the South would typically spend a significant portion of their salary of 100,000 liras on a bed. If you had a family, you could spend up to 40,000 liras a month for accommodations, and if you had no family, you would save a bit by living in desperate conditions.

We sleep all piled up against each other in small, damp rooms, and we pay a lot, 10 to 15 thousand per person. The three of us sleep in a room so small that in the morning, when we wake up, we have to take the bed apart if we want to move around. We are forced to leave our clothes and other belongings in our suitcases, because there are no closets. But even if we did

have a closet, you would not be able to open the doors, that's how crammed it is in the room. In the entire boarding house, there is only a single toilet for 20 people and, if you want to wash or go to the toilet, you have to stand in line at all hours of the day (34).

If this was the situation in Turin, which was infamous for its signs reading "we don't rent to southerners", the situation was certainly not better in Milan, as we can see in the brilliant investigative book *Milano, Corea* by Franco Alasia and Danilo Montaldi, which contains a preface written by their close collaborator and noted social activist Danilo Dolci (35).

The social desperation which characterized the situation of migrant workers was reflected in the enormous profits of the companies.

As stated in the *Giornale di lotta*, published on 6 June 1969 by a PSIUP workers' group in Turin:

When a worker begins to think about his 8-hour working day and wonders where his salary and his boss's profit come from, he discovers something unexpected: that his day is divided into two parts. In the first part of the day, the worker produces a sum of money equal to his salary; in the second part, the worker produces the boss's profit. The first two hours become wages, and the remaining 6 hours become the boss's profit. [...] The boss does not pay the worker's work, otherwise all 8 hours would be considered as paid working hours. What the boss is actually paying the worker is simply the means to live. [...] With those facts in mind, the Fiat workers' entire struggle must be directed against this system of super-exploitation. And that struggle is carried out by reducing production. (36)

The question of wages was thus a central issue for the workers, and at the same time it was the most basic claim on which to focus. There were heated discussions and great conflicts about it within the workers' movement, which led to two particularly lively moments in the spring of 1969 at Fiat. In subsequent months, the issue continued to be relevant during the drafting of the contractual platform for the national metalworkers' contract.

On the one hand, *Potere operaio* (37) was aiming for strong wage increases that would be equal across the board for all worker groups. By contrast, *Lotta continua* had a position more centered on egalitarianism, not just on wages. Guido Viale, one of the leaders of *Lotta continua* from Turin, describes this division as follows:

The line of Potere operaio *(...) could be summarized in three points: money, money and money. They were convinced that there was a capital plan based on the income policy, and that the working class had to dismantle that plan using the leverage of wage demands. It was a popular sentiment, but one that completely neglected the emancipatory content of the struggles and our fundamental egalitarian and anti-hierarchical demand, which was to give all workers the possibility to enter the second pay category (38). The controversy continued until autumn when the definitive break between the organizations occurred (39).*

At the other extreme, the trade union and FIOM (40) in particular were afraid that the whole conflict would be resolved purely as a wage demand, a situation which would still leave the factory bosses with considerable power concentrated in their hands, e.g. the ability to determine the organization of work, the regulation of toxicity, the workloads, and so forth. This had already happened in France the previous year and any pay increases had been re-absorbed in a very short time. In addition, the trade union was worried that the demand for high wage increases in the spring struggles, i.e. in the period before the national labour contract was signed, would in fact be detrimental to the negotiation of the national contract. That is what the Fiat management was aiming at – they intended to separate the working class at Fiat from the rest of the Italian working class by proposing that the wage increases in the spring should constitute a sort of pre-contract, essentially a stalling tactic, a small settlement at the local level instead of conceding a full contract at the national level. For this reason, FIOM had a position in the spring that was fundamentally opposed to wage demands and regularly found itself overtaken by the demands of the workers.
A third position, advanced by the Turin PSIUP, proposed to combine strong egalitarian wage increases and the reduction of workloads, with the issue of workers' control to be resolved via the figure of workers' delegates.
This discussion was positively resolved moving forward as the struggles progressed. Eventually, strong wage demands were combined with requests for a change of pay category and a reduction of workloads. Also, certain demands were made regarding the contractual recognition of the workers' control over the production cycle. The workers gradually began to exercise that control, starting with the proactive role that the trade union delegates began to play.

Egalitarianism: overcoming the war between the poor

During the drafting of the metalworkers' contractual platform, a major national debate took place on the issue of equal wage increases for all.
The trade unions were divided, one against the other, but also internally. On the one hand, there was a position calling for equal increases for all. On the other, there was a position that favoured the regulation of increases on the basis of predefined categories, as expressed by Bruno Trentin, the general secretary of FIOM. During consultations, which involved over 300,000 workers and gave rise to an enormous democratic and participatory process, the position of equal increases for all prevailed. Those increases were then demanded – and subsequently obtained – by the trade union as a whole.
The push towards egalitarianism was a fundamental point in the struggles of 1969. For a time, these efforts overcame staunch resistance and changed political cultures.
The choice of equal wage increases for all was not just a financial consideration, because the deliberations were about more than just money. Similarly, positions on wage increases did not simply derive from the theorization of salary as an independent variable, a position put forward by

FIM-CISL general secretary Macario in an interview in the newspaper *La Stampa* on 18 October 1969, and which played an important role in trade union discussions in the following years.
These elements were certainly present, but in the context of a strong egalitarian drive, there were other important issues which demanded attention. One of the main tasks was to address the unbearable divisions between workers which had been artificially introduced by the owners. Egalitarianism meant taking away from the owners the possibility of dividing workers arbitrarily.
The owners had built up a ferocious system of divisions after World War II. During the cycle of struggles of 1969, existing class divisions – and particularly the internal wage war between the poorest of the workers – were utilized as motivation in a powerful drive for unity.
We have seen how the struggles before 1969 had already challenged the wage cages, and how those protests had involved both the farmers of the South and the workers of the North.
Beyond wage cages, another practice which was radically questioned were the so-called *job evaluations* (just imagine, 50 years ago they were already using English terms in Italian factories to cheat people...). The employers, in order to divide the workers – and to do so with some semblance of objectivity – tried to introduce *job evaluations*, which established a different pay level for each job. Using this system, in a company like Italsider in Naples which employed about 8000 workers, there were 284 different pay levels (41).
Such a system made it nearly impossible for the workers to make general and unifying demands. Instead of fighting for collective gains, the workers found themselves in a situation where they were wasting their energy, effectively working against one another, with each person trying to occupy the best paid position. This system was overwhelmed by the contractual struggles of 1969.
Another hot issue in 1969 was the struggle against the use of wage categories and so-called *superminimums* (42), which divided workers by pitting them against each other. Facing those internal divisions, it is clear why the workers were demanding automatic wage category changes for entire departments and consistent and equal wage increases for all. Over the years, the owners had used low wages and promotions to create a system of unilateral and selective wage increases; this was done to reward loyalty to the company hierarchy rather than to compensate the work of the workers. The demand for substantial and equal pay increases for all, which was accompanied by the demand for collective wage category changes – while eliminating the so-called *masterpiece tests* (43) – was intended to unhinge this system of divisions that the employers had built up over the years and guarantee each worker a decent wage. Moreover, in factories where difficult working conditions minimized the possibility of acquiring professional certifications, the demand for collective equal increases was not only a powerful unifying factor – it also reduced the margins of the company to

"give" money individually to workers, e.g. as an act of rewarding loyalty and subordination to the company hierarchy.
Egalitarianism also meant not wanting to strike for employees and bosses who did not join the fight (owners would often pay workers a better wage if they promised not to strike). In other words, egalitarianism meant first and foremost having control over one's own subjectivity, one's own "class composition", and one's own community. Owners used wages to divide the workers just as they used their despotic power to put them in competition with each other. Essentially, egalitarianism meant obtaining those economic demands and introducing behaviors which helped to consolidate and strengthen the workers' collective, while taking actions which reinforced the importance of solidarity in a class conflict. With egalitarianism, "united we stand", is only one side of the coin.

The technicians

Although it is the workers of a Fordist (44) factory who are the main protagonists of the struggles of 1969, it is nonetheless interesting to mention the significance of the participation of other groups such as office workers and technicians (45) in that cycle of struggles. In Turin, and in the Fiat factory in particular, the power dialectics were decidedly polarized between unskilled workers and the factory hierarchy. By contrast, the situation was very different in other areas of the country – for example in Milan – where regular office workers made up a substantial proportion of the company hierarchies. Large companies had different social, cultural, and political climates, and they primarily employed a skilled workforce composed of people like office workers and technicians. A critical detail: many large companies were also heavily unionized. Taken together, these factors may explain the phenomenon of mass participation which was displayed among those social groups during the trade union struggles which ensued. It is interesting that, in the end, the Fiat workers and the employees of large companies shared many of the same motivations for joining the struggle. Franco Calamida, then a young engineer at Philips in Milan, gives the following account:

In 1968, after hearing about the events in Avola, three of us went on strike at Philips headquarters. (...) On 14 April 1969, Ludovico Morozzo was fired in an effort to intimidate us. We responded immediately, in decisive fashion, declaring a strike. About 90% of the technicians, the workers, and the secretaries agreed to join us. It was exhilarating. What had happened? It felt like favourable winds were blowing. Around the same time, we were hearing other voices from around the world. We heard about Mexican students being massacred. We also heard about American researchers who were developing bombs with plastic pellets that weren't visible on X-rays, for use in Vietnam, so that they couldn't be extracted from the victims' bodies, even if children were hit. It was said then, and indeed it was also shouted: "science is not neutral!" We felt that the world was changing and we wanted to be part of that change. All generations participated, but it was

primarily a revolt among the young. It was young people like us who led that rebellion. And by the way, we didn't win: after 23 hours on strike, the management did not give in to our demands and Ludovico Morozzo was fired. But it served as a lesson to us, and we learned. When the management, all high and mighty, returned to their old tactics and fired another colleague of ours, we went on strike again, and this time we won – because we had become experts. The colleague had been fired because he had long hair. He said: "I don't want to cut my hair, it's a matter of dignity for me" (at that time there was not a workers' statute to protect employees from such discrimination). We all thought: "dignity is important, it should be upheld for everyone", and we knew we were fighting for a good cause. We felt so strong and united. Winning is a beautiful feeling, it gave us self-confidence and a sense of belonging to a collective. That immediately gave us the impetus to start working on a platform, which was then discussed by everyone down to the smallest detail, gathered around the coffee machines, which were our habitual meeting places. Later, we eventually presented those ideas officially at the assembly (46).

The protesters valued human dignity and they believed that society could be organized in a different way. These are two unifying elements to which a less obvious third must be added. When the trade union organized an assembly of technicians and office workers to discuss their contractual platform at the Palalido sports arena in Milan in 1969, the assembly voted by an overwhelming majority for the platform that proposed equal increases for all. Among the technicians and office workers who participated in the struggle, the construction of class unity was considered by far to be the most important element to be taken into account in defining the platform. It was an overarching concern which went beyond anyone's immediate material interests.

The Milanese case is worth studying because of the quality and high rate of participation shown by the office workers and technicians in the trade union struggle. It is worth underlining how the activism of the technicians also emerged in other situations. For example, at Montedison di Castellanza, a chemical plant in which very dangerous processes were running and a large number of technicians were among the workers, a work group was set up in 1968-69 which was responsible for worker's health, work organization and environmental issues. This group of individuals went on to become the Environmental Protection and Environmental Hygiene group of the Works Council, which over the years collaborated with all workers who were interested in those issues. That work group had emerged based on the experience of previous years, in which groups of Montedison technicians had gradually begun to collaborate with other workers at the Donegani Research Center in Novara, where they discussed what to produce, how and for whom. Their publicity campaign, aimed at a broad audience, read as follows:

We are not interested in conducting research to find the most suitable hair to put on dolls if the hair is made of PVC. We know that PVC is a plastic

material whose basic monomer (i.e. raw material) is vinyl chloride monomer, a compound known to cause liver, lung and myocardial cancer, as well as other diseases (47).

The experiences at Castellanza demonstrated the central importance of workers' groups as a fundamental nucleus from which to analyze the working environment, evaluate its toxicity level, and modify it. Here we can also see the theme of workers' subjectivity, which began to mature, thanks to the special relationship with the technicians. The workers were not only using science to make a point in the context of a trade union struggle – they were trying to organize production and society in a totally new way. Many insights have been taken from work at that chemical factory and from other similar experiences. Some of the most relevant findings were collected by Giulio Maccacaro, a noted biologist and founder of the Democratic Medicine movement (48). That association still continues to do so much in the fight against toxicity in the workplace and in the information campaign on the environmental impact of harmful production practices.

In the struggles of 1969, questions of worker exploitation went hand in hand with questions about the division of labour and the role that the owners had reserved for technicians. The subject of workers' control (i.e. of what to produce, how to produce, and for whom to produce) demanded a planning capacity in which technicians – the bearers of scientific and organizational knowledge – could play an active role. This collaboration signaled a restructuring of class in the direction of what Marx called the *general intellect*. It is one of the most relevant developments that emerged in that cycle of struggles and it has definitely left a lasting mark. The direct relationship between the working class and the bearers of scientific knowledge, not mediated by common political affiliation, but rather by the common search for a different way to organize production, represented a point of no return. Today, nearly all environmental activist groups have scientists and technicians in their ranks. These professionals can help the general population to deconstruct dominant ideologies which often present themselves under the false guise of scientific neutrality. This development, too, is an achievement of 1969.

The housing issue and the battle of Corso Traiano

Another issue that weighed heavily in determining the radicality of the 1969 struggles, and which was ultimately a unifying factor in helping the movement reach a larger base, was the dramatic situation in which a large proportion of migrant workers lived outside the factory. The most pressing issue was the housing situation. Let's have another look at the emblematic case of Turin.

In 1951, Turin had 719,300 inhabitants and there were a few thousand others living in its suburbs. By 1969, the city's population including the suburbs had reached 1,600,000. With this exponential growth, neighborhoods traditionally inhabited by workers became dangerously

overburdened by an unprecedented proletarian influx. From 1951 to 1969, the population of the Mirafiori South district increased from 18,747 inhabitants to 119,596, and in Santa Rita the change was from 22,936 to 88,563 inhabitants (49).

In this situation, Fiat continued to hire employees seemingly without any concern for the fact that accommodation was lacking, while also ignoring the discriminatory thrust of the "we don't rent to southerners" signs which could be seen throughout the city. Unscrupulous owners would crowd dozens and dozens of people into accommodations which were not designed for such occupancy. The conditions were inhumane; some owners went so far as to rent beds by the hour, with three people sleeping in the same bed depending on their shift at the factory. In this context, those who were "lucky enough to find an apartment" found themselves paying just under half their salary for rent while the others were compelled to sleep in barracks-style accommodations or substandard housing.

*There are five of us in a decrepit room. Just imagine: the plaster on the walls is crumbling because of the humidity – sometimes pieces of it come loose and fall on my head while I sleep! I pay 14 thousand liras a month for a place to sleep and for the use of a gas stove (*l'Unità*, 10 May 1969).*

At the end of the 1960s, the situation had become so dire that even the Italian government was against the construction and opening of a new Fiat plant in the Rivalta area outside of Turin. After the war, Turin had become the city with the third largest concentration of southern Italians in the country, after Naples and Palermo. In order to find the 15,000 workers it needed to operate the Rivalta plant, Fiat had sent its recruiters to various localities around southern Italy. Bringing 15,000 new workers to Turin meant bringing at least 50,000 people to the city if the workers' family members were included in the calculation. Faced with this news, local landlords immediately increased rents by 30% and started evicting those who were unable to pay. By the late spring of 1969, however, the workers' struggles in Turin – at Fiat and elsewhere – had already been going on for some time, and there was considerable resistance. The wave of evictions encountered an organized response which included the formation of committees and trade union intervention.

The situation in a town like Nichelino, on the outskirts of Turin, was emblematic for the general trend: in just a few short years, the town had become a sort of workers' dormitory in the suburbs of Turin, growing from 6724 to 44,368 inhabitants. About 60% of the newcomers were from the South, 23% from the Veneto region, and the remaining 17% from other regions (including Piedmont...).

Most of the migrants were young people between the ages of twenty and forty; there were about 5000 children, but only 380 nursery school spots were available. To make matters worse, there were only 106 elementary school classrooms for 175 classes (the children were obliged to attend classes in shifts, with up to three shifts per day). Out of an active population of 15,000 people, 12,000 were workers. For about 70% of the workers,

renting housing typically cost about a third to half of their wages. For the rest, who had bought housing with a mortgage, about 60% spent half their wages every month addressing those costs.

The tense situation was escalated by a wave of evictions which occurred when several tenants could not pay their rent on time. In response, the inhabitants of some buildings in Via Carducci created a spontaneous committee of tenants and began to protest. Their protests were aided by a group of architecture students who had been carrying out field research on housing issues, studying the lack of services and the effects of urban planning. Those students had already documented a similar situation in the neighbourhood of Corso Taranto in Turin.

On 13 June 1969, at the end of a demonstration against high rents, the participants (workers, students and above all the citizens of Nichelino) entered the local town hall building and occupied it. Dozens of the demonstrators sustained a permanent assembly there which lasted for twelve consecutive days. The participants were determined to maintain their occupation until the Christian Democrat mayor came to the Prefecture and had a meeting together with a delegation of tenants' committees. Essentially, the committees were requesting that extraordinary regulations be put in place which would effectively block rent hikes and evictions. Those demands were reinforced by two big banners hanging on the facade of the town hall, which clearly stated: "General ban on rent hikes", "General ban on evictions".

Three telegrams were sent from the occupied town hall: one for Hanoi, applauding the constitution of the revolutionary government of South Vietnam; one for the Minister of the Interior, who was urged to quickly find a solution to their problem; and one to CGIL with the request to start a radical struggle on the issues of housing and fair rental fees.

Even the moderate *La Gazzetta del Popolo* observed: "Having a job is not enough if you don't have a roof over your head" (50).

In this tense climate, a general strike about the housing question was called for 3 July 1969 in Turin. This time, however, it was not the trade unions that organized the demonstrations. This round of protests were set in motion – not without differences in style and content – by the assembly of student workers who had been meeting for weeks at the doors of the Mirafiori bodyshop, and who signed their flyers with the slogan *the struggle continues* (not to be confused with the political organization *Continuous Struggle* that was later formed). That particular slogan had been coined by Mario Dalmaviva and Vittorio Rieser, who were among the most active in the movement.

The demonstration was convened at entrance 2 of the Mirafiori factory, with several thousand people gathering in the early afternoon. A good number of the demonstrators were Fiat workers who had been protesting during the preceding weeks, regularly ignoring the trade union's orders.

The procession was immediately attacked by the police, but the crowd did not completely disperse. Some of the demonstrators, including many

students, headed toward the Faculty of Architecture in Valentino Park, where they were again attacked by police officers. Meanwhile, other demonstrators regrouped on another street, Corso Traiano, where they were joined by many tenants and workers from Nichelino, who were equally upset about the housing situation.

That afternoon, despite intense repeated attacks by the police, several jeep raids *(51),* and all the strategies that the police had put in place over the years against workers' mobilizations (those tactics had started back in the days of Mario Scelba (52)), the demonstration did not disperse but continued to regroup, again and again, engaging with the police in a sort of urban guerrilla warfare. The unrest lasted until late at night and was characterized by barricades set up with building site material, a car carrier trailer blocking a street, a bus set on fire, and heavy stones. The construction sites in the area also provided a mechanical shovel that was used as a tank by demonstrators.

The police continued to send for reinforcements, and despite the presence of around 4000 officers, they were unable to regain control of the area. In the evening, the number of barricades increased, with about ten set up on the only large road that connects Nichelino with Turin. The clashes lasted until after midnight, until the demonstrators went home, as the vast majority of them had to go to work the next day.

There are several elements of the battle of Corso Traiano which deserve a closer look.

First of all, the conflict was triggered by a brutal and indiscriminate police repression. This violence, which affected otherwise passive bystanders along the way, only served to fuel the revolt.

Secondly, the participation and solidarity of the local residents was incredible. The tenants of the houses in Corso Traiano and the neighboring areas opened their doors to protesters being chased by police in an effort to protect them. Beyond this, many residents actively participated in the clashes, even if it was only for a few moments. For all intents and purposes, once the clashes had started, all the citizens who took to the streets had no doubt which side to take: they were all against the police.

Thirdly, the battle of Corso Traiano contributed greatly towards changing the social climate in the city and in the factories. A liberating fact had been expressed in the revolt: the residents had stood their ground thousands of riot police, and in that moment they discovered that they were not alone in their anger and dissatisfaction. This collective experience produced a climate of happiness and an awareness of strength which was destined to reverberate positively through the community in the following days.

It is not surprising that the police and several right-wing newspapers presented the events in a very different light. In their view, the clashes had been preordained by the demonstrators, who were essentially Maoist revolutionaries from outside Turin. As the *Corriere della Sera* wrote, "it was yet another revolutionary splinter group of an aggressive minority", mainly composed of "Chinese students (...) who had arrived from other

cities" (N.B.: "Chinese" in this context was a pejorative codeword for especially combative Italian workers and students from the movement). The rewriting of history continued in the following days, with some sources claiming that there had been no workers at all at the demonstration, or alternately, that the workers were simply "a small minority, whereas the vast majority of the protesters were Maoist students, the real professionals in the art of protesting, misfits who had just arrived from other parts of the country and who were easily influenced by revolutionary catchphrases" (53).

The final statistics after the clashes were as follows: 200 people detained, 29 arrests, and one hundred police officers wounded. On 5 July, *La Stampa* estimated the value of the damage at several hundred million liras, including a hundred damaged or burned cars, 40 of which were police cars. On the political level, there was a wide range of contradictory comments.

The worker-student assembly said:

In the factories, the time of coercion by bosses, oppression by guards, and trade union swindles is over. There will be no more fear of the police, and no more acceptance of the lies in the newspapers and on the radio. (...) We learned a valuable lesson yesterday: that we can win. Not from one day to the next, that's clear enough, but with a long and continuous struggle.

The PCI, on the contrary, maintained that even though the incident was started by police provocation, it basically "serves only the owners, and the supporters of the current establishment", as Maurizio Ferrara wrote in *l'Unità* on 5 July 1969. Thus, in an article significantly entitled *Le barricate del padrone* (The owner's barricades), published in issue 6 of 1969, the magazine *Unità Operaia* (Workers' Unity) condemned those revolutionaries who "lent their support to the owners", giving rise to clashes in which "they can punch everyone, even the fascists". Adalberto Minucci – who 10 years later was still talking about the "bottom of the barrel" in reference to the new hires at Fiat – wrote an article for the 1 July 1969 edition of *Rinascita* (54), again attacking the groups that had

carried out the most violent anti-union polemic, while searching for a demagogic and ephemeral relationship with the less politicized groups of the working class. In doing so, they played right into the owners' hands.

It seems to me that he really did not understand what actually happened.

The assessment of the Turin PSIUP, the party that had the greatest political project at Mirafiori, goes in a completely different political direction and arrives at this conclusion:

The transformation of Turin into a militarily manned and occupied city, the calculated and savage aggression against the demonstration, (...) the manhunts, the chases in the houses, the beatings, (...) the raids in the bars and courtyards: it was all these factors which provoked the outrage, the reaction, and the response of the population of the Mirafiori area.

The community

We have seen how in 1969, beyond mere wage considerations, egalitarianism meant first of all recognizing oneself as part of a community. For the workers, that meant identifying with the working class community, which was becoming more and more independent, autonomously making its own rules, typically against the interests of the owners. Some of the best examples of such activism were the technicians in Milan, who spoke their mind convincingly, demanding equal increases for all. Egalitarianism meant making rules for oneself which neutralized the owners' attempts to divide the workers. One of the most famous songs of the American workers' movement is entitled *Which side are you on?* For many people, 1969 was first and foremost a learning process – they first needed to recognize what "our side" meant before they could start organizing it. And in the beginning, they discovered that their side was shattered, divided and dominated by hegemonial power relationships vis-à-vis the owners.

I would now like to share two testimonies. They are very different from each other, but they speak of the same theme. The first one is from a mechanic at the Mirafiori factory, where the workers did not work on a production line but rather on individual machines.

Sometimes it was discovered that one of the operators on our team had not participated in the struggle. This sometimes happened with particularly tough workers who did not have clear ideas about the objectives, or with people who had a "strikebreaker mentality", i.e. who did not show solidarity with us. Shift stops were then made, and the bosses were forced to ask these workers to do as they wished, but they were made to understand that there was no pressure on them to work. The bosses understood that they were paying a lot more for only some workers to work while the others went on strike. Of course, they couldn't say "go on strike" because of their role, so instead they would simply say "we won't force you to work". It was an elegant way of saying "probably because of you, we'll now have another three hours of interruption". The bosses would say this because they understood the willingness of the vast majority of workers not only to strike, but to discuss with these other workers who did not strike, thus actively supporting the collective struggle and working for common goals (55).

In this case, we see a very refined use of the factory hierarchy by the workers, who understood that Fiat could not afford to lose hours of work. Great efforts were made in order to solidarize the community, ensuring that the strike was carried out by everyone, so that no clever differences could be introduced between those who were losing money and those who were not.

Luciano Parlanti's testimony tells us about the situation in the bodywork department. The clash was very intense in that department, partly because it had started from a more backward situation of bestial exploitation.

The internal marches were essential, they were the fundamental form of protest during those struggles. Without the marches, the strike would never have succeeded. (...) There were only a few of us on the first marches.

People had come together because they knew the leaders, but there weren't many of us. One of the first times, a worker from the seating division joined us with some ropes in his hand. As the march passed through the various departments, we used the ropes to pull in the workers who were standing near the entrances, even if their bosses were standing close by. We would pass behind them, grab them with the ropes, and thrust them into the middle of the procession. One of the bosses was caught in there, too, but he managed to run away. The workers stayed, however, and when they got to the next department, they were the ones using the ropes to get other workers to join. It's clear why they were initially hesitant to join: there was still a lot of lingering fear from past experiences. But as soon as they left their department, as soon as they were liberated from the control of their boss, they were transformed from rabbits into lions, the change was remarkable (56).

During an internal march, everyone is forced to strike, and even those who are afraid of the owner feel entitled to do so. If a worker is on a march, and arrives in a workshop other than his own, where no one knows him, it might be that worker who shouts the loudest. This type of struggle goes beyond legitimate individual conviction and introduces a broader organizational element, in which the worker collective is more important than the individual – it is the only effective way to neutralize the domination exercised by the owners.

In building up the workers' sense of community and solidarity, the conflict with strikebreakers was a very important part of the workers' struggle and of 1969 in particular. At Mirafiori, the storming of an office building to remove the antagonistic strikebreakers – and making those strikebreakers walk in shame between two columns of workers who were shouting insults at them – was a significant moment in the construction of a collective working-class identity. It is no coincidence that one of the most beautiful songs of the workers' movement uses this topic as its central subject. I am referring to *O cara moglie* (O dear wife), written by our late friend Ivan della Mea, which is a compelling story about the formation of working-class consciousness.

The construction of a collective workers' identity begins by disputing the internal divisions which have been introduced over the years by the owners. Those divisions must be broken down in order to neutralize the owners' dominance. Once that happens, it is finally possible for the workers to express their own individuality. It must be remembered that a workers' collective is not just a political entity; on the contrary, there are very strong human emotions present within it as well. This was visible particularly in the situation in Turin, which was so deeply marked by the despotism of the owners. Under those conditions, with so many migrant workers from southern Italy, the theme of alienation was very strong.

There was a great loneliness in the city. Dino Antonioni describes the situation:

I didn't know anyone, and I didn't have any friends. I was worse off than the migrants from the South who at least had a group of countrymen to belong to. I had no one except my family. From the age of 15 to 20, I was constantly alone; I did nothing but work and stay at home. At most I would go to the cinema on Sundays, but even then I was alone. Those Sundays were terrible, they never ended – all day long doing nothing or going to the cinema alone, it was so depressing (57).

Angelo Papaleo arrived in Turin in January. Prior to that, he had been used to living "in a place where there was always sunshine". Because of the cold, it now seemed as if he had arrived in a world where it was impossible to chat with friends in the street, and the foggy bar windows imbued him with "a sense of incredible anguish".

Here is another example, this time from Silvio Biosa, a migrant worker from Sardinia:

One time I got lost and I couldn't find my way home. There was a heavy fog in the air; I had never seen fog like that before. I got off at the wrong stop and found myself at the end of the line, far from Borgo San Paolo where I was staying. I cried for a whole night in despair, asking myself "where do I live, what am I going to do?" (58).

But the loneliness was not only in the city, it was also in the factory:

Among the workers there was no solidarity. On the contrary: when you got fined for an infraction, the others would smile and laugh at you. The workers would even steal each other's baracchino *(59) (60).*

This situation was drastically changed by the workers' struggle.

The relationship among the young people changed; there was suddenly more unity and more discussion among the workers. A whole series of obstacles, even firmly entrenched stereotypes, were disappearing. Mutual understanding improved as different cultures increasingly began to mix at the workplace. If a Piedmontese person called another worker a "southerner", it was no longer a sign of disrespect emanating from a lack of knowledge about the person standing in front of them. The workers were still using these words, of course, but it was now being done with a smile on their lips, as if in jest. Indeed, there was a sort of transformation within the teams as mutual appreciation emerged and a sense of unity was created among the men. There was also a solidarization which took place among the workers with respect to their common objectives. This of course had negative implications for the company; many of the bosses were taken totally by surprise and could only sit back and take note of this new reality. As a growing number of workers asserted themselves, the bosses were no longer able to carry out their work so calmly as they had in the past ... (61).

I remember that a few of us had been singing before, but this time we all sang together. Revolutionary songs were sung; we sang a whole series of songs that we had also used during the marches. Not everybody had grown up with those songs – our cultural backgrounds were often different – but little by little, we learned the words and the melodies ... (...) We sang them

all together; it was another element of solidarity that existed among us, and it was a beautiful thing to witness, because there was nothing the bosses could do to stop us. On the contrary, the bosses always tried to leave when it happened (...) (62).

Moments like this are worth mentioning because, as Bruno Canu points out, *personal relationships are one of the things which make up the fabric of a social class. There are relationships between workers in general, and also those between delegates and their team. The need for friendship is widespread, it's something that goes beyond class solidarity (63).*

And as Silvio Biosa reveals:

My sense of class affiliation had changed. I was no longer just the son of a well-to-do farmer in Sardinia, nor a former petty officer in the army, nor a student: I had become a proletarian (64).

Prior to 1969, the factory was a prison-like universe in which the bosses, in order to strengthen despotic mechanisms and the hierarchical structure, exploited the differences between workers to reduce them to passive and incommunicative cogs in the machinery. During the struggle against the owners, the factory itself became a space of lively social encounters, where people could meet and build a community of solidarity with other workers.

The construction of class unity

This reflection on community allows us to take a look at class consciousness as it was constructed in 1969.

