

Trans. #: 165849



Title Excerpts from a diary ; women's liberation and workers' autonomy in Turin and Milan /

Author Cantarow, Ellen.

Double-click here to edit text.

Excerpts from a Diary:

WOMEN'S LIBERATION and WORKERS' AUTONOMY in TURIN and MILAN

ellen cantarow

Last spring I made a trip to Italy. For two weeks I met continuously with comrades in Turin and Milan. In describing the trip I thought it best to concentrate on those parts of the left I found most interesting, and which were probably less known to radicals here than the general contours of the Italian New Left already described in the American movement press. Moreover, between the nascent Italian women's movement and the rank-and-file movement in the shops there seems to me to be an obvious dialectic. I hope the following essay will make that apparent, and will offer a somewhat different perspective on the struggles of our comrades in Italy than has been available so far. Further information about the Italian left, including a good many first-hand documents, is available from The Europe America Communications Service, 6th and Rogers Streets, Cambridge, Mass.

* * *

June 5, Turin

There is a left in Italy. The left has a history. That history with its legacy of massive class-consciousness among workers, unbroken even by twenty years of fascism, is something I can feel here. I can see it, practically touch it walking around Turin, as I could in Genoa, in Rome, in the centuries-old neighborhoods where the proletariat almost invariably lives—though state housing projects are beginning to go up American-fashion on the outskirts of the larger cities. In the old neighborhoods, the working class lives amidst all the architectural, historical stability of these districts, as well as amidst all the deteriorating or non-existent heating, plumbing, plaster, of the houses and apartment houses. The buildings are often converted *palazzi* with big stone arched doorways through which you enter to find a courtyard and several stone passageways leading to stone stairwells that mount upward to the apartments.

History hasn't been systematically destroyed, destruction hasn't been rationalized as "urban renewal" in any city but Milan, perhaps, or the outskirts of Rome: but even in Milan the old *quartiere* remain. In the buildings in Rome centuries cluster visibly upon centuries. Renaissance apartment houses are built under the arches, into the crevices of Roman ruins; seventeenth-century upper stories have been added to Renaissance bases. History is part of the landscape of daily living. Its contours fix themselves in the deepest part of your consciousness. If you go from America to Italy you've got to know the difference even if you don't know who Guarini

was. Here buildings aren't blasted away, blocks aren't razed to a pitiless wasted rubble. You don't see barren lots with their burden of broken glass, bricks, dogshit, planks with jutting nails, the weeds an indomitable timeless life thrusting up through the waste people heap on the waste that's been heaped upon them. No: not yet visited upon Italy is the ultimate violence of capitalism, rendering its citizenry a race without memory, animals torn away from habitat, a mass lobotomy that leaves but a dull ache, occasionally stirring the heart to anger with no real understanding exactly why.

It is in these old neighborhoods that you come on the CP office, open to anyone who might want to come and sit. (I've never seen anyone sitting there; I suspect it would be mainly the older folks who would.) The CP has long sold out on its revolutionary origins. Indeed, it has close to thirty years of history here, as elsewhere, of putting the brake on rank-and-file militancy. Having made its compromise in the Forties with the Christian Democrats, the big ruling-class party, to gain a toehold in Parliament, it has grown more and more "respectable" ever since. At the same time it is the only left formation with a mass following. Last election it polled 20,000,000 votes, second only to the Christian Democrats. It's clear that the working class—particularly the young people—aren't entirely satisfied with the CP. On the other hand there's really nothing else as powerful: the New Left is splintered and immature.

In regard to the New Left the CP predictably plays a despicable role. The new, or extraparliamentary left (called this to distinguish it from the CP and the Socialists), is now suffering the worst repression ever visited on it. One kid just got 14 months for writing a political slogan on a tablecloth in a restaurant. It was argued by the court that the slogan might have "corrupted the morals" of the waitress had she seen it. Every day in *Manifesto's* daily or in the *Lotta Continua* newspaper are tales of mammoth sentences meted out for nothing—for graffiti, or for distributing leaflets in "unauthorized places." In all of this the CP not only sits on its hands: it cries for more "law and order," so that you're hard pressed to tell it apart from the Christian Democrats. Yet, as a comrade at the *Manifesto* office in Turin remarked wryly to me, "As we say, the CP may be pretty bad now, but she's still the big mama of us all . . ."

On the walls of the working-class neighborhoods are many posters. Wall posters are obviously a traditional means of mass political communication here. At this moment the

October 1972

NOTICE: This Material May Be Protected
By Copyright Law. (Title 17 U.S. Code)

Women's liberation & workers' autonomy in Turin & Milan



May elections are just past. *Manifesto*, the organization founded two years ago by former members of the CP central committee, who had been expelled by the Party, ran its first candidates this month. And so the legend *CON IL MANIFESTO PER IL COMUNISMO (WITH MANIFESTO FOR COMMUNISM)* is plastered everywhere. There's also the *Manifesto* poster with the photograph of Valpreda, their chief electoral candidate. Valpreda is the anarchist on whom the State tried to pin the Agricultural Bank of Milan bombing committed in December, 1969, by fascists. *Manifesto* ran Valpreda as their chief candidate in an effort at once to free him, to raise the issue of the growing repression of the left to a mass level, and to enter the arena of mass electoral politics as an organized force. Valpreda lost. In its campaign *Manifesto* was deserted by the rest of the extraparliamentary left, partly, I am told by comrades in Turin, because other groups shunned the electoral path as reformist, partly because of the factionalism rife in the Italian movement at present. Among the comrades I meet there is much condemnation of the desertion of *Manifesto* by the rest of the left, even though many feel that *Manifesto* is a bunch of ex-heavies from the CP, intellectuals who don't engage in much everyday practice.

There is something else here, which I find a continuing miracle: every day when I wake up and go out for coffee, I have my choice of three communist dailies! One, which I never buy, is *l'Unità*: that's the CP's official organ, and everyone agrees it's for shit. I usually buy both *Manifesto* and *Lotta Continua*. *Lotta Continua's* daily suffers from the same

sort of "triumphalism," and movement-centeredness that the *Guardian* does—the comrades-are-struggling-on-land-and-seas sort of politics. *Manifesto's* paper consists mainly of broad analysis, of local strike coverage, and of important international events. Written by people like Lucio Magri, Rossana Rossanda, *Manifesto's* national and international analysis is consistently provocative, often first-rate, but usually pretty flat in style. Who in Italy reads *Manifesto*? Mainly intellectuals, and the advanced cadre in the factories.

How much a national left press, especially a daily one, contributes to your sense of movement on a national level, prevents you from feeling isolated in your own local work, you discover only where such a press exists. But it is everything taken together that gives this impression of vibrant life on a left that continues to rally now as fifty, a hundred years ago—the newspapers, the posters upon posters, the demonstrations into which I've occasionally stumbled, like the one in Perugia a week ago, organized by the CP about Vietnam.

June 7, Turin

MT's apartment houses the Turin Women's Political Collective. The collective's office is a large room with sculpted cornices and ceiling, an ordinary feature of buildings in Turin, which is an eighteenth-century city. This elegant room, with its high ceilings and ornate detailed work, is barely furnished. There's a work table composed of a slab of some sort of synthetic material and two wooden "horses"; a daybed with an old blue cover; a carton with some clothes in it. Against one wall there's a bookcase piled with newspapers,

magazines, a few books. Among these there is much international material, and browsing one day I found *Ms.* and *Notes from the Second Year*. Above the bookcase are a series of photos taken at a women's demonstration. They could have been taken in America, but for the Italian placards: *ANCHE NON PAGATA LA DONNA LAVORA!* (WOMEN WORK EVEN IF THEY AREN'T PAID FOR IT!), *3,000,000 DI ABORTI IN UN ANNO! 20,000 DONNE CI LASCIANO LE PELLE* (3,000,000 ABORTIONS IN A YEAR! 20,000 WOMEN DEAD). Above the photographs the legend, *DONNA E BELLO* (TO BE A WOMAN IS BEAUTIFUL). Next to the tall windows that look out on the street hangs a large placard made out of some lightweight metal. Printed in red at the top is the legend: *NON C'E RIVOLUZIONE SENZA LIBERAZIONE DELLA DONNA* (THERE IS NO REVOLUTION WITHOUT WOMEN'S LIBERATION); in the center, the women's symbol; at the bottom, *NON C'E LIBERAZIONE DELLA DONNA SENZA RIVOLUZIONE* (THERE IS NO WOMEN'S LIBERATION WITHOUT REVOLUTION).

Though I'm struck by how greatly this group—the only one with which I'm to have any extended contact—seems to have borrowed from the American women's movement, still its atmosphere is unmistakably Italian, for like any group on the left it has been shaped in the crucible of Italian socialist and communist history. In America we call each other "Sister," and how much more than this the women's movement owes to the early civil rights movement requires no little reflection. In Italy women address each other as *compagna*, comrade. While I was there I was always *la compagna americana*. How much other women's groups here owe to Italian communist history, I can't say. But in MT's group there is no doubt that people are cognizant of the class struggle. It not only exists in Italy: everyone recognizes that it does, there is no balking it. It is the frame of reference even of the unions, which, unlike American unions, at least profess a left perspective and use the parlance of Marxism. One member of MT's group, a working-class woman from the South, might declare: "You may all be Marxists, but as for me I'm a feminist *e basta!* (and that's that!)" But even this declaration is uttered within the context of a Marxism absorbed into popular consciousness, assimilated into daily life and thought.

Tonight the regular meeting of the collective is to take place. Around seven o'clock women begin arriving. No question of having meetings during the day: most of the women work, or are occupied with their families. As they enter the room, I am struck by the fact that their average age seems over 25. I am struck, too, by the difference in dress: MT and perhaps two or three other women wear slacks; there are no work shirts, peasant blouses, huaraches, no American youthisms in costume. Many of the women wear skirts, dresses; many wear makeup.

Several of the women are schoolteachers, but others are not professionals: I learn later from MT that a good many women in her group, as in Italian women's groups generally, are white-collar workers. A secretary at Fiat opens the meeting. She asks the others if they are willing to send representatives to her union. The men there have expressed an interest in finding out about feminism. Smiles around the table; a

moment of silence; murmurs of skepticism. M, who is among the marchers in the large photo on the wall, speaks: she doesn't see much use, she says, in sending representatives

In P as she speaks and in the other sisters as they listen, there is a sense of novelty, indeed of fascination, not just about homosexuality, but about the sheer fact of *any* freedom of sexual expression for women.

where they will surely be seen as curiosities. Another woman, who belongs to a different union, seconds M's skepticism, but allows that there may be some usefulness in going to the meeting.

The item of greatest interest on the agenda is the report of three comrades on a visit to a homosexual group in Turin. P, a stylish young woman with dark hair strained back into a bun, modish-looking glasses, and a yellow dress, makes the report. A distinction from the American women's movement: this whole accounting is done in an almost formal manner. Only parliamentary procedure is lacking. This feels odd, but it places the visit in the context of political decision-making: Should the Turin collective have anything further to do with the homosexual group, or should it not, and on what basis?

P reflects that she and the other comrades had felt edgy about the visit. They hadn't known what to expect. At one point in the meeting one of the lesbians put her hands on P's breasts and announced: "You see? I'm no different from a man." (Murmurs, expressions of irritation, indignation, dismay on the parts of the sisters sitting around me.) The lesbians seemed to pride themselves on being "just like men," P says, and had no other notion of liberation.

In P as she speaks and in the other sisters as they listen, there is a sense of novelty, indeed of fascination, not just about homosexuality, but about the sheer fact of *any* freedom of sexual expression for women. Later MT confirms my feeling that the lives of the vast majority of Italian women are extremely restricted, even though increasing numbers of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women are going to universities. Few, for example, live together away from their families, as do MT and the sister sharing the collective's apartment. There is a distinction between the lives of working-class women, still stiflingly cloistered, and those of students among whom "sexual freedom" is growing, but both groups clearly feel unhampered sexual relations is a positive goal as yet to be reached.

The judgment of the comrades is to suspend further contact with the homosexual group. The three comrades who visited the group repeat several times that they found the visit extremely beneficial: they understand and sympathize with a phenomenon that had seemed ludicrous before, and fearsome. (It seems clear throughout the whole discussion that gay liberation is not soon to become part of the Italian left, given the country's backwardness in all areas of sexual

definition and expression.) At the same time there seems to be no political reason for continuing to relate to what, after all, is a *groupuscule*: the most pressing need for Italian women's groups, after all, is to begin becoming a movement, and this, one comrade remarks, hasn't gotten underway yet. In order for it to happen, the masses of Italian women have to be reached: the homosexual group doesn't represent them. Some brief discussion of other business follows, among which there is talk of a meeting of representatives from various women's groups all over Northern Italy: this is to take place tomorrow evening in Milan for the outlining of a women's manifesto. It seems the meeting is an extremely important moment, perhaps the springboard from which the groups, as yet isolated among themselves, will announce a real movement.

June 8, Milan

Tonight I go with MT and P to the meeting in Milan. The drive from Turin takes an hour and a half. The meeting begins late, at 10 p.m., and we're surprised—indeed, disappointed—that there are only fifteen women present. The meeting is in a fifth-floor walkup; again this is in a converted seventeenth-century *palazzo*. In the room where we are meeting, bookcases surmount the worktable: I notice in them a large volume of Gramsci beside the works of Lenin, of Marx, of Engels. On the edge of one of the shelves is the motto, humorous, outrageous, obviously a felt accompaniment to the classics ranged above it: *IO SONO CLITORACRATE* (I AM A CLITOROCRAT). Down the shelf from the volumes of Marx, Lenin, and Engels, is *Sisterhood is Powerful*.

Before the meeting one of the women puts a record on. It is a work song, the song of a woman worker explaining the difficulties of her work, and what she has to do when she goes home. Then another, in which a young woman sings about her wedding day, "How happy I am! I have bought my gown, my veil, I will put on my new shoes and carry flowers . . ." The song has a self-mocking edge to it. During it everyone sits silent, ironic. There is a pervasive feeling I've not experienced since the early women's movement in America. It's the spirit of new recognition, in which every time-worn motto, every banality, every careless phrase takes on a sharpness, a poignancy one realized before only dimly; in which normality is revealed as crippling restriction; in which beyond all else one discovers that those private chafing reflections, that occasional sense of pervasive dull dissatisfaction one had felt a mark of one's own failure, are shared by thousands of other women; that other women are one's own self and one's self is to be found in other women. Out of such feeling in America four or five years ago came the motto, *SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL*, the fallacies of which (there are differences among us, of class, of race, of politics) were later shown as the entire left splintered and entered a longer, harder and more workaday phase.

After the records A is urged to sing. She is the oldest woman in the Turin group—in her late forties, perhaps fifty. She has long dark hair; like some others in the group she wears makeup. Before the women's movement she had never participated in politics. She supports herself as a translator, and recently she translated the Bread and Roses pamphlet, "Our Bodies, Ourselves," for a medical project planned by

the Turin group. She has grown children; she separated from her husband some time ago. (Despite the recently liberalized Italian law, divorce is nearly impossible to get; the courts either refuse to grant it or tie you up in the knots of bureaucratic procedure.) Only in a slight initial shyness, in the mild self-mockery of A's humor, might one sense the mark of her age. Otherwise there is nothing in her of the hesitancy, the sense of their difference, the uncertainty how to relate to much younger women, that one finds in many older women in the U.S. who have joined the women's movement.

In a low, strong, pleasant voice, A sings a feminist song written by an Italian woman. After she's finished there's a moment of silence. Then we remember it's 10:45 in the evening and the meeting hasn't begun. Only around 11 does a discussion of the proposed manifesto begin. The chief questions are the form in which it should appear, and the audience to whom it should be addressed. Someone suggests it should be a wall poster, perhaps with the legend, *Donna è Bello* ("Woman is beautiful"). Another woman observes that no one outside of the women's groups understands the meaning of that phrase. (I secretly agree, given not only the grammatical oddness of the statement in Italian, but given also its genealogy, which few Italians can know: it comes from America, and from the black power movement—Black is beautiful.) Another woman, who has a strong, blond face, begins a long discourse in which she talks about the identification of the personal with the political. Perhaps this is what the manifesto should stress, but clearly this sister is telling us, elaborately, and with no small pedantry, what we already know. B, a woman in MT's group to whom I have taken immediately, finely intelligent, small, delicate, with a serious, beautiful Semitic face, speaks up in irritation: "What the comrade has been doing is lecturing us, just as if she were in one of the extraparlimentary *gruppi*. It is the style of the Italian male heavy. The comrade should be telling us simply and plainly what she thinks the manifesto should consist of, to whom it should be written, and above all what its purpose should be." B continues, "It seemed to us from Turin that we had met together here in an effort to write something like a Communist Manifesto for women, something the writing of which would bring together groups formerly isolated, something that would announce our existence as a political movement." Therefore the manifesto itself, B continues, announces a new chapter in the development of women's politics on the left, as a movement. She related that the conception of the Turin collective was that the manifesto should be broadly political, sketching in bold strokes the large, urgent reasons for the existence of a movement for women's liberation.

A moment of silence follows B's remarks, then comrades begin considering what she has said. All agree that the statement should explain the concept of women's liberation. There are questions, however, about how the large politics underlying the concept are to be expressed. One sister observes that the manifesto shouldn't be a denunciation (women are exploited, underpaid, abused, miserable). It should be a positive statement: first and foremost it should explain that women's liberation is indeed a political concept, not the psychological triviality male comrades on the left would sneeringly make of it. There is much defensiveness in this

and I sense behind it the history of the experience of the women in the Italian New Left groups, or *gruppi* as they are colloquially called. MT has told me that about half of the women in the Turin collective have worked with *Lotta Continua*, *Potere Operaio*, and other extraparliamentary groupings. The experience of the young women in these organizations is much like that reported by American women of SDS in its early days. The women who left the *gruppi* did so because they were treated the same on the extraparliamentary left as in society generally. The women comrades did the typing, stenciling, filing. They were infantilized, sexualized, by their supposed male comrades. The wounds incurred in this experience still ache, and the women still justify themselves with an eye to the *gruppi*. The question of audience is thus a pointed one. Should the manifesto be a document to be circulated throughout the left, or should it be addressed to a mass audience outside of the left?