"Agnelli l'Indocina ce l'hai nell'officina", is one of the slogans that were shouted during the marches inside Fiat. In general, the radical class struggle of 1969 lent itself to identification with groups who were struggling against imperialism, starting with the Vietnamese. This identification could be seen as an element of self-consciousness among the workers, or by turning it around a bit, the reference to other groups could be seen as an act of denigration by the employers, for example when the workers were called "Chinese" in the fight against Pirelli in 1968. At first glance, these elements might suggest that the class struggle in 1969 started out as a general class struggle, following a fairly clear progression: the workers developed a certain class consciousness, they consolidated the working class on a national level, and then immediately became international and even internationalist.

I think that this mythical narrative of the working class – a storyline in which the working class is presented as a type of homogeneous block, based on the idea of the mass worker, who is also straightforward and simple like the assembly line – has little to do with the concrete processes which determined class consciousness and the workers' struggle.

It seems to me that the development of class consciousness did not take place on a primarily theoretical level. Rather, class consciousness has frequently been determined by specific events, and has been imbued with concrete elements.

Let us consider for a moment the protest strikes at Avola and Battipaglia. For hundreds of thousands of southern workers transferred to the North, how important was it to identify with those slain labourers? How important was the concrete mechanism of rebellion, which helped the workers – more than any abstract concept of class – to face the concreteness of bestial exploitation, to respond to the arrogance of the boss, or to safeguard themselves by reducing physical fatigue? Why was it so important for the workers to build the communities that were discussed earlier in this chapter? What was the value of being recognized as an individual – and as a human being with feelings – on a team, or on a shift at work?

It is difficult for an outsider to understand all this, but let's take a closer look at the situation at Mirafiori. Of course, the workers were Italian and perhaps even internationalists, but then they also had the pride of being Fiat workers, the workers who took up the toughest fight against the biggest boss. Remember that they were from Mirafiori, the centre of the Fiat empire. And then remember that there were internal subdivisions: the workers identified as being from the bodywork department, or as part of the mechanics department, or as operators of the large presses. Even here, the identification was strong and there was a desire to show that their part of the factory was the most combative. A person could also identify as being from the paint shop, or as a worker on the assembly line. At a certain point, however, you always arrive at the level of the teams within any department.

And here you have it: the team is quite homogeneous in nature, a group of several people all living in the same condition – it is the real core of this working class. If the community inside this group cultivates egalitarian and supportive relationships, its nucleus will be an example of combativeness and of class consciousness. And more to the point: if the team is managed by a boss who tries to pit them against each other, those workers will be the driving force behind the movement. In this case, the construction of a working class is a construction of workers' communities that recognize each other, that identify with each other, but that do not cancel each other out.

Similarly, class consciousness – not only in trade union terms but politically as well – was not an abstract concept which came from above. Rather, class consciousness is something which developed on the ground, in the midst of a rebellion against concrete individual and team exploitation. Eventually, the rebellion turned against the owner, then against all owners, and finally against the system itself. In order to arrive at a general, universal vision, you must first tear down the many layers of domination that envelop your specific situation. It does not work the other way around.

The working class that was formed in 1969 was not a sum total of atomized individuals, nor was it a crowd of indistinct people. It was a community, full of relationships and sub-groups, in which the density of social relations constituted the fundamental element of the community's ability to maintain itself. If you invited the boss to your son's communion, you were

considered a strikebreaker. If you invited a workers' delegate, you were a comrade.
This relationship between the specific and the general, between the struggle against concrete exploitation and the general struggle, between the struggle for personal freedom and the struggle for class liberation, must be given a lot of consideration. If those dynamics are not properly understood, we run the risk of reducing 1969 to a mythical and mystical event that never really existed, and we will never be able to fully grasp – in concrete terms – how 1969 could have ever taken place.

Delegates, councils, assemblies

The fundamental components in this construction of community and class are all concentrated in the figure of the delegate, in the workers' assemblies and in the struggles within the workplace. These are three founding elements of a class structure in which the exercise of radical democracy coincides with the construction of power relations, i.e. with "worker power". They are not places of "powerless" discussion, but rather places of discussion, decision making, organization and the modification of reality, in which the construction of the workers' will and the manifestation of those wishes coincide. It is a basic democratic structure, and the movement is based on three pillars. The delegates are the connection point to the larger group of workers, the fundamental choices are discussed and validated by the assemblies, and the broader participation of all workers in the class struggle is an expression of their solidarity and strength.
We could say that these are the three "institutions" that were produced by the movement in 1969. They guaranteed not only the strength of the movement but also its continuity over time.
Until 1969, there was an enormous hierarchical apparatus in the factory which had been set up by the owners to manage the workforce. At Fiat, for every 12-13 workers who were working in production, there was a boss who had the task of managing those workers, and to make them produce at the maximum level without protest. It was the boss's duty to prevent the emergence of a subjectivity among the workers which was autonomous from the will of the factory owners. The power structure was of the military type; in other words, it was similar in nature to hierarchies found in the mafia: absolute power made it possible to punish workers for no apparent reason, just as it was possible to arbitrarily grant small favours.
After 1969, as the autonomous working class community began to take shape, it started to demonstrate its opposition to the owners and against the factory hierarchy. The workers' community was not only a handful of fighters dedicated to the struggle; rather, it was an institution of solidarity, with the aim of protecting and improving human lives. It built pleasant relationships between humans who refused to be subjected to the despotic domination of the hierarchy.
Within that community, the assembly in the factory was the official "public" meeting structure, where solemn decisions were discussed and

then officially made. The assembly was the *polis*, the constituent moment when the members gathered, representing the will of the class and its expression. Ideally, the gatherings took place without watchmen eavesdropping on behalf of the factory bosses...

The delegates, on the other hand, were the boss's alter ego – they had to ensure that the workers were not cheated and that the company respected its commitments. Here, the principle of class organization was structured in a manner exactly contrary to the hierarchical apparatus typically used by the bosses. The delegate was also the person who had to deal with general matters through the Works Council and who – among their other duties – looked after their team to ensure that it was solidarized and combative. Being able to have delegates marked a very important milestone, because for the first time in many years, the social fabric of the factory was not left entirely in the hands of the factory hierarchy, with choices being made and situations being manipulated at the sole discretion of the bosses. Instead, with delegates, the social fabric was created directly, in an autonomous and antagonistic form, by the workers themselves. As we have seen, constructing that social fabric was a difficult enterprise, a balancing act between conflict and solidarity. Often, the ability of a delegate to oppose the factory hierarchy and to solidarize the workers' group played a decisive role. Not all the delegates had the same wisdom and preparation; being a delegate was a challenging and multi-faceted job which demanded skillful interaction with the workers on many levels. The following account given by Liberato Norcia, a union delegate of the Mirafiori CUB, is revealing.

I had trustworthy relationships with the workers, and I used aggregation strategies. When I introduced myself, I would say: we must strike. And they didn't dare to say no to me, because I intertwined both political and personal relations with them. We were friends with each other; I knew everything about them, I knew them personally one by one. Having that relationship of trust, I knew about the problems they faced at the workplace, but also within their families. They would confess to me all the problems they had, they would ask me for advice, and when conflicts arose between them, I was able to calm them down, because I understood the different types of problems they were facing. I was present everywhere. The team became stronger on the basis of this approach (65).

Delegates and councils were able to create positive developments even outside the workplace. Already in the 1970s, from the starting point of those "social factories", a movement was born that, in turn, created its own institutions which pushed the workers' movement forward. At a certain point, it was not only the technicians who were engaging in dialogue with the workers on how to overcome toxicity at the workplace, how to change the factory, or how to improve society. New committees and newspapers were starting up in many areas, in the local neighbourhoods, and in the villages. Associations of doctors, lawyers and magistrates were also formed, the members of which – in defining themselves as "democrats" – put their professionalism and their civil passion at the service of the

movement free of charge. Their contribution toward social transformation helped the workers to make further gains.
The workers' delegates and the Works Council were thus fundamental elements in the cycle of struggles which began in 1969, as they were the guarantors of the movement's unitary character. The lack of understanding of this fact is, perhaps, the principal error of certain groups like *Lotta continua* and *Potere operaio* which have generally opposed the figure of the delegate and, in fact, have proposed that the organization of the workers should be carried out by a sort of external vanguard. These political choices undoubtedly weighed negatively on the prospect of transforming the 1968-1969 movement into a united mass political movement. The alternative to a united front is a movement which simply becomes a collection of loosely associated groups; such a movement typically has very limited political influence when compared to its actual potential.

Spontaneity, organization, and the role of the trade union

In the reconstructions of 1969, there has been much discussion about whether it was a spontaneous occurrence or a planned event. Many opinions exist about the role that the different political and trade union organizations had at that time. My impression is that everyone tends to advance their own cause, finding merit in their own opinion. Any analysis is inevitably distorted by the fact that whoever is writing now does not necessarily represent the perspectives of those who had the most influence in the dynamics of that time. Obviously, it is normal that historical events – and particularly events of the recent past – are remembered and interpreted differently according to various underlying political preferences. The case of 1969 is astonishing, however, because sometimes the different reconstructions do not seem to have anything in common; indeed, it seems as if the reader is presented with historical accounts from totally different eras. Emblematic in this regard are the books *Autunno caldo: il secondo biennio rosso* by Bruno Trentin and *L'orda d'oro* by Balestrini and Moroni. In my opinion, stories which look at events through the prism of personal experience paint an overly subjective picture of historical events. Such an approach is of course useful to please the respective "sympathizers", but in the end it does little to help most people understand the actual dynamics of what happened. It seems quite evident to me that such a broad and varied series of struggles like the ones witnessed in 1969 cannot be properly understood if we read about them through the perspective of any single organization, or through any single participant's own personal biography.
Without wanting to make impossible summaries, I believe that three elements came together in 1969 that went far beyond the individual political leaders and trade union representatives.
Firstly, the working conditions and social conditions had become unbearable in a context where it was clear that change was possible – and indeed, everyone could see that the changes were already underway. If the students were rebelling, and if a man had flown to the moon in July 1969,

why did workers still have to slave away in a factory, working under beastly conditions, earning merely a starvation wage, while living in squalid accommodations? The real ongoing changes in the world at that time were a powerful factor; witnessing those events allowed people to believe that a transformation of their own reality was equally possible. What came to the fore in 1969 was the unendurability of class exploitation in its most elementary traits.

Secondly, there was the willingness of young people to engage in active protests. In particular, those who had just started working in the factory were quicker to join the struggle. The revolt of 1969 was many things, but it was certainly not the revolt of those who had already been in the factory for thirty years. Indeed, workers who had been in the factory for a long time – the case of Fiat is emblematic – had often made the unbearability of the working conditions into the shell of their own identity. For them, the terrible working conditions seemed like an unchangeable fact of life. By contrast, those who had entered the factory more recently did not accept such inhumane treatment so easily. This was true for the young peers of those who had already struggled in 1968, but also for the new members of the working class which had not yet been "socialized" in Fordist working conditions. As Luciano Parlanti tells us: "It was the southerners with their blunt manners that broke the discipline". We should be forever grateful to them for that!

Thirdly, there were a number of militant politicians and trade union members involved in the movement. While it is true that they were all rather different from one another, they were nonetheless recognized by the workers. These individuals were able to act as a detonator, to set certain events in motion, and were subsequently able to give political direction to the struggles. Among their ranks were noted trade unionists from both CGIL and CISL, political militants of historical leftist organizations like the PCI and the PSIUP, and militants of various other groups and collectives. There were also southern workers who had seen the concrete organization of the labourers, the workers' leagues and the *reverse strikes* (66) in the South, and who had personally seen some particularly courageous leaders in action. They were the sons of partisans who in their youth had heard the stories a hundred times about how dignity, organization, and decisive action had been relevant in defeating a strong and determined enemy. Some of them were also young catholics who had grown up in a general climate of *conciliarism* (67), and who had perhaps learned about the value of nonviolent protests by reading certain works of *Don Milani* (68). The forms of action of these grassroots political militants – formally or informally organized – were many, and those actions were capable of nurturing the potential for sustained revolt. It was this group of militants which formed the backbone of the Works Councils' trade union.

Starting from the moment when these three basic elements came together, the situation became somewhat more complex and certain differences started to emerge among the various class struggles. In some situations,

only the trade union was present, as we shall soon see in the cases of Zoppas and Marzotto di Valdagno. In others, there were several organizations in competition with each other, even if they were not in open confrontation. This was the case in Marghera, in a good part of the struggles at Fiat and – in other forms – at Pirelli. Then there were situations, particularly following the defeats of the 1950s, in which the weakness of the trade union was so accentuated that the union practically did not exist. This was the case of the bodywork department at Mirafiori, where the union had no members, and at the Mirafiori factory more generally, where the Internal Commission only had 18 organizers for 50,000 workers. To me, it seems necessary to underline the fact that those different situations had similar dynamics, and that the general trend in the cycle of struggles was more important than the presence of any single organization within it.

This does not mean that discussions of political positions within the movement were irrelevant. At the time, there were those who thought of replacing the trade union completely, and those who wanted to keep the union just as it was. In general, it seems to me that during 1969 both of those political alternatives were shown to be untenable. Terrible mistakes such as the "no delegates" proposal, or the idea that there was no need for negotiation because everything was based on the balance of power, or the re-proposal of an external vanguard composed of small groups approved by the party line – all of these poor policy ideas paved the way for a trade union which eventually decided to make internal reform its central priority. To a large extent, and especially in the case of the metalworkers, the union had the ability to change while remaining unified and democratic. It was able to enhance the role of workers' delegates by transforming them into trade union delegates. The union also listened to the workers' ideas and maintained existing workers' cadres. In short, it was ready to change as the movement developed. In the spring of 1969, the trade union had been following the workers' movement, and had sometimes even been opposed to it on certain points, but things changed in autumn that year. Starting in the autumn of 1969, the trade union almost always "rode the tiger" (i.e. took aggressive positions in contract negotiations in order to achieve the workers' demands) and was positively modified in the process. This is the real difference between Italian trade unions and most other European trade unions, which have not always been able to connect with the mass movements in their base and adapt by engaging in a process of internal renewal.

The revolution in the West: the lack of conciliarism

Does this mean that everything went well, and that the revolutionary movement of 1969 subsequently reached its full potential in terms of political and social change?

Not by a long shot. It is true that 1969 was an enormously important event which produced positive results on the trade union level; those events changed the face of the country and produced a large proletarian ruling

class, the likes of which had never been seen in the history of Italy. But the fact remains that the movement certainly did not achieve all that it could on the political level, nor in terms of social transformation. The balance of power shifted in the factories, and there have been some changes in the power relations of society in general, but the gains have all been minimal with respect to the potential which existed at the outset.

The workers' community has become a full-fledged social class, but it has not developed into a revolutionary entity capable of leading a more general, large-scale social transformation. Thus, the workers' presence has remained powerful in the factory, but their role has somehow come to a standstill in society, diminished in the midst of inflation, "historic compromises", sacrifices, and waves of terrorism. The owners waited patiently until the end of the 1970s, when the workers' isolation from society became apparent, to start taking their revenge.

The year 1969 was an enormous event, a watershed year which defined an era, perhaps the most important and decisive year in the history of the Italian Republic. Despite this, it was still not able to trigger a revolutionary process in Italy, even though the power relations were sufficiently in place at the time to rationally conceive of such a change.

We are not talking about a revolutionary process in the sense of "storming the Winter Palace in Petrograd". In this case, we must rather imagine a revolutionary process in the sense indicated by Gramsci when he spoke of revolution in the West: social transformation, the accumulation of power, the construction of *casemates (69)* on all levels until a paradigm shift, a real transition, is possible.

The social activism of the 1970s was stifled by terrorist activities and by the struggle for national unity (70) in Italy. Obviously, I have my own political opinions on those years: I was against all proposals that claimed to make progress in the interests of the working class, but which never emanated from the working class itself. Those proposals have devastated the working class; they included everything from the so-called "historic compromise" (71) to armed struggle. But that is not what I would like to focus on here. Quite honestly, at the point when people found themselves having to choose sides between different political proposals, the movement had already been defeated.

I personally believe that the real game was played out during 1969, and that it was primarily about the relationship between worker subjectivity and political organization. As we have seen, political organizations – including the majority of those on the left – were constituted as separate political structures, as self-proclaimed avant-gardes. It has not been possible to build a united, mass political movement on that basis because the only common denominator among those political organizations has been the trade union. Obviously, the establishment of the Works Councils' trade union, the questioning of the division of labour between political parties and the union, and the ability of the trade union to play a political role have all been

very positive steps forward. Those steps were achieved with great dynamism, but they did not solve the basic problem.

In the great cycle of struggles in '68-69, several splinter groups and organizations – I will not discuss them here – were created on the political level. What was missing was a unified political movement capable of bringing together all the positive elements, the questions and the expectations which emerged from those struggles. Starting from '68-69, on the political level, many of the newly created organizations were in competition with each other, each convinced of having the correct political approach. This was a formidable impediment to the construction of a unified political entity which could express the radicality of that cycle of struggles.

Evidently, a unified political entity could not be created in the same way as the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had been created following the "Red Biennium" of 1919-1920 (72). In 1969, there was no revolutionary Russia that could recognize one of the communist parties as the "correct" or "authentic" one. The only way it would have been possible to construct a unified political entity – giving expression to that cycle of struggles – would have been to base it on the characteristics that had made the struggles possible in the first place. For this reason, it seems to me that the construction of a unified socio-political-cultural entity, based on factory delegates, workers' councils, and the experiences of the social struggles, could have been the keystone on which to build a unified political movement. A council-based movement like that would have been able to gather the necessary strength and intelligence in order to design and advance better alternatives for society as a whole.

The proposal of electing workers' delegates and factory Works Councils as the basis on which to organize a mass political movement – while preventing the delegates and councils from being sucked into a purely trade union mindset – was, in my opinion, the most astute idea on how to give a positive political outlet to that cycle of struggles. That proposal, which was put forward and practiced by the Turin PSIUP at Fiat during '68-69, had made significant headway during the struggles. It represented a very relevant trend among the elected delegates at Fiat and had quite a bit in common with the proposition made by the CUB. Unfortunately, the proposal had already failed by the end of 1969. Interestingly, it had not been defeated by the factory bosses. Simply, the discussion within the union left and PSIUP had broken down and left the workers in Turin totally isolated. A second blow was delivered to the federation of Turin PSIUP when comrade Pino Ferraris, who was the decisive figure in that situation, left for Rome.

It seems to me that the fundamental error in that missed opportunity was one of incomprehension. The leading groups within the movement simply did not fully understand the political and trade union role (and other roles) that the delegates' movement could have played in the construction of a mass political movement.

The construction of a unified movement also calls for a certain degree of political unity. Achieving that unity is only possible in a council-based

system. But consider what happened instead: the majority of the political avant-gardes that emerged in 1968 were imbued with the idea of traditional political organization. These groups created various parties, newspapers and leagues, all in competition with each other, trying to establish the "real" political party of the revolution. Thus, on the political level, the possibility of founding a unified council movement with great potential to take a leading role in society was held back. Such a unified movement could have represented a positive alternative to the crisis of representative democracy, and it could have "grounded" the revolutionary movement, bringing it a step closer to the realities experienced by its base. Useless divisions within the movement could have been avoided, along with subjectivist delusions which would eventually lead to terrorism and the substitution of the working class with "the armed vanguard".

In spite of the fact that the movement was never fully developed at the political level, the actions of the delegates and the Works Councils at the trade union level nonetheless gave rise to very important processes. Mass organizations were formed in the factories and elsewhere. Social knowledge was collected and put to use in social struggles. Taken together, the events of 1969 were the closest thing that one could imagine to the creation of the "casemates" Gramsci was talking about: it was a cycle of struggles that alluded to the theme of revolution in the West.

It is a known fact that those struggles were eventually defeated. Today, the situation for workers is much more similar to the one prior to 1969 than to the situation of the 1970s. In the name of modernity, the world has gone back to archaic social relations characterized by low wages, exploitation, toxicity, and ignoble hierarchical relationships. That it took the owners more than a decade to reverse the workers' gains is equally clear. The defeat was not due to the fact that globalization had reduced the number of workers in the West. Similarly, the class struggles were not defeated because the group that had produced them – the working class – was missing. The defeat was caused by the inability to build a political outlet consistent with the strength and radicality of that cycle of struggles.

The events of 1969 terrified the Italian ruling classes. This can easily be seen in the care that they dedicate, after having defeated the movement, to erasing its memory as well. The seventies – years of freedom, joy and mass activism – are today catalogued as the horrible *"Years of Lead"* (73). It is said that, in times of war, the end justifies the means. In our case, the ruling classes inundate us with shameful "mainstream" information. Their objective is simple: every trace must disappear of those workers whose actions once shook the world. No one should ever again have the idea that, if such events were once possible, they might be possible again.

1. Wage cages (*gabbie salariali*): Italy was divided into 7 different wage levels that corresponded to different areas of the country, resulting in unfair wage inequality for the workers.

2. CGIL: *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, Italian General Confederation of Labour. The main Italian trade union organization, at the time socialist-communist.
3. CISL: *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori,* Italian Confederation of Trade Unions.
4. UIL: *Unione Italiana del Lavoro*, Italian Labour Union. A social-democratic trade union organization.
5. Vittorio Foa in Cesco Chinello, *Il sessantotto operaio e studentesco a Porto Marghera*, in CSEL, annual 2/1988*,* 205.
6. FIM: *Federazione Italiana dei Metalmeccanici*, Italian Metalworkers' Federation. A metalworkers' union affiliated with CISL.
7. UILM: *Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici*, Italian metalworkers' union affiliated with UIL.
8. SIDA: *Sindacato Italiano dell'Auto*, Italian Automobile Trade Union. A pro-owner trade union founded at Fiat from a moderate split of FIM-CISL.
9. Confindustria: *Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana*, General Confederation of Italian Industry.
10. INTERSIND: Trade Union Association of Italian Public Ownership.
11. PSIUP: Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity. A party created from a left-wing split of the PSI (Italian Socialist Party).
12. Vittorio Foa, *Per una storia del Movimento Operaio* (Turin: Einaudi,1980), 135.
13. «Il Giorno», April 10, 1969.
14. P. Longo, *Tumulti a Battipaglia*, in «Il Giorno», April 11, 1969.
15. Pino Ferraris, in http://www.communianet.org/delegati-operai-e-democrazia-diretta-fiat-nel-69-un-inedito-del-luglio-del-1969
16. Bruno Canu in *1969/1977 Lotte operaie a Torino. L'esperienza dei Cub, Comitati unitari di base* (Milan: Edizioni Punto Rosso, 2009), 50.
17. Basic Unitary Committees (CUBs) arose in many factories and offices during the struggles of the late 1960s. Of these, the committee at Pirelli played a particularly important role. Working within a large Milanese company, the Pirelli CUB – which was made up of workers, clerks and students – was in a unique position to lead the workers' struggles, acting as a sort of avant-garde for the movement at the national level.
18. Avant-garde Workers (*Avanguardia operaia*): organization of the extra-parliamentary left, founded in 1968.
19. Continuous Struggle (*Lotta continua*): organization of the extra-parliamentary left, founded in 1969.
20. "Agnelli, you have Indochina in your workshop" *("Agnelli, l'Indocina ce l'hai nell'officina")* was a slogan signifying that the workers' struggle against Fiat was in some ways similar to the Vietnamese people's struggle against the USA. Gianni Agnelli was the president of Fiat at the time.
21. Gabriele Polo, *I Tamburi di Mirafiori* (Turin: Cric editore, 1989), 66.
22. During the second half of the 1800s, particularly in southern Italy, there were various peasant uprisings. These revolts typically took place when new taxes were announced, and they frequently took the form of an assault on the local town hall, leading on many occasions to the building's destruction – by fire or otherwise.
23. Jacquerie: a type of anti-feudal peasant revolt, characteristic of the Late Middle Ages in France. The term generally refers to a predominantly spontaneous revolt of short duration.

24. Polo, *I Tamburi*, 125.
25. P.R. of Cuneo, born in 1943, 15 years of Fiat – quoted in Marco Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat*, 34.
26. Marco Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat* (Milan: Garzanti, 1989), 33.
27. Salvatore R., born in 1937, from Sasso di Castalda. In Marco Revelli, 34.
28. Polo, *I Tamburi*, 204.
29. Luciano Parlanti, interview edited by Roberto Buttafarro and Marco Revelli published with the title *Da Valletta a Piazza Statuto*, in «Primo maggio», 9/10, winter 1977-78.
30. Polo, *I Tamburi*, 134.
31. Polo, *I Tamburi*, 44-45.
32. B. Canu, in *1969/1977 – Lotte operaie*, 38.
33. Bianca Guidetti Serra, *Le schedature Fiat* (Turin: Rosemberg e Sellier, 1984), 35.
34. Testimony collected by «l'Unità», May 10, 1969.
35. Franco Alasia and Danilo Montaldi, *Milano, Corea. Inchiesta sugli immigrati negli anni del «miracolo»* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010).
36. The document on self-reduction of workloads can be found in *Lotte alla Fiat. Documenti*, in «Classe», 2 (Bari: Dedalo, 1970), 221-223.
37. Workers' power (*Potere operaio*): political organization of the extra-parliamentary left, founded in 1967.
38. Metalworkers were divided into contractual categories in which different pay levels corresponded with the various levels of professional expertise. That was on paper, but the reality in a large Fordist factory often looked a lot different. Given that most factory activities were categorized as unskilled work, it was nearly impossible to acquire any further professional qualifications, even after several long years on the job. As a result, metalworkers who started in the third category (a low category) when they were hired typically remained in that category for their entire careers. Faced with this situation, workers began demanding a promotion to a higher category – the second – which would happen automatically after a certain number of years of work. This was a way of increasing wages and of recognizing a certain level of work experience in the factory.
39. Aldo Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 64.
40. FIOM: *Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*, Federation of Metalworkers' Employees. A metalworkers' union affiliated with CGIL.
41. Maurizio Lichtner (edited by), *L'organizzazione del lavoro in Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1975), 254.
42. Superminimum (*superminimo)*: Individual salary level of a worker, higher than the minimum required by collective labour agreements. These pay levels were often used as a tool to divide the workers.
43. Masterpiece test (*capolavoro)*: a metalworkers' skill test that certified technical ability and enabled workers to pass from the third to the second wage category. With a much more difficult test, it was also possible to pass from the second wage category to the first. In the case of the mechanical fixers, who were the most professional workers in the metalworking industry, the masterpiece test to pass into the second wage category consisted in using a file to create a perfectly symmetrical interlocking cross from two pieces of raw iron. To move up to the first wage category, the masterpiece test consisted in drilling perpendicularly into a metal cylinder which was 15 centimetres high

and 7 centimetres in diameter, in order to obtain a rectangular hole. The corresponding rectangular piece – to be inserted in the hole – also needed to be created from a piece of raw iron. When that piece was inserted, it had to slide in perfectly in order to pass the test. In both cases, in addition to the perfect functioning of the joints, the tolerances were a few hundredths of a millimetre and in any case below a tenth of a millimetre.

44. Fordist *(Fordista)*: refers to a type of standardized mass production using special purpose machinery and unskilled labor.
45. In this text, I use the word "technicians" to refer to a broad class of individuals, usually office workers or otherwise specialized workers with higher education, but sometimes also scientists and other professionals, who helped the workers in their class struggle. This group is not so easily defined, however, because not all technicians supported the workers – a lot depended on where they were employed.
46. First of all, the vast majority of workers at Fiat were unskilled workers, and they were therefore not in this category. A small group of skilled workers at Fiat such as maintenance workers or workshop specialists, who had sometimes attended technical school, would often participate in the strikes. By contrast, the high-level technicians at Fiat (engineering graduates who worked in offices) were on the side of the factory hierarchy.
47. In other companies, and especially at the large Milanese companies, the situation was very different. At Philips in Milan, for example, nearly all of the employees were university-educated engineers (e.g. Franco Calamida) who supported the protests in large numbers. In other companies where the majority of employees were skilled workers (i.e. technicians, not university graduates), the struggles also found a solid base of support. In practice, an electrical engineer at Philips could be a militant left-wing trade union delegate, fully supporting the class struggle, while at Fiat an electrical engineer would certainly not be a member of the union, would never strike, and would firmly identify with the company hierarchy, not with the "lower class" workers on the assembly lines.
48. F. Calamida, in *1969/2009. A quarant'anni dall'autunno caldo* (Milan: Punto rosso, 2009), 14.
49. A. Cova and L. Mara, *La formazione e la cultura: la fabbrica, la scuola, il quartiere*, in «Quaderno di Agape» 5 (Prali: Agape, 1980), 6.
50. Giulio Maccacaro was a noted biologist and founder of *Medicina Democratica*, the Democratic Medicine movement. A movement which participates in class struggle, Democratic Medicine is still active today and publishes its own magazine.
51. Diego Giachetti, *La rivolta di Corso Traiano – Torino 3 luglio 1969* (Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini, 2019), 56.
52. http://piazzadivittorio.it/index.php/2017/07/10/lautunno-caldo-1969-e-partito-da-nichelino/
53. Jeep raids: Italians use the phrase *caroselli dei gipponi* ("jeep carousels") to describe police raids in which police jeeps would quickly zigzag through the streets and sidewalks in order to disperse a demonstration.
54. Mario Scelba was a Christian Democrat politician and Italian Minister of the Interior from 2 February 1947 to 7 July 1953. He was the initiator and driving force behind very harsh anti-worker and anti-communist repressions by the police. Scelba had re-organized the Italian police after the war, creating heavily armed riot squads (the *reparto celere*) which used jeeps to intimidate

demonstrators and maintain public order.