B speaks again. The situation of the left as a whole, she observes with some passion, is an ugly one, in which there is much violence, a violence that reflects the violence of capitalist society. She stresses the word, leaning forward with intensity as she does so. I'm not entirely sure what she means, but I have the dawning sense that at least in part she is implying the extreme sectarianism that has riddled the left under the increasing pressure of repression, a sectarianism that for example led the *gruppi* to desert *Manifesto* during

the elections. B talks as well about the competitiveness and egocentrism of the left. Feminism, she continues with increasing warmth, can change the nature of the movement; there is a need to create a counter-culture. But at the same time as B urges the other women in the room to emphasize the cultural implications of feminism she also includes mass political themes—the economic exploitation of women in the home and on the labor market, and the question of abortion. I wonder at B's perceptiveness, her imagination, for cultural issues as they are understood in America are in general almost wholly foreign here. I am moved, even shaken, as I realize that in all of Italy the only part of the left that may be able to fuse the larger questions of political economy, of class, of power, with the politics of personal experience, is the women's movement. In America it was the great contribution of the women's movement to have made clear the identification of the so-called "personal" with the political. But there was some historical background for that. Here in Italy there has been no such preparation. Indeed, my greatest culture-shock here is my sense of the general absence among Italian movement people of a critical examination of one's own experience and practice in relation to one's comrades. Only in MT's group or here, tonight, have I found the deep stirrings of what Americans on the left take so much for granted.

As the end of the meeting is drawing near, MT outlines a possible form for the manifesto. Sharply, clearly, even with eloquence, she points out the necessity to make the document as brief as possible. She says that it should be a wall poster. It should announce briefly and in plain language the major points women's liberation as a movement wishes to make about the social condition of Italian women. It should then announce a program in which concrete goals are undertaken, goals that speak to the needs of the masses of Italian women. Of course, among the issues to be touched upon are employment, household work and the community, abortion When MT stops there is a moment of silence; the outline shimmers there before us waiting to be elaborated. Various comrades make additional suggestions, and it is decided that a meeting should take place in Turin a week from now to begin the actual writing of the document.

It is 1 in the morning. Down in the darkened street it is quite silent. A streetlamp casts a bright circle of light around which we gather for a moment before separating to go. Suddenly a motorcycle passes. Speculatively P and A regard the young man as he goes by. "Mm-mm!" says P to A, "nice, isn't he?" A strikes an inviting pose, hip thrust forward, eyebrows raised appraisingly, cheeks sucked in. "You could do worse," she says, intoning the cadences of a small shopkeeper. We burst out laughing.

Before we leave the city we stop at a bar that is just about to close. A man and his daughter are cleaning up behind the counter. We order *panini* (rolls) with ham and cheese, a quick *espresso*. We talk about the meeting. MT observes there weren't many comrades there; on the other hand the meeting came to an agreement on continued work in common, and this in itself was a mark of success. The young woman behind the counter listens covertly while she prepares the *panini* and coffee. Clearly four young women who travel alone at one in the morning and discuss politics—



Autonomia operaia isn't a formal organization here any more than women's liberation is in America. It is a mass desire that has been given a name—the desire for autonomous power distinct from both the unions and the bureaucratic, arteriosclerotic albatross that is the CP.

feminism!—are oddities to say the very least. As we leave, I can see the young woman and her father gazing after us, shaking their heads, laughing . . .

On the way home, P and I talk about her teaching and the integration of her politics into her teaching. Her history is a fairly common one here. In high school she worked with PSIUP, which was a split-off party from the Italian Socialist Party, to the left of the latter. Before 1968 it purported to be an alternative to the CP, and attracted many students who later left it when the extraparliamentary left surged forth. After high school P went to university and started working with comrades in a *doppo scuola* (lit: "after school"), a supplementary educational program for young workers. Now P works actively in one of the large industrial unions that is organizing among high school teachers. Such participation isn't uncommon, but many comrades still scorn working in any of the unions, which are controlled by the parliamentary left. But P feels the union to which she belongs is reaching masses of teachers. The only other union is extremely right-wing. Union organizing among high school teachers, she says, is a growing reality. You must come to grips with that, or you risk marginality, even extinction as a political influence.

Sunday, June 10

S, a friend of MT's, has kept saying to me, "You'll have to meet some workers and ask them what *they* think of the extraparliamentary groups. When you meet them you'll be talking with people who are at the center of the whole problem." So today I've come to the apartment that S, a former partisan in his forties, shares with two young workers from the South: one of them works at Fiat, the other was recently fired from there. Not only "a proletarian commune," as S and the two other men call it, the apartment is also an office. Sparsely furnished, like MT's place it has large rooms and high ceilings with ornate moldings. At the entrance to the apartment is a long metal bookcase on which are piled pamphlets, leaflets, newspapers.

The young men who live with S are in *autonomia operaia*, workers' autonomy. *Autonomia operaia* isn't a formal organization here any more than women's liberation is in America. It is a mass desire that has been given a name—that is, the desire for autonomous power distinct from both the unions and the bureaucratic, arteriosclerotic albatross that is the CP. In the fall of '69 the disaffection of the rank and file assumed the proportions of mass struggle as a chaos of strikes erupted around the triennial, industry-wide contract renewals. It was during "the hot autumn," *l'autunno caldo*, as it was named, that *autonomia operaia* arose as a movement and not just a sentiment. Now, three years later, the question is whether September will bring another hot autumn. It is against this possibility that the unions are preparing their

platforms: in particular, the union of the *metalmecanici*, the auto workers, has taken the initiative from the rank and file by including several points on the all-important issue of job ranking and classification in the program they'll present to ownership. But if there's another hot autumn, will the comrades in *autonomia operaia* be sufficiently organized to seize the initiative and come out ahead of their own class managers—the unions and the CP—as well as ahead of the ruling class? These are questions I'm impatient to ask the worker-comrades I'm about to meet.

In S's kitchen are several young men. Clearly they aren't students. Their bearing is at once deferential and courtly; from the moment I enter I'm not only the American visitor, but *compagna*, and woman. For this reason the young worker-comrades are somewhat shy, attentive, careful of my halting Italian. There is a small, dark young man, almost a boy, who can't be more than 20 or 21, with bright, dark eyes, grave thin-lipped mouth, round face and pointed chin, who has been organizing at Fiat ever since he arrived two or three years ago. There is F, a tall, wiry young comrade with auburn, crisply curling hair, aquiline nose, long chin, ridged eyes that give him an earnest, attentive look. When he talks, it is with a slight stutter that slows down his speech. There are several other young comrades, including a boy whose voice hasn't changed yet; he has left high school and has been working at Fiat. And then, A: I have heard about him from an American at home. "If there's an Italian counterpart to a really militant black worker," said my American acquaintance grandly, "It's A. You must meet him." But I've also been warned about A's attitude towards women—allegedly very sexist. But S has also told me of the difference, in his opinion, between the worker-comrades and the young male students and intellectuals in the *gruppi*. S says, "While young men in the *gruppi* will make fun of women's liberation or be dishonest in talking about it with you, A and the worker-comrades will be very up front, you can really struggle with them. And when it comes to things like equal pay for equal work, the condition of women in the factories, they will entirely agree with you."

The comrade, when he appears, looks like Anthony Quinn playing an Italian worker. He looks like Quinn in a more wiry, tense form: black, close-clipped hair combed forward and down, high, jutting cheekbones, curious, wide-set black eyes with long, heavy black brows. (I learn later that A's curious abstract gaze is partly the result of an eye injury, one of the thousands of industrial accidents that workers in Italy suffer yearly. Italy is second only to the U.S. in what is called here on the left *white homicides*.) A is older than the other comrades, who fall silent in a sort of deferential but warm greeting when he enters. We all sit down at a longish

table. One young comrade stands at the stove, cooking *pasta* and a joint of beef in tomato sauce for lunch. To my left are two young Americans visiting Turin. As lunch goes on, more and more young brothers enter, and at one point a young woman, obviously not working-class, takes her place across the table from us. Finally there are some fifteen people in the room.

A speaks with a heavy Southern accent. There are jokes all around about how he should slow down because otherwise the *compagna americana* won't understand his terrible Italian. But A talks with a fluency and eloquence I've found in no one here so far; that's obviously the point of the joke. Often, as the conversation proceeds he grasps my arm or hand, and with the other arm gestures compellingly. As he speaks you have the sudden impression of a long history of participation in workers' assemblies, in shop meetings. He is self-consciously a leader, an orator. Throughout the conversation I have the feeling that A uses me as a reference point, ignoring the other Americans and S. This is partly because I've taken over for S as translator, but I sense it's also because I'm a woman. This makes me very self-conscious, but it seems no one else has noticed what I'm so acutely aware of. The Italian comrades listen seriously, attentively, to A: what he says provokes continual side discussions and arguments among them.

A is a proletarian and a communist—he describes himself as these. He is a communist with a small c, not a member of the Communist Party. He talks not of himself but of his class. "*Noi proletari siamo i veri comunisti*," he says at one point with pride: "We proletarians are the true communists." He goes on to discuss the internal committees, the small groups that express *autonomia operaia*. Among the masses of workers the desire for autonomous power, frequently submerged or slumbering just beneath the surface of apparent allegiance to the unions and the CP, articulates itself in a myriad of informal organizational forms. Exactly what form *autonomia operaia* takes depends not just on the particular factory but also on particular departments within given factories. In one factory the *consiglio* (council), an official body, may become the expression of workers' autonomy. In another the *consiglio* may be completely under the union's control and therefore worthless as a truly representative body. A and the comrades in the room today aren't on the *consiglio* (A, in fact, has been fired from Fiat, and apparently can't get work anywhere else). They are part of an independent collective.

A, who has been in the North for eleven years, and the other young men in the room, are among the millions of young people who have emigrated over the past decade from the agrarian, underdeveloped South to Northern Italy and Germany. That South stands in relation to the North as colony to imperialist country, and this relationship has over a century of history. "The meridional question," the exploitation of a South maintained in backwardness by Italian capital, has become more intense over the past five years. During this period the increasing flow of workers northward has been comparable to the mass exodus of black workers from the American South after World War II. Indeed, in Italy the *emigrati* are the niggers of the country. You see them work-

ing in the same kinds of shit jobs that black people have in the U.S.—as parking attendants, as low-level service workers, as domestics. Often enough the *emigrati* are forced to eke out a scant living as street hawkers. And you also find them in the black market and fence trade that ferments, for example, in the port city of Genoa. But they are also an increasing majority on the assembly lines. It is the *emigrati* who emerged in '69 as the spearhead of the struggles of the hot autumn. It is they who have become the most militant and politically conscious force in an historically highly politicized working class.

Since the mid-nineteenth century Italy has experienced the steady development not just of a militant proletarian tradition—which America has, for example—but of a socialist tradition. It is here in Italy that I begin to have some inkling of what communist consciousness means—the gradual, pervasive acceptance of the basic ideas of Marxism. Not every working man and woman in Italy has read the Communist Manifesto, but nearly every working-class person knows its basic ideas on a gut level, and knows the experience, both actual and historical, that it describes. In America liberalism and bourgeois ideology in general are so pervasive and deeply rooted, that articulating the most elementary ideas about class, power, and the state is an effort, a deliberate act that small groups of radicals here and there are engaged in making. Here in Italy such elementary ideas are popular ones; people accept them as facts.

A communist culture exists in embryo. It is there when A says proudly, fiercely: "We proletarians are the true communists." It is there in the personal lives of many of the worker-comrades whose parents and grandparents participated in the historical development of socialist and communist movements. It's as common to find young working people who say, "My grandfather was a Socialist; my mother was a Communist," as it is in America to find young people who say, "My grandfather came over from the old country, and he opened up a drugstore all on his own."

While such thoughts are passing through my mind, A begins talking about the student groups, the extraparliamentary *gruppi*. Helpful at first in doing things the workers weren't in a position to do—writing, printing and distributing leaflets, organizing mass assemblies—later they tried, says A, to curb the workers' desires and movements towards inde-

The Center for Cuban Studies
186 West 4th St.
New York, N.Y. 10014

The center's purpose is to make available to interested people a comprehensive collection of documents and study materials about revolutionary Cuba. Important Cuba collections now exist in the Library of Congress and a few regional libraries, but they mainly serve only the academic community. The Center is open to the public and encourages those who are generally outside of the academic community to make use of its facilities.

If anyone has materials collected on trips to Cuba since 1959 or would like to be a speaker on Cuban life, please contact us.



pendent organization and action. "Also," remarks A, "there'd often be as many as six theoretical leaflets about the same thing. The comrades didn't know what to think, and they became disgusted." The student groups held assemblies to which the workers came, but perforce remained mute while the students debated abstract ideological issues that had little to do with the actual conditions the workers suffered in shop and community. "You can't talk revolution right away," says the dark young comrade with the bright eyes. "First you have to talk about what's bothering people, what problems they feel need to be solved."

It was after splitting with the *gruppi*—with *Lotta Continua*, for example—that the Fiat movement towards *autonomia operaia* assumed its own character and took its name. A emphasizes that the workers' struggles haven't been wage-hour struggles, but struggles to change the nature and organization of work. Nowhere, says A, is the dehumanization of work seen so clearly as in *nocivita*—pollution and hazardous health conditions. "Nowhere is our reduction to wage slaves so clearly seen as in the fact that the bosses want to pay us higher wages for more dangerous jobs. But we won't bargain anymore over the degree to which we'll be exploited: we won't negotiate about life." He goes on to say that competitive divisions among workers must be abolished. But to change the nature of work in the factories the struggle also has to be linked with life in the *quartiere*, the neighborhoods. This means housing, rents, food, education. A worker is someone who goes back from work to a neighborhood and community—to eat, to sleep, talk, argue, laugh, think, in short to live. And he lives a certain way because he is a

proletarian. The struggle for communism, in short, must embrace one's whole life.

While this conversation is going on, an argument erupts across the table between F—the auburn young comrade—and the young woman who entered the room earlier: the argument is about feminism. Now, wherever I happen to be I'm nearly always asked about feminism, and discussions—or arguments—break out among the Italian comrades over it. But today's argument has occurred without any apparent participation on my part. F's remarks reveal that the male comrades here believe feminism to be hatred of men, pure and simple. Feminism arouses bitter memories of the workers' sexual rejection by women students who went to the factory gates from *Lotta Continua* to leaflet in '69-'70. A and the men in the room perceive *Lotta Continua*'s sending the women to the gates as exploitation. They feel the women students were prostituted by the men students, and they are infuriated by this. On that score alone, "We wouldn't have touched the women," F says. The sympathy and indignation of F and A are obviously themselves openly sexist, but ironically F and A may well have understood the situation of the women students better than others would have understood it. I reflect that the women must have been doubly exploited, first by the sexism of the New Left groups, second by the sexism of the Southern emigrants who saw them only as potential sexual companions or conquests, not as political comrades. Moreover, A and F accuse the women students of being *fascisti* because they wouldn't socialize or sleep with the workers. F's face grows dark, bitter, as he relates how he and others were rebuffed. His expression conjures up the world

of the young Southern male immigrant, wholly without society or sex. Indeed, the young men from the South suffer terrible ostracism of all sorts in the North, but the most frustrating deprivation in this country, where mores are beginning to relax only among a small subculture of students and intellectuals, is sexual deprivation.

My feelings about all of this are contradictory. I find myself siding at once with my absent sisters and with this young, bitter comrade whose anger and hurt evokes the larger social conditions of Southerners up North. I finally ask: Didn't you think of the women as comrades? But the question of the women students is deeply imbedded in F's memory, bound up with the memory of the male students, of their arrogance as F perceives it, their false superiority, their know-it-all attitudes, their ham-handed attempts to channel the workers' struggles, to play little Lenins. F's mouth is set, tense, bitter. It is clearly useless to go on.

Evening

There is a meeting late this afternoon to tape an interview with several of the women from MT's group; after this F and A are to come for dinner and more talk.

The tape begins with difficulty; everyone is tired, the week has been an endless round of meetings. Moreover, one of the women, who has a good deal to contribute to the discussion, has had to bring her one-and-a-half-year-old, and the child keeps screaming to draw our attention to her. We are caught in the absurd predicament of trying seriously to discuss the politics of women's liberation while having to do child care. Here in Italy the men on the left don't do child care; the movement, including the women, has apparently not considered that yet, even on the level of lip-service.

After about three-quarters of an hour, E arrives. She is short, stocky, dark, gusty, with an air of self-assurance, humorous decisiveness. E is from the South, and we decide that perhaps it would be best for her to talk about her life there; a sort of instant *presa di coscienza* (consciousness-raising is a device imported, together with its name, from the States; the Italian women have participated in it, as far as I can tell, with the same sense of exhilaration and sudden revelation as we did a few years ago). This turns out to have been the best possible decision: E is unusually expressive; her voice, her gestures, are fluid and eloquent. E speaks of her cousin, married in the South to a Southerner, and childless. This is of course a big problem. At first E thought her cousin had purposely refrained from having a child, and was using birth control. On congratulating her upon what E supposed was her shrewdness, she found her cousin was quite distraught about her "barrenness." This was a situation that she, her husband, her parents and parents-in-law felt was her fault. "But hasn't Franco gone to the doctor to have tests made?" "Whatever for?" "For godsake, girl, don't you know there could be something wrong with *him*?" "Oh no, that could never be! There are so many children in his family! No one has ever had any problems!" This woman's relatives hold her in light contempt, E continues. They listen to her when she speaks, but with condescension. "They don't give the weight to her words that they would if she had a son. For them she is a thing, a problem they discuss, not a person. She is like a barren earth, like a tree that gives no fruit. . . ."