55. Diego Giachetti, *La rivolta*, 95.
56. Rebirth (*Rinascita*): weekly magazine of the Italian Communist Party, founded by Palmiro Togliatti.
57. I. Oddone, A. Re, G. Briante, *Esperienza operaia, coscienza di classe e psicologia del lavoro* (Turin: Einaudi,1977), 120.
58. Polo, *I Tamburi*, 63.
59. D. Antonioni, *1969–1977 – Lotte operaie*, 39.
60. S. Biosa, *1969-1977 – Lotte operaie*, 39.
61. *Baracchino*: a steel container in which food was stored for mealtimes, and which was heated in the factory in special tanks with hot water. It was composed of two sections, for the first and second course. It was obviously prepared in advance at home.
62. Polo, *I tamburi*, 45.
63. I. Oddone, A. Re, G. Briante, *Esperienza operaia*, 121.
64. I. Oddone, A. Re, G. Briante, *Esperienza operaia*, 124.
65. B. Canu in *1969-1977 Lotte operaie*, 42.
66. S. Biosa in *1969-1977 Lotte operaie*, 43.
67. L. Norcia in *1969-1977 Lotte Operaie*, 43.
68. Reverse strikes (*sciopero alla rovescia*) were a method of fighting unemployment in which people would voluntarily do public utility work and then ask to be paid for the work done. Such strikes were particularly common in the agricultural sector.
69. Conciliarism is the theory of church government which places final ecclesiastical authority in representative church councils instead of in a papacy (there are certain parallels here between conciliarism and the workers' movement, which was trying to establish Works Councils in the factories, for example). More generally, however, and specifically in this text, the term refers to a particularly progressive climate. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) produced a remarkable openness towards the modern world, ecumenism, the democratization of the church, and a renewed interest in social struggles.
70. Don Milani was a pacifist priest, an innovative educator, and an important reference figure at the end of the 1960s in the context of the nascent catholic dissent movement. Milani was a noted advocate of conscientious objection.
71. Casemate *(casamatta)*: a strongly defended fortified military structure. In this case, figuratively used to describe a strong, fortified position in a power struggle.
72. National unity (*unità nazionale*): this term refers to the practical application of the strategies developed through the very close parliamentary collaboration of the Communist Party and Christian Democrats during the period of historic compromise. In Italy, the struggle for national unity was strongly characterized by the promulgation of special anti-terrorism laws.
73. The "historic compromise" (*compromesso storico*) is an expression referring to the political collaboration of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) with the Christian Democracy party (DC) between 1973 and 1979. Conceived as a democratic alliance, the aim of this cooperation was to create a strong political force which would be capable of carrying out a program of profound social renewal in Italian society.
74. The Red Biennium (*biennio rosso*) of 1919-1920 was a 2-year period of social unrest that occurred in some European countries – and in particular in Italy – after the end of the First World War. This revolutionary period was

ideologically influenced by the events of the Russian Revolution which had started in 1917.

75. Years of Lead (*anni di piombo*): a historical period during the 1970s in Italy, characterized by the presence of armed struggle.

Chapter 3
Some emblematic struggles

Several of the struggles which took place in '68-69 were organized in direct contravention of official trade union directives. In the end, however, the union still managed to proceed with the renewal of all its national labour contracts. Starting from this apparently contradictory situation, in the broader narrative of 1969, different and sometimes opposing opinions start to become intertwined. Some people claim that 1969 was a movement against the trade union, while others assert that it was the union which gave direction to the movement. As I have already stated, I believe that 1969 was possible precisely because the events could not be reduced to any such gross simplification. In studying those events, I believe it is essential to grasp their complexity, the twists and turns, and the quintessential element of class struggle. These do not always fit in neatly with the schemes of any particular organization, political or otherwise.

After having given an account of the main points that emerged in 1969, in this chapter I will try to give a brief account of certain emblematic experiences from that cycle of struggles. I will therefore concentrate my attention on various situations relating to some of the large factories: from Zoppas to Marzotto, from Porto Marghera to Pirelli, and of course the situation at Fiat.

First, however, I believe it would be useful to underline some of the elements that characterized the trade union landscape in which 1969 came into being.

Following the defeat of the 1950s with its anti-worker repression, political dismissals, union divisions, and the marginalization of the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and CGIL, there was a general resumption of class conflict at the beginning of the 1960s, right in the middle of the "economic miracle". The great ideological myth of the successful integration of the working class within the neo-capitalist course of development was exposed by the facts on the ground. The initiative to return to active class struggle was taken up by the Milanese working class, which had not suffered a hard defeat like that of Fiat in Turin. The workers of Milan mounted a 16-day protest on the Alfa Romeo assembly lines, and the Milanese electromechanics also put together a string of protests in 1961. Continuing on this wave, the struggles for the metalworkers' national contract renewal grew significantly in 1962. For the first time after FIOM's defeat in the Fiat Internal Commission elections in 1955, Fiat went back on strike. A new working class was emerging on the scene, still without proper organization. In that new context, in July 1962, there was a conflict at Piazza Statuto in Turin: for three whole days, the workers and particularly young proletarians clashed with police in front of UIL headquarters. The UIL was guilty of having signed a separate agreement with Fiat.

In short, the beginning of the 1960s saw the resumption of class struggles and the emergence of a new, youthful proletarian subjectivity. This had

already become evident in Genoa in 1960, when young people "in striped T-shirts" were the activists in clashes with the police as the neo-fascists of the extreme right-wing Italian Social Movement attempted to hold their national congress in the city. Honestly speaking, those young people deserve the gold medal of the resistance movement for their actions.

The dominant Italian classes responded to those struggles with two coordinated actions. On the economic level, the Bank of Italy instituted a "credit crunch" (1) that produced economic recession and layoffs. This policy succeeded in spreading fear among the workers and it effectively put an end to their demonstrations. On a political level, the Christian Democrats made a concerted effort to involve the Socialist Party in the government. This move produced the desired division between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party; it also led to a left-wing split within the Socialist Party itself. As a result of these tactics, the revolutionary flames that had just begun to burn suddenly died off, and the national metalworkers' contract of 1965 was even postponed by a year because the trade union did not have the strength to fight. It was a bad contract.

It took some time for the movement to get back on track. In the second half of the 1960s, economic development resumed, companies began to hire people again, and the fire that had been smoldering under the ashes resumed with vigor. Concurrently, other ongoing disputes were reopened, namely the fight to overcome *wage cages* and the pension affair. The strike of 7 March 1968 was proclaimed unilaterally by CGIL on the issue of pensions after CGIL withdrew its signature from the agreement with the government. This opened a new phase in the movement at the union level, a phase in which the union – in the search for class unity – began listening more attentively to the workers.

It was definitely the workers that re-shuffled all the cards in the spring of 1968. At the time, the system of industrial relations was based on company contracts; those contracts were regulated by the workers' national contracts. That system broke down in the course of a few weeks when, independent of the trade unions' control (the central confederal unions and the trade union organizations of each industrial sector were determined to keep their commitments and were ready to renew their contracts for 1969), the workers in dozens and then in hundreds of companies started long and hard strikes. The objectives of those strikes were conditions not provided for by the national contracts: wage increases, the abrogation of the so-called "job evaluations", and better control of the working environment (2).

Those struggles tended to go beyond the normal trade union dialectics, completely modifying the connection between social conflict and trade union negotiations. At the same time, the struggles transformed the relationship between the working class and the trade unions. The working class went from being an "object" which was passively represented, to an independent "subject" which was now able to actively question its subordinate position, demanding explanations for the exploitation being

carried out against it. At the same time, the workers questioned and broke down all the "cooling strategies" which had been implemented after WWII to prevent them from rising up in revolt.
In 1962, during the struggles of the textile workers in the Valle Susa cotton mills, it was considered an isolated episode when the workers continued to strike, without any interruption or truce, during their contractual negotiations (3). In the spring of 1968 and subsequently in 1969, those tactics became commonplace.
Since the end of the Second World War, industrial relations had been centred on signed contracts, and it was the responsibility of the signing parties – including the trade unions – to enforce them. Beginning in 1969, class conflict became a central consideration in negotiations, and while this certainly gave rise to a series of agreements and compromises, it was only a starting point from which to reopen existing conflicts and to achieve more advanced objectives. In 1969, the working class became an active social subject in its own right; it began to question its own social role, starting with an examination of the exploitation it was enduring. It was a major step forward.

Zoppas

The Zoppas (4) factory of Conegliano Veneto, on a course of strong production growth, had 3200 employees in 1967, of which over a third were very young people who had entered the factory in recent years. A dispute arose in December 1967 regarding the rules on the production line and about the subject of piecework. Generally speaking, the dispute was about the regulation of workloads and wages. A presentation was made summarizing the union's platform, but the proposals were rejected by the owner. Within a few weeks, a crescendo of sudden and intense wildcat strikes began. There was some strategic variation in the tactics used: sometimes the workers would leave their posts for a different number of hours; other times, different departments would strike at random; another tactic was when daily workers and shift workers would alternate strike activities at the various plants. The strikes were aimed at inflicting the maximum possible financial damage on the owner while suffering the least possible loss in pay for the workers. Pickets and external rallies were also organized as part of the protests.
It was a climate of fiery class conflict that – apart from the events at Porto Marghera – had no precedent in the primarily white and Christian Democrat Venetian reality. After 100 hours of strikes, in April 1968, the negotiations began. These took place publicly, with Bruno Trentin – then Secretary General of FIOM – as chief negotiator speaking directly with the owner. At certain junctures, workers would also intervene from outside if the negotiations called for it. After 40 hours of negotiations, at 5.00 a.m. on 6 April 1968, the agreement was signed, marking a great victory for the workers. In the end, all of their requests had been accepted in terms of wages, negotiation formats and union rights.

It was a success that immediately spread throughout the metalworking factories of northern Italy and of which FIOM and FIM were rightfully proud, because they had taken a good look at the processes and had understood the new tendencies in the factory at an early stage (5).

The distinguishing features of the Zoppas struggle – which incidentally also apply to Marzotto and many other factories – were described by Nino Magna in the following terms:

The struggles were primarily triggered by the younger trade union cadres, but the leadership role was quickly assumed in an unexpectedly radical way by a group of progressive-minded individuals who had no explicit political or trade union affiliations. This leadership group was capable of managing the dispute in a creative way; they appropriated external slogans and selected forms of struggle which would be most useful when combined with active mass participation (6).

This was a radical struggle that succeeded on many levels, starting with the proposed platform, continuing with the manner in which the strikes were carried out, and finishing with the negotiation phase. The negotiations took place within a dialectic which was determined and managed by the metalworkers' trade union. The decisive point was that the younger, more educated working class took on a leadership role in the struggle. Considering the contribution made by these young workers, Trentin justifiably underlined the influence of the student movement (7).

Marzotto

After a few days had passed, the sleepy Veneto region was shaken again by another strike, this time in Valdagno, the town where the Marzotto factory (8) operations were located, in the province of Vicenza.

On the morning of 19 April 1968, at 7.00 a.m., the strike of all Marzotto textile operations began, with *carabinieri* (9) stationed at the factories. The first workers' demonstrations began with the women taking the lead; they were soon joined by students who were on their way to the factory. At 9.00 a.m. the riot police *(celere)* arrived and, as the protest unfolded, police officers began to use their customary violent methods in attacking the workers and students who had come from all over the Veneto region and from Trento. In the afternoon the tensions increased: two workers were arrested, the protests resumed, and a new attack was carried out by the police and the *carabinieri* against which the demonstrations then multiplied and spread. At a certain point, the entire population was protesting and demonstrating against Marzotto and the riot police. The monument to Marzotto was occupied by a group of workers; a rope was tied around the neck of the statue, and eventually the statue fell, face first, to the ground. In that moment, the symbol of oppression had collapsed: the workers and the whole population vented their exasperation against the unbearable working conditions in the factory and against the oppressive "feudalism" in Valdagno.

The end of this "feudalism" led to a deeper questioning of the exploitation inherent in the capitalist organization of labour, which in turn led to collective action in the form of class struggle:

Following the demolition of the monument, the number of strikes increased as the workers continued to seek negotiations on workloads, piecework, and staffing issues. A request was also made to release those who had been arrested. A general strike was soon organized on the basis of a referendum which had been called unilaterally by CGIL, and although that strike was boycotted by CISL and UIL, nearly 100% of the workers participated. After the summer holidays, the strikes resumed, this time with all the workers united and with the participation of the trade unions. The workers continued their strike for a total of 244 hours; during that time, the form and duration of the individual strikes were decided at the workers' assembly. The protests culminated in a long and militant occupation of the factory from 24 January – 23 February 1969. The final result was an agreement, unanimously approved by the workers' assemblies, which increased wages and gave the workers more control over their workloads. The agreement confirmed the gains of the departmental trade union committees and also granted the workers the right to assemble in the factory. It was a major step forward and "a preview of the actual gains which would later be consolidated on a contractual level by the great struggles in that sector in autumn 1969 and spring 1970". The workers came out of the factory and, enjoying their victory, "marched in a procession down to the town hall square, where the ashes from the skirmishes with the police could still be seen" (10).

The demolition of the statue of Marzotto came to symbolize the path the workers had taken in the construction of their new subjectivity. Armed with this new consciousness, within a few short months, the workers had reversed decades if not centuries of history. The workers' struggle was not superficial *jacquerie* which was incapable of going beyond a symbolic level. On the contrary, their struggle represented a concrete modification of power relationships between the classes which led to the creation of a new reality.

As elsewhere, the hard fight at Marzotto took place with trade union assistance, and there was also considerable activism on the part of the young workers. With the help of these factors, the protesters were able to question the despotism of the paternalistic owners, the violence of the police, and the exploitation inherent in the capitalist organization of labour.

Porto Marghera

Porto Marghera, with its over 50,000 employees, is not a factory but an enormous industrial complex in the metropolitan area of Venice which is characterized by strong interrelationships among the companies that operate there. Those relationships often extended beyond contractual relationships. Most of the companies at Porto Marghera were chemical producers, and the

Montedison chemical plants represented the core of that industrial complex. There were also engineering companies which had operations there.

The events which took place in Porto Marghera in 1969 had their roots in earlier developments, as did the other Venetian struggles; these included both student protests and worker revolts. Already in the spring of 1965, there had been a significant student presence in the struggle at Sirma, a company that Fiat had been restructuring by laying off hundreds of workers. The workers' struggles started in 1968 and continued into 1969. This was similar to the 1968 student movement in Venice, which had started the year before: the occupation of Ca' Foscari, the prestigious faculty of architecture, had taken place in April 1967.

This continuous and parallel relationship between struggling students and dissatisfied petrochemical workers was one of the relevant features of the Venetian storyline as a whole. In that connection, an important factor was certainly the presence of certain key figures, for example the public intellectuals Toni Negri and Massimo Cacciari, who from the early 1960s drew attention to major issues in publications like *Quaderni rossi* (11), *Classe operaia (12)* and *Contropiano* (13), and who later dedicated their efforts to political organizations like *Potere operaio* and the PCI. These publications and organizations built important bonds between the students and the workers. It is no coincidence that, already in 1965, leaflets of *Potere operaio* had been distributed which contested the trade unions' decisions in the Sirma dispute. Another incidence of mutual cooperation was on 4 March 1968, when the Faculty of Architecture – once again occupied – addressed an open letter to the workers of Porto Marghera in which a common struggle by students and workers against capitalist dominance was identified.

In August 1967 there was a warning of impending worker radicalization at Porto Marghera. Facing a separate agreement between CISL and UIL which effectively reduced the workers' ability to defend themselves against toxicity at the workplace, an initiative was unilaterally started by CGIL which included a strike against toxic exposure. The activists expected to participate at that strike were young workers who were generally highly critical of trade unions. The daily newspaper *Il Gazzettino* commented that the "pro-Chinese" (i.e. pro-communist) had taken power in CGIL. In July 1968, starting from a trivial dispute regarding the renewal of a production prize, a workers' struggle of great political significance began.

In its contract negotiations, the chemical workers' union – an example of moderation in the Italian trade union panorama of the time – proposed to ask for a ridiculously low sum: a pay increase of less than 2%. This request was made in the context of enormous increases in productivity. For its part, "*Potere operaio* – the political newspaper of the workers of Porto Marghera", which had been published regularly since March 1967 and which had among its collaborators some of the most prestigious workers' cadres of CGIL and the PCI, proposed a demand of 5000 liras, equal for all. This demand, considered by many in the trade union as blasphemy, was

nevertheless supported by the overwhelming majority of the workers who, in their assembly, insisted that their union move forward with it. In the end, the union appropriated the request and presented it to the company.
In the words of Italo Sbrogiò, a worker who was a member of the Internal Commission for CGIL and the main exponent of *Potere operaio* in the petrochemical industry:
In a heated debate that lasted for days, the proposal of "5000 liras equal for all" was born. The request was decided directly by the workers' assembly, which then imposed its will on the trade union. That decision was the result of a collective mass struggle in opposition to the infinite capacity of the owners to break up the workers' unity. It became clear that the collective will of the workers had substantial value in the fight against the discrimination that was taking place. "5000 liras" was a slogan of ours which had now been turned into a serious objective. We were finally moving against the mediation led by the unions, which had recently only resulted in political inequality. Moreover, even if they were only achieved in part, the objectives of our struggle were not something which could be so easily taken back by a capitalist plan (14).
Faced with a negative response from the owners, the first strike was carried out on 21 June and it went well. There was a 90% participation rate, a large student presence at the gates, and an assembly at an outdoor cinema to discuss how the struggle should continue. The second strike on 27 June went even better, and at that point the assembly, which convened at the Marconi cinema in Mestre, under the leadership of *Potere operaio*, proposed to go on strike every other day. The trade union was stalling and, amidst the controversy, the third strike was proclaimed for 2 July. The third day of that strike was described in a leaflet published by *Potere operaio* in a bitter polemic against the trade union:
Faced with the massive show of strength demonstrated by the entire working class of Montedison in the strikes of recent days, the trade unions – themselves united – have responded in the most shameful possible way. They have betrayed the decisions made by all of us in the assembly; they have changed the timetable for the strike; they have falsified the results of regular voting in the board meetings and in the assembly. They have put the will of the workers underfoot and have taken no account whatsoever of the formidable results of the latest strikes. These are very serious transgressions [...] Because they changed the calendar, we now run the risk that our strikes will be less powerful, and less effective [...]. The problem is simple: either we give up and lose everything, or we organize for strikes next Friday and Saturday, just to show the trade unions that the working class exists and needs to be reckoned with [...]. But at this point striking is not enough. It is now necessary to change the strategies and methods of the union. We need to make sure that the workers' assembly has control over every demand, and that the unions totally respect the mandate of the assembly. (15)

From that moment on, the struggle would be decided upon and managed by the assembly of all workers. The assembly now had the power to determine the actual political direction of the struggle.
During those same days, the Venetian movement of 1968 also organized protests during the so-called "Biennale (16) of the gentlemen*"*. This event, which was held in June, put Venice on the front pages of newspapers and on television screens all over the world, and the coverage included images of the violent attacks by the police, to such an extent that commentators at the Biennale jokingly remarked "*This year the police force is on display"*.
The protest against the Venice Biennale as a classist cultural institution would also be subsequently repeated during the Contemporary Music Festival, with Luigi Nono's consistent refusal to participate, and during the Film Festival as well, with the occupation of the Volpi room by various screenwriters including Zavattini, Ferreri and Maselli, who were carried off by the police.
On 5 July, the fourth day of the strike was held, and a meeting of the CGIL chemical workers' representatives was held in the presence of the CGIL national executive at union headquarters in Piazzale Ferretto in Mestre. Faced with the hypothesis that that meeting had on its agenda the removal from CGIL of certain worker cadres who were leading the fight, a few hundred workers and students surrounded the union headquarters, which in turn called the police. The union meeting ended with the resignation of the secretary of the chemical workers section of CGIL in Porto Marghera.
On 12 July, the fifth strike was held. A further three days of abstention from work were also announced for 18, 19 and 20 July. Additionally, 18 July was chosen as the date for a trade union demonstration.
A chronicle of the demonstration – a very realistic account in the opinion of Cesco Chinello, former secretary of the Venetian federation of the PCI and eminent historian of the Veneto workers' movement – was published in the *Potere operaio* magazine:
After an active round of picketing in front of the gates, instead of getting on the buses made available to take them directly to Venice, the workers proceeded to walk along Via Fratelli Bandiera, effectively blocking the entrance to both the Romea state road and the Brenta state road. Shouting "5000 liras now", the procession headed towards the overpass, causing the complete blockage of traffic to and from Venice. The march arrived on foot at the Agip gas station and, by various means, the demonstration continued on towards Venice. There, workers from other struggling factories had already blocked traffic at Tronchetto Island [...] The procession through Venice was enormous: the police and union leaders in Campo S. Salvador tried to prevent the workers from heading towards St. Mark's Square, but every obstacle they set up was literally knocked down. Amid shouts of "the Gazzettino *is the mouthpiece of the owners", the headquarters of the* Gazzettino *city newspaper was stormed by 10,000 workers from Montedison [...] Finally, St. Mark's Square was reached, despite a last attempt by the unions to make the procession withdraw towards the interior*

of the city. All of this happened amid a constant stream of slogans: "Increased wages!", "5000 now!", "Montedison assassins", "Venice is like Valdagno". At this point the workers headed towards the destination previously set by the unions. The brief speeches, given by the three union secretaries, finally confirmed who was in charge: it was the workers. The union "bandwagon" could not move on its own – it could only be towed forward under the direct management of workers (17).

Additional strike days were announced for 25, 29 and 31 July. On 25 July there were mass pickets involving hundreds of workers, and the situation was very tense. When strikebreakers attempted to enter the factory, dozens and dozens of their cars were damaged or destroyed during the clash. The police watched from the sidelines.

On 29 July the workers decided that there would be no "indispensable" workers, and *de facto*, on 31 July, the workers who had been "ordered" to man their posts were blocked by the pickets and were unable to work. In a continuous cycle plant, indispensable workers served to guarantee the safety of the plant, but the number of those workers was often inflated by the owners in order to significantly reduce the damage to production caused by the strike.

Montedison, which had not yet agreed to open negotiations, responded in a very arrogant and provocative manner. The company forced the workers who were in the factory on the previous shift to remain for many hours and turn off the equipment, which effectively led to a lockout starting on 1 August.

Starting at Marghera, a huge protest rally on 1 August 1968 blocked vehicular and rail traffic throughout the morning. To give an idea of the severity of the clash, the newspaper *l'Unità* gave an account of the demonstration with a lengthy front-page headline story.

On 2 August, which was another day of strike action, negotiations began at the Ministry of Labour in Rome, and within a few hours an agreement was reached. Properly speaking, that agreement hardly met the demands of the workers at all. People began to discuss, and there were communication problems between the workers in the negotiating delegation in Rome and the workers in the factory in Marghera. In that context, the decision was made to suspend the strike, and also the assembly which had been planned for the following day and which was preparing to sign the agreement.

The magnitude of the struggle was therefore not matched by a corresponding result in concrete terms. In the end, however, the workers approved the agreement, and even *Potere operaio* took note that the assembly "did not reject the Roman trade union agreement", while remarking that "at that moment, continuing the struggle would have been a serious political error". This poor result, however, did not generate distrust in their leadership among the workers. By all accounts, the great demonstration of strength during the protests led to the construction of a certain subjectivity. That subjectivity is of the highest value and it deserves to be protected and retained.

In the first months of 1969 there were intense widespread activities which took the form of mass workers' assemblies held at the factory gates. The assemblies were convened by the workers' committee, which also put forward a contract proposal. That proposal included a very significant pay increase: the committee wanted to bring the minimum wage up to 120,000 liras when in many companies the pay at that time was 60-70,000 liras. The union obviously opposed the calling of these assemblies, and it considered the wage proposals unrealistic. On the other hand, however, the union also appropriated some of the practices and concrete demands which had developed within the movement during the preceding months.

What was effectively happening, in a context of social conflict less intense than the previous year, was a return to power on the part of the trade union leaders, who in the meantime had changed personnel in their leading groups.

At the same time, using the excuse of a failed strike which had been called by the Internal Commission (18), the trade union (CGIL) decided to proceed ahead of schedule and hold early elections to the Internal Commission. The aim of this move was to eliminate the *Potere operaio* component in the assembly, which would effectively make the assembly more docile and easier for the trade union to manage. *Potere operaio* had the majority of elected members at CGIL at that point. On 20 August 1969, CGIL presented the candidate lists for the elections of the Internal Commission accompanied by the slogan: "*Vote, and vote for our trusted candidates*". Recognized workers' leaders such as Italo Sbrogiò were deliberately left off of the lists, and during the new elections of the Internal Commission in September 1969, CGIL obtained 1000 fewer votes, decreasing from 2400 to 1400 votes. Those 1000 votes did not pass to other unions; they were "white votes" (i.e. ballots intentionally spoiled or left blank) or abstainers. This "normalization" process of the workers' representatives by the chemical trade union, which at the same time radicalized its positions, did not manage to close the conflict in Porto Marghera. The petrochemical industry was still the principal protagonist in the national contractual dispute, and it retained the ability to produce fragmented struggles which were very harmful to the owners. The trade union was "riding the tiger", and in other companies in the Porto Marghera industrial complex, such as Chatillon, there was a process of radicalization and conflict. In part, this was made possible by the evolution in the positions of certain CISL cadres. The other companies thus became places where important battles in the struggle were played out.

After the contractual struggles of 1969, a wave of repression arrived at the beginning of 1970, with formal legal action being taken in the court system against a series of "guilty" workers' cadres. They were charged with the "crime" of having organized assemblies of the workers' collective in front of the factory in order to discuss their contract.

Despite such setbacks, the workers' struggles continued, recommencing with a dispute regarding the unequal treatment of workers hired by

companies through third-party contractors. There were over 10,000 such individuals who were being treated as second-class workers. The claims started from elementary things ranging from wage increases to the elimination of cash-in-hand payments. The companies were asked to stop using these subcontracted workers as precarious replacement labour. There was also a discussion of the possibility that the subcontracted workers could have access to basic services like the canteen, changing rooms and safety clothing – just like the other workers. This dispute, poorly managed by the union, went on for weeks until there was a first major demonstration on 13 July with a new general strike set to take place on 3 August. During that general strike in August, the police brutally attacked the demonstrators using truncheons, tear gas, fire hoses, and other forms of physical violence. There were also manhunts in the streets and houses of Ca' Emiliani, a very poor small neighborhood located close to the petrochemical plants. The reaction of the workers and the inhabitants of Ca' Emiliani was very strong. In the meantime, all the factories in Porto Marghera came together in protest against the police violence and in support of the externally hired workers.

On 4 August, as the workers' representatives were summoned to the labour office to open negotiations, a police division arrived in Porto Marghera and attacked the workers' pickets with armored cars and fire hoses. The workers responded to this violence and the police opened fire, wounding two workers. At that point, the clashes extended for kilometres into the periphery of Porto Marghera, and included the participation of the workers and the inhabitants of the working-class neighbourhoods.

In front of a church [Church of Jesus the Worker] in Porta Marghera, a worker was hit by a police truck. The policeman driving the truck was kidnapped by the workers and taken to Ca' Emiliani where, by pure chance, he was saved from lynching. When we took him back to the avenue to give him back to the police, with four or five of us defending him from those who still wanted to beat him up, the riot police who surround us on the avenue began to shoot at us, and again there were people wounded. (...) Porto Marghera had not seen clashes with the police of such a serious nature since the assassination of PCI secretary Palmiro Togliatti back in 1948, which had led to considerable civil unrest. (...) A couple of hours later, the police were reduced to a few remaining positions around the petrochemical plant, surrounded by the workers' barricades, from which stones and Molotov cocktails were constantly being thrown. They had a road of retreat still open towards Venice. At that point, a few thousand workers arrived on their other flank; they were metalworkers from the first trade union district which was nearby. The metalworkers were singing songs like Bandiera Rossa *and the International. It was like a scene from a movie. They stopped about fifty meters from the last jeep of the huge police group which now had no choice but to retreat (19).*

The police were forced to evacuate after a few hours and the demonstrators remained in control of the area, continuing to occupy the bridge and blocking tourists arriving from Germany. Their continued presence at night was signalled by bonfires which would remain a symbol of the struggles in Porto Marghera.
On 5 August a general strike was proclaimed which completely blocked Porto Marghera. A procession of workers once again occupied the bridge between Mestre and Venice, completely blocking traffic while also setting fire to some railway wagons and piles of wooden beams. The next day, the owners signed an agreement granting the workers a good part of what they requested.

Pirelli

Pirelli, a factory with about 9000 workers located in the Bicocca district of Milan, which had a great trade union and political tradition, concluded disappointing agreements with its employees in the mid-1960s. In August 1967, departmental strikes began in response to the excessively high workloads and the piecework system which had resulted in low wages. The paychecks at Pirelli were insufficient in comparison with other companies in the rubber sector.
After a particularly "lame-duck" agreement, which was also approved by CGIL despite the majority of activists being against it, many workers tore up their union cards and withdrew from the union. Soon thereafter, at the beginning of 1968, political and trade union cadres from different backgrounds came together and created a basic unitary committee (CUB in Italian, *comitato unitario di base*).
The CUB set itself up as a political body with a very clear objective: to build worker power and to fight against exploitation. It proposed to do this by overcoming the traditional division between economic demands (normally delegated to the union) and political demands (typically discussed with a political party). In the new setup, those decisions would all be centralized within the CUB. The CUB, decidedly anti-fascist but with few other affiliations, proposed itself as the instrument of self-organization of all workers. It accomplished this by constituting itself as a body of workers and other employees, and by opening participation to students who were interested in long-term involvement at the factory. The CUB was therefore conceived as an organization in which workers, employees and students acted equally to intervene politically in the factory.
The CUB sought neither confrontation nor consultations with the union, because it was on a different level; it was interested in the political approach to problems and the political strategy during the workers' struggles, which was something that went beyond conventional union management.
But even without seeking a confrontation, the CUB nonetheless set itself apart from the unions when it came to drawing up a strategy in the struggle at Pirelli. The CUB went on to lead many struggles; it conceptualized strike

actions as an expression of worker combativeness which was capable of changing the existing power relations in the factory. The CUB was not so interested in the ritual strike; rather, it viewed the conflicts as a physiological construction of the workers' subjectivity, and it was that subjectivity which enabled the workers to contest the existing social relations. An important characteristic of the CUBs, which could be observed in many factories and offices, especially in Lombardy and in the province of Milan, consisted in their method of taking the workers' condition as their starting point. They would use the fight against exploitation as a unifying common denominator among the workers to build a policy which went beyond any plan the union could have suggested. In essence, the CUBs did not simply accept workers' opinions as unchangeable facts. Instead, they went further: starting from the workers' organization and from the context in which the struggle was framed, they aimed to produce a new political sensibility, a new political subjectivity for the working class.

The problems at Pirelli were numerous: the wages were low, the workloads far too high, and there were unacceptably high toxicity levels at the workplace. The worker Salvatore Ledda gave an alarming description:

In the compound department, when you put the raw rubber into the cylinders, the rubber would splatter all around, to the point where it looked like a bomb had gone off inside the factory (...). Just imagine, I had a bad accident at work one time. I ended up with one foot under a dumpster that had come loose from its fixings on the line. That dumpster went off the rails and crushed my foot. I was trapped there for ten minutes with my foot crushed underneath this machine that kept spinning, and nobody heard anything...(20).

At the beginning of June, after a couple of months of discussion, the CUB presented a document at the factory which outlined its new program. This document contained the fundamental slogan: "*Let's resume the fight*".

And so, in mid-June, after several informal discussions in the canteen, a first debate on the subject of qualifications began in department 32. A conversation opened up among the workers which then expanded to the subjects of workloads and piecework. Within a few days, sudden stops on the production line started to occur. These gave rise to informal meetings which in turn became instruments for organizing a protest. The CUB pushed for broad worker participation in the struggle; it organized assemblies at the end of shifts outside the factory gates. Finally, around 10 July, with CISL and UIL condemning the spontaneous work stops, CGIL laid out a platform with the workers' demands.