While E talks the rest of us sit spellbound; her words rush forth like a bitter poetry. She talks about her own family, about her father who seems to know no other way to relate to his wife, his daughter, but through brutality. E's mother died a year ago. The two women had been very close. The mother poured out her frustration to the daughter, and though the code of sexual ethics forbade E's making similar confidences, she knew that her mother knew that she, E, had already gone to bed with the man who shortly thereafter became her husband. Earlier, when she was growing up, E's relationship with her mother was walled round with the close, stifling Southern taboos regarding women. When E first had her period, she relates, she went for several days terrified lest anyone should discover the shameful thing that was happening to her, which she didn't understand. Finally, unable to keep washing out underwear and hiding rags beneath a pile of old clothes, she showed her mother. "Oh, Madonna!" breathed her mother, growing visibly pale. A second of silence, then: "Now you are a Signorina." The words came down like a cascade around the bewildered E: "You're a young lady. You have to learn what to do every month, I'll show you. And you mustn't play with boys anymore."

But E was "an unnatural young lady. I was everything a girl is not supposed to be. I played with boys. I refused to stop. Why should I just because I was a woman? When I

Here in Italy the men on the left don't do child care; the movement, including the women, has apparently not considered that yet, even on the level of lip-service.

found out about how children are born I was so shocked I got sick. How could that dreadful thing be visited upon me for the simple accident of my birth, because I was a woman? Besides all this I was short, I was fat, I was dark, I was homely, and I had pimples. Yes, I wasn't what a girl is supposed to be at all. . . ."

Because she was a rebel there were many quarrels between E and her father. As recently as several years ago, when she was in her early twenties, her father threw a plate at her, but she gave him as good in return. In their last exchange the father finally said: "*Quando sono io chi ha il piccio, e tu che hai la figa, quando io parlo, tu chiedi.*" ("When it's me that has the prick and you have the cunt, you shut up when I talk.") Whereupon E: "Who told you the prick is better than the cunt? *Who*?" "Never mind who told me, that's the way it is." "If you can't explain it," retorted E, "you can go to hell."

Having taped all of this, I'm naturally still thinking about it when F and A arrive. They sit uneasily in MT's kitchen. A young man doing his military service is there, an ex-student. He is talking to me in English . . . about esthetics! The conversation is luckily cut short by the announcement that there is no bread in the house. Who will go and buy it?

My husband Louie and I have a car: it is decided one of us should go with either A or F. I volunteer: instantly A's and F's glances veer questioningly to Louie to gauge his reaction. There is none. A moment of undoubtedly mystified silence; then it is decided A should go.

It is pouring rain outside. A talks like a machine gun. In an effort to understand him I keep missing turns. We talk about Louie's and my vacation. "We have renounced all privileges," A says firmly. "You saw how we live. We have a proletarian commune. In our commune everyone shares. If

A emphasizes that the workers' struggles haven't been wage-hour struggles, but struggles to change the nature and organization of work.

you need bread I'll give it to you, we divide money equally, we have all things in common. . . . That's what communism is, as a beginning." A talks about workers' struggles in the South. "One time," he says, of a town whose name I have forgotten, "they burned down the police station with fifty cops in it, the CP headquarters, the union hall, everything. When they fight, they really fight. They're tough people."

He asks if I have children; I answer that I don't, and query: "Why do you ask?" A sits in silence for a moment, then replies: "Don't make children. Children are a problem. It's particularly hard for women, bearing children is very hard. And when you're a revolutionary you shouldn't create that problem for yourself." We have come to the bread store; A gets out. I feel deeply moved, and I am newly aware of the deep contradictions underlying the simple description that A is "a terrible sexist."

At dinner an odd exchange starts off the conversation. The two young Americans who are staying at MT's house want to know how A and F "became political." In the American movement that's a normal enough question, but when I translate A and F both look at me uncomprehendingly. "What do they mean, how I got into politics," A asks. "I was born a worker; I came from a communist family; my grandfather was a Socialist; my mother and father were in the Party. I went to strikes when I was a kid; later, when I began working in the factory, I worked for the Party. When I decided it was corrupt and not truly communist, I left. I was in the strike in '69; I'll always live the same way since I am a proletarian, I am part of the working class." He shrugs conclusively. F continues in the same vein: "My grandparents were anarchists; my mother was a Communist. I worked for PSIUP. Now I'm not in any of the parties; I work with the comrades on the shop floor. . . ."

How is work outside the traditional union structure organized? I press for information, and in doing so I ask A what position the comrades with whom he is working take on *inquadramento unico*, "the single grouping" proposed by the auto workers' unions, and one of the major union proposals for the contracts that are coming up this fall. "The

single grouping" proposes collapsing what are now two salary and job-classification scales—one for clerical and white-collar workers and one for blue-collar workers—into a single scale, with automatic passage from the lowest to the next-lowest rank of the new scale.

This proposal, which purports to attack the very structure and organization of work, is the union's attempt to harness the swell of mass militancy from '69 on. It has been quite clear to the rank and file since '69 that most of the classifications given to tasks on the shop floor as well as in the offices are phony. Ideally, as a comrade in Milan is later to tell me, there would be only two categories for blue-collar workers and two for white-collar workers: skilled and unskilled. The *avanguardia*, the cadre organizing independent of the unions, have their own ideas about *inquadramento unico*, as do the regular labor reporters for *Manifesto*. In one *Manifesto* story a worker from Bergamo reported that *inquadramento unico* had already been achieved at his factory (Dalmine) for all intents and purposes. The union upheld the notion of *inquadramento unico*, maintaining that "single grouping" would represent a victory over salary and rank distinctions. It would also introduce the criterion of *professionalita*: professionalism. This would overcome invidious distinctions between white- and blue-collar workers, and between workers in each of these categories. It would also make the nature of the work seem different; ostensibly, by attaching the notion of "professionalism" or expertise to the accomplishment of particular tasks, alienation would be overcome! Instead, reports the worker from Dalmine, what has happened where he works is that salary distinctions in fact have doubled. And the concept of "new professionalism" threatens to rationalize all political questions that attach to the job. "Among other things," reports the worker at Dalmine, "pollution, fatigue, discomfort, are transformed into elements of careerism, while the periodic raises in salary separate and individualize the interests of the workers, creating the groundwork for a decisive attack (on the part of ownership) against articulated contract procedure, and against mass struggle around the capitalist organization of work."

I relate this, and other opinions I've gleaned from reading *Manifesto*, to A. His response is: "Don't worry about *inquadramento unico*. *Inquadramento unico* is meaningless. It answers none of the workers' real problems." But, I persist, don't the autonomous workers' groups have to take some clear, articulate position on the fall contracts? Yes, replies A, but what is most important is to draw out the workers around their real concerns, and create moments of struggle in which those interests can be advanced. I agree, but keep pressing to know how much organization actually exists now. For it seems to me that if there is no effective alternative to the unions, and if the autonomous groups choose to ignore the unions, then the mass of workers will go where their interests have time-proven guarantees—the unions—and the autonomous groups will be the worse off for having removed themselves from the scene of greatest mass concern. A and F exchange meaningful glances. A says: "Right now it's very difficult. There isn't any overall organization." "What's going to happen in the fall, do you think?" "Un casino!" replies F, grinning. "Un casino," seconds A. ("All hell will break loose.") But, I ask them, do they plan any organiza-

tional meeting to get the groups that do exist outside the union structure together? Yes, replies A, it will be very difficult, but they plan some sort of meeting probably for September, for the groups around Turin.

Later on this evening the issue of feminism is again raised. This time MT is present. A makes an uneasy joke about feminism, F laughs: "Aren't all you women against men?" Instantly MT stiffens, her face is set, tense, adamant: "*Ma chi ti l'ha detto? Tu non sai niente. . .*" ("Who told you that? You know nothing about it!") Wry and defensive, the men protest weakly. F says, "I'm a friend of women, I know what they want. I talk with them. I understand what they need." MT keeps at them: "You can't say what women want, you're not in any position to." F insists he can, he knows women, he can speak about their problems. MT grows angry, the voices rise. A reaches out, tries to pat MT placatingly. "Little MT," he appeals. He tries to placate her by touching her, caressing her hair, trying to calm her down in the way men do with women when they feel the women are getting out of hand, hysterical. He infantilizes her. She hardens, backs off several steps out of his reach towards the door. Louie, the other young American woman and I leap in, at once angry and supportive of MT. I try, however, to keep myself in check; I tell myself that it's Italy, and it's MT's struggle and that of Italian women, not mine. But I also keep thinking of E's story this afternoon, and an image, like a kind

of lurid vignette, keeps obtruding into the memory of what E said: a truck I saw passing on the Via Madama Cristina this afternoon, with a large decal of a pin-up girl on the window—black lace nightie revealing pointed breasts, the legs spread wide and apart in invitation, the whole body arched and leaning back. This image so dismays and angers me that I describe it to S and demand: "How can they live with such images of their comrades, their sisters?" S nods seriously. "It's a big problem," he says. But F and A understand this differently. They feel I am championing women's chastity, women's virtue. Frustrated, I give up. I turn to S: "When A described *autonomia operaia* I was deeply moved, because what it made me think of was my own experience in the women's movement. We were saying five, six years ago, *basta!* We've had enough of your telling us how to work, what to do: we have to go our own way and tell you what our oppression is, what our needs are, and you have to listen." S nods seriously: "That's what they'll understand," he says. He turns to A, translates. A nods, this time attentive, sober.

But throughout this conversation what surprises me somewhat more than I had expected is the complete misunderstandings that keep cropping up. At one point, for example, S asks A what happens when a new woman comes into the shop, where in fact there are very few women employees: "Do you make an effort to talk to her? Do you include her in discussions?" "And how!" simpers F. "That's what they meant," shouts S, "you don't see her as an ally!" But this doesn't clarify, it only mystifies F, who turns to me, appealing for sympathy. He leans toward me, begs: "If you were to walk into the shop and I saw that wedding band on your finger, I wouldn't bother you for a minute! I wouldn't think of touching you!" "But that's not what we mean," I say, gentler. "What's the first thing you think of when you see a woman? It's whether or not you can go out with her, whether or not you can sleep with her, isn't it?" "Yes," F agrees. I continue, "But what we're saying is that we want to be regarded as political allies, not just as bed partners. If I get up and speak in a meeting I don't want the men all saying how pretty my legs are, I want them to listen to what I'm saying, because I'm a revolutionary just as they are." F nods slowly, really trying, it seems to me, to understand. But it will take more than understanding to break through the ideologies that are the warp and woof of family life and of Italian society generally.

The conversation continues for some time. Afterwards, Louie and I give A and F a lift home. We decide to go for a coffee. We get out of the car. But my husband's presence makes the two young men uncomfortable. It's not only a matter of sex, but of class. We walk behind them in the darkened street; however much we may be *compagni*, they are the workers, we are the American tourists. F, in fact, slips and addresses Louie with the formal *Lei*, and A angrily corrects him: "What do you mean, *Lei*? *Tu, Tu!* He's a comrade!" But we continue to walk behind them. They continue at some distance ahead of us, talking to each other. It turns out we have miscalculated the time: there are no bars open. We say goodbye with warmth, but with some finality: the distance is still there. We shake hands; we give the fist; we part.

WHAT IS CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS?
by WILHELM REICH

First English Translation

\$1 each
80¢ each for orders of ten or more

Published by **LIBERATION**
339 Lafayette,
N.Y., N.Y. 10012

Enclosed is \$ _____. Please send me _____ copies of Wilhelm Reich's *What is Class-consciousness?*

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

Dutch Elm Disease

trees
down

hot sun
beating
on the neighborhood

an old couple
pauses
in the spot of shade

heads
slow
lungs move
more smoothly—
the fragile mechanism
rights itself

trees
down

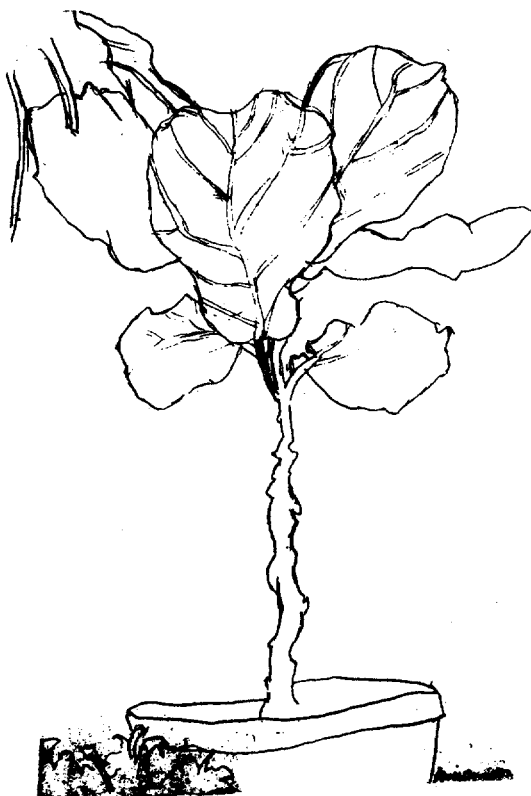
hot sun
beating
on the neighborhood

Baby Bird

slightly flattened
from the impact,
a baby bird
dead from the fall—
feast for the ants

small children
crouch and watch—
a whispered
exclamation,
an occasional
shudder

they are learning



After the Demonstration

sitting in a circle,
a member missing,
another wanting to go home—
vague shame,
we'd hoped to find
a way
to struggle with the Vietnamese,
to be their comrades.
We found none.
We can hardly speak now.

For Josh #1

mistrust all generals
my son,
especially
General Foods and General Motors

They have a policy
of Genocide.

Mr. President

"pig—
fascist,
fucking
criminal
pig."

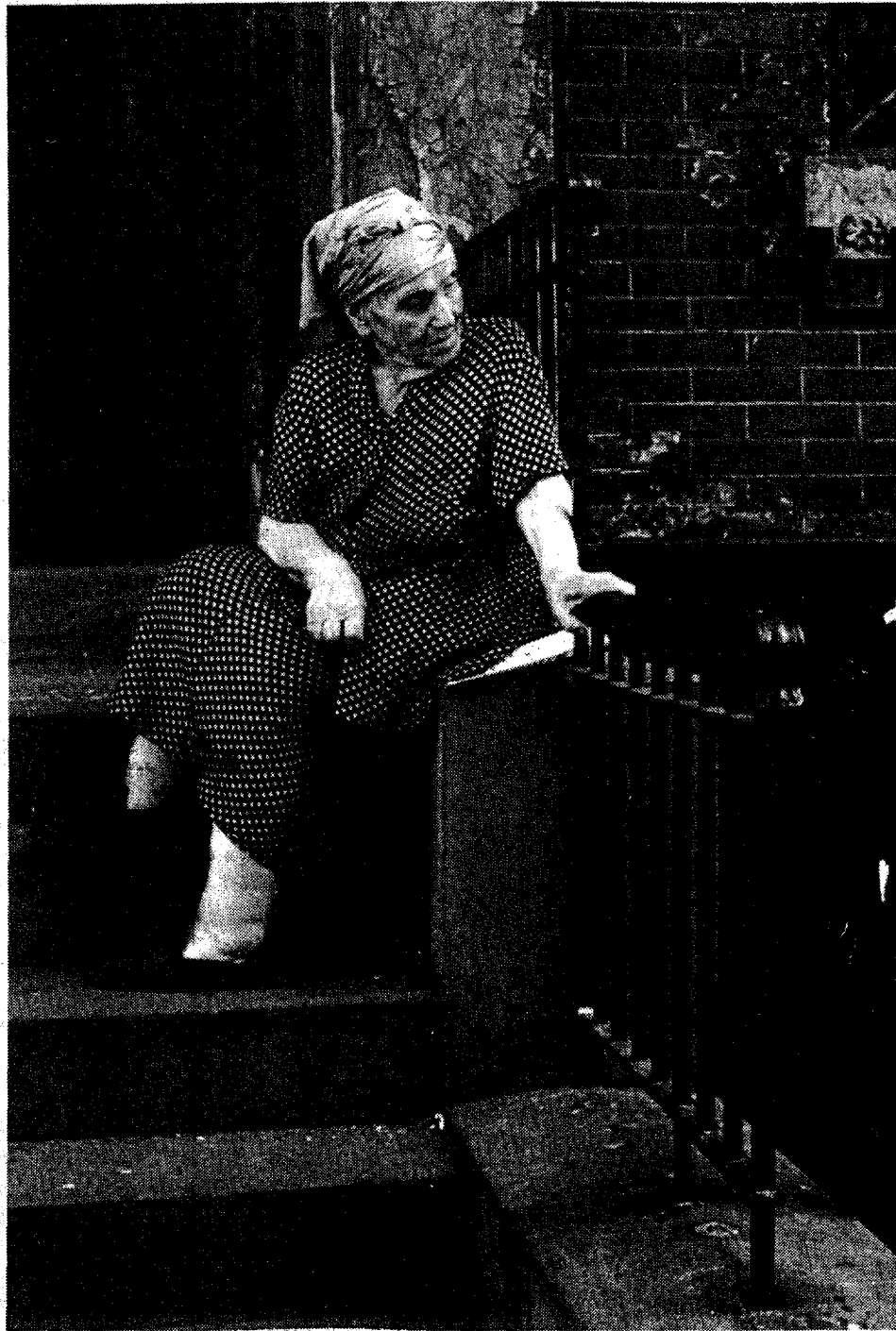
words,
like small clenched fists
against the enormous
obscenity
of your policies

guess I'll just
stop shouting
at you,
guess I'll
talk to others

poetry by warren friedman

women's liberation movement - Italy - articles & position papers

(3)



East Broadway, New York City

Excerpts from a Diary:

Part II

WOMEN'S LIBERATION and WORKERS' AUTONOMY in TURIN and MILAN

the last few years this has begun to break down, especially among the young, but the problem is enormous. Even in the Democratic Army and the EAM-ELAS it is a mistake to think of women fighters as liberated. They struggled to create new relationships, but we must admit, with pain, that they failed. It even came about that if a man had an affair with a woman guerrilla he had to marry her. There were thousands of such marriages, often ending in divorce. This wasn't liberation, but a new kind of authoritarianism with the revolutionary leadership acting as irate fathers. The situation in those armies was of course better than in normal Greek society. Women had responsibility and authority. They were treated with far greater respect than before. Some progress was made, but the basic task of the liberation of Greek women remains.