The struggles continued in a structured way for a brief period, and when many workers returned from summer vacation, the protests began to spread. In that situation, the CUB proposed a general strike at the factory, a proposal which was harshly opposed by the unions. Despite this opposition, on 2 October, following an attempt by the company to further increase workloads, the workers on the night shift walked off the job, and a factory-

wide struggle began. The unions joined the strike later in the day, declaring that it had been their idea. In the following weeks, the clash between the CUB and the unions focused in particular on the forms of struggle. The trade unions advocated for planned strikes, the financial losses from which could be more easily absorbed by the owners. By contrast, the CUB promoted internal and sudden strikes, so as to do as much financial damage as possible. As an additional form of struggle, and also as a political practice, the CUB proposed the self-reduction of production, which cost the owners a lot and the workers very little.

The tension in the factory soon boiled over with work stoppages and the self-reduction of production. In response, on 25 October, Pirelli published a communiqué in which it denounced the strikes, which it said "took place outside of the protest schedule officially announced by the unions". As factory production came to a halt, Pirelli defined the strikes as "violence of the few", saying it was "the workers' decision to prevent any activity of the company's offices and managers".

In the preceding days, a manager, in order to slip under the workers' radar, had taken refuge in the shower room, from where he was subsequently removed by the workers, dripping wet in his underwear. (In all fairness, he probably really was there at 8.00 in the morning just to take a shower…). Other executives, for the same reason, had locked themselves up in the darkroom, but they were soon discovered and removed. It was "for their own good", as one of the workers said, "because they could have asphyxiated themselves in that closed space...". Once discovered, these executives were summarily "escorted" out of the building. As they gradually came out, they were delivered from the internal picket line to the external picket line, so as to totally guarantee their "abandonment of the workplace". In one of Pirelli's subsidiaries, SAPSA, faced with the obstinacy of all the employees who didn't want to leave their posts, the workers decided to barricade the exits, saying: "If you want to stay, you will have to stay here until we decide otherwise". Quite some time later, at the insistence of the trade unionists, the workers eventually let them leave. As Salvatore Ledda from the CUB remembers:

The workers went on strike but the office employees hardly ever joined us. Back then, when the decision was made to go on strike, we would do the famous "sweep" inside the office buildings. We entered the offices in a big procession and sent out all the employees, including all the managers...(21).

In that situation of general mobilization, even the office employees started to listen to their conscience, and significant elements of pride matured. When the production prizes were suspended, the office employees got organized and went on their own strike, gathering outside the plant to challenge the management. It was something unheard of at the time.

During that phase, the protests followed three intertwined paths: adherence to the planned strikes, the sudden work stoppages in response to the owners' reprisals, and the self-reduction of production.

Faced with this situation, Pirelli ramped up its response, in particular against the self-reduction of production, and sought the mediation of local government officials. The negotiations, however, led to nothing and the struggle continued. In particular, the conflict between the trade unions and the CUB became more apparent. The unions proceeded with their planned work stoppages while the CUB insisted on more effective forms of struggle. In that context, hard battles were fought at Pirelli. Here is the story told by Mario Mosca:

Some goods had been stopped at the gatehouse. In the canteen, a number of departments had been gathering to have discussions. Word spread that while we were stopping tire production, Pirelli was importing tires from a Turkish branch to supply its customers. As proof of this, we saw three or four trucks from Turkey that were stationed in the factory's driveways, ready to leave again. The workers stopped their discussions, and everyone went out into the street. It was a moment of maximum tension. And then it happened: the rubber tires that had been on the trucks were burned. Some cars were overturned as well. There were some serious fires that time. (22)

From the middle of November 1968 onwards, the struggle got completely out of hand, and the union was harshly criticized for its inability to handle the crisis. In the factory, the forms of struggle which had been proposed by the CUB – the self-reduction of workloads and spontaneous strikes – started to be implemented on a wider basis. Pirelli constantly threatened to fine the workers, and the union tried to prevent those forms of struggle. This produced quite a few divisions among the workers. In the end, on 10-11 December, the factory assemblies gave the trade union organizations the mandate to sign the new contract. The CUB did not oppose the signing of the agreement; after months of very hard struggles, it had become necessary to find some form of resolution. It should be pointed out that after the agreement was signed, many workers began participating in the unions again. This was not a sign that the workers had regained full trust in the unions; rather, the workers did this under the pretense that the unions would henceforth follow their assembly's instructions. Not much time had passed before the CUB – followed by CGIL – began to point out the limitations of the contract which had been signed. These criticisms effectively reopened the conflict at the factory in the first months of 1969. The CUB again positioned itself as a promoter of class struggle. In particular, it developed the theme of unity between the workers of Pirelli's Bicocca plant and the rest of the working class. In doing so, it drew conclusions from the most advanced experiences that had taken place in the preceding months and that had prepared the ground for 1969. This theme of class unity was a distinguishing feature of the CUB. Emblematic in this regard are the words of CUB leader Mario Mosca:

In the meantime, starting already in 1969, the Red Brigades (23) had begun to operate and there were extra-parliamentary groups of a very violent nature. Everyone was trying to instrumentalize the struggles, to hang their hats on the movement. Some did this in a proper way and others did not. As

the avant-garde inside the factory, we ran the risk of falling under the influence of violent groups or of being compromised by the clashes between those groups. But all of this was never able to affect the workers as a collective unit. Our movement was about the liberation of minds, we wanted live our lives in a completely different way than what we had experienced before. No organized ideological group had foreseen this movement, just as no one could have predicted what a huge impact it would have (24).

We have here a significant example of a certain dialectic regarding the construction of class unity. Thanks to the political direction of the CUB, the workers were able to solidify class unity over time, while also managing to have a major impact on the politics of the trade union. Without that class unity, and without the CUB's influence over the union, the workers in the chemical industry certainly would not have been able to organize their efforts to the same extent as the metalworkers. At Pirelli, major violence was avoided, but a revolutionary class consciousness was created that was able to last over time, allowing deep relationships to form inside and even outside the factory. Indeed, an entire network of strong relationships was built, not only during the workers' experiences at Pirelli and other factories, but also by the CUBs, the student movement, and other democratic structures involving journalists, magistrates, doctors and artists. Without that network of supportive relationships, the strong response by the democratic base of Milan to the Piazza Fontana massacre and to the "strategy of tension" would have been unimaginable. Class unity, constructed from below, democratic and powerful, was the true transformative core that emerged from this experience – and it would be a reference point for years to come as other CUBs were founded.

Fiat Mirafiori

An account of what happened at the Fiat factory in 1969 would require a book of its own. And indeed, many books have been written about the events that took place there. Here I would like to highlight just a few points that will help to give a more complex picture of that struggle than is typically provided.

The working conditions in Fiat, particularly in the bodywork department, were very harsh. Here is a short description from a section of the painting department where sanding was done to remove imperfections:

There are no words to describe it. The workers had to smooth the metal sheets of the cars with sander and water in such terrible conditions. They worked with water up to their knees, and when they had to go to the toilet, they just peed right there on the spot. It didn't make much difference if their urine caused the water to rise a bit higher, as everything was totally wet anyway... It was logical that it couldn't go on like that, and that strikes would eventually start, one way or another (...) If anything, one had to wonder how it was possible that they had not broken out earlier (25).

Even the company realized that the continuous increase in production was leading to an unmanageable situation:

At the painting department of Mirafiori, there were frequent moments of tension: to increase the speed of the production cycle, the vehicle frames would exit still scalding hot from the ovens, before the castings were able to cool them sufficiently. As a result, the workers would frequently burn their fingertips, and at the end of the day their hands were all swollen. The workers had reached their limits and the system was out of control (26).

All this was happening in a company which was completely geared towards the production of two million vehicles per year. To reach that production target, the company had been recruiting workers on a large scale which – significantly – corresponded to mass resignations. The "turnover" figures relating to those who were no longer able to work in the factory were shocking; they give an account of a system which was wildly out of control, with staggering levels of worker exploitation. The absolute, despotic power of Fiat was so complete and unquestionable that it could manifest itself in inhumane forms, creating a dangerous situation for those who somehow managed to continue working in the factory.

Year	Entered	Exited
1966	15.878	5.991
1967	15.930	7.979
1968	22.078	10.104
1969	27.478	13.431 (27)

The trade union was tasked with handling a company dispute which developed between April and June 1969. There were various points within the dispute, starting with the establishment of a company canteen (the workers at Olivetti, another Turin company, had already had a canteen for years). Another hot issue was the subject of worker qualifications in relation to their pay scale.

In that context, there was a first struggle among the mechanics who were requesting that all 75 workers in the engine testing room be transferred automatically from the third pay category to the second category without having to complete a *masterpiece test*. For the first time, an internal strike was used as a tactic, and the management completely accepted the union requests.

At the same time, the most important dispute had started at the auxiliary workshops. It was a dispute involving more than 8000 workers who were trying to overcome company discrimination. The workers were asking for the company's recognition of their professionalism, their pay categories, and their *superminimums*.

Perhaps even more than the mechanics, the auxiliary workshops were largely staffed with qualified workers; they had a much lower percentage of new employees than the assembly lines or in the bodywork department. The other pertinent characteristic was that the auxiliary workshop workers were

engaged in their duties throughout the plant. As a result, their struggle became immediately recognizable and well-known.
As we saw previously, on the occasion of the protest strike dedicated to the massacre of Battipaglia, the first internal assembly since the 1950s was held in that workshop. It was also the site of the victory against the transfer of the employee – the comrade – who spoke up in the interest of all the workers. In the following days, a dispute started at that workshop which gave rise to internal strikes. Those strikes produced the first worker delegates of the struggle. The auxiliary workshop had its own periodical workers' newspaper, *Giornale di lotta Sud-Presse*, which was published by the comrades of the PSIUP who worked there. In June, the newspaper published the "Appeal of the auxiliary workshop team delegates" which outlined the role of the assemblies, described the position of the unified group delegates, and defined the powers assigned to the assemblies and delegates. That document also put forward, for the first time, the proposal "to convene a council of Fiat workers' delegates". It should be noted that workers' delegates were mentioned intentionally, because this proposal – like other policies of the Turin PSIUP – did not state that workers' delegates should simply become integrated as the base of the trade union. Instead, it stated that the delegates should maintain their autonomy and be a decisive partner in the construction of a mass political movement, i.e. in the political construction of the workers' movement, as the workers were at the center of the transformations.
From April onwards, the movement was born and began to take hold inside the Fiat factory. In May, the number of spontaneous work stoppages increased in the bodywork department, where working conditions were the worst and where the union presence was almost zero. At that time, the union at Fiat was largely external; it was not a union which was present in the factory.
After the auxiliary workers held their first internal strikes, which the workers regularly extended beyond what the union had envisioned, new disputes arose at the large presses and among the forklift drivers.
Starting in mid-May, the student movement began a systematic campaign at the gates of the Mirafiori factory that went beyond the distribution of individual leaflets. Prior to that, a political campaign had been carried out for months at the factory gates by individual militants – from Rieser to Dalmaviva to name only the most famous – but the mass presence of students qualitatively changed the situation. The assemblies at the gates became the meeting and rally point for a complex of groups and political militants who were active on the left wing of the PCI. The assemblies were also an excellent opportunity for discussion and for the organization of further events. They contributed in a significant way to the development of the struggle in the factory, starting in the bodywork department, where the relationship with the trade unions had been especially weak. From the meetings in the bars of the Corso Tazzoli area, which was not far from the entrance doors of the bodywork department, a unitary organization was

created. This group had a daily presence at the gates and it distributed leaflets signed “workers and students”.
In the meantime, almost all the leaders of the various extreme left-wing groups (i.e. to the left of the PCI) arrived in Turin. Fiat had become a kind of advanced laboratory where political leaders would come to see the results of a workers’ conflict that had escalated beyond the trade union’s control.
Beginning in the last week of May, the newspaper La Classe *– which in previous issues had not even written about the situation at Fiat – began to function as a sort of bulletin of the struggles, publishing the texts of the leaflets and the chronicles of the struggles on a daily basis (28).*
In that context, with the enlargement of the workers’ conflict, tensions between the trade union and the assembly of workers and students also grew, with each group accusing the other of being instruments in the hands of the owners.
In the meantime, on 28 May a first agreement was signed which concluded the disputes of the auxiliary workshops, the forklift drivers and the workers of the large presses, with positive results in terms of wages and work organization. The result of that agreement was not social pacification; rather, it led to an intensification of the struggles. The workers justifiably believed that they could improve upon those results.
Fiat, in that context of generalized conflict, made an explosive proposal: on 30 May, it communicated to the union representatives its intention to resolve the 80 disputes that were currently underway – mostly about wages and working conditions - granting “a preliminary version of the national contract” (29).
This scenario was perceived as very dangerous by the union. The risk was that the largest company in the country would destroy the unity of the workers’ struggles on the issue of the national labour contract renewal, which was supposed to start in autumn. The union viewed the proliferation of worker struggles – conducted in explicit controversy with the union, with mainly wage increases as their goal – as a weapon through which Fiat could easily divide the metalworkers and resolve the social conflict solely in terms of wages, without having to deal with issues of work organization and without having to negotiate workloads.
From the perspective of the worker-student assembly, in addition to the obvious inadequacy of union action, there was certainly a strong wage element as a motivating factor. The demands, which were very popular in the bodywork department, were for 50 liras/hour more in basic pay, 50 liras/hour more in pay related to the worker’s position, and an automatic transfer for all workers from the third pay category up to the second (30). In addition to this, the assembly – which in the meantime had begun to meet in a classroom at the Molinette hospital – underestimated the importance of the negotiations on workloads and the organization of work. These misjudgements were accompanied by an extremist rhetoric which asserted

that exploitation could not be regulated in a contract, and that everyone needed to decide for themselves how much to work.

I say that their rhetoric was extremist because, to me, the idea that the absence of rules is revolutionary seems to be a real mistake. A position like that makes an oversimplified assumption that the workers are always stronger than the owners. Not even the CNT, the Spanish trade union that at one point had one and a half million members, and which did not sign agreements with the owners owing to its anarchist belief system, had ever supported rhetoric of the type stated above.

The worker-student assembly, which had begun to call itself *Lotta continua* (Continuous Struggle), continued with its polemical stance, protesting against the election of worker delegates, which was something the unions had been advocating for. A large part of the assembly, against the idea of elected delegates, started using the declarative slogan "*we are all delegates*".

In that climate of tension between the workers and the company, in which the workers were also facing tensions within their own ranks due to the different options on the table, the so-called "*accordone*" (i.e. major agreement) was signed between Fiat and the union at the end of June, which attempted to address a series of open disputes and provided some first general answers.

The agreement secured a series of wage and pay category improvements, but above all it reduced the workloads on the assembly lines. It tripled the amount of break time during the day – from 10 to 30 minutes – and defined in very strict terms the ratio between the workforce on the line and actual production. Finally, it identified a means of ensuring that those rules were respected: 56 "expert" workers would be elected to assist the members of the Internal Commission in monitoring the line. The agreement was Fiat's first recognition of trade union delegates. But the fact that there were only 56 line delegates was something that many workers found objectionable.

A curiosity about the agreement was that it was formally dated on 30 June. Many people consider the actual date of that agreement to be 26 June, because that is when it was probably signed by Fiat and the union. The union had adopted the regular practice of submitting agreements to the workers for consultations and final approval before the agreements were definitively signed, and this is likely what happened with the *accordone*: the workers had taken a few days to read it before giving their formal agreement on 30 June.

Fiat, and the owners in general, were vociferously opposed to the positive changes contained in the agreement, accusing the union of not being "representative" and of not being able to move with autonomy and authority vis-à-vis the workers. The questioning of the union's representativeness was one of the mainstays of Fiat's political strategy, which consistently attempted to create contradictions in an effort to undermine the workers' solidarity as much as possible.

On 17 June, during talks for the *accordone*, Fiat even invited a group of 12 striking workers to participate in official negotiations alongside the trade union representatives at the Industrial Union. This attempt to bypass the union, which was politically a very serious breach of etiquette, did not work very well because a Fiat executive began arguing with the striking workers, essentially increasing the level of conflict. Fiat tried once again to circumvent the union by summoning a group of workers for company negotiations with the deputy director of Mirafiori, but even this second attempt was not successful *(31).*

The worker-student assembly defined the *accordone* as "a lame-duck agreement", but it was nonetheless approved by the majority of the workers, becoming the first concrete result of a struggle which had been going on for weeks.

In any case, during the month of June, a total of about 200 delegates were elected at Fiat. The union allowed team delegates to be elected regardless of whether they were recognized by Fiat or not, and more importantly, it also allowed the election of delegates who were not union members. It was an important democratic process, and many leaders of the workers' struggle naturally became delegates of their own department team.

As Sergio Garavini – secretary of FIOM in Turin – commented in July 1969:

Of the 199 delegates elected to the Fiat lines, 70 are members of the union, and 28 of those union members are also CGIL members. We consider this a success. (32)

Between the end of May and June, the union had largely lost control of the struggles. In this context – as Garavini himself pointed out years later – it was undoubtedly an enormous success to have identified the delegates as a vehicle for reorganizing the overall movement and increasing worker power in the factory.

In the meantime, struggles also began at the newly opened Fiat factory in Rivalta, located just outside Turin. With this change, the worker-student assemblies took on a new format, becoming a sort of town hall meeting which represented other locations besides just Mirafiori. The first assembly of this kind, chaired by Mario Dalmaviva, was held on 21 June at Palazzo Nuovo, the seat of humanistic faculties at the University of Torino. There was a clear political message in that meeting as the assembly tried to define itself as the legitimate alternative political leadership of the workers' movement, in opposition to the union and the PCI which – as they demonstrated poor analytical capacity – were to be substantially assimilated.

In that context, on 3 July, the battle of Corso Traiano took place. I have already given an account of those events in chapter 2 of this book. That battle had a positive influence on the struggles at Fiat because it helped the workers to believe in the power of their collective strength.

A few short weeks later, the city's worker-student assembly organized a "national conference of the basic unitary committees and avant-gardes" at

the *Palazzetto dello Sport* in Turin for 26-27 July, from which "unions and political parties will be excluded, along with all those who have spoken for us and decided over our heads so far". The aim of the conference was to *discuss and deal with all the current issues facing the workers. On the one hand they needed a forceful response to the attacks of the owners. (...) On the other hand, they had to address the problem of how to organize the struggle that would continue in September with regard to the contracts (33).*

As stated in the preparatory document published in *La Classe*, the assembly believed that after having fought in the spring struggles – not only for workers' demands but also against the trade union – it was now necessary to prepare for the autumn contractual struggle. But even more importantly, it was necessary to move beyond the contractual struggle and build a political organization capable of leading the fight against the capitalist system and the Italian state itself. It was quite a bold political challenge that the assembly had laid out in its attempt to seize power and ascend to a leadership role. And yet it was disconcerting that the assembly could not even manage to provide a unified synthesis of its own activities and the work it had done recently. As some of the participants wrote:

The meeting confirmed all our doubts and ended in nothing. In reality, on that occasion the assembly laid down the premises which soon led to the liquidation of the unitary experience. It was the struggle of all for power over nothing, and the attempt to achieve hegemony over what was defined as the vanguard of Fiat workers (...). In short, they wanted to create a political party without telling anyone, and there were already two executive groups that were vying for power to divvy up the cake (34).

The rivalry between the two groups took off from there. On 18 September, the weekly magazine *Potere operaio* began to be published, and a few weeks later, the newspaper *Lotta continua*. These two publications became the organs of the two factions present in the movement. Both publications, let it be said incidentally, provoked heavy controversy.

And so, in the fall of 1969, the worker-student assembly fell apart, as Liliana Lanzardo pointed out:

In those weeks, a mass vanguard was destroyed in exhausting discussions which were extraneous to the logic of the workers' struggle underway at Fiat. More than anything else, the discussions were imbued with a power struggle for the direction of the group itself (35).

In the meantime, during the month of June, the metalworkers' union had begun drafting its contractual platform. At least 300,000 people were involved, with many large discussions and hundreds of amendments regarding the choice between revised individual pay increases or equal pay increases for all. In the consultations, the workers opted for equal pay increases for all; that decision was then formally approved by the assembly of delegates held on 26-27 July in Milan. On 30 July, the platform was sent to the relevant counterparts – the *Confindustria* for private companies and INTERSIND for public companies – with the aim of opening negotiations

in September. Fiat, in an attempt to put itself in a good bargaining position with the *Confindustria*, had immediately placed a preliminary ruling on the issue of separate negotiations, trying to abolish them.
The workers' struggles had faded with the approach of the holidays and also with the need to recover money after the large number of striking hours that spring. The struggles recommenced starting on 1 September at workshop 32, a mechanics' workshop which had not carried out any work stoppages before the holidays and where there was a very strong demand for wages. The fight began spontaneously, organized by the workers themselves, without waiting for union directives. The next day, during negotiations between the company and the union, Fiat announced the suspension of production in the department that was on strike. According to Fiat, there was a shortage of parts needed to assemble the vehicles.
Over the next two days, Fiat went on the offensive, suspending 40,000 workers and telling them that they could stay at home – without pay – until their fellow workers at workshop 32 had resumed work. Fiat's conduct was harshly contested by the unions and by the political left, and on 12 September the Minister of Labour, Donat Cattin, announced that he had ordered an investigation into the suspension of work at Fiat in order to ascertain whether the supplies had actually run out. On 23 September, Cattin made it clear to the Italian parliament that Fiat's actions could not be justified from a technical point of view; the actions were therefore of a political nature.
To protest this "send home" tactic, the union proclaimed a two-hour strike for the whole Fiat group on 3 September, but the strike failed. In that failed strike, the worker-student assembly proposed the occupation of the Fiat Mirafiori factory. On that occasion,
Adriano Sofri managed to enter Mirafiori through a gate on Corso Tazzoli, and he circulated for 4 hours inside the factory with a megaphone, trying to convince the workers of the various shifts and sections to occupy Fiat. He organized an internal march composed of hundreds of suspended workers who passed through a number of Mirafiori workshops, trying to organize meetings and discussions. The occupation certainly did not take place that day, but the internal parade served to spread the slogans related to equal pay increases for all (36).
A very heavy controversy broke out surrounding the activities of Sofri inside Mirafiori, with accusations from the union and the PCI that those activities had taken place with Fiat's approval. On 4 September, the newspaper *l'Unità* wrote: "Groups of provocateurs entered Mirafiori under the protection of the Fiat guards" (37).
For its part, and without this type of controversy,
the Turin Federation of PSIUP invited the workers to join the strike, and suggested that the workers should come together in their assembly, elect delegates, and in this way create a formation which would be capable of mounting an effective struggle. Such a formation would be capable of extending its influence within the factory and beyond. Similar structures

could then be created in other Turin factories and also in the surrounding neighborhoods, eventually leading to the creation of "a single mass movement organized against the owners and the state" (38).

Meanwhile, the strike in workshop 32 continued throughout the week, and only when the members of that workshop agreed to return to work did Fiat withdraw its suspension of production and its suspension of the 40,000 other workers. During the very intense struggle that week, many delegates were elected – and it was evident that a sea change had occurred at Fiat in the space of just a few months. Dino Antonioni, the leader of the struggle in workshop 32 and subsequently a member of the CUB at Mirafiori, recalls that moment:

When they presented themselves to the workshop manager, each delegate had their own roll of paper with the signatures of all the workers who had elected them as delegates. It was an exceptional thing, because everyone had personally signed those documents (39).

The workers could now breathe a sigh of relief, as the worst was behind them.

Negotiations soon began for the national metalworkers' contract. Bruno Trentin, then national secretary of FIOM, gives us the following account:

On 8 September, the first meeting took place with the Confindustria*, which re-proposed the preliminary ruling – initiated by Fiat – regarding the separate negotiations. In doing so, their objective was to reduce the bargaining process to a simple discussion of the national employment contract. The response of the trade unions was the proclamation of a national strike for an effective duration of 24 hours, to be held starting on 11 September, three days after the break-up of negotiations. It was a pretty good showing from a trade union that many considered defunct. But what immediately and unequivocally signaled the union's recovery of strength and representativeness was the fact that the 24-hour strike was a partial, "fragmented" strike, i.e. fragmented in time. It was a strike that relied completely on the willingness of many workers to leave their workplaces and return to them on the same day, challenging the authority of the owners and bosses. Or, as happened in many cases, the purpose of the fragmented strike was to interrupt work in order to hold an assembly in the factory. This was a sign that the trade union had sufficient authority and consensus among the workers to resist the temptation of engaging in a full-scale strike, which usually left the final decision to end the conflict in the hands of the owners, who then would normally resolve the matter on their own terms (40).*

During the general strike, the participation rate of the Turin metalworkers was very high. At Mirafiori, 98% of the workers participated, and after the first strike, the unions immediately made it clear that the struggles would no longer be suspended during negotiations, as had been the normal practice throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The bargaining platform demanded considerable and equal wage increases for all; it also included reduced working hours, parity among workers and

office employees, and the right to assemble at the workplace. It was a platform that incorporated many of the goals which the workers had struggled for that spring. Despite this, in a leaflet distributed on 8 September, the worker-student assembly concluded: "the proposed contract is a cage for the workers' struggle; we will therefore also fight against the contract".

On 19 and 25 September, the metalworkers held general strikes. The second of those strikes included a national demonstration in Turin in which 50,000 people took part. The strikes went very well, and at the rally in Turin, addressing what he called the "protesters" (i.e. those in the worker-student assembly who had opposed the workers' contract), Trentin said:

The trade union is not perfect, but it is nonetheless irreplaceable. If you want to participate in our movement, even to criticize what may be old and in need of change, you are welcome to join us. We do not take kindly to disruptors, however, and it will be a bitter experience for you if you try to divide us (...) Gathered here today, you have an opportunity to better understand the situation. If you are here to divide our movement and drag us down, we will respond accordingly. If you want to participate in the strike with us, the door is open and we welcome your cooperation (41).

In the meantime, the election of the delegates continued, and on 13 September at the Chamber of Labour in Turin, the first "plenary meeting of the Mirafiori Council of Workers' Delegates" was held. The purpose of this meeting was to establish "a council of workers' delegates which, together with the governing bodies of the trade unions, will have the task of coordinating and directing the contractual struggle at Mirafiori".

It was an important step because the union had taken the initiative in setting up the council of delegates while also clearly defining the council's role within the larger context of trade union activities.

It was the subject of a political clash that would last for months. The "Mirafiori delegates' newspaper", led by members of PSIUP, claimed that the real delegates were the ones elected at the heart of the internal struggle and who were revocable by the workers' assembly. "To become a proper movement represented by delegates, the movement cannot remain closed within a single department at Fiat, and it cannot be limited to just one factory. It must be linked to the workers in the other factories; it must be linked to the workers in districts where it is necessary to fight against the owners and control rents, for example". Therefore, in accepting the union's proposal to convene a council of delegates, it was necessary to make it clear that "the council of delegates must not be an assembly that the unions simply consult; rather, it must be an organization which is capable of making decisions autonomously" (42).

After the two national strikes, fragmented strikes resumed at Fiat at the end of September. The strikes came from below, department by department, and were much more effective at inflicting financial damage on the owners. The union, which at this point was "riding the tiger", supported this form of struggle and proposed its implementation at the national level, even

suggesting the use of fragmented strikes in the factory for the purpose of electing departmental delegates. During these fragmented struggles, internal marches were organized at Fiat and the practice of "bringing the unionists to the assembly inside the factory" began. This happened on 9 October at the Lancia factory, provoking heavy protests from Fiat and the Industrial Union. The scene was repeated the next day, on the occasion of the strike of 10 October, when two trade unionists from FIM and FIOM were carried on their backs and hoisted onto the gate of door 7, allowing them to hold an assembly "inside" the factory. After that, a mass procession headed off to stone the windows of the *Palazzina Impiegati* (factory office building), shouting "out with the strikebreakers" while jeering the employees, sarcastically inviting them to join the strike. Faced with this large procession, the police were unable to intervene. After some time had passed, between the two columns of workers in the procession, the employees and the managers began to come down, leaving the factory amid spitting, kicking, and the ironic throwing of flowers. There was even a worker in the front row who stopped each of the managers and employees, saying "Dear sir, please take this" while putting a 5 lira coin in their hands (43).

In the meantime, the financial situation of many workers had reached a critical point. They were earning very little due to the high number of hours that they were on strike. The proposal of the Turin PSIUP, published on a leaflet on 18 September, was rather radical:

Instead of money, we should present our Fiat ID when we get on a tram or a bus. Our Fiat ID should be valid as a public transit pass. Agnelli should come up with the money for our transport to the workplace, just as he has to pay for the raw materials to arrive at the factory. When we enter a store, we should present our Fiat ID and claim a discount of 30, 40, 50% (it depends how many people participate and how much collective bargaining power we have). Let's organize ourselves and not pay the rent at the beginning of the month, or at the very least we should receive a substantial reduction. We'll refuse the payment of bills (electricity, gas, etc.) during the period in which we are on strike (44).

Similar strategies were proposed by *Lotta continua* and by parts of the metalworkers' union.

In October, fragmented strikes continued on a daily basis and often lasted until the end of the shift. On 16 October, on the occasion of a national strike with a large national demonstration in Naples, the *Palazzina degli impiegati* (factory office building) in Turin was again surrounded. Fiat filed official complaints for acts of violence which had been committed against 27 of its employees; it also condemned the fact that about ten Fiat bosses had been forced to march at the head of the internal processions.