No matter where one starts discussing Greece it always ends with the enormous problems left by the bitter failures of the past. The Greeks have mounted two unsuccessful armed revolutions since 1940. Some groups believe the Greeks have suffered too much. You spoke of workers who wanted to laugh a little. Are the Greeks tired? Will the colonels remain just as Franco has remained?

I reject that line of thinking. I don't believe it for an instant. It rests on a misconception of what a people is. A people is not an animal—a race horse, say, that you allow to rest up so that he will then run faster than ever. Our situation allows for nothing but revolution. When you are in a closed room where the only escape is through an open window and a wild creature bursts through the door, you jump! You don't have any choice. It's not a question of Greeks being tired. This time the Greek people will be very careful. That's a sign of their political sophistication. The dangers and the opportunities are immense. It's not at all a matter of being tired. Sooner or later there must be an armed resistance. The blows being suffered by the people are intolerable and they will rebel. The revolutionary cadres will be ready at that moment for a struggle that will not be a mere episode but a true revolutionary process to wipe out the Junta and the entire environment which created it. Armed revolution is not something one wants. Armed revolution is not something pretty. No one asks for armed revolution. No one calls it a good thing. But there is no choice. It is the only struggle we can make. We are like a parent holding a child and someone has come to take that child. We have a knife. We must strike.

The Junta is like a steady surgical attack on the people. Day by day it cuts deeper and demands more. Every day the people realize it must be driven away, but the revolution is not only what the revolution makes, it is the way in which the revolution moves. It is the new relationships. The revolution is the faith, ideology, and relationships which develop in the course of a process culminating in the seizure of state power.

Most anti-Junta groups seem to operate on a far less ambitious level. They appeal to international bodies such as the Red Cross, Amnesty International, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations. Is there any value in those pressures?

They are not a bad thing to do. On the other hand, when they become the only thing you are doing, they are not very effective. Had such actions gone hand in hand with an organization of the people, then they would have had a tremendous effect. They could trigger off profound resistance. Such efforts are not bad even in isolation but they just don't produce anything concrete or lasting.

Most anti-Junta groups emphasize the tortures and the need to return to pre-April 21st "democracy." It seems to me people are not going to move on either of those bases. They are horrified by the torture but they aren't going to risk their lives in order to return to a situation that only looks good now in comparison with its ultimate product, the Junta.

Mistakes of that kind result from an incomplete analysis of the Junta. The colonels are represented as a group of hoodlums. They are treated only as a kind of joke. The situation within Greece is different. People are slowly being educated through the secret radios, clandestine press, and just by living under the regime. It is clear they are being educated and are not at all docile. They have shown themselves ready to act but they see no clear alternatives. They are presented with a kind of compromise that undercuts their enthusiasm to mount the necessary struggle. Too many times they are only given a rehash of all the old ideas crowned with a solution that can only lead to some new kind of junta, just as those solutions in the past led to this Junta. You do not teach someone to count only up to eight. You do not say nine and ten and beyond do not exist. You give people everything or they are not able to count at all. There is a real revolution or none at all. ●

eros in an insect

Do you know I like your butterflies best?
The source of dancing cats
Those colored bits who after eating flower's juices
Fly in drunken paths through summer afternoons.
Sometimes; drunk myself,
I enter into smokey buttercups
And rest on yellow walls;
Then dip my naked lips
And drink again,
The golden swirling dust of dreams.

—James Barry

Milan is big. Not graspable, as was Turin, a small, eighteenth-century city surrounded by hills. Turin's beauty surprised me all the more because I'd expected it to be Italy's Detroit architecturally as well as industrially. Its proletarian neighborhoods, cast in the same eighteenth-century mold as its central tourist area, comprise the major part of Turin—*are* Turin. Milan, on the other hand, is not a proletarian city. It is less of a piece architecturally. More cosmopolitan. More bourgeois. More "American." It has more faceless glass and cement buildings, more urban renewal, more of a feeling of alienation. In a sense it is epitomized by its vast central Piazza del Duomo, which is like Italy's 19th century meeting Times Square. At one end stands the cathedral, at the other there are office buildings. At the top of one of the corner buildings is one of those long black strips that flashes ticker-tape news reports. On either side, 19th-century buildings and arcades alternate with Italy's version of East 60's Deli Modern (sandwich and hot buffet bars with tinted wall-length windows, wine-colored carpeting, imitation crystal chandeliers, the works).

This morning I go to the *Manifesto* office, a twenty-minute walk from the Piazza del Duomo. The office is down the Via San Gottardo, off the interior court of what seems a 19th-century palazzo. From the main street you enter through large, oak doors, then walk round a shadowed passageway that smells damp and cold, like a cellar. The interior court bursts upon you. Across this, at the top of a steep, narrow flight of stairs, is the *Manifesto* office—a large, bare room off of which there are several smaller offices. The large room is unfurnished, save for a clot of chairs and a couple of tables left over from a recent meeting. Stacks of mimeographed leaflets rise at intervals along the wall nearest the entryway. On one wall: DON'T FORGET THE SUBSCRIPTION DRIVE! EACH COMRADE MUST SELL 10 SUBS MONTHLY! Several posters line the walls, all from the recent failed electoral campaign. Valpreda gazes down at me. Banners from a foiled past; winds across empty spaces . . . And yet work obviously continues. There is the national daily. There are a myriad of projects on various job- and community-related issues. There is a forum series this week on high-school organizing, and the relation between student organizing and the fall industrial contracts.

I have come to visit Pietro, a teacher and a member of *Manifesto's* central committee. His major political work is in the Milan Tenants' Union, whose work I wish to know more about, since I work for a tenants' organization in Cambridge. The Milan Tenants' Union is a mass organization that treats not just housing problems, but a variety of issues pertaining

to city living and including, for example, transportation. The organization's ideology is attractive, at once clearly socialist and nonsectarian. The union's literature makes clear that the organization considers housing but one element in the lives of workers, and that the badness of proletarian housing is linked to the badness of proletarian schools; to the scarcity, exorbitant costs and "bad delivery" of services like transportation and medical care; and to relations of production.

Pietro uses a large wall map that hangs beside his desk to review the city's development since World War II. He shows me the areas of greatest proletarian concentration, and within these, the neighborhoods where the Southern emigrants live. The struggle for housing may be easier here than in the States, he observes, if only because there is one clear and demonstrable enemy—the Public Housing Authority. In the tenants' movement there have been notable successes—a real, though sporadic, squatters' movement, and here, in Milan, a city-wide tenants' union with a real, mass base.

But on any other score, continues Pietro, organizing is hard. For example, the connections that must be made between factory and community struggles are accepted with great reluctance on the part of the worker in his capacity as community resident. The point, he reflects, is that workers' lives are fragmented. They see themselves as workers on the one hand, as tenants on the other, as parents on still another hand. And whereas they may be very militant in their capacity as workers, and comparatively advanced in political consciousness, as parents they are conservative, even reactionary. This, he continues, is because they see their children as property, as an investment. The whole ideology of capitalism crystallizes peculiarly in this area. Pietro's conclusion is that if political consciousness and activity are to develop most fruitfully, it will be necessary to criticize severely the role of the nuclear family, and to project its future dissolution. Otherwise, workers in their capacity as parents won't be able to understand basic issues—for example, the tracking system in education and the job market. They will continue to be conspirators with the class enemy in their desperate attempt to "improve the lot" of their children as compared with their own.

I ask Pietro whether he sees any relationship between this line and arguments that the women's movement may have made. At this question he halts, smiles slightly. He really isn't all that familiar with what is happening among women's groups, he says, though he understands the importance of the women's movement. He's aware that the women's movement is a mass one in the States, and may have raised such issues more cogently than the Italian women's groups

by
ellen cantarow

The first part of this article, focusing on Turin, appeared in the October 1972 Liberation. Both parts were edited for Liberation and will appear in longer versions, together with other essays, in a forthcoming book. In this second part of the article, unlike the first, names (all pseudonyms) are used rather than initials. The two pieces were the product of a visit Ellen Cantarow made to Turin and Milan in the spring of 1972; in January-February 1973 she went again to Italy and has added a postscript updating and amplifying her view of the situation there.

have done so far. His attitude discourages further conversation on this point.

To be blunt, the situation of women on the left here is deplorable. Treating women as sex objects is not only commonplace, but no one outside of women's groups feels such episodes are offensive. No doubt they are taken for granted as human moments that lighten the day and lend humor to the hard work of organizations on the left; no doubt it is taken for granted that relations between men and women comrades must be so, and are normal and fun this way. For me, it's very hard to take. I walked into a movement office one day to find a group of young men theorizing about the Italian economy. On the lap of one sat a young woman. She gazed at him adoringly, nuzzled his ear, while over her head—literally and figuratively—he carried on a lengthy debate with the comrades. He punctuated his remarks by gesturing elaborately with one hand, while with the other he caressed the young woman, absently, as one would a dog.