On 23 October, during a fragmented strike, 10,000 workers gathered on the test track at Mirafiori (the place where Mussolini had given a speech at the inauguration of the factory). A group of trade unionists from CGIL-CISL

and UIL, who had been brought into the factory by groups of striking workers, were given the opportunity to speak.
On 29 October, on the opening day of the annual Turin Auto Show, the workers of certain Fiat workshops proposed to arrive at the event in a large procession to give a worthy welcome to the participants. The union was opposed to the idea and the attempt failed. With nowhere else to go, the internal parade then "did a sweep" through the various Fiat departments at the factory before carrying out yet another occupation of the factory office building, which was filled with employees who did not take part in the strike. The next day, Fiat suspended 130 workers – many delegates and union members among them – at Mirafiori and Rivalta, denouncing them "for committing violence".
The national secretaries of FIM, FIOM and UIL immediately left the negotiating table, informing Minister Donat Cattin that they would only return after Fiat had withdrawn its suspensions. In the meantime, strikes were intensified throughout the whole factory. Over the following days, the suspensions reached almost 200, but Fiat was starting to tread on thin ice. The company was becoming increasingly isolated, not only in the eyes of the general public, but also in the view of the *Confindustria*, where a number of the owners did not share the same extremist line of the Turin factory management.
The fragmented strikes continued, not only for the workers' contract, but also against the suspensions which had been handed out by Fiat. The strikes were accompanied by demonstrations as well: there were pickets at the Turin Auto Show and at the Turin offices of RAI, the Italian national public broadcasting company.
After a week of both planned and spontaneous strikes, a large evening assembly was organized at the Palasport indoor arena entitled "Fiat on trial". During that event, Emilio Pugno (regional secretary of CGIL in Piedmont) announced that, in a meeting in Rome between the union secretariats, Agnelli and the Minister of Labour, the suspensions had been withdrawn.
It was a great victory for the workers and a decisive downsizing of Fiat's leadership role within the Italian ruling class. In the 1980s, Agnelli would later remember that decision as one of his greatest mistakes.
On 19 November, a general strike was called on the housing issue. In Milan, during clashes in the streets, a law enforcement officer named Antonio Annarumma lost his life. There were numerous testimonies stating that Annarumma's death was the result of his jeep's collision with another law enforcement vehicle engaged in jeep raids against the demonstrators. Despite those testimonies, Annarumma's death sparked a very intense right-wing campaign on the need to restore order in the country.
The metalworkers' union was not intimidated and proceeded to call for a general strike on 28 November, which included a national demonstration in Rome. That event took place in an atmosphere of great tension; there were

fears that altercations could occur at any moment, but fortunately everything went smoothly.
In the meantime, the fragmented strikes continued at Mirafiori. Those strikes involved almost everyone, because on 25 November the bodywork department had gone into full strike mode, a move that essentially blocked production in all other departments. In response, Fiat ordered tens of thousands of people to be sent home and production was blocked until 8 December, when the bodywork department returned to fragmented strike activity.
The fragmented strikes continued until 12 December, when a bomb exploded at a branch of the National Agricultural Bank in Piazza Fontana in Milan. That tragic event, which marked a turning point in the so-called "strategy of tension", had an immediate impact on the contract negotiations. As Bruno Trentin commented:
At the table of the metalworkers' contract negotiations, as both the chemical and construction unions were forced to wait for them to finish, the Confindustria *delegation seized the opportunity and hardened its stance once again. The Minister of Labour did not hesitate to mention the threat of the "colonels" and of a Greek-style military coup d'état to induce the unions to accept – with a modification of their demands – an immediate closure of the negotiations.*

The metalworkers' unions decided to suspend their strikes for a few days as a sign of mourning for the victims of Piazza Fontana. Soon after, however, they planned an intensification of the struggle which was to be implemented in all private companies. At INTERSIND, a preliminary agreement was reached on the eve of the demonstration in Rome. The agreement was submitted for consultations with the workers of the state-owned companies, which led to the workers giving their first (i.e. preliminary) signature on 10 December (45).
A climate similar to a witch hunt followed the massacre at Piazza Fontana. The police in Milan were on the "anarchist trail", and on 15 December the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli mysteriously fell to his death from a window while in custody at police headquarters. On 16 December, the anarchist Pietro Valpreda was arrested and accused of carrying out the massacre.
The fragmented strikes at the factory did not stop, and from 15 December onwards Mirafiori was completely blocked. On 21 December the contract was signed, and on 23-24 December the assemblies approved it by a majority vote.
In 1969, the production of cars within the Fiat group decreased by 4.9% despite the fact that employment in the same year had increased by 14,000 people. The number of strike hours among Fiat workers, which in 1967 had been 662, had risen to 1,885,434 hours in 1968. In 1969, the number of strike hours increased to 15,074,551, which was equivalent to over 127 hours on average for each Fiat employee (including bosses, office workers and managers) (46).

1. *Credit crunch:* a strategy by which the central bank of Italy raised interest rates and therefore the cost of money. By virtue of this higher cost, companies reduced expenses and investments, thus increasing unemployment. The expected effect of this choice was the reduction of demands by the workers, who increasingly faced the threat of unemployment.
2. Vittorio Foa, *Contrattazione collettiva, sindacato e classe operaia*, in *Per una storia del movimento operaio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 213.
3. Giovanni Mottura, *Cronaca delle lotte ai Cotonifici Valle di Susa*, in «Quaderni rossi» 1, Turin, 1961, 18.
4. Zoppas: a famous Italian producer of kitchens and domestic appliances like refrigerators, washing machines, dishwashers, and bathtubs. The factory was located in Conegliano Veneto, north of Venice. It was bought out by its competitor Zanussi, and later acquired by the Swedish Electrolux group. Zoppas Industries still exists today.
5. Cesco Chinello, *Il sessantotto operaio e studentesco a Porto Marghera*, in CSEL, Annual 2/1988*,* 207.
6. Nino Magna, *Per una storia dell'operaismo in Italia*. *Il trentennio post bellico*, in G. Napolitano, M. Tronti, A. Accornero, M. Cacciari, *Operaismo e centralità operaia*, edited by Fabrizio D'Agostini, Rome, 1978, 325.
7. This is a passage from a long interview in which the author spoke with Bruno Trentin at the end of 1986, published in C. Chinello, *Sindacato, Pci movimenti negli anni sessanta. Porto Marghera-Venezia 1955-1970*, Preface by Marco Revelli, vol. 2, Milan, 1996, vol. II, 586.
8. Marzotto: an Italian textile manufacturer based in Valdagno, in northern Italy, west of Venice.
9. *Carabinieri*: the Carabinieri Corps (previously known as the Royal Carabineers Corps) is one of the main law enforcement agencies in Italy. Operating at the national level in permanent service of public security, it is also a branch of the Italian armed forces.
10. Italo Sbrogiò, http://www.euronomade.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Italo-Sbrogio_Lavorare_al_petrolchimico.pdf, 11.
11. *Quaderni rossi* was a Marxist magazine founded in Turin in 1961 by Raniero Panzieri. The magazine had the objective of rediscovering a non-ideological approach to Marxism useful in studying new forms of neoliberalism and in finding possible paths of liberation for the working class. It had extraordinary theoretical importance and was also the starting point of the theoretical strand of workerism.
12. *Classe operaia* was a working-class magazine founded in 1964 after some editors left the project at *Quaderni Rossi*. It was published by the editors Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, and Massimo Cacciari among others.
13. *Contropiano* was a quarterly magazine founded in 1968 after *Classe operaia* ceased publication. Edited by Alberto Asor Rosa and Massimo Cacciari, the magazine represented the working class that had chosen to join the Italian Communist Party.
14. Chinello, *Il sessantotto…*, 209.
15. Potere operaio flyer, published in *Potere operaio di Porto Marghera*, *Porto Marghera-Montedison. Estate '68* (Florence: Centro G. Francovich, 1968), 29.
16. The Venice Biennale is one of the most important cultural institutions in Italy and the world. It stands at the forefront of research and the promotion of contemporary art trends, specializing in fine arts, architecture, cinema, dance,

music and theatre. Since 1895, it has organized the International Art Exhibition in Venice, which is held once every two years.

17. Potere operaio flyer, published in *Potere operaio di Porto Marghera*, 30-31.
18. Internal Commission: a democratically elected body within the company which represented and protected the interests of workers vis-à-vis the owners. Although it was not a formal trade union body, its members were elected on the basis of lists submitted by the trade unions. The Internal Commission therefore represented the trade union in the workplace.
19. Antonio Negri, *Storia di un comunista* (Milan: Ponte delle Grazie, Milano, 2015), 403.
20. Salvatore Ledda, in *Storia di un impiegato*, video n. 1/6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEVR6o-_TyI&t=10s.
21. Salvatore Ledda, in *Storia di un impiegato*, video n. 3/6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xY6BujEnLbU.
22. Mario Mosca, *C'era una volta la classe operaia* (Milan: Unicopli, 1999), 86.
23. The Red Brigades were an extreme left-wing Italian terrorist organization formed in 1970 with the goal of popularizing armed struggle.
24. Mosca, *C'era una volta*…, 88.
25. Polo, *I Tamburi…*, 125-6; 131-2.
26. Enrico Auteri, in Giuseppe Berta, *Conflitto industriale e struttura d'impresa alla Fiat, 1919-1979* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 16.
27. Cesare Damiano, Piero Pessa, *Dopo lunghe e cordiali discussioni – storia della contrattazione sindacale alla Fiat in 600 accordi dal 1921 al 2003* (Rome: Ediesse, 2003), 122.
28. Diego Giachetti, Marco Scavino, *La Fiat in mano agli operai. L'autunno caldo del 1969* (Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini, 1999), 24.
29. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano …,* 25.
30. C. Damiano, P. Pessa, *Dopo lunghe…,* 126.
31. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano…,* 36.
32. C. Damiano, P. Pessa, *Dopo lunghe…,* 129.
33. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano*…, 50.
34. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano…,* 54.
35. Diego Giachetti, Marco Scavino, *La Fiat in mano…,* 55.
36. Diego Giachetti, Marco Scavino, *La Fiat in mano…,* 62.
37. Diego Giachetti, Marco Scavino, *La Fiat in mano…,* 62.
38. Diego Giachetti, Marco Scavino, *La Fiat in mano…,* 62.
39. G. Polo, *I Tamburi…*, 84-86.
40. Bruno Trentin, *Autunno caldo. Il secondo biennio rosso 1968-1969*, Interview by Guido Liguori (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2019), 101.
41. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano*…, 70.
42. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano*…, 72.
43. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano*…, 81.
44. D. Giachetti, M. Scavino, *La Fiat in mano*…, 71.
45. Trentin, *Autunno caldo*…, 107.
46. C. Damiano, P. Pessa, *Dopo lunghe*…, 132.

Chapter 4
The strategy of tension

On 12 December 1969, a bomb exploded at the National Agricultural Bank in Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing 17 people and wounding 84. That fascist massacre – immediately presented as an anarchist plot by the police, the government, the judiciary, and the mass media – led to a significant escalation in what has been defined as the "strategy of tension". Specifically, this was

a forced exacerbation of social conflict aimed at shifting public opinion to the right, and shifting the overall political axis to the right as well. It worked towards establishing conditions which would be favourable to police states, authoritarian presidencies, and the fracturing of constitutional structures (1).

The strategy of tension was brought into being by fascist groups, but they were not acting alone; there were evident connections and collaborations with state apparatuses, government forces, the media, and foreign countries. For a considerable part of the dominant classes in the country, the immediate response to the cycle of struggles in '68-69 was thus to launch a terror campaign against the general populace, with the goal of rendering Italians more receptive to an authoritarian solution, a solution which would "put things in order again". The strategy of tension was used to create certain preconditions in Italian society, i.e. to set the stage for the passive acceptance of a coup d'état. This very serious fact should not come as a surprise – indeed, just a few years earlier, in 1964, the policies proposed by some socialist ministers within the center-left government had given rise to the preparation of a coup d'état called "Solo Plan". It is worth remembering that this plan, which foresaw the seizure of power by the carabinieri (hence the name "Solo", i.e. *only* the carabinieri) was not developed solely by carabinieri commander Giovanni De Lorenzo. On the contrary, the preparation of the plan had been requested by the President of the Republic, Antonio Segni. The Italian Army's Chief of Defence, General Aldo Rossi, was also perfectly aware of the plan. It was not by chance that on 15 July 1964, the military commanders were involved in an unprecedented event which thankfully has not been repeated since. During consultations for the nomination of the new President of the Council of Ministers (i.e. the Prime Minister) and for the formation of the new government, General De Lorenzo was officially summoned by President Segni. Immediately afterwards, General Aldo Rossi was consulted as well. Hearing the "rattling of sabres", the socialist politician Pietro Nenni recognized the impending danger and agreed to accept a more moderate program; in a further gesture of compromise, he also agreed to exclude the socialist ministers Francesco De Martino and Antonio Giolitti from government. Those actions appeased right-wing groups and effectively put the brakes on the preparations for a military coup.

The planned coup did not become public knowledge until May 1967 when a commission of inquiry discovered serious irregularities about SIFAR, the

secret service of the Italian Armed Forces. During the debates, the Honorable Luigi Anderlini revealed that in the summer of 1964, SIFAR had made all the necessary preparations to carry out an authoritarian coup: "In 1964, we all ran the risk of living through a night like the one recently experienced by politicians in Greece" (2).

As Salverio Ferrari tells us:

There was a long incubation period that preceded the series of massacres which took place in Italy at the end of the sixties and during the seventies. The breeding ground for those events, more than in the political class, was to be found in the apparatuses of the state, which had passed almost seamlessly from fascism to democracy without resolving any of the issues. One thinks of the military summits, the police hierarchies and the secret service. It was this "Cold War" atmosphere which pushed large parts of the ruling classes to participate in right-wing politics, playing right into the hands of the fascists (3).

To have a better idea of what we are talking about, it is useful to have a look at the data. At the beginning of the 1960s, 62 out of 64 first-class government officials, 64 out of 64 second-class government officials, 241 out of 241 deputy government officials, 7 out of 10 inspectors general, 135 out of 135 police chiefs, and 139 out of 139 deputy police chiefs had begun their careers during the fascist regime (4).

It would also be erroneous to think that individuals within state apparatuses were the only ones who harboured authoritarian inclinations. As former national secretary of FIM-CISL Luigi Macario underlined in 1966 when speaking of Fiat:

What is surprising, disgusting and disorienting is that police battalions, in the name of public order, have contributed to sustaining such a state of affairs. The lack of essential trade union freedom, the mass acts of intimidation and the anti-union measures are the true reasons why our strikes are only partially successful. It is not a victory for Fiat but rather a shame – they are the most illiberal and undemocratic owners in Italy (5).

Also in 1966, on the occasion of Fiat's dismissal of three FIM-CISL trade union activists, Macario commented: "there are some entrepreneurs who are digging a new and deeper abyss of resentment with their own hands. The terrorism at Fiat is reminiscent of slavery-era Alabama" (6).

At a certain point, a part of the fascist movement underwent a significant change which led to a new series of tactics. Although they still participated in the tragically well-known beating squads, many fascists began to direct their efforts towards the preparation of terrorist attacks.

The massacre of Piazza Fontana took place on 12 December 1969 (...). It was not by chance that Milan was chosen as a target; there had been mobilizations of workers and students going on in that city. But it was perhaps by chance that the very first of a long chain of deadly massacres took place there. There had been many other attempts earlier that same year. On 15 April in Padua, a bomb had devastated the university rectorate,

and on 25 April in Milan, 19 people had been injured at the fairgrounds by an explosion inside the Fiat stand. A second bomb had exploded in the exchange office of the National Bank of Communications at Central Station, fortunately causing only structural damage. Shortly thereafter, on 12 May, three bombs were found unexploded, one at the city courthouse in Turin and two in Rome at the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Supreme Court of Italy. On 24 July, in Milan, another bomb was discovered and defused in the corridors of the Palace of Justice. Between 8-9 August there were eight separate attacks on railway trains, causing twelve wounded. Investigations revealed that the same hands had built and placed all of the devices. The bombs which were found unexploded showed absolute identity with the fragments found in Padua and at the fairgrounds in Milan. The most serious attempt took place on 4 October, with the discovery of six sticks of gelignite (7), which had twice the destructive power of the bomb used in Piazza Fontana. The gelignite had been connected to a timing device and placed in a box on the bathroom windowsill of the Slovenian school in Trieste. It was only due to a technical malfunction that the bomb had not worked. Had it exploded, it would have taken the lives of many children at that school. A few years earlier, Clemente Graziani, one of the main leaders of the extremist New Order Political Movement (8), *had written: "The essential objective of the struggle is no longer the possession of territory but rather the conquest of the masses ... This idea implies the possibility of killing women, children and the elderly. Today, these forms of terrorist intimidation are considered valid and at times even absolutely necessary for the attainment of certain objectives". In this case, the project was to trigger a total war, erasing existing distinctions between conventional and unconventional war, between military and civilian conflict. Society was transformed into a battlefield in order to fight communism. All means were possible to that end, including bombs, in order to frighten, provoke, and blame the left (9).*

On 10 December 1969, only forty-eight hours prior to the Piazza Fontana massacre, the national secretary of the neo-fascist MSI (10) Giorgio Almirante told the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*: "Fascist youth organizations are preparing for civil war". This was part of the strategy of tension. The fascist groups counted on other groups for support, including the ruling class, the military, and NATO (11).

In the face of these numerous attacks, the fascists obviously sought to place the blame squarely among those on the left. After bombs exploded on 25 April at the Milan fairgrounds, MSI's daily newspaper wrote:

The very serious attacks in Milan are the work of communist criminals. By resorting to cowardly and criminal acts of terrorism, the PCI and CGIL have unleashed an offensive against the Italian state and the rule of law in this country: the centre-left must step down (12).

At the same time, the police dismissed the idea that the attack could be of fascist provenance. In their view, as *Il Giorno* reported, the attack could

more likely be attributed “to the senseless and irrational extreme left-wing protests” (13).

The police therefore neglected to investigate the fascists’ activities, despite the fact that on the same day of the explosions, 25 April, in addition to the destruction of partisan tombstones at a Bergamo cemetery, there had also been an attack at Bergamo ANPI (14) headquarters. The police also neglected to consider the fact that there had been a fascist assault on 12 April, complete with the throwing of Molotov cocktails, at a former hotel at Piazza Fontana which had been transformed by students into a student and worker’s dormitory. And so, even before the bombing at Piazza Fontana, the situation had already begun to smell of a coup. This was not just the opinion of the PCI, who later discussed the event in a party directive on 24 May 1969, or of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who in that same year spoke of a possible coup in his book *Estate 1969* (The Summer of 1969). At the time, it was also abundantly clear to the representatives of other political forces that something big was brewing.

Already that spring, a few days before the Milanese attacks, the socialist minister Giacomo Brodolini had given public warning signals of a right-wing political plan as the socialists attempted to impose a new moderate political course towards the centre-left (this was similar to the political situation in 1964 which had led to the far-right reactionary Solo Plan) (15).

In the Christian Democracy party *(16),* when Carlo Donat-Cattin of the party’s left wing made the proposal to disarm police forces during trade union demonstrations, the party secretary Flaminio Piccoli replied: “The situation is approaching that of a civil war; it would be a mistake to disarm the police” (17).

In a further string of events, during the night between 8-9 August 1969, seven bombs exploded on passenger trains, and it was only by chance that there were no casualties. There were also two other bombs – placed in the train stations of Milan and Venice – which did not detonate. Twelve people, including both regular travelers and railway personnel, were wounded in the incident. The bombs had exploded between 1.10 and 3.05 a.m. on 9 August, all in first-class carriages.

According to the neo-fascists, the responsibility for the bombings was evidently attributable to leftist groups. In an article from 10 August 1969, published in *Secolo d’Italia (18),* the following comments were made:

This was a near tragedy. It is only thanks to a miracle that the attacks did not have a tragic outcome. The attackers are as yet unknown but will most certainly be traced to one of the well-known extreme left-wing anarchist and protest groups. The bombs were placed in first-class coaches to ensure that only people belonging to the wealthy classes would be exposed to the lethal blasts.

The investigations were subsequently covered up, and the UAR (19) contributed to the cover-up, removing useful findings and leaving the judicial authorities in the dark while also underestimating the importance of a key deposition.

In November 1969, tensions were on the rise again and the headlines of *Il Corriere della Sera* in the second week of that month demonstrated how the Milanese newspaper had been contributing to a climate of unrest leading up to the national general strike of 19 November. The strike had been organized to protest against the government's lack of reforms. In Milan, around 11.40 a.m., the demonstrators exited the *Teatro Lirico* where their trade union meeting had taken place. As they left the theater, they crossed paths with a procession of the Union of Marxist-Leninist Communists which was being pursued by police squads in full riot gear with jeeps and police trucks. The tension grew steadily until a protester was hit by a jeep. Word of the incident spread quickly, the protesters reacted and the police brutally attacked them, sending the jeeps at high speed into the crowd, driving up on the sidewalks and hitting a number of pedestrians.

Giampaolo Pansa writes:

In Via Larga the confrontation between the workers and the police vehicles started to heat up. Many young workers and even some elderly workers were shouting and coming dangerously close to the police lines, such that the union's own security personnel was barely able to hold them back. *From the corner of the theatre I could hear the dull sound of fists pounding on the hoods and sides of vehicles. And then someone ordered the attack (this was the second and most serious mistake), but we will never know who it was. There were jeeps and police trucks moving at very high speeds along Via Larga. It was a dreadful attack; the crowd was screaming and there was no way to take shelter on the sidewalk because the drivers would chase you there too. A few rounds of tear gas were used as well (20).*

The demonstrators responded to the violent attack of the police by dismantling the scaffolding of a nearby building site. In that context, an incident took place which led to the death of police officer Antonio Annarumma. At this point the various reconstructions of the incident diverge markedly. *Il Corriere della Sera* described a scene in which unarmed state security forces were faced with a crowd of extremists bearing arms; the paper further complained that existing laws had prevented police officers from being able to properly defend themselves (21). The official version of events, which was consequently the one reported by all the major newspapers, attributed the death of Annarumma to the blow he received from an iron bar which had been thrown at him by the demonstrators.

The version of events provided by the unions and by leftist groups, on the contrary, indicated that the policeman – who was not wearing a helmet – had died from the impact of his head striking his jeep's windshield following a collision with another police vehicle. This hypothesis was supported by *l'Unità* which, basing its story on the testimonies of several demonstrators, made reference to a video clip on French television which apparently verified the hypothesis of a collision between police vehicles (22). In the video, Annarumma's jeep was supposedly seen driving in the wrong direction, with two wheels on the sidewalk and two on the road. As he came down from the sidewalk, Annarumma's hat reportedly fell over his

eyes, blinding him momentarily and thus rendering him unable to avoid a collision with another police vehicle that had driven into his path. At some point immediately following the impact of the collision, Annarumma apparently hit his head against a part of the metal frame of his jeep. This critical piece of film evidence, however, mysteriously disappeared (23). Annarumma's death was the subject of a frenzied press campaign which depicted the ongoing social conflict in Italy as a state of affairs resulting in death, devastation and chaos. The newspaper *Corriere della Sera* was the prime example of that campaign, which claimed that the trade union and student struggles represented an imminent danger to Italian democracy. In that context, Italian President Giuseppe Saragat fully embraced the hypothesis that Annarumma had been murdered, placing the blame on the communists and the trade union which had allegedly acted irresponsibly during the conflict. The objective of this move was to weaken the union. In attributing the moral responsibility for Annarumma's death to the union, it would be possible to foment the angers and fears of the so-called "silent majority". It is clear that Saragat was prepared to continue with violent government responses to such protests. In fact, that sentiment was expressed in one of his official messages:

This odious crime must compel everyone to seek out the criminals and neutralize them. Their aim is the destruction of life; it is therefore paramount that we show our solidarity with those who defend the law and our common freedoms. That solidarity must be reflected not only in the actions of the state and the government, but above all in the minds of the citizens (24).

The position of the President of the Republic was connected to that of his party, the *Partito Socialista Unificato* (PSU), which had formed as a result of a social-democratic split within the Socialist Party in July 1969. The PSU placed considerable blame on the striking demonstrators: "the assassination of Annarumma raises the issue of direct responsibility among the communists and their accomplices in the PSIUP, the PCI and the unions"(25). These were very heavy words, especially if one recalls that in those years of great conflict, Saragat was certainly the principal interlocutor and trustee of the US administration in Italy, as he was generally considered more reliable than the members of the centrist *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) party.

The death of Annarumma was therefore instrumentalized to construct a narrative that would later be repeated after Piazza Fontana, i.e. that the attacks, the bombs, and the victims could all supposedly be linked to the workers' and trade union protests, and that it was necessary to respond to those protests with force. Annarumma was a police officer, a fact which made his death even more intolerable in the court of public opinion. After Saragat's message, most citizens were actually under the impression that Officer Annarumma had been killed by demonstrators. It must be added that the president's message was televised on all major news channels and broadcast on all radio news programs. Gian Carlo Pajetta, speaking during a PCI executive committee meeting on 24 November, reported that "Saragat

had attempted to suspend the regularly scheduled broadcasting of a film on Italian television; he wanted to deliver his message and have a moment of silence for the victims with music playing in the background"(26). Meanwhile, the workers continued their struggle under increasingly harsh conditions. The bodywork department at Mirafiori went on permanent strike, while factory workers in Milan decided to block the transfer of goods indefinitely. Among the Milanese police forces, episodes of insubordination were occurring with greater frequency, as police officers publicly demanded an explicit modification of the rules of engagement, for example asking for permission to use firearms and live ammunition against the demonstrators.
The neo-fascist weekly magazine *Il Borghese* called on the police to respond with force to the workers' protests:
The police must take decisive action today if they wish to resolve the crisis in which Italy currently finds itself. If the officers of the Milan barracks had decided to occupy the city on November 19, instead of defending themselves against their own men who had joined the protesters, they would not have encountered resistance and would have been applauded by the majority of the population (27).
At the end of November 1969, it became increasingly clear that the groups who were appealing to the "silent majority" were attempting to shut down the series of protests and demonstrations which had been going on. They were even prepared to use the threat of military intervention if the protests did not stop.
In the meantime, at the beginning of December, the contract renewal was signed for the workers in the chemical industry and for the employees of state-owned engineering companies.
The situation was therefore somewhat "in limbo" as the month of December began. Some people believed that, in one way or another, the social conflict would quickly come to an end. And yet the strikes and protests continued to take place. In Milan, a new programme of struggles was launched by FIM, FIOM and UILM for the entire month of December, which included a blockade of goods in the large factories and a new installment of "Christmas in the square" (the electromechanics had previously protested there on Christmas in 1960). At the same time, the national CGIL, CISL and UIL announced a national general strike of all Italian industries which was to be held on 19 December.The atmosphere at the time was captured well by Bruno Trentin:
In that moment, after more than 80 bomb attacks dating back to the summer of 1969, the "strategy of tension" – a tool used by reactionary groups partially located within the apparatus of the state – reached its culminating point.
The so-called "silent majority" was created, an entity which barely hid its reactionary roots and its collusion with fascist gangs. The hunt for anarchists and other subversive individuals was unleashed, and attacks on the union were intensified. The union, with its intransigence and its mass struggles, was an easy target for such attacks. At the table of the

metalworkers' contract negotiations, as both the chemical and construction unions were forced to wait for them to finish, the Confindustria *delegation seized the opportunity and hardened its stance once again. The Minister of Labour did not hesitate to mention the threat of the "colonels" and of a Greek-style military coup d'état to induce the unions to accept – with a modification of their demands – an immediate closure of the negotiations (28).*

The attacks were carried out by the fascists, but those attacks were only a small part of a much broader plan in which the sowing of terror emerged as the main strategy in responding to social struggles. Judge Guido Salvini, who in later years brought the investigations and the trial on Piazza Fontana to a close, offers us an interesting perspective in this regard:

A plan to spread terror was consistent with the strategy of radical groups like the "New Order". These organizations could certainly not take power alone, but they were capable of serving as a detonator so that others, especially the military, could more easily intervene. In Italy and in other countries, a "strategy of tension" was a concerted action aimed at creating, through terror, the necessary conditions for the public acceptance of a strict authoritarian stance. On the whole, my personal opinion is that it would be very difficult on a political level to conceive of or accept the idea of a massacre with all its criminal implications. Without taking direct political responsibility for violent acts, there are more subtle levels of collusion that include the possibility of becoming "occasional beneficiaries" of a strategy capable of using bombs. In some respects, bombs and attacks were a blessing to moderate centrist politicians: let us not forget that after 12 December 1969, contracts with the unions were concluded more quickly and with greater ease. Indeed, shortly before his death, Edgardo Sogno (29) recounted in his "Testament of an anti-communist" that in those years, in the most conservative Christian Democrat political circles of Turin, there was active support for this phase of "small explosions". There were even economic rewards for those who promised to commit such acts, because keeping the public in a state of fear served to maintain the status quo. A campaign of "demonstrative" bombs, like the ones planted leading up to 12 December 1969, was probably somehow accepted at the top levels. It is possible, however, that the massacre at Piazza Fontana represented an acceleration or a change of strategy desired by the people who organized it (30).

To me, it therefore seems reasonable to assert that the dominant Italian classes significantly changed their course of action as they faced an intensifying situation of social conflict. The strategy of tension was one of the main reponses to that conflict. In addition to this, it is worth remembering the level of repression which was taking place at the time: in a period of only four months in the autumn of 1969, ten thousand workers were reported to police in connection with the social conflict. It is also worth remembering that repressive and terrorist responses were not the only

responses possible; the approval of the Workers' Statute (31) in the summer of the 1970 undoubtedly represented a different path towards a resolution.
The point which I feel needs to be underlined is that the strategy of tension was not the far-flung idea of some madman, but rather an organic response by a large part of the Italian ruling class. The use of such a strategy was a concrete possibility throughout the first half of the 1970s. One could say that, in the dominant Italian classes, the tendency to resolve problems through the use of force has always been a constant; it is a tendency which can be regularly observed from the 1870 unification of Italy onwards. The strategy of tension was initially defeated by the response of the workers' movement, which was able to maintain its strength and solidarity as it increasingly won public approval. It is evident that the strategy of tension did not represent a coup in itself; rather, through the production of fear, it attempted to lay the foundations for a mass public consensus in moving towards a reactionary turning point, which would eventually lead to a coup.
It seems to me that the movement's response to the strategy of tension had three important elements.
The first was the perseverance of the unified trade union, especially the metalworkers, who resisted the pressure to conclude their contract negotiations on unfavourable terms in the context of the democratic emergency. The refusal to submit to the pressure tactics of Carlo Donat-Cattin – regardless of whether he was frightened by the risk of a coup or interested in instrumentalizing it – was an intelligent strategy implemented by the union's unified leadership group. Without giving in to coercion, that group was able to maintained the unity of the workers' movement while major transformations were taking place.
Secondly, the intelligence of the Milanese movement in its various components – starting with the student movement – was a critical factor. As we have seen, with the massacre at Piazza Fontana, Milan was the epicentre of the terrorist campaign. It was likewise the centre of the media campaign that was trying to lay the groundwork for an authoritarian change by building public consensus. The role of the *Corriere della Sera* went far beyond that of other newspapers – such as *La Stampa* – which were also under the control of the owners. After the massacre at Piazza Fontana, the media campaign attributed responsibility for the bombings to the anarchists, while the murder of Giuseppe Pinelli was portrayed as the suicide of a mentally unstable individual who could not bear the weight of responsibility for what he had supposedly done. The arrest of Pietro Valpreda was sensationalized on the front pages of many newspapers which portrayed him as the perfect monster. In short, the democratic viability of the city had been reduced to zero. The whole incident was like a preview of the events that were in store for the entire country over the coming years. In that situation, the student movement was able to react, as Mario Capanna explains:

It was a difficult situation, there's no doubt about that. It was after the massacre at Piazza Fontana. I'll take a few minutes to tell you how we reacted back then, because it may help us to not lose hope today.
On 12 December 1969, Pietro Valpreda, an "anarchist dancer", was framed by Rolandi, a taxi driver who claimed to "recognize" him. At the time, that was enough to make a case against him. Then there was Giuseppe Pinelli, a good father and a totally innocent man, who fell to his death from the window of police headquarters. So, what more proof do you want?
It was "evident" that the bomb had come from within anarchist circles and therefore from the left. By extension, that meant the bomb had come from the protest movement, starting with the struggles of the students and workers. There was a climate of fear in Milan in particular, but the fear was present throughout the rest of the country as well.
Essentially, our constitutional rights were suspended: the right to free speech, the right to demonstrate and the right to assemble. Those of us who are a little older will remember that when you were caught in a group of more than three people on a sidewalk, you were arrested by the police.
At that moment, the students wrote the most important page of their history together with the workers, the office employees, and the intellectuals. On 18 December (6 days after the massacre) we had put out the call for a demonstration at Milan's State University; we wanted it to be a very big one, against repression, for democracy and freedom.
The State University had been surrounded by an imposing column of police officers and carabinieri: whoever passed them on their way to the rally was stopped, searched and threatened. Nonetheless, Giovanni Pesce, a champion of the resistance, managed to reach the demonstration along with some others.
There were 3000 of us in the end, which was a shamefully low number of demonstrators in those days ... (...) So we started out rather modestly, with our tail between our legs, so to speak. Then Christmas arrived, and we agreed to restart again after the holidays. There was a lot of confusion and many people had lost their focus. There was no initiative on the part of the workers' movement, the union, or the PCI.
L'Unità*, the newspaper associated with the PCI, finally snapped out of it after the massacre, with the headline: "Let there be light". In other words: all hypotheses were still possible, and it was not a foregone conclusion that the anarchists had placed the bomb. On 9 January, the general assembly of Milanese students met and there was an intense debate. There was an enthusiastic decision to hold a big demonstration on 16 January.*
Preparations were made. The police told us: "If you enter Via Larga, we'll tear you to pieces". There was no room for negotiation.
At that point we made the cunning decision to postpone the event from the 16th to the 21st. Why?
Police headquarters had banned our demonstration which had been scheduled for the 16th, but that event was no longer taking place. If they

now decided to ban the demonstration on 21 January, it would be completely obvious that our constitutional rights were being suppressed.
No warnings were sent to us for 21 January. Thousands of people were gathering. We placed journalists (Giorgio Bocca, Camilla Cederna and Eugenio Scalfari among others) and university professors (Mario Dal Pra, Ludovico Geymonat, Enzo Paci and others) on the front lines, thinking that they would function as an additional deterrent.
The police attacked straight off, using clubs against journalists, professors, and students. Despite this, we had made the decision that that demonstration had to take place at all costs. And so we defended our ideals and we defended ourselves. The procession continued, passing Cathedral Square and continuing along Via Corridoni until it reached the municipal courthouse. From there, we went back to the state road, still under repeated attacks, but partially defended by the security personnel we had brought with us. Despite everything, we managed to carry out that demonstration.
There were dozens of arrests, and dozens had been injured on both sides, but our efforts had not been in vain: it was a turning point, the moment where Milan started to react. We received a seemingly endless number of messages expressing support – as well as condemnations of the police violence – from various unions, journalists, Works Councils, etc. ...
The Minister of the Interior, the government, and the police headquarters were now totally isolated. The next day, another assembly was held and we decided to call a new demonstration for 31 January.
It was extraordinary. The city of Milan administered a decisive blow. There was no school, the university was closed, and the factories came to a halt. In those ten days between 21-31 January, there was no discussion about the clashes or about the violence of the police. In the meantime, the idea had begun to emerge that Valpreda was innocent, that the bombs could not have been planted by the anarchists, and that somehow the state, powerful interest groups, the secret service, etc. were behind it all.
Delegations of workers came from every factory. The metalworkers were there, and groups arrived from Pirelli, from Cremona, from Brescia, from everywhere. There were affirmations of solidarity from all the other universities in the country. Danish students demonstrated at the Italian embassy in Copenhagen, saying it was shameful for Italy to repress its students and its workers. Similar scenes were happening in many other European capitals. On 31 January 1970 an immense march took place; it was the so-called "march of the 50,000". If such a march were held today, it would certainly attract 500,000 demonstrators. The police were no longer in a position to attack the demonstration, which took place under absolutely peaceful conditions. The demonstrators were shouting: "Valpreda is innocent, the state is responsible for the massacre." That was the moment in which the democratic recovery started; from there, it spread throughout the rest of Italy. The situation following Piazza Fontana was therefore anything but a "walk in the park". If we are sitting here today with the luxury of discussing this freely, it is because those tens of thousands of

young men and women took action together with the workers, with all the risks that entailed, and turned the situation around (32).

Thirdly, there was the fact that the workers' struggles did not end with the signing of their contract. On the contrary, as early as January 1970, there was a series of mobilizations against repression within the factory and for the concrete implementation of the agreements which had just been signed. In that context, the ability to build "institutions of the movement" was not the only achievement of the workers' struggles in the factories. There were other positive results of the struggle which went far beyond the structure of the delegates. A strong relationship began between intellectuals and workers which became deeply rooted in society at large. There was the birth of organizations like Democratic Medicine, Democratic Psychiatry (33) and Democratic Judiciary. There was also the theatrical and musical activity of thousands and thousands of people – relatively famous personalities like Dario Fo and Franca Rame but also including ordinary neighbourhood collectives in the country – who produced and spread the music of the movement along with essential counter-information. In that connection, it is also worth mentioning the Committee of Democratic Journalists of Milan, which after Piazza Fontana began publishing the BCD (Bulletin of Democratic Counter-information). The BCD played a fundamental role in the dissemination of mass information which challenged the dominant narratives and discourses of the ruling class.

After Piazza Fontana, the strategy of tension continued to be implemented, generating an alarming trail of deaths as more incidents occurred. But that strategy was ultimately defeated as the movement succeeded in overturning the climate of fear which had been essential in building a consensus towards authoritarian politics. The dynamic activism of the workers and students had defeated the bombs and the culture of fear.

This victory was maintained over the years, until the tragic intertwining of *unità nazionale* (i.e. the collaboration of the PCI and the DC) and terrorism marked the beginning of a deep process in which the subordinate classes became increasingly passive. If 1969 had represented a widespread process in which politics was determined from below through self-organization, then the strong recovery of the state apparatuses – armed or otherwise enabled by the government – has contributed significantly to the destruction of those social politics and to the de-socialization of politics in general. Those state apparatuses have re-established politics as an activity dominated by elites, i.e. as an activity which excludes the participation of most citizens and which is simply imposed on the general population from above. In this context, there should be no confusion about right-wing vs. left-wing involvement. When the ability to make decisions is taken away from the people, the politics are always right-wing in nature.

The great potential for change, one of the main gains of the workers' movement, has gradually been eroded. The disconnect between politics and social dynamics, which many Italians increasingly view as "normal", constitutes a great danger. In this context, there are some statistics which

are worth considering. The participation by right-wing groups in episodes of violence was 95% between 1969 and 1973, 85% in 1974 and 78% in 1975 (34). There is thus a direct and evident relationship between the increasing passivity of the workers and the increase in episodes of violence carried out by forces ascribable to the left. In other words, as the number of violent acts carried out by the proponents of armed struggle on the left increased, it had a silencing effect on the workers' peaceful mass movement. Without wanting to overly simplify a situation which is obviously quite complex, we can generally say that, although the workers' movement has certainly survived the fascist violence of the right, it has also been seriously damaged, divided and silenced by two tragic developments: terrorist activity and the fateful agreement between the DC and the PCI.

Dates, places and victims: 135 dead and 550 injured in a decade of fascist massacres

12 December 1969, Milan, bombing of the National Agricultural Bank: 17 dead, 84 injured
22 July 1970, Gioia Tauro, train bombing: 6 dead, 72 injured
31 May 1972, Peteano, car bombing: 3 dead, 2 injured
17 May 1973, Milan, bombing of police headquarters: 4 dead, 45 injured
28 May 1974, Brescia, bombing at Piazza della Loggia: 8 dead, 103 injured
4 August 1974, San Benedetto Val di Sambro, train bombing: 12 dead, 44 injured
2 August 1980, Bologna, bombing of Central Train Station: 85 dead, 200 injured

Other terrorist attacks

The following data is based on the dossier *A Report on Fascist Violence in Lombardy,* which was edited by the Lombardy Regional Council and published in 1975 by Cooperativa Scrittori Roma.

From 18 January 1969 to 28 May 1974, the region of Lombardy registered:
180 assaults
46 cases of property damage
36 hand grenade explosions or explosions of similar devices
63 Molotov cocktail explosions
14 cherry bomb explosions
10 attacks with dynamite or TNT
25 cases of illegal possession of weapons and explosives
35 shootings
10 stabbings
30 cases of arson

1. G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), 373.
2. G. Corbi, *Qui si udì rumore di sciabole*, «la Repubblica», 3 March 1997.

3. S. Ferrari, in Aa.Vv. *1969/2009. A quarant'anni dall'autunno caldo. La città di Milano dalle lotte dei lavoratori e degli studenti alla strategia della tensione* (Milan: Punto Rosso, 2009), 46.
4. A. D'Orsi, *La Polizia. Il potere repressivo. Le forze dell'ordine italiano* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972), 40.
5. Luigi Macario's statements are reported by «La Gazzetta del Popolo», 6 April 1966.
6. Macario's statement is quoted in G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato*, 58.
7. Gelignite: a high explosive similar to dynamite in which the adsorbent base is largely potassium nitrate or a similar nitrate usually with some wood pulp. Used particularly for rock blasting.
8. The New Order Political Movement (*Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo*) was an extreme right-wing extraparliamentary political organization founded in December 1969. The group had connections to fascist ideology. It was a splinter group of the paramilitary group *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* (New Order Scholarship Center) which had been formed earlier in 1956.
9. AA.VV, *1969/2009. A quarant'anni…*, 49.
10. The Italian Social Movement (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*, abbreviated as MSI) was a neo-fascist, national conservative political party in Italy from 1946-1995.)
11. AA.VV, *1969/2009. A quarant'anni…*, 44.
12. *Sciopero dello Stato e terrorismo rosso. Il governo vigila disarmando la polizia*, in «Il Secolo d'Italia», 27 April 1969.
13. *Sono bombe anarchiche*, «Il Giorno», 27 April 1969.
14. ANPI: *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia,* the National Association of Italian Partisans.
15. *Brodolini denuncia un piano di destra*, in «l'Unità», 23 April 1969.
16. The Christian Democracy party (*La Democrazia Cristiana*, abbreviated as DC) was the main Italian political party of the post-war period. Founded on Christian Democratic ideals and American ideology, the DC was always a participant in Italian government throughout its existence from 1943 until 1994.
17. G. Spadaccia, *Dc: la legge del ricatto*, in «Mondo Operaio», N. 17, 27 April 1969.
18. *Secolo d'Italia*: daily newspaper of the neo-fascist MSI party.
19. The Office of Classified Affairs (*Ufficio Affari Riservati*, abbreviated as UAR) was a secret service office dedicated to carrying out illegal operations. It was part of the Italian Department of Public Safety from 1948-1974.
20. Francesco Paolo Palaia, *La Cgil e il Pci tra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)* – Doctoral Thesis in History – La Sapienza University – Faculty of Literature and Philosophy, academic year 2016-2017, 88.
21. *No alla violenza battaglia comune*, in «Corriere della Sera», 20 November 1969.
22. *La morte di Annarumma*, in «l'Unità», 21 November 1969.
23. Cfr., M. Dondi, *L'eco del boato*, cit., p. 130; G. Boatti, *Piazza Fontana*, 80.
24. The transcript of Saragat's telegram is in *Il grave messaggio di Saragat ripetuto dalla Rai-tv per 24 ore*, in «l'Unità», 21 November 1969.
25. *Ibid*.
26. Francesco Paolo Palaia, *La Cgil e il Pci…*, 90.
27. «Il Borghese», 30 November 1969.
28. Bruno Trentin, *Autunno caldo…,* 107.
29. Edgardo Sogno was a singular figure in Italian history: a partisan, a

monarchist, an anti-communist and a freemason who at the beginning of the 1970s planned an anti-communist coup d'état in Italy.

30. Interview with G. Salvini, in AA.VV., *1969/2009. A quarant'anni….*, 110.
31. The Italian Workers' Statute is one of the main regulatory documents of the Italian Republic in terms of labour law. Introducing important and remarkable changes concerning working conditions and workers' rights, both on the trade union level and on a political level, it was an extraordinary achievement of the Italian workers' movement.
32. Mario Capanna, in AA.VV., 1969/2009. *A quarant'anni….*, 23.
33. Democratic Psychiatry (*Psichiatria Democratica*) is an Italian organization founded by Franco Basaglia and by a larger movement which was lobbying to abolish mental hospitals and to liberate the sick from their segregation in such structures. Democratic Psychiatry advocated for reforms to the laws governing psychiatric care in Italy.
34. Donatella Della Porta, M. Rossi, *Cifre crudeli. Bilancio dei terrorismi italiani* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986), 2.

Chapter 5
Why was 1969 such an extraordinary event, and why has it lasted over time?

At a certain point, after looking at the longevity, the radicality and the strength of the 1969 workers' movement, the need naturally arises to delve deeper in order to explain why it all happened in the first place.
It seems to me that the reasons for the explosive events in 1969 are to be found in dynamics that involve Italian society as a whole.
In Italy, political and cultural phenomena of great importance were inextricably linked to that social explosion; those phenomena contributed significantly towards determining the duration and depth of the cycle of struggles. The roots of the revolt can be traced back to transformations in the social structure of the country, and the Italian situation must therefore be explained by considering the political cultures and organizations which were involved during those transformations.

The basic social elements

To start with, the struggles of 1969 represented *a rebellion of young people*. This younger generation typically did not have much experience working in factories, and they were against the unacceptable conditions of a Fordist-style work environment. On average, the young people were more educated than the higher-ranking members of the factory hierarchies to whom they found themselves subordinated. The epicentre of the workers' protests were the large Fordist factories in which the "scientific" organization of labour had led to unbearable workloads, high exposure to toxicity, and despotic internal discipline. All of those factors were present in addition to the general context of low wages. There were several contractual issues which needed to be addressed in trade union negotiations, but at the heart of the revolt that characterized 1969 there were more pressing issues like the defence of one's own dignity, subjectivity, and psychophysical integrity. The young people who entered the factories at the end of the 1960s were about the same age as those who were participating in the student protests. These two groups – the students and the young workers – had many things in common; they were closer together in terms of their worldview than the generation of their respective parents. This fact – along with other factors which will be discussed below – allowed young people to transcend some of the cultural divisions that had historically separated the working classes from university students.
The beastly exploitation in the factories had been going on for years, and the unacceptable conditions in the southern Italian countryside had been a fixture of everyday life for many years as well. Looking at the situation from that point of view, there are some elements we can mention which actually created the necessary preconditions for the revolt to take place.
First, there was the fact that *Italy had been changing rapidly* for several years. During the economic miracle (1958-1962), growth rates had been

extremely high and the country was undergoing major transformations. This same pattern generally held true in other countries where large-scale workers' struggles subsequently took place.

Another critical factor in the revolt was the widespread perception that everything was changing in the world and that things were constantly improving. Against this backdrop, the workers began to re-evaluate their own working conditions which continued to be very harsh or were actually getting worse.

On 20 July 1969, mankind took a major step forward in its conquest of outer space. For many, it was a disconnect which was hard to accept: if there was so much progress in the world, and a man could be sent to the Moon, why was it still necessary for ordinary people to continue working under such inhumane conditions?

The revolt did not occur in 1964-1965, when a recession caused by the government's "credit crunch" policy led to widespread unemployment and layoffs. Instead, the revolt occurred later, at a time when companies were hiring again and the system appeared to be working more efficiently. This is a relevant fact: it was not the worsening of the economy but rather the positive change in the overall economic situation which made it possible to have a discussion about the direction of future changes. In the context of a generally positive economic trajectory, the exploitation of the workers' labour quickly came into focus as something particularly arbitrary and unbearable.

Those social changes were accelerated by the entirely Italian phenomenon of *returning immigrants*. A significant number of new employees in the large companies of northern Italy were southern Italians who had previously left their homes to work abroad in Switzerland, Belgium and Germany. With the prospect of finding work in their native country, these individuals made the choice to return. After having suffered the racism and discrimination that characterized the situation in many foreign countries, these workers arrived back in Italy with the expectation that they would be treated like human beings. They thought they would have a proper home, unlike in Switzerland where they had slept in barracks-style accommodations. They believed they would finally be able to reunite with their families, without having to remain in a foreign country. They also believed that they would earn good wages, finally overcoming the situation in Germany where they had been underpaid compared to the native workers... Instead, they found themselves in a situation which essentially reproduced the conditions they had experienced abroad – and in some cases those conditions were even worse. The wages were low, the housing situation was intolerable, and the working conditions in the factories were mostly worse than those they had left behind.

In this book there are various accounts of the poor working conditions in factories and also of incidents that occurred at the workplace, particularly at Fiat. But the statistics on work-related deaths are even more shocking: in 1969 in Italy there were 12 deaths per day. At the beginning of the 1970s,

for every 100,000 industrial workers in the USA there were 9 deaths per year, in France 13, in Belgium 25, and in Italy 45. It was a massacre in its own right – the statistics speak to us of working conditions in which the life of a worker was worth nothing. It should be noted that, in large companies like Fiat, when workers suffered fatal injuries, the documentation nearly always stated that the workers had died in the ambulance during their transport to the hospital. It was very rare that a worker would be declared dead directly in the factory. This was done in order to reduce the company's legal and financial responsibility for the deaths, and to falsify statistics on the number of deaths at the workplace.

Another significant element was *the advent of television*, which gave people the opportunity to see what was happening elsewhere in the world. Together with the increasing number of radio programmes on offer, television was a sort of escape for many young people; it enabled them to broaden their horizons and to break down the proletarian realities which they had previously experienced as unchangeable. The changes and the rebellions of young people that were taking place worldwide, from *rock music* to the student protests of 1968, entered into homes and bars throughout Italy, reaching even the most remote villages. In that period, it was perhaps true that many young Italians in their twenties identified more strongly with the Beatles than with the customs typical of their parents' generation.

This element of renewal is a recurring theme in the proletarian world. One recalls the anecdotal stories of Giuseppe Di Vittorio (1) from the early 1900s in which there were discussions and even quarrels with the older farmworkers in Cerignola. At that time, Di Vittorio and the other young people did not want to wear their *tabarro* (2). Instead, they preferred to wear a different, more modern type of coat in order to break the stigma of social inferiority. For the older labourers this was a betrayal of class identity. For Di Vittorio and his peers, however, it was an opportunity to escape the social marginalization inherent in their restrictive proletarian reality; it also gave them the possibility of being "noticed" by the girls. The 1960s were years of powerful transformations in clothing, customs and other social habits. This had a profound impact not only on students, but on all young people in general.

Another fundamental element was the new ideology that emerged during the 1960s. This new set of ideals came from the re-thinking of social norms in that decade, but also from events like the youth revolts or from influential non-conformist groups such as the *beat generation*. The ideology was characterized by a *libertarian ethos* which was intolerant of hierarchies; its supporters preferred active revolt over a passive acceptance of the status quo. It was a worldview that wanted to overtake the traditional military-style attitudes of people who insisted that "things have always been done this way" (today we commonly hear similarly depressing and apathetic phrases being used, like "there is no alternative"). The worldview of the 1960s was linked to the possibility of change; it was also connected

with the possibility of challenging the status quo, a task which the students had taken into their own hands. The French experience in May 1969 had certainly not gone unnoticed in Italy.

This new worldview was felt not only on the level of social norms, but also in *political and religious terms*. In addition to the student protests of 1968 there was *Vietnam*, the revolt of a poor country which stood up to the most powerful nation in the world. The Vietnamese resistance was a clear demonstration of the possibility of rebelling, but also of the moral righteousness for doing so. The Cultural Revolution in China – without wanting to go into it here – also demonstrated this need for change through revolt. In that period, ideas about communism had become more diversified, moving beyond the correlation with the Stalinist repressions of the past. In the liberation struggles of third-world countries and also in the West, a new creative Marxism was emerging which led to a more sophisticated view of communism. Fidel Castro, and above all Che Guevara, inspired millions of young people with their alternatives to the status quo.

The *Second Vatican Council* brought a breath of fresh air to the catholic church in terms of church membership, the sharing of wealth, and the reduction of hierarchies. The long-standing links between catholicism, the preservation of catholic traditions, patronage practices, and the Christian Democracy party were beginning to crack. During the years the Council was held (1962-1965), the church also modified its policy towards workers' protests and strike activities. Previously considered a sin, going on strike came to be regarded by the catholic church as a legitimate act of self-defense against injustice.

Taken together, these elements produced a worldview which was not only compatible with the protests but which in some ways also legitimized them. In addition, the internal discussions and divisions within the "big families" that had characterized the Italian post-war period – *catholicism and communism* – made it easier to have a dialogue. Despite the ideological differences between those two groups, the internal discussions within each camp enabled both catholics and communists – perhaps at a distance – to arrive at an understanding of each other's points of view.

The extreme exploitation in the factories, the feudalistic domination of the landowners, and the arrogance and power abuses of the police thus became unbearable for a large part of the working class and for other societal groups. This occurred because those abuses no longer possessed a dominant ideology or other symbolic order which justified them. In this context, people increasingly believed that protesting was the correct thing to do, and that a rebellion was indeed a real possibility. These ideas were widespread; they went far beyond the supporters of any single leader or group.

In my view, these were the main elements – widely observable in the working world as a whole – which made the extraordinary events of 1969 possible.

Political and cultural subjectivities

In the context of the deep changes which were occurring in 1969, there were several small groups that played an important role culturally and politically. There was a great sense of disappointment that year as many people searched in vain for a political party which was prepared to take on a leadership role. In that situation, the workers' movement often moved in to fill the political vacuum, frequently overtaking the trade union and even the PCI in almost every instance. In 1969, the role of the political avant-garde was not played by any formal grouping or organized political party; instead, a diverse group of individuals and informal organizations stepped forward to take on that leadership role. There were discussions about what position to take: sometimes the leadership acted in unison, while in other instances there were contrasting views and even outright opposition among the decision-makers. In any case, these individuals and informal organizations guaranteed a certain level of reflection on how best to proceed in any given situation. The most intelligent and progressive members of the Italian trade unions realized that a change needed to be made. They therefore allowed the trade unions to be permeated by the workers' movement, leading to a profound transformation of the union structures. The role of these enlightened and informally organized activist groups is relevant in at least two respects.

First of all, some of those activists had the courage to break company discipline at key moments in the struggle. They were able to resist the bosses' coercion while calling on their co-workers to join the movement. It should be remembered that a large part of the "spontaneous" struggles of 1968-1969 were actually not spontaneous at all – they were simply strikes or demonstrations which had not been officially declared by the union. Many of those events had been organized – sometimes with long and painstaking preparation, other times waiting to seize an opportune moment – by workers who had a stepped forward in a political, trade union or religious context. We have seen that "spontaneous" protest marches did not just start spontaneously in the factories. The work of perhaps a dozen people was required to promote them and ultimately to set them in motion. In the same way, workers' assemblies at the factories did not just appear out of nowhere – someone needed to get up on a table and start talking. And for "spontaneous" strikes to occur, considerable informal discussion was required in advance, e.g. someone needed to turn the machines off or leave the production line at exactly the right moment. In other words, the situation always required someone to take a risk. In the vast majority of cases, there was nothing spontaneous at all about the actions taken by the workers' vanguard; they were individual acts of courage with considerable planning behind them.

Secondly, it was the activists themselves who determined the direction of the workers' movement. The decision to elect workers' delegates during the struggles was not a spontaneous phenomenon but rather a calculated political practice instituted by those who had built a political strategy

around it. The practice of having worker delegates later became generalized, but that change was not something which was taken for granted. The workers started with the election of delegates to control workloads in the factory, but they eventually proceeded to establish the Works Council which addressed deeper issues of workers' control in the factory and in the company more generally. This was not a spontaneous development; rather, it was the result of a conciliarist approach and of a particular political culture which had been instituted. When the workers chose not to limit their demands to the issue of wage increases, deciding instead to also push for an increase in worker control over production, and demanding more power for the workers in general, it was the result of a political culture and of a political battle that was taking place. When the workers transitioned from making mere wage demands and began questioning how their work was structured, fighting against exposure to toxicity in the workplace, and demanding a zero-risk work environment, it was the result of political growth among the workers.

It was this group of individuals, acting either independently or within structured organizations, which worked to ensure that the spark of revolt did not die out, and which subsequently became the backbone of the Works Council trade union. Whether they were grassroots political militants or the leaders of worker initiative groups, their common denominator was a culture of class unity and a shared goal of liberating men and women. Their work allowed FIOM and FIM to bring about innovations in the trade union landscape that had no precedent in other parts of the world. Those innovations gave birth to the FLM (3) and also profoundly changed Italian trade union politics for several years.

The emergence and eventual formation of these avant-gardes can be traced back to developments in various social and political groups.

In new streams of thought within the catholic world. Here we can highlight the role of influential figures such as Don Milani, whose writings challenged existing norms and paved the way for a type of activism previously unthinkable in the catholic community. Some examples of his works are *Obedience is no longer a virtue* from 1965 and *Open letter to a teacher* from 1967.

In the paradigm shift within socialist and communist milieus. From the "Red Notebooks" *(Quaderni rossi)* to "Problems of Socialism" *(Problemi del socialismo*) to the "Notebooks from Piacenza" *(Quaderni piacentini)*, there were dozens of magazines in the 1960s which carried out the fundamental task of criticizing Stalinist orthodoxy while putting class struggle back at the centre of the discussion. Literally thousands of people formed their political opinions based on these magazines which did not present socialism and communism as a religion or as a dogma. By avoiding a doctrinaire position, the magazines enabled people to more easily engage with the changes that were happening in the catholic world.

In the changing constellations within the trade union landscape, especially between the different groups of metalworkers and within CGIL and CISL.

In that context, the workers' movement led to a series of discussions which included: the ability to question the relationship between the party and the trade union; a renewed focus on the workers' condition and workers' democracy as prerequisites for the recovery of the trade union; a clear understanding that trade union unity had to be built from class unity; a questioning of the neutrality of technology and of the centrality of concepts such as the "development of productive forces"; and a questioning of the backwardness of Italian capitalism. During the 1960s, the proposals of various trade union members were regularly much more advanced on issues like these in comparison with the proposals presented by the PCI or the PSI. The advanced proposals of the trade unions played an influential role in the development of the workers' movement of 1969.

Why did the repercussions of 1969 last for a decade?

The transition from the *hot autumn* to the chain of events which occurred in Italy during the subsequent decade goes beyond the scope of this work, which is mainly focused on 1969 and has no ambition of presenting the entire decade of the 1970s. However, some important elements can be highlighted.

To start with, 1969 gave rise to *new trade union structures* that allowed the workers to consolidate their power, creating forms of participation that went beyond the struggles of that year. This led to *assemblies in the factory* and the right of the workers to gather and speak with each other at the workplace. *Delegates* were elected and *Works Councils* were established – this was an enormous process which occurred rapidly over a relatively short period of time. Indeed, by early 1970, among the metalworkers alone, more than 30,000 delegates had been elected and 2000 Works Councils had been formed. This rapid diffusion of the Works Councils was linked to increasing trade union solidarity. In particular, that solidarity led to the founding of the FLM and, in a more advanced development, to the founding of area councils. The trade unions were quite active in this period; they branched out and networked with a series of political organizations of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left, but also with collectives, grassroots committees, and other relevant groups. This social and political leftist movement produced a mass political avant-garde, a widespread alternative ruling class which had great importance in the 1970s. A number of professional organizations were also created which maintained a dialogue with the left and which actively supported social transformation; of these, Democratic Medicine, Democratic Judiciary, and Democratic Psychiatry were among the most well-known. One must also consider the role that the universities had in those years, given the importance of knowledge and its application in the context of class struggle. Institutions of higher education not only disseminated knowledge, they also initiated a process of the democratization of knowledge.

It is worth mentioning the fundamental value of brilliant initiatives like the 150 hours of paid educational leave, which was one of the gains made in the

metalworkers' contractual agreement in 1973. That initiative made it possible for workers of both sexes to attend courses for a total of 150 hours over a three-year period (the hours could also be used all in a single year upon request). The courses were paid for by the company if the workers committed 150 hours of their own free time to the project. For more than one million workers, those 150 hours represented the possibility of acquiring their middle school diploma and of completing their compulsory education. In addition, the courses were places of social experimentation where solid and lasting relationships were created between manual labourers and white-collar workers, producing an unprecedented social block which could support the alternative ruling class. The subjects which were covered in those 150 hours of courses went far beyond compulsory school programmes, and in that regard I would especially like to highlight the courses on women's health. When the metalworkers' negotiators initially made the demand for 150 hours of educational leave, which could be used towards education on any subject (i.e. which was not limited to professional competencies), Felice Mortillaro, the president of Federmeccanica (4) ironically asked if they wanted to teach metalworkers how to play the harpsichord. The unionists said yes. I honestly do not know how many workers actually learned to play the harpsichord, but I do know that hundreds of thousands of manual workers who had been systematically excluded from access to culture did learn to read and write. Those workers acquired knowledge, produced culture, changed power relationships, and created spaces of freedom for themselves and others.

The events of 1969 led to major changes in Italy because they produced a widespread alternative ruling class. Those events modified the anthropology of an entire generation. People who were socialized under that basic value system typically challenged injustices, they assumed personal responsibility for their actions, they participated actively in demonstrations, and they understood the importance of knowledge in making changes. There are some studies that show how, for the generation of Italians that came of age at the outset of the seventies, the rates of civil commitment, participation, and attention to public affairs are two times higher than the rates for the generations which came before and after them. It was a great achievement to change so many people so deeply, and to give birth to a political generation that has lasted over time.

It is said – with good reason – that Italy has never had a revolution, and that it is therefore a country of opportunists. The only real revolutionary process that Italy has experienced was precisely the one that emerged at the end of the 1960s and which continued into the subsequent decade.

Secondly, the great redistribution of wealth in Italy – in the form of profits, annuities and wages – was undoubtably fundamental in increasing mass consumption and thus in developing the internal market. In a similar fashion, the expansion of the welfare state – a major achievement claimed by the workers' struggles – was able to satisfy popular needs and contributed significantly to the growth of overall prosperity. This virtuous

circle strengthened the trade union's position at the bargaining table and also increased the workers' capacity to make further demands. Taken together, these factors led to an enormous overall improvement in Italian society.
Worker subjectivity was incompatible with capitalist structures, but this did not mean that trade union efforts and political struggles in terms of investment in the South, *welfare* development, and the redistribution of wealth had a negative effect on the development of the country. While the workers' and trade union struggles raised issues of power and hegemony, they did not prevent economic development. For a few years, this situation produced a sort of dualism – or perhaps it is better to say pluralism – of powers in Italy. On the one hand, the power of the owners remained formally intact, but in reality, the power of the workers in the factories was also very strong. In a similar fashion, the government and the parliament maintained their powers in full, but the ongoing class struggle played a very important role in mitigating that power. There are several significant examples of governments that fell after a general strike proclaimed by the trade unions. In this context, the continuing class struggle led to certain innovations in the structure of the country. After that, however, the inadequacies and errors of the workers' movement, combined with a decisive offensive carried out by national and international owners, produced the outcome which is now well-known: the defeat of the workers' movement in Italy and abroad.
The events in Italy in 1969 produced such long-lasting effects because, at a certain point, an important transformation occurred. A relatively small egalitarian and libertarian revolt grew into a powerful, large-scale social movement which continued to develop around the union of the Works Councils. That movement was able to exert an overwhelmingly positive influence on the development of society as a whole.

Why are 1968 and 1969 so often treated as separate events?
As I have repeatedly pointed out, I believe that 1968 and 1969 are inseparable from each other. They are part of the same cycle of struggles and they address very similar issues: anti-authoritarianism, social justice, egalitarianism, the questioning of social roles, and therefore also the questioning of capitalism and those who profit from capitalist structures.
While it seems to me that the fundamental commonalities of those two years are difficult to deny, the presentation of 1968 and 1969 in the mainstream media generally does not reflect those similarities. While 1968 is frequently remembered, 1969 is usually conspicuously absent.
The student movement is presented as a movement that speaks of the future. Young people always have something to rebel against – it is a recurring theme, typical of every generation which inevitably inherits the structures built by past generations. In other words, 1968 is typically presented in a way which underlines the narrative of generational renewal, of rejuvenation. In some way, this renewal is seen as a positive phenomenon

in a modern society, like a snake shedding its skin at the beginning of a new season.

Quite the opposite is true of 1969, which is commonly presented as an episode of the distant past, filled with historical figures who no longer exist – the workers – in a situation that has become irrelevant because factories of that type purportedly do not exist anymore. While 1968 speaks to us about a phase of life – youth – which reappears with each new generation, 1969 tells the story of an archaic and almost "geological" era which no longer has anything to do with today and above all with tomorrow.

There is nothing random about this separation. It serves to conceal underlying class conflict and to suppress the universal character of the struggles of 1969. It also attempts to prevent current generations from questioning exploitation in the workplace. Capitalism is constantly evolving and changing the forms of exploitation, and every generation must therefore recreate its own version of 1969 in order to question the capitalist tactics which are the cause of their suffering.

A second point, however, is that this separation serves to distort, to deform, and to co-opt the events of 1968.

There are two ways to tell the story of a student revolt like the one which happened in 1968. It could be presented as a regular episode which contributed to the natural modernization process of society. It could also be framed as an event which began with the anti-authoritarian challenge of young students and which went on to question the existing capitalist social structures.

The separation of 1968 from 1969 serves to portray the student struggles as a simple by-product of the modernization of Italian society. This is the version of events preferred by people who were once student leaders and who later went on to become bank managers or newspaper owners.

Taking the opposite perspective, if 1968 and 1969 are taken together as two parts of a larger, more significant phenomenon, the events of those years can be considered among the best pages in Italian history. Those events marked the beginning of a revolution in the West; they demonstrated that it was possible to change the world and to change one's country in a meaningful way.

It is therefore necessary to keep '68 and '69 together. The student protests and workers' struggles are part of the same phenomenon; separating them only serves to further entrench existing capitalist social relations. When there are divisions in leftist camps between the supporters of students and the supporters of workers, neither of those camps can emerge victorious. Without a united front, all groups on the left remain powerless to resist the dominant ideology.

1. Giuseppe di Vittorio (1892-1957) was the most important and also the most famous Italian trade unionist. A communist of peasant origins from Cerignola, he was secretary of CGIL from 1943 until his death.
2. *Tabarro*: a type of cloak traditionally worn by farmworkers.

3. The Italian Metalworkers' Federation (*Federazione lavoratori metalmeccanici*, abbreviated FLM) was a unitary union composed of the individual trade unions of the main Italian trade union confederations (CGIL-CISL-UIL). Formally created in 1973 but already functioning in practice since 1970, the FLM was the most advanced, innovative and democratic organization in the entire Italian trade union landscape at the time. It was an important social, cultural and political reference point during the workers' movement of the 1970s.
4. Federmeccanica is the Trade Union Federation of the Italian Metalworking Industry, founded in 1971.

Chapter 6
1969 is the future

Writing a chapter on the contemporary relevance of 1969 may seem like a preposterous undertaking. In recent decades, capitalist interest groups have produced a good deal of ideological propaganda which routinely invites us to accept the insuperability of capitalism. Much of that propaganda has attempted to convince us that the situation has changed, and that workers, social classes, and big Fordist factories no longer exist today as they did in the past.

It is not possible here to examine how much the world has changed in the last fifty years. I will limit myself to three considerations in making my closing remarks on the relevance of 1969.

The first consideration is that the changes which have taken place over the past 50 years have not abolished class struggle nor the classes themselves. The problem is that, after the material and ideological failure of the left in the West, the class struggle was actively taken up by the dominant classes, and those groups are now winning that battle. Through neoliberal modernization, humanity has made what Serge Halimi (1) has called "a great leap backwards".

The second consideration is that, by virtue of this victory by the ruling classes, the exploitation of labour has now reached alarmingly high levels. The current situation actually bears more resemblance to the situation in the 1950s and 1960s which the workers rebelled against in 1969 than it does to the situation of the 1970s. The rights which had been secured in that cycle of struggles have now been eliminated to such a degree that many workers – younger generations and migrants in particular – are now living in a context where they have no job security and where they are constantly subject to coercion. This state of affairs has given rise to a whole array of negative phenomena: slave labour, underpaid work, human rights abuses, and an exposure to toxic substances and other dangers at the workplace. Today, instead of the large factories and the owners as culprits, there is the coercion inherent in the market itself which turns each one of us into our own best self-exploiter. Like the bosses prior to 1969, the market does not bargain: it imposes its imperatives on every worker, regardless of whether the worker is regularly employed or self-employed. In other words: the forms of oppression may have changed, but the coercion continues unabated. If anything, the exploitation has become more pervasive, as it is no longer limited to eight hours of work per day.

The third consideration is that this regression has produced a dramatic sense of loneliness and social impotence; those feelings start from a person's working conditions and extend to all other parts of their life. A sense of loneliness is something which is increasingly widespread today and which for many people can lead to a general fear of the future. Some individuals experience paranoia and persecution anxiety: they begin to perceive others as enemies, creating an atmosphere of distrust and the sense of always

having to defend oneself. It is a situation characterized by powerlessness and fear, with atomized individuals in fierce competition with each other. In short, it is a situation not dissimilar to the one experienced by many workers at Fiat prior to 1969.

(Concrete) actions speak louder than words

One of the most important and useful lessons that can be derived from the events of 1969 concerns the concrete methods which can be implemented to change the world and oneself. In 1969, many workers became protagonists in a large-scale process of social transformation and self-transformation. That journey started when they stood up and challenged the concrete situation in which they found themselves. The workers rebelled against several elements of that situation: the workloads, the toxic exposure at the workplace, the arrogance of the bosses, the unbearable discrimination, the hunger wages, the unacceptable housing conditions, and so on.

In other words, the workers began their rebellion by focusing on the concrete elements of their condition. In addition to the recognition that the conditions were unbearable, at a certain point the workers sensed that those concrete elements could be modified. The rebellion began with the other workers on their team; from there, it gradually expanded to include the whole workshop and then the entire factory. Eventually, that circle was further extended to include all workers and all other exploited individuals. The process of building class consciousness and identification with all the exploited groups was a conquest that went from the bottom up, proceeding from the specific, concrete experiences of individuals to the general, universal experience of entire social classes.

I believe this is the main roadmap which should be followed in constructing class consciousness on a large scale. Proceeding this way also makes it possible to establish a new humanism and to restore humanity in social relations. I stress this element because the current situation in Italy seems to be heading in the opposite direction.

The left – and I mean the alternative one, not the neoliberal one – speaks about values and encourages people to adopt and uphold those values. The values they mention are noble ones which I personally believe are worth disseminating: solidarity, equality, anti-racism, an acceptance of differences, respect for the environment, and so on. In Italy, the left often proposes grand ideals which we should all strive for and hopefully achieve. In that context, however, people's concrete living conditions are also frequently neglected. It is a situation which the left condemns as unacceptable, even scandalous, but the popular impression is that the left generally does little to improve those living conditions. To be more precise, the mass perception is that the left shows little determination in pursuing the concrete material interests of regular working-class people. They talk about the issues, they condemn the state of affairs, but in the end they do nothing concrete which has any lasting character.

On the contrary, the fascist and racist movement on the right routinely presents itself as the defender of the immediate material interests of Italians. It typically does this by identifying enemies and scapegoats. These right-wing groups take real conditions as their starting point in proposing solutions to concrete problems. One example of this is their "Italians first" policy, which is reflected in their approach to the housing issue. Their positions are mostly accompanied by racist and nationalist propaganda.

I have deliberately summarized this situation in harsh and provocative terms. I believe that if the left does not make a decisive leap forward, a large part of the Italian population – starting with the weakest and most vulnerable groups – risks being hegemonized by the delirious ideology of fascist racists. We should remember that it would not be the first time this has happened. Fascism was not an aristocratic or elitist phenomenon; it was a phenomenon with roots in a national-populist subculture in which conditions of need and suffering were used to justify racism, war, and the extermination of dissenters. When Giovanni Pascoli (2), writing in 1911 about the colonial war in Libya, proclaimed "The great proletarian, she has risen" (3), he paved the way for a fascist narrative in which the Italian people had the right to wage colonial wars. According to that narrative, as a great proletarian nation, Italy purportedly had the right to "a place in the sun", which necessitated the gassing and extermination of Libya's native populations.

A few moralistic appeals will not be sufficient to overcome the present dysfunctional situation in which social malaise causes wars among the poor. As 1969 has shown us, it is necessary to start over again by firmly and unceasingly challenging the concrete conditions of exploitation at the workplace and in society at large.

A large-scale change of consciousness cannot be brought about from the top down, starting with a generalized theoretical idea before arriving at the level of individual subjectivity. Instead, one needs to begin with the specific problems faced by individuals and branch out from there. A concrete conflict-resolution strategy is necessary, one that allows people to understand the links between their own exploitation and the exploitation of others, the links between their own liberation and the liberation of others, and the links between the exploitation of labour and the exploitation of the environment.

The social atomization that produces loneliness, anger and social impotence can only be overcome if we insist on a staunch collective defence of the living and working conditions of the weaker social classes. Delegating responsibility to politicians will not alleviate the situation – instead, it is necessary to construct a movement in which people can come together, recognize that they share the same problems, and take action in the interest of achieving their common objectives. It will be a movement that actively engages in class conflict, but also one which is capable of developing forms of concrete mutual support and solidarity. Communities and other local groups need to be created which can provide that solidarity and give

direction to the common class struggle. Moralistic appeals are simply not enough if we wish to eliminate the war among the poor and win the fight against racism. The only thing which will help us to reach those objectives is the construction of a collective subjectivity which is founded on the principles of class solidarity and a common class struggle against the elites.
In other words, I think that the tangible lessons of 1969 should prevent us from falling into the trap of overly moralistic or idealistic solutions. Instead, those lessons should compel us to identify the concrete elements on which to base new paths of struggle.
We need to start from the specific conditions of malaise that people are experiencing and understand – through investigation – what the main contradictions are. This is the first step which needs to be taken in order to get the political discourse of the left back on track.
Identifying the concrete paths forward and using sustained political interventions to improve the situation is, in my view, the second step which needs to be taken. Given the limited resources at the left's disposal, it is quite clear that all the existing issues cannot be addressed simultaneously. Trying to address everything at once is exactly what happens when politics is based on propaganda; it leads to the illusion that everything can be solved by just voting in the elections. If the left attempts to solve everything at once, its platform will also become mere propaganda, which will not help the situation at all. In reality, it is not necessary to try to do everything, but rather to concentrate on engaging in meaningful class conflict. It is class conflict – much more than any sort of propaganda – that effectively reveals existing social inequalities. Class conflict, the concrete path of rebellion and liberation, "speaks" to other individuals who want to rebel or who are already rebelling. Today, in the current context of social atomization, actions speak louder than words.

Building communities and a sense of solidarity

The workers' social isolation was interrupted in 1969 when demonstrations began in the factories. Today, the workplace can no longer serve as the hub of social movements as it had in the past. Nonetheless, in the present situation where capitalism is increasingly revealing its destructive side – eliminating labour rights and social rights, destroying local communities and the environment – there are still plenty of possible rallying points outside the factories. The whole country, with its houses, blocks of flats, neighbourhoods, villages, valleys and cities, is filled with possible aggregation points. A rallying point does not need to be a physical place: issues like environmental protection, the management of leisure time, or the right to healthcare, education and social mobility can also be concrete meeting places in a class struggle. In aggregate, our everyday activities, the issues we engage with, and our social networks can give rise to communal forms of social relations and produce mutual support structures which help us build solidarity and wage class conflict. In that sense, the proposed TAV (4) project in Val di Susa is a prime example of how a conflict can generate

a critique of the development model and lead to a broader willingness to engage in class struggle.

In my view, the struggles of 1969 have shown us at several concrete paths moving forward. First, we must start the class struggle by looking into the problems that working-class people concretely experience on a daily basis; this makes it easier to address their material needs. At the same time, we need to build supportive working-class communities to break the culture of isolation that people have been enduring. Solidarity among the exploited and a collective struggle against the elites are necessary elements for a successful movement.

We have seen how a team of factory workers managed by a line boss was a place of exploitation, nepotism and discrimination. During the workers' struggle, with the boss removed and in solidarity with their delegate, that same team became a place of solidarity and equality, a place where the workers' rights were created and defended.

Communities are places of class struggle, which includes the political struggle among different competing visions of society. This was true of the teams working within Fiat. The building of supportive communities is the necessary precondition for overcoming the fears of atomized individuals, for avoiding wars among the poor, and for perpetuating the class struggle from the bottom up.

It is no coincidence that those on the right prefer the atomized, frightened and passive masses, the impotent crowd that relies on an authoritarian leader to restore order.

To defeat the politics of fear – which are based on economic insecurity and personal insecurity – there is no need for authoritarian, security-based policies. Fear is created for the purpose of destroying something, and security-based policies only increase that fear. We need a change of plan: we need class struggle, social security policies and the construction of a strong and supportive community. As Marx reminds us: "Workers form a class to the extent that they recognize themselves as being in opposition to another class. Otherwise they are one against the other as commodities in competition". This is exactly the situation we are currently facing.

The revolt

As we have seen, the 1969 movement began as a revolt, gradually affirming its strength until it was eventually able to impose negotiations upon the owners. Today, as in the period prior to 1969, the owners are no longer willing to participate in negotiations. And this means that another revolt is necessary...

As a form of class conflict, the revolt remains a modern and highly relevant strategy in our current situation. When those in power impose their will with impunity on workers and other classes, without allowing any sort of recourse to negotiations, the revolt is a concrete way for individuals in a weaker position to tear down the domination that oppresses them. When material power and the dominant ideology are all in the hands of the

adversary, a revolt can be the unpredictable turning point in a struggle and a way of affirming one's own subjectivity.
I think that the French *gilets jaunes* (yellow-vest protesters) are only the forerunners of a wider trend: if the social malaise is not addressed by those in power, the social classes which are suffering will be forced to find more effective means of communication...
The French case demonstrates that, in the face of a revolt, those in power cannot pretend that nothing is happening and that everything is fine. This is due to the fact that, in a context of generalized social malaise, a revolt – even of a few individuals – quickly becomes emblematic of the desires of many. In an entertainment-driven society where continuous media manipulation serves to maintain the consent – or at least the social passivity – of the masses, a revolt is still recognizable as a symptom of the failure of those in power. At the same time, a revolt also signals the possibility of change. The ruling classes cannot limit themselves to considering revolts as a problem of public order because, as is well known, the challenge facing capitalist logic is that of achieving maximum profits with minimum social risks. All the factories can be moved to other parts of the world, but if revolts break out within the capitalist metropolises, where most of the goods are consumed, and the situation becomes unmanageable, it poses a serious problem for the capitalists.
The *gilets jaunes* revolt has led to a change in the French government's economic policies and it has also pushed European leaders to relax the austerity measures which were in place. An urban revolt is therefore capable of initiating a negotiation process and of forcing the ruling classes to take the population's opinions into account.
I believe that we need to re-evaluate the way in which we interpret and interact with revolts.
We should avoid demonizing such protests; the inevitable confusion that accompanies them should not lead us to confuse them with right-wing movements. Italy has a constitution and a democratic culture, and Italians therefore tend to be wary of revolt, considering it a reactionary practice or often mistaking it for superficial *jacquerie*. I believe that, at a time when social rights and constitutional democracy are being destroyed by neoliberal policies, responses which rely on standard trade union intervention and regular parliamentary mediation have become completely ineffective. It seems to me that we have largely experienced the consequences of these developments during this new millennium.
It is therefore incumbent upon all of us to broaden the spectrum of the social practices in our arsenal, from mutual support networks to revolt.

A new generation of communist militants

If we need to broaden the spectrum of our social practices, we would do well to remember another relevant lesson of 1969. As we have seen, the effectiveness and duration of 1969 would have been unthinkable without a group of grassroots militants and leaders who were able to give the revolt a

timely push in the right direction, and who were instrumental in selecting the necessary forms of struggle in transforming the actions of the movement into real power. The valorization of revolt and mutual support networks as strategies of class struggle requires us to create the types of militants and political leaders who are able to move on the appropriate levels.

There needs to be a redefinition of political action, moving away from a reliance on traditional institutional mediation. Social and cultural practices need to have a central place in our political activity. We must develop the ability to speak about a wider range of issues, and to look at those issues from different points of view. In short, we need a new, modern approach to fit the times we are living in. Being a representative of factory workers in the Fordist context required the ability to fight for the demands of a relatively homogeneous social group. In the present context, however, we are faced with the necessity of building solidarity between social groups that have very different languages, backgrounds and career paths. Contemporary communist militants who intend to make a positive contribution in constructing a new society must therefore have an uncommon capacity for social interaction; they must be skilled translators and networkers who can work in various languages. Those communicative competencies can facilitate dialogue in the search for common paths which can unite people while transcending the diverse social situations and backgrounds.

We need to build a political culture that is capable of navigating conflicts and revolts, one which can provide a support network and which is also able to create its own institutions to serve the movement. This means educating militants so that they are more accustomed to working with various social groups instead of spending the bulk of their time on institutional mediation. Essentially, this new generation of militants will be mediators within their own social class as well as mediators for all poor and working-class groups. Their function will also be to pursue intense class conflict against the elites. As the song "Goodbye beautiful Lugano" (*Addio Lugano bella*) tells us: "Peace among the oppressed and war against the oppressors". I could not have summarized it better myself.

Changing the dominant ideology in order to change the world

As we have seen, the revolt of 1969 was able to capture the popular imagination; among other things, many people optimistically believed in the possibility of change and that they even had a right to see those changes occur. That period saw the development of a set of ideals that legitimized change and which had lasting effects on a large part of society – not only the forces of the left but also the main institutions capable of influencing class consciousness, from television to the church.

The current narrative, produced by the neoliberal counterrevolution, is the exact opposite. We are led to believe that, because there is no money, "there is no alternative" (a phrase popularized by Margaret Thatcher, which even has its own acronym: T.I.N.A.). The situation can be described as one in

which an apparent scarcity of resources legitimizes harsh measures and the need to tighten our belts. The neoliberal claim of scarce resources is obviously blameworthy: it tells us that public funds are short today because the working class has been living beyond its means, causing enormous public debt which now falls on the shoulders of our children and grandchildren.

This mantra – according to which there is no money – has been the dominant ideology which has made it possible to reduce politics to upholding the status quo, i.e. the narrative of scarce resources for the general population and the continued high profits for those in power. The dominant classes have used – and continue to use – this ideology of economic scarcity to destroy politics, the existence of alternatives, and the possibility of changing the world.

This continuous narrative of financial shortages is not only the basis of neoliberal policies managed by neoliberals; it is also the basis of proposals made by fascist racists. In fact, slogans like "Italians first" arise from the perception that "there isn't enough for everyone" and that we must therefore "feed our own children first". Economic woes, and the need to tighten our belts, are the bedrock of both neoliberal and fascist policies. The neoliberal policies are used to justify austerity measures; the fascist ones justify the need for racism.

In this ideological framework, there is a growing sense of social impotence; if the country has purportedly become impoverished because of the actions of the working class, fighting against the system would only make the situation worse. The message is that we must not harm the rich but instead defend ourselves against our neighbours, and in particular against those who are worse off than us, e.g. the immigrants. In this dystopia based on resource scarcity, all other human beings are potential enemies who need to be fought. We are told that we must especially fight against the poorest who, being hungry and therefore more desperate, are even willing to die in the middle of the Mediterranean to try to reach our dinner tables.

This vision of the world is not only held by extreme right-wing groups who aspire to political power – it is shared by many others as well. Sergio Marchionne, CEO of Fiat-Chrysler Automobiles, regarded international competition as a type of war; as a consequence, those who went on strike at the Fiat factory were considered traitors. Nationalist and corporatist ideologies have many common traits and they lead to the same outcomes: penury, unbridled competition, nationalism, racism. This is the worldview that is proposed to us – it is one which produces fear and social impotence, and one which compels many people to search for a strong authority figure who can magically resolve all of their problems.

On the basis of this ideology, any type of social problem can be instrumentalized as a concrete reason for a war among the poor. The result is a zero-sum game between those who are afraid of losing the little they have and those who are typecast as invaders and social parasites.

Ideology cannot be changed by opinions alone

For the reasons stated above, it is necessary to use several strategies in combination when trying to effect change. Some strategies we have already mentioned include the waging of class conflict, the development of support networks, and the construction of solidarity within our communities. To be effective, those strategies must be combined with a strong ideological struggle. It is necessary to challenge and destabilize the dominant ideology, exposing the fact that it is founded on a series of lies. Even if those lies are continuously repeated in unified media networks, they can never be accepted as the truth.

Our task is to figure out how to effectively engage in class struggle against the dominant ideology. A typical and simplistic strategy has been to present our ideas and opinions in opposition to those of the ruling classes. In my opinion, if we continue with that strategy, our opponents will always have the upper hand – they own almost all the media with which to colonize the minds of the entire population. As Sergio Leone used to say: "When a man with a handgun meets a man with a rifle, the man with the handgun is a dead man".

For that reason, our battles cannot be based solely on opinions. As those who frequent bars and cafes are well aware, opinions are a dime a dozen – they are all legitimate in some sense, but they can also change at a moment's notice.

As I have attempted to explain in my book about Marx (5), I believe that we need to concentrate our efforts on unmasking the mechanisms which show us how our world really functions. The problem of ideology is not to express our opinions in opposition to the opinions of others, but rather to reveal how the world actually works, bringing problems into plain view in order to solve them.

Marxism can unmask the dominant ideology and show us how the world really works beyond appearances.

The situation in the world today is precisely the opposite of the one which is presented to us on a daily basis by the unified mass media of the ruling classes. Just think about it for a moment: the current crisis is not a crisis of scarcity but a crisis of overproduction. The world has never been so rich; the problem lies in the dramatic gap between those who are excessively rich and the majority of the population. This is true internationally but also in our country in particular: Italy has enormous public debt but exceedingly high levels of private savings, twice as high as in Germany. For the most part, those private savings are in the hands of the richest 10% of the Italian population. In other words, the richest 10% of Italians have more collective wealth than all Germans put together, from the richest to the poorest. It is quite evident that there is a direct relationship between great private wealth and great public debt (6). It is therefore necessary to construct a narrative, an alternative ideology, which is not based on opposing opinions but on concrete reality. It is the same strategy Greta Thunberg uses when she

rightly accuses the President of the United States of disregarding scientific truth: our strength lies in starting from reality.

Three ideas

First of all, there are no shortages, but there is dramatically misallocated wealth. Therefore, first and foremost, the wealth must be redistributed. The rich are the cause of widespread poverty. The war among the poor is not only unjust and inhumane, it is also ineffective: money should be taken from those who have too much, not from those who do not have it. On the basis of this elementary reasoning, we can establish an ideology which is based on the fact that our opponents are at the top of the pyramid, not at the bottom.

Secondly, job shortages are mainly due to new work-saving strategies associated with technological innovation. Faced with this fact – which is objectively a positive development – it would be unthinkable to increase production disproportionately. To a large extent, that would mean producing items that are not needed; and since natural resources are not infinite, we would also risk destroying the environment to such an extent that it would no longer be possible to live on this planet. The point is therefore not the production of more goods, but the redistribution of work while maintaining the same wages, drastically reducing working hours while increasing the work we put towards caring for each other and for the planet. We do not need more cars, but we do need more nurses, more social workers, more care for the elderly, more reforestation work, and more concern with regard to protecting the environment. The twentieth century will be remembered for the incredible amount of goods that were produced; the third millennium must be remembered for our environmental activism and the way we take care of each other – otherwise we will not make it to the end of the first century of this millennium. We need to make a drastic change, a change which moves away from the production of new goods and instead focuses on societal and environmental renewal.

Thirdly, the only thing in short supply are environmental resources. There is only one planet and we must take care not to destroy it. That is why we need the radical and very rapid development of environmentally-friendly production practices and a complete overhaul of the economy itself. Traditional profit mechanisms cannot bring about such changes, because reducing pollution would lead to a drop in production and a corresponding reduction in profits. Powerful public intervention is therefore needed to guarantee the protection of the environment, just like in the post-war period after World War II and until the 1980s there had been public intervention to guarantee the right to education, healthcare, transportation and housing.

While the ruling classes continue to pollute and make people's lives miserable, we are constantly being told that there is not enough money. The opposite is true: there is enough money, but environmental resources are scarce and people's health and well-being are increasingly compromised. We only have one planet, and we only have one life.

We are not powerless

With a huge media apparatus against us, one could argue that we are not strong enough to change anything and that our efforts are all futile – like Sisyphus, perpetually rolling his stone up the hill, only to have it roll back down again. I disagree.

In my opinion, there are currently quite a few elements we can leverage to overturn the dominant paradigm. I will give just three examples, although I could certainly think of others.

We have an expansive global youth movement that is addressing the issue of climate change in very radical terms. It is a critically important movement and one which can lead to the mass politicization of many social classes. We should give this movement our full attention as it has the potential to shape the future. A typical strategy of climate change activists is making connections between local choices and their global effects.

We have a fantastic women's movement, here in Italy and internationally, which regularly addresses the issue of male violence, radically attacking the roots of male domination and using strikes as the means by which to express its radicality.

We have a pope who routinely makes statements that are worth disseminating, for example on the subjects of justice, the environment, and peace. By putting the salvation of humanity at the center of christian discourse, the church can also advance a more universalist discourse. This opens new possibilities not only for dialogue, but also to make significant steps forward. It is abundantly clear to me that this discourse is not without its contradictions; for example, there is still quite a gap between how the catholic church claims to treat women and how women are actually treated. These are contradictions that we must highlight and fight, without throwing the baby out with the bath water, so to speak. The message of universal brotherhood is a positive one and a significant obstacle to racists, warmongers and neoliberals around the world.

There are therefore several groups and movements which are leading us in the right direction. The point, however, is that these groups generally do not network with each other. Moreover, some of them have little connection with the concrete conditions of suffering in which the majority of people live. We listen as the pope addresses his followers on Sundays, and sermons are given in various churches, but during the week people experience the harsh law of competition in an increasingly dog-eat-dog world.

If we think about it, however, this is exactly the situation which existed in the factories before the revolt of 1969 broke out. All the elements were present for a revolution to take place, but the fire could not be ignited without a spark.

I believe that in this case, just as in 1969, political militants from different walks of life will play a critical role. These individuals are networkers who can find common ground and a means of establishing dialogue between the great currents of universalist thought.

Using their communication skills, they will select the appropriate strategies and create the necessary links to engender collaborations between the avant-gardes in the fields of peace, justice and environmental protection. Together with the avant-gardes, the militants will undertake the arduous task of building the necessary political and social networks aimed at defending social rights.

Together with the lessons that 1969 has bequeathed to us, it seems to me that these three areas – the youth movement towards environmentalism, the women's movement, and the dialogue with religious communities – are good starting points where we can concentrate our efforts.

We must use inclusive and comprehensible language to formulate the great problems facing humanity while identifying the paths which can lead us toward concrete transformations. This enormous cultural task is at the centre of the revolutionary challenge – it is perhaps the most acute emergency we have to face. The events of 1969 emanated from a rebellion against exploitation in its many facets. In the early 20th century, Lenin led the revolution by proposing peace and land to the peasants. Today, it must be made clear that there is enough money in the world; like work, it just needs to be redistributed. The environment and people's well-being, on the other hand, are scarce commodities which must absolutely be safeguarded.

Changing the world without taking power

The 1969 workers' movement was able to change Italy without officially taking power. Indeed, in 1972, after three years of ferocious clashes, the elections nonetheless rewarded the right. But the Andreotti-Malagodi government, which had come to power with the support of fascism, was shipwrecked in March 1973 as it tried to confront the red flags waving at the occupied Mirafiori factory.

The events of 1969 produced a balance of power which demonstrated how political power was not at all autonomous from social and cultural dynamics. In that context, politicians were obliged to come to terms with societal pressures in order to govern. Throughout the first half of the 1970s, when political power was effectively balanced by the social power of the worker-student movement, the changes were significant. The disasters of the 1970s began when the search for a political outlet took the path of terrorist attacks, the "historic compromise", *unità nazionale*, and the sacrifice of human lives.

In 1969, society was able to change the way politics were run. Today, politics has returned to being monopolized by governments who manage a society that seems devoid of a voice and perceives itself as powerless. The situation is all the more deleterious given the fact that the big parties – despite their differences – think the same way about economic policies: the budgets must be balanced at any cost.

Learning from 1969 means radically changing the way we look at things, starting from our relations at home and then analyzing relations in society as a whole. Instead of looking to politicians for all the answers, we should

create alternative solutions by building our own movements from the ground up. Essentially, this means that we should attempt to engage in class conflict, build institutions to serve the movement, and create our own forms of social organization.

This is the context in which the principles about building communities – discussed earlier in this chapter – come into play. We need to build support structures at the workplace, throughout the country, and in many other diverse ways. The construction of a society with strong social bonds, one which is able to discuss and reason, one which is able to educate itself, and one which has a clear understanding of reality: this is the foundation upon which to wage class conflict and upon which to build a counterweight to multinationals and neoliberal policies.

Within that framework, I think that the idea of representative councils should be relaunched; these could be extended from the workplace to a series of other movements and communities. We are currently faced with a gigantic crisis of democracy: there are an increasing number of plebiscites and upstart "instant democracy" solutions led by the fascist right and the nascent Five Star Movement (7). Besides our efforts on the institutional level – e.g. our defence of the constitution and of our proportional electoral system – we must necessarily address the issue of building democratic structures from below. Democratic representative councils allow members of the base to express their own subjectivity and to enter into discussion with those who have differing opinions.

We need to actively address the problem of how to build the society we want; this should not always be formulated in negative terms, as being in opposition to something, e.g. discourses against neoliberal policies, but rather in positive terms and with actions, for example by starting immediately to build social relationships in solidarity with each other. In that framework, representative council democracy, based on the election of delegates by a unified base, continues to be the best strategy. Building democratic, solidarity-based social relations will give us the power to manage our own affairs. It will also give us the necessary strength to force those currently in power to change their plans. We need to do this because, as we have said, the challenge facing capitalist logic is that of achieving maximum profits with minimum social risks.

To sum up, our first step is to clearly identify the adversary – we may even say the "enemy" – which is an aggregation of big businesses, multinational corporations, and the elites. These are the oppressors, the global exploiters.

Then we must get out of the quagmire of "political politics" (*politique politicienne*) by taking two decisive steps – one step down, and one step up. We must take a step down to the community level, engaging in class conflict, building communities and developing mutual support networks from below. Concurrently, we must take a step up by establishing an ideology based on cooperation, humanism, and a respect for the environment. This will produce a truly viable alternative to the idea of resource scarcity and the need for competition – and it will give people

concrete ideals to strive for. Continuing along that path, we must build a culture of representative council democracy that implements the principles of constitutional democracy.
In our current situation, I believe these are the steps which need to be taken in order to bring about a renewal of communist practice, theory and policy.

1. Serge Halimi is a French journalist and editor of the newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique*.
2. Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912) was an Italian poet and classical scholar.
3. The Italian colonization of Libya began in 1911. "The great proletarian, she has risen" (*La grande proletaria si è mossa*) by Giovanni Pascoli was an influential text in that context. An English translation and critical introduction of this text has been prepared by Adriana Baranello. It is available online at https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6jh07474
4. The TAV (*treno alta velocità*) is a high-speed rail line which has been proposed and partially built between Turin and the French city of Lyon. There has been considerable resistance to this international project, especially on the Italian side of the border, for example in Val di Susa.
5. Paolo Ferrero, *Marx oltre i luoghi comuni* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2018).
6. For a more detailed analysis on the subject of private wealth and its relationship with public debt, see my publication *La truffa del debito pubblico*, (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2014).
7. The Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) is a relatively new big-tent political party in Italy, founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009. Its platform is a mix of political right and left, which often makes it difficult to define. One of its characteristic features is an anti-establishment sentiment. The party has come to prominence in recent years as a party promoting transparency and modern e-democracy, but it faces harsh criticism due to the tight control exercised by its party leadership.

Appendix
1967-1969: a chronology of important events in the worker-student movement

1967

8 February
Student occupation of the University of Pisa, which is broken up by police after 3 days of protests. During the occupation, the students develop and disseminate their *Tesi della Sapienza* (theses written at the university's Palazzo Sapienza), which formulate the student's positions in Marxist terms. The university comes to be seen as a place of confrontation between capitalist interests and the working class. For their part, the students are increasingly regarded as belonging to the working class and therefore as "subordinate" in terms of their social status, more or less on the same level as other subordinate classes like the workers. The *Tesi della Sapienza* constitute the first significant connections between the revolutionary left and the student movement.

9 February
Occupation of Palazzo Campana in Turin to protest against the government's university reform project. After 20 days, the university rector calls the police to break up the occupation and files an official complaint against 200 students.

21 April
Military coup in Greece, organized by the CIA as part of its anti-communist strategy.

14 May
L'Espresso publishes the report "14 July 1964, Segni and De Lorenzo were preparing a coup d'état", revealing the story of how a military coup called the *Solo Plan* had been prepared in Italy.

June
In Trento, the student movement develops its *Manifesto for a Negative University*, i.e. the reverse of the existing institution. Universities are seen by the students as institutions which serve the capitalist system; in their view, universities were only necessary to fulfil the technical needs of society, while upholding and expanding the domination of the ruling class. It was therefore necessary to oppose "the capitalist use of science by developing explicitly socialist techniques and methods".

26 June
Don Milani dies in Florence. He had recently published his *Open letter to a teacher*, a harsh condemnation of the classist Italian school system. Its

publication revealed the mechanisms by which students were placed in certain schools, based not on their merit but on their social class. The children of the bourgeoisie had an advantage at school because the information they received in the classroom was the same type of knowledge they had been absorbing in their own families from an early age. Written in simple Italian, which further highlighted its clarity and richness, Milani's book was an indictment not only of the Italian school system as an institution, and not only of a school "tailored to the needs of the rich, those who have culture at home and go to school only to reap diplomas", but also of the insensitivity of teachers and the overly abstract knowledge they transmitted. The book was written in the form of a letter, addressed to a teacher who is a member of the PCI (Italian Communist Party) but who is not the least bit critical of the school as an institution or of the knowledge transmitted by it. The book became a bestseller, selling over a million copies in just a few years, and the issues it raised in the fight against unfair placement practices became one of the central subjects of the debates and mobilizations of students and teachers.

8 October
In Japan, 3000 students and 2000 workers try to occupy Haneda airport in an attempt to prevent the departure of the Japanese Prime Minister for South Vietnam.

9 October
Ernesto "Che" Guevara is assassinated in Bolivia by the Bolivian army and the CIA.

17 November
In Milan, the Catholic University is occupied to protest against the increase in university fees. The leader of the protests is Mario Capanna, who is soon expelled together with the other students involved. All of the expelled students subsequently transfer to the State University of Milan.

27 November
In Turin, Palazzo Campana (seat of the university's faculty of humanities) is occupied to protest against the baronial-style power of the professors, the teaching methods, and the course programs, all of which the students deem obsolete. The student protests are organized using the assembly method, i.e. the direction of the struggle is decided by the students' assembly. Besides this "discovery" of participatory democracy, a group of strong student leaders also steps forward. These two aspects, assembly-style democracy and strong leadership, will become permanent fixtures of the student movement from this point forward.

1968

January-February
Practically all Italian universities are occupied in protest against a bill which would reorganize certain aspects of the universities. More generally, however, the demonstrations are against "academic authoritarianism", i.e. against the overwhelming power of university professors (the so-called "barons"). There is also harsh criticism of the teaching methods and course programs at the universities. The criticism soon extends to the role of universities in society, which ultimately leads to a fundamental criticism of society itself.

10 January
In Tokyo, there are fierce clashes between the police and *Zengakuren* (an organization of revolutionary students) who are protesting the arrival of the USS Enterprise, an American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. The police attack the demonstration but the students are protected by the local residents who do not heed police directives to isolate the students. The students receive this protection because they are the only ones who had supported other protesting groups like the workers or the farmers of the Narita area who were opposing the construction of the new airport.

31 January
In Vietnam, the Vietcong unleash the "Tet offensive" on Buddhist New Year's Day, putting the U.S. armed forces in serious trouble. The struggle of the Vietnamese against the Americans is one of the main issues of the nascent student movement. Particularly striking is the disparity between the Vietnamese "David" and the American "Goliath": despite the fact that the Americans deploy all of their technological power and destructive potential (including chemical warfare and napalm to burn the forests where the guerrillas seek refuge), the Vietnamese partisans not only resist but also manage to go on the offensive.

29 February
At the University of Rome, the rector calls on the police to break up the occupation. The police intervene by savagely beating protesters inside the university and outside as well, attacking a protest march that was headed towards the Italian parliament.

1 March
In Rome, students gather in Piazza di Spagna to regain control of the Faculty of Architecture at Villa Borghese. The faculty is garrisoned by the police who attack the protesters. The students respond in what comes to be known as the "battle of Valle Giulia". Around 150 police officers and 400 students are injured during the clash.

5 March
The protests spread to a number of high schools: the first of these to be occupied is Parini High School in Milan, whose principal is dismissed for refusing to call the police. The manner in which the students decide to occupy their school is noteworthy in itself: the 1100 students decide in favour of the occupation in an assembly, voting by roll call using the class registers, with only a dozen against the enterprise and as many abstaining. This very precise and rigorous method is a sign of the climate of order and discipline that prevailed in the school system at the time, and to which students had become accustomed. The students used that same ingrained discipline to carry out the occupation. In that first series of occupations, other schools and universities also exhibited similar decision-making processes; this was very different from the more chaotic assemblies which followed during the second half of the 1970s. Besides Parini, other notable occupied schools include D'Azeglio High School in Turin and Mamiani High School in Rome. At this moment in time, however, the participation of average students is still limited; the protests become more widespread later in autumn of that year.

8 March
Massive student demonstrations begin in Warsaw, with the future leaders of the *Solidarność* movement among the participants. The demonstrations are held during the trial of a group of students who had been arrested in January for having protested against the government's decision to end the staging of an opera which contained anti-Russian sentiments. The students want freedom and democracy, albeit within a socialist system.

16 March
In Rome, a group of fascists storm the university, assaulting a number of students; the Marxist intellectual Oreste Scalzone is seriously injured. In Vietnam, American soldiers massacre the population of the village of My Lai, killing 500 people including women, children, and the elderly. The massacre, which is on the level of Nazi war crimes, evokes horror all over the world and contributes to making the U.S. commitment in Vietnam even more detestable.

4 April
Black civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. is killed in Memphis. The following day, riots break out in the black ghettos of the USA.

11 April
In Germany, the leader of the German student movement, Rudi Dutschke, is seriously wounded by a right-wing extremist fanatic. The shooter had been emboldened by a right-wing media campaign calling for physical violence against students.

19 April
In Valdagno there are clashes between police and the Marzotto textile workers who are on strike against the company's restructuring plan. The workers knock down the statue of Count Marzotto – founder of the company and symbol of corporate paternalism – and storm the villas of the company's managers. The day ends with the arrest of 47 workers.

3 May
In an article in *Rinascita*, PCI (Italian Communist Party) secretary Luigi Longo expresses his positive opinion of the student movement. Longo also meets with a delegation of the Roman student movement. Despite this, there are differing opinions about the movement within the PCI. In another *Rinascita* article published on 6 June, PCI parliamentarian Giorgio Amendola accuses the student movement of being "a regurgitation of extremist infantilism and anarchist positions". The relationship between the PCI and the movement will always be difficult to manage.

13 May
In Paris, Sorbonne University is occupied amid violent clashes between police and demonstrators. The clashes last for the entire month in a series of events commonly referred to as the famous "French May".

27 May
In France, De Gaulle takes the situation into his own hands: he dissolves parliament and calls new elections, outlawing revolutionary groups while the unions sign agreements in the various factories which had been on strike. De Gaulle takes advantage of the impasse involving millions of French students and workers who had participated in the demonstrations but who did not know what outlet to give to the struggles. In the elections of 23 June, the French who want a return to order vote De Gaulle back into power for another term in office. At the same time, some of the demands that had given rise to the struggles are accepted; these include wage increases, the democratization of university life, and an increase in state funding for universities which will allow for the improvement of certain structures and the creation of new ones.

June
The Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the attempted military coup of 1964 concludes its work with a majority report supported by the Christian Democracy Party (DC), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), the Unitarian Socialist Party (PSU), and the Italian Republican Party (PRI). The report denies that there had been an attempted coup, arguing that De Lorenzo limited himself to "preparing illegal measures aimed at taking control in large cities". In opposition, the left-wing parties formulate their own minority report. Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro denies any

government involvement in planning a coup despite delicate and compromising documentation in the government's possession.

5 June
Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated during his campaign for the Democratic nomination in the run-up to the American presidential election. Many hopes for change – especially regarding civil rights and pacifism – had been placed on his shoulders (Kennedy had spoken out in favour of the cessation of the bombings in Vietnam). With his death, those hopes are definitively buried.

7 June
In Milan, students barricade the exit of the *Corriere della Sera*'s printing house, preventing loaded delivery trucks from distributing the newspapers. This is done in protest of the newspaper's negative and one-sided coverage of the student movement. The newspaper had contemptuously defined the student demonstrators as "Chinese", i.e. as communist sympathizers.

8-9 June
National assembly of the student movement in Venice. The event is attended by student delegates from the Italian universities participating in the struggle. At the center of the debate is the relationship between students and workers.
11 June
L'Espresso publishes a poem by Pier Paolo Pasolini about the clashes in Valle Giulia, in which he states that he sympathizes with the policemen, who are the children of the poor, rather than with the students, who he considers to be the children of the rich.

14 June
In the USA, the famous pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock is convicted in a court of law. Spock, who was against the war in Vietnam, had encouraged young men to violate the law on compulsory conscription.

21 June
First strike in Porto Marghera (near Venice) in which the workers' assembly imposes its demand of "5000 liras, equal for all" on the trade union. The strike has a 90% participation rate among the workers and there is also a large student presence at the factory gates. The assembly at Cinema Marconi, which discusses how to proceed with the struggle, becomes the concrete organizational body of the movement.

Summer
In Porto Marghera a workers' struggle begins which is among the first to be conducted directly by the workers. One of the workers' central objectives is egalitarianism (an increase of 5000 liras for all workers in base pay).

Among other things, this struggle leads to the formation of the Autonomous Assembly of Porto Marghera; this independent organization becomes the main base of the extraparliamentary group *Workers' Powe*r in the Veneto region.

After the experience at Pirelli, many CUBs (Basic Unitary Committees) are founded in several large companies, especially in northern Italy. These are workers' organizations, often registered with CGIL, CISL, and UIL, but sometimes with no particular trade union affiliation. With the wave of struggles in 1969, the CUBs manage to unite a large part of the factory left. Most of these individuals subsequently join *Avanguardia operaia* ("Workers' Vanguard"), an extraparliamentary left-wing organization.

In Dagenham, England, 187 women workers from the Ford factory go on strike.

21 August
The USSR invades Czechoslovakia, putting an end to the brief experience of democratic socialism during the "Prague Spring". The PCI condemns the invasion, but the event does not seem to arouse much interest among the Italian student movement.

25-29 August
There are protests at the Venice Film Festival.

14 September
In Parma, dissenting catholics occupy the cathedral, which is then cleared by police at the request of the bishop.
21 September
The film *The Green Berets*, which glorifies the war in Vietnam, arouses protests in several Italian cities; the most relevant of these protests are in Bologna and Viareggio, where the film is withdrawn from cinemas.

October
A dispute over wage increases and the organization of piecework begins at the Lancia automobile factory in Turin.

2 October
In Mexico City, on the day before the opening of the Olympics, the police react with violence to student protests, killing over 300 students in the Square of the Three Cultures. Those same Olympics also produce the famous image of two black athletes on the podium who each raised a black-gloved fist in solidarity with the struggles of black Americans.

16 October
In Rome, Mamiani High School is occupied once again. During the autumn months, the student mobilizations extend to middle schools as well. The political activism of middle school students starts off with demands similar to those of the university students; in particular, the protesters wish to obtain the right of assembly and the right to protest delays in the reform of high school and state exams. Similar to the university movement, the middle school movement soon moves to criticize the school system itself, i.e. on an institutional level, raising questions about its role in society.

21 October
Student demonstrations in Tokyo. The students' targets include the American Embassy, the National Diet Building, the Prime Minister's residence and Shinjuku station (the most important railway station in Japan, symbol of the alienation of millions of people). These demonstrations mark the beginning of the culminating phase of the clash between students and the government. That standoff eventually ends with the defeat of students: there are mass arrests (3000 in a few months), the approval of an ad hoc law allowing the police to enter universities (in a few months there are more than 300 police raids), and other preventative measures such as replacing cobblestone streets with asphalt so that student activists cannot throw stones at the police.

17 November
In Rome, the principal of Plinio High School expresses the desire to expel all the "long-haired people"; the students react by occupying the institute.

2 December
In Avola, police open fire during a farm workers' strike, killing two people and wounding 48.

4 December
In Florence, Don Enzo Mazzi, a parish priest of the city's Isolotto district, is dismissed for his left-wing political views and activities; the faithful gather in permanent assembly inside the church as a form of protest.

7 December
In Milan, students throw eggs and vegetables at the Milanese bourgeoisie at the opening night of La Scala's opera season.

19 December
The Constitutional Court establishes that adultery, when committed by a woman, is no longer a crime.

31 December
New Year's Eve demonstration in front of the La Bussola nightclub in the Tuscan seaside town of Marina di Pietrasanta. The police open fire, seriously injuring the student Soriano Ceccanti.

1969

16 January
The Italian Minister of Education recognizes the right of assembly for high school students, thus granting one of the main requests of the student demonstrations of the previous months.

24 January
The occupation of the Marzotto factory in Valdagno begins. After the demolition of the statue of Marzotto on 19 April 1968, the struggles had continued until this occupation which finally attained an agreement on wages, workloads, the right of assembly in the factory, and the creation of departmental trade union committees. This victory was a preview of the gains that the metalworkers were to achieve in their struggles later in autumn that year.

5 February
Acting alone, CGIL calls a national general strike on the issue of pensions. At the Fiat Mirafiori factory, the worker participation rates are close to 100 percent.

13 February
A reform is launched which changes the format of Italian high school final exams. Initially intended as a temporary measure, the reform ends up lasting for 30 years.

9 April
Police open fire on demonstrators during a strike in Battipaglia, leaving two dead and 50 injured. The two-hour national general strike announced by the unions has great success, and at Fiat Mirafiori the first internal workers' assembly is held after fifteen years of dictatorship-style conditions under Fiat president Vittorio Valletta. In the following days, strikes begin inside the engine testing room of the mechanics department and then in the auxiliary workshops. From there, the strikes spread throughout the entire factory in a crescendo-like fashion as the conflict and its objectives become increasingly radicalized.

15 April
In Padua, a bomb ravages the rectorate of the university.

25 April
At the Milan fairgrounds, a bomb explodes at the Fiat exhibition stand, injuring 19 people, and another bomb explodes at the central train station. A group of anarchists are accused of the attacks; in reality, however, the attacks had been organized by neo-fascists. Due to a lack of evidence, the anarchists are later cleared of all charges.

1 May
A wildcat strike of 30,000 British metalworkers takes place in opposition to the government's proposed anti-strike legislation.

June
The first issue of the communist daily newspaper *Manifesto* is published, edited by a group of left-wing PCI militants led by Pietro Ingrao. The newspaper is strongly critical of the political line of the PCI.

3 June
All departments at Fiat's Mirafiori factory engage in a 2-hour strike in response to Fiat's threats to suspend thousands of workers. Plebiscites and workshop assemblies are held, and the first factory delegates are elected.

9 June
The leaders of the Milanese student movement Mario Capanna, Salvatore Toscano and Andrea Banfi are arrested for protesting against Andrea Trimarchi, a professor of private law. The students had detained Trimarchi for ten hours in the faculty after he refused to return an exam booklet to a student who had not passed the exam.

15 June
Giorgio Almirante becomes the secretary of the Italian Social Movement. This party, which for all intents and purposes is a fascist party under another name, inaugurates the strategy of "double-breasted suits and truncheons". On the one hand, it presents itself as a party of order, attracting moderate voters who wish to end the experience of the center-left government and repress the extreme left. On the other hand, it organizes groups of thugs at various universities and supports neo-fascist extremist groups which implement a strategy of terror by carrying out terrorist attacks. These attacks have the aim of creating social disorder and increasing the demand for authoritarian solutions or a military coup.

26 June
The third agreement is signed between Fiat and the trade unions, with equal wage increases for all and a first recognition of union delegates from the bodywork department.

30 June
After five weeks of continuous mobilizations, 1,134,000 hours of work lost, a production loss of 55,000 vehicles, and about 50 billion liras in damages for Fiat, an agreement is definitively reached and formally signed.

3 July
In Turin, during the general strike called by the unions on the housing issue, the workers' assembly decides to organize a separate protest march. Instead of concentrating the march in the city center, the organizers elect to start on the outskirts of Turin and proceed towards the center. Ready to draw attention to the struggles at Fiat, 3000 demonstrators gather at the gates of Mirafiori. The police intervene, preventing the procession from forming, and a day of urban guerrilla warfare begins which will soon come to be known as "the battle of Corso Traiano". The events of 3 July are important because of the large-scale participation of workers and students in the autonomous struggles at Fiat. Another noteworthy element is the considerable and widespread popular support from local residents in the southern suburbs of Turin. As the workers' magazine *La Classe* writes: "The newspapers will call them extremists: they are the workers of Turin, young men and women. Tens of thousands of 'extremists', keenly aware that the only weapon of the exploited is the communal struggle, and that winning is possible".

24 July
In Milan, an explosive device is discovered and defused in the corridors of the Palace of Justice.

25-26 July
The "first national conference of avant-garde workers and students" takes place in Turin. Differences of opinion emerge which soon lead to the establishment of two competing extraparliamentary organizations: *Potere Operaio* and *Lotta Continua*.

8-9 August
A series of bombs on eight trains leaves twelve people wounded. Investigations reveal that the same hands had built and placed all of the devices. The bombs which are found unexploded show absolute identity with the fragments found in Padua and at the fairgrounds in Milan.

26 August
In Venice, students and directors occupy the Film Festival.

Autumn

1 September
Steel workers go on a spontaneous strike in Dortmund, Germany.

2 September
Factory workers and office workers at Pirelli go on strike with the objective of obtaining union rights and instituting a production bonus.
At Fiat, workers from workshops 32 and 33 at Mirafiori go on strike. The company responds with 40,000 worker suspensions which are not contested by the union. Fragmented strikes and large-scale mobilizations begin.

6 September
More than two million metalworkers, construction workers and chemical workers are actively engaged in the struggle for their contract renewal.

8 September
The national metalworkers' contract dispute begins.

11 September
A 24-hour national metalworkers' strike is called, and 100% of the Fiat workers participate. The *autunno caldo* (hot autumn) begins; it is the most impressive wave of workers' struggles in the post-war period.

12 September
National construction workers' strike with construction sites closed throughout the country. The metalworkers also hold demonstrations in Turin, Milan and Taranto.

13 September
First meeting of the Fiat Mirafiori council of delegates.

16-17 September
National 48-hour chemical workers' strike, national cement workers' strike, and another day of protests by the construction workers.

22 September
Demonstration in Milan with the participation of 6000 Alfa Romeo workers. Metalworkers in Turin, Venice, Modena and Cagliari also stage protests.

23-24 September
The cement workers carry out another 48-hour general strike.

25 September
A national 24-hour metalworkers' strike with a national demonstration in Turin is a complete success.
A lockout situation unfolds at Pirelli with the indefinite suspension of 12,000 workers. The workers react immediately with a blockade of all the company's production facilities.

29 September
Demonstrations by metalworkers, chemical workers and construction workers in Porto Marghera, Brescia and Genoa.

30 September
Construction workers go on strike in Rome. In Livorno, 15,000 metalworkers hold demonstrations.

7 October
Strike of metallurgists in the metropolitan area of Milan. Nine processions with a total of 100,000 workers converge on Piazza Duomo.

8 October
National general strike by the chemical workers. Provincial general strike in Terni. Demonstrations by metalworkers in Rome, Sestri, Piombino, Marina di Pisa and L'Aquila.

9 October
60,000 metalworkers carry out a strike in Genoa. There is also a general strike in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.

10 October
For the first time, a departmental workers' meeting is held at the Fiat Mirafiori factory. Assemblies and internal protest marches also begin in the other Fiat factories. The police carry out attacks outside the factories. There is also a strike at the Italsider steelworks in Bagnoli against the suspension of five workers.

16 October
Hospital workers, public transit workers, postal workers, telephone and telegraph operators, local government officials and general labourers hold demonstrations for the renewal of their contracts. General strikes in the provinces of Palermo and Matera.

22 October
In Milan, 40 factories win the right to hold assemblies.

30 October
Following the events of the previous day (some workshops had attempted to stage a protest march at the opening ceremony of the annual Turin Auto Show), Fiat suspends 130 workers from its Mirafiori and Rivalta factories "for violence" and reports them to the authorities. In the days that follow, the suspensions reach almost 200. The trade unions (FIM-FIOM-UIL) immediately break off their national labour contract negotiations, announcing that they will resume talks only after Fiat has withdrawn the suspensions.

8 November
The construction workers' contract is signed. The agreement includes wage increases, a reduction of working hours to 40 per week, and some trade union rights such as the right to assemble at the workplace.

18 November
A week of fragmented strikes and spontaneous work stoppages culminates in a large evening assembly at the Palasport indoor arena where Fiat is "put on trial". Fiat president Gianni Agnelli yields and withdraws the suspensions.

19 November
In Milan, demonstrators exiting the Teatro Lirico at the end of their trade union meeting are attacked by police with jeeps and police trucks. Two of the police vehicles collide, causing the death of officer Antonio Annarumma, whose head strikes the metal frame of his jeep following the collision. The official version will be that "it was the students". The newspaper of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, *Il Secolo d'Itali*a, runs the headline "Red strike stained with blood: communists kill a young man in uniform". Italian President Saragat advances the theory of "opposite extremisms", i.e. that the Italian state must actively defend itself by using force against both the extreme right and the extreme left. This position serves to justify the worker-student movement.

23 November
U.S. marine sergeant Michael Bernhardt tells American television audiences about the massacre of 109 civilians in My Lai, South Vietnam.

25 November
Nationwide general strike by the chemical workers.
As the fragmented strikes foreseen by the trade union continue, the Fiat bodywork department goes into full strike mode, effectively paralyzing all other departments at the factory.
At Annarumma's funeral, fascists go on a manhunt through the streets of Milan, chasing down and beating up students associated with the worker-student movement. A number of journalists are the victims of similar attacks. The leader of the student movement, Mario Capanna, is also attacked. Capanna had gone to the funeral to explain that the movement had not been involved in Annarumma's death.

26 November
Citing accusations of "factionalism", the central committee of the PCI decides to expel the editors of the magazine *Il Manifesto* from the party.

27 November
The Italian parliament approves a law which legalizes divorce in Italy (this law officially took effect on 1 December 1970).
In Rome, there are demonstrations against President Nixon's visit to Italy. The student Domenico Congedo falls to his death from a window at the faculty of education while trying to escape from a group of fascists who were throwing stones and light explosives.

28 November
General strike by the metalworkers. Over 100,000 metalworkers attend the demonstration in Rome as a show of support for their labour dispute. This event is one of the largest and most combative workers' demonstrations that ever took place in Italy.

3 December
Revisiting the issue after its first ruling of 19 December 1968, the constitutional court reaffirms that adultery, when committed by a woman, is no longer a crime. With this new ruling, the court repeals the remaining sections of the original penal code article 559 from 1930.

7 December
In an article published in the *Observer*, English journalist Leslie Finer coins the phrase "strategy of tension". This term is later frequently used in Italy to define the string of terrorist attacks which create a climate of fear in the country.
The contract of the chemical workers is signed, establishing wage increases of 19,000 lire monthly, a 40-hour work week, three weeks of vacation time, and certain union rights such as the right of assembly at the workplace.

8 December
A preliminary agreement is reached for metalworkers employed at state-owned companies. This agreement provides for a wage increase of 65 lire per hour across the board, regulatory parity between factory workers and office employees, the right of assembly at the workplace during working hours for ten paid hours per year, and a 40-hour work week.
Despite this preliminary agreement, the bodywork department at Mirafiori reverts to its strategy of holding fragmented strikes. From 8 to 13 December, fragmented 2-hour work stoppages continue to be implemented. In practice, these stoppages almost always exceed two hours, frequently lasting until the end of the workers' shift.

10 December
General labourers strike for a national agreement, with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating all over Italy. The employees of private oil companies begin a 4-day strike for the renewal of their contract.

Giorgio Almirante, the national secretary of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, declares to the German weekly *Der Spiegel*: "Fascist youth organizations are preparing for civil war".

11 December
A law is passed which gives all Italian high school graduates the possibility of attending university, regardless of the type of high school they attended.

12 December
In Milan, a bomb explodes in the National Agricultural Bank at Piazza Fontana, causing 17 deaths. Three hours after the massacre, chief of police Marcello Guida gives a statement explaining that anarchists are to blame for the killings. This becomes the official version of events supported by the police and most major newspapers, with the exception of *Il Giorno*, which runs the headline "Infamous provocation" and puts forward the hypothesis of a fascist attack. The official narrative is that the worker-student revolt has created a climate of subversion in which extremist groups such as anarchists are prepared to resort to violence. The Milanese police pursue the "red trail" for over a year, while ignoring elements that could have pointed towards fascist involvement, such as a Padua police report stating that a merchant had recognized the bag that contained the second unexploded bomb in Milan as one which had been sold in his store. The merchant claims to have sold two bags of that type, saying that he would also be able to describe the person who bought them. A year later, judge Giancarlo Stiz tracks down that police report and re-evaluates its importance, changing the course of the investigation.

13 December
The anarchist Pietro Valpreda goes to the courthouse to be questioned by judge Amati, who asks him if he knows the anarchists accused of planting the bombs at the Milan fairgrounds. At the end of the interrogation, in the hallway of the courthouse, Valpreda is stopped by the police and arrested. The theory of a "red massacre" is now seemingly complete: the massacre has its culprit, and the following day the *Corriere della Sera* runs the headline "The monster Valpreda has been arrested".
Police commissioner Luigi Calabresi illegally detains the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, keeping him in his office for 48 hours.

15 December
Pinelli falls to his death from the fourth-floor window of Calabresi's office at police headquarters. The police's version of this incident, given in a press conference by police chief Guida, is that Pinelli threw himself out of the window shouting "It's the end of anarchy" when they told him that Valpreda had confessed to organizing the massacre. Subsequently, when the thesis of voluntary suicide proves to be untenable, there is talk of Pinelli's "active illness" which would have caused him to lose his balance. Several facts remain which the police narrative fails to explain. For example, why did

Pinelli's shoe remain in the hands of a policeman if he jumped to his death? Why did Pinelli have marks on his neck? What reason would Pinelli have to fear judicial consequences if he already had an alibi for the afternoon of the massacre, when he had been playing cards in a bar with a pensioner?

17 December
A confidential note from the Italian secret service (SID) asserts that "Mario Merlino and Stefano Delle Chiaie [two noted neo-fascist terrorists] committed the attacks with the goal of placing the blame on other movements". The police and the judges ignore this note and other evidence, and continue to pursue the "red trail".

21 December
Following up on the preliminary agreement from 8 December, the metalworkers' contract is officially signed. It includes an increase of 65 liras per hour across the board, a reduction of working hours to establish a 40-hour work week, one more day of vacation time, and some important trade union rights, e.g. the right to assemble at the workplace, trade union representatives, and permission to belong to a trade union.

23 and 24 December
The worker assemblies at Mirafiori approve the terms of their contract by majority vote. Overall in 1969, the number of vehicles produced by the Fiat group decreases by 4.9% compared to the previous year, while the total number of strike hours exceeds 20 million.

24 December
After 4 months of struggles, the national agreement for labourers is renewed. The agreement provides for 20 days of vacation time and a progressive reduction of working hours to achieve a 42-hour work week.

1970

28 January
The Italian parliament approves the law establishing the new organization of Italian regions; the senate later approves this law on 15 May.

14 May
The Italian parliament approves the statute of workers' rights.

This chronology has been assembled based on the book *Cronologia 1960-1980: La stagione della rivolta* by Fabrizio Billi, published in "1969-2009... op. cit. I have made some alterations to Billi's chronology, removing certain details while adding other information. I acknowledge the contribution of Fabrizio Billi – who I wish to thank – and declare that the responsibility for the statements contained in this chronology is solely my own.

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