As for women's participation in the work of *Manifesto*, it's not that there aren't powerful women on the central committee. But these are older people of vast political experience in the CP and the other parliamentary parties (the younger women students remain in the organization's lowest echelons). Rossana Rossanda, for example, was one of the original founders of *Manifesto*, a former member of the Italian CP's central committee. She is reputed to be one of the organization's chief theorists and one of its two or three major figures. But such older people exert no feminist influence on the organization's development. Although in *Manifesto*'s first comprehensive political statement, "200 Theses for Communism" (1970), there were several references to the failure of the international Communist Party in the West to take account of the subordinate social and economic position of women, this theoretical recognition of the problem doesn't seem to be reflected in any way in the current daily practice of *Manifesto*'s local chapters.

Years ago the Communist Party formed a mass women's organization called *Unione delle Donne Italiane* (the Italian Women's Union). UDI's accomplishments seem mainly to have been in legal reforms. They've gotten day-care and maternity-leave laws passed, as well as other laws that are supposed uniformly to apply to all communities and to all of industry. Apparently the laws are enforced, but given the prevailing sexism of the society, they often have little meaning. I've heard from various women comrades that maternity-leave laws open the door to widespread discrimination—women are kept in low-paid, low-status jobs because it's expected they'll take advantage of their legal prerogative. The law serves to keep women in the place to which society consigns them—motherhood. However, it's not the law itself that permits the discrimination, but the absence of a mass feminist movement to reinterpret the law and put pressure on industry to promote and hire women. And up to now there hasn't been the glimmer of a possibility that such a movement could exist.

* * *

Tonight I have dinner at the home of my main contacts here—Franco and Margherita. The couple live in a working-

class section of the city. With them lives Antonella, a woman *emigrata* (one of the millions of people who have been emigrating to the industrial North from the South of Italy over the past eighty years or more; the exodus has become concentrated and massive over the past five years).* Antonella is from Naples, and works at the Borletti factory, which produces sewing machines. Later I learned that she is quite militant; in the factory where she works, she ranks as an advanced cadre. But she entered very little into any political discussions Franco, Margherita and I had, perhaps because of my foreignness and my class.

Franco, who describes himself as a Marxist and a revolutionary, works as a public relations man at Alfa Romeo. Such a combination of job and political stance doesn't seem unusual here. Margherita is a nursery-school teacher. She has written a pamphlet called "Bambini, Mani in Alto!" (Hands Up, Kids!), an indictment of nursery-school education in Italy. A socialist analysis, it describes the function of the nursery school in the Italian tracking system. Nursery school begins a training in discipline, where the rhythms of industrial life under capitalism are instilled early into Italian children. The pamphlet is also a feminist statement. It is written by women teachers and by mothers. It continually emphasizes the role women are forced to play as collaborators with the ruling class, instilling servility and conformity, passivity and regimentation, the qualities demanded of the working class by capitalism. "The struggle against exploitation," ends the introduction, "must also be carried on through the *scuola materna* (the "maternal," or nursery, school). Putting oneself on the side of the children means beginning to remake school, family, society, in short everything!" Margherita herself is in no formal women's group. Her women's group is on the job.

* * *

After dinner, Franco and I go to a meeting at the home of Donatella and Giorgio, who is a white-collar worker at Alfa Romeo and a delegate to Alfa's factory council. The council, it turns out, is in this case the expression of dissident rank-and-file sentiment—Alfa's *autonomia operaia* grouping.** The meeting is on the fall contract, and how the council is to approach the platform that's been drawn up by the coalition of autoworkers' unions. We arrive to find five men seated around a long, low, modern coffee table in a fashionably modern apartment. In one corner of a deep, handsome sofa is huddled a woman, obviously the wife of one of the men. Donatella, Giorgio's wife, exquisitely made up and dressed with the elaborate care I associate especially with Italian women, ushers us into the room and from then on proceeds to play the role of hostess, pouring wine, attending to everyone's needs. I learn from Franco that several of the men are

*See Part I ("Women's Liberation and Workers' Autonomy in Turin and Milan," October 1972 issue of *Liberation*) for a longer account of the situation of the *emigrati*.

**See Part I (*Liberation*, October 1972) for more detail on *autonomia operaia* and the groups that represent it in Turin.

white-collar workers at Alfa. A couple are lineworkers. Not surprisingly, all are from the South—Giorgio and Donatella are from Sardinia; one of the lineworkers, Pepino, is from Naples.

Several copies of the platform lie on the coffee table. The platform is entitled, "Al Contratto con l'unita" (To the Contract in Unity). It is prefaced with the approval of the United Executive of Auto Workers, a coalition of unions. The title of the contract is historically significant. After "the hot autumn" of 1969, when workers all over Italy staged massive strikes, taking by complete surprise the companies and unions alike, the unions saw that it was necessary to regain the allegiance of their rank and file. The economic situation in the country was extremely bad. In their desire to prevent strikes, enlightened capitalists like Pirelli (rubber industry) and Fiat pushed for tighter relations among the three national unions. They wanted the unions to be their watchdogs, keeping the lid on rank-and-file militancy, and they saw unification as the means to that end. Their desires coincided with the unions' own aims. Of course, there were political differences among the unions. CGIL (of which the autoworkers' unions are part) was historically affiliated with the Communist Party; CISL was connected with the Christian Democratic Party; UIL was a Social Democratic and Republican union. From the post-war years through the Fifties, the two latter unions had collaborated in isolating CGIL and in the repression of CGIL members by Italian capital. Now, however, the three drew together in the face of the crisis posed

by "the hot autumn," during which the workers had demonstrated to both unions and capital their ability to act on their own—and in so doing, to throw the country into upheaval.

But *unita sindacale*, as it turned out, was achieved only at the top of the labor bureaucracy. Between 1969 and 1970, rank-and-file workers continued to stage wildcat strikes, and thereby to demonstrate that they were capable of acting without the guidance of the labor bureaucracy, and that they were also capable of opposing militantly the strategies of the ruling class. So it was that in 1970 Italian capital withdrew its support from "union unity," and many forces in CISL and UIL followed suit. The one union that as a whole kept to "union unity" was CGIL. CISL and UIL split on the issue; only certain elements of their hierarchies and constituencies continued to ally with CGIL on the question.

Thus, the contract before us represents a fairly complex historical and political situation. For one thing, it represents the desire within the national labor bureaucracy on the left to continue a policy abandoned both by big capital and by the labor bureaucracy from the center to the right. In this sense it represents a statement of principled opposition. It also continues to project greater centralization as an objectively progressive aim, though perhaps not for the reasons originally projected by the labor bureaucracy. Finally, the contract clearly reflects Italian CP policy, which of course dominates the direction of CGIL, and as such bespeaks the contradictions of the present situation of the rank and file vis-à-vis the Communist Party on the one hand, and the un-



Lower East Side, New York City

ion bureaucracy on the other. On the one hand the rank and file is dissatisfied with the CP as a political party and with the unions as the sole framework of workplace organization. On the other, *autonomia operaia* hasn't so far been able to generate coherent organization and strategy.

Therefore, certain leaders in the workers' autonomy movement seem to feel that the contracts must be dealt with as a reality. They can't be shunted aside in the vain hope that spontaneous actions by the rank and file will be sufficient in and of themselves to oppose the ruling class and to develop new, working-class economic and political organizations.

The point the men are now discussing is the first item in the autoworkers' platform, the famous *inquadramento unico* (single grouping) described in Part I of this article. Giorgio and Pepino tell me that in 1970 there was a very important strike at Alfa, one that resulted in a significant concession by management: after several months of work at Alfa, new workers would rise automatically from the lowest job classification to the next lowest. It is highly important, Giorgio and Pepino continue, that this gain not be erased in the fall contract struggles. Thus it is important that the autoworkers' unions be held strictly to the new categories they propose. In the single grouping to be made of blue- and white-collar job classifications, the union platform now proposes five classifications. It is entirely possible that when push comes to shove against the companies, the unions will fudge and introduce subcategories that actually create more than the existing five classifications. It is crucial that this not happen, and therefore imperative that debate and struggles be carried on around this point of the unions' platform.

Single grouping can't be junked. This would be impossible; it would be suicidal for the factory council to pose maximalist alternatives. Ideally, of course, there would be only two categories for each larger division of labor—blue- and white-collar (or unskilled and skilled). But it is folly to think of posing such ideal categories at present; there's been no long-term preparation for such a struggle. It is therefore essential to push for gains that are valid even though, Giorgio observes, rank-and file consciousness has surpassed what the unions are now proposing.

Posing short-term goals for the rank and file, and opening the possibility of struggle for clearly obtainable ends, will give the rank and file a sense of its own power. One such goal is the stipulation that succession from the lowest to the next-lowest categories happen only on the basis of seniority, a mechanism that would drain succession of its usual ideological implications. Between tasks on the assembly line there aren't real gradations of difficulty. The notions of "mastery" and "expertise" are tools in the hands of management to control the workers. It is the great advance of the Italian workers not simply to have realized this, but to have articulated it continually in the strikes occurring in 1969 and since.

On the other hand, particular goals like these are valid only insofar as the rank and file identifies with them, struggles for them, and wins them. Only through such struggle and the discussion that goes along with it can real consciousness be raised. Only through active engagement will the possibility for future, more advanced, more highly organized struggles be created. This notion is quite different from the essentially

anarcho-sindicalist view of the Fiat comrades in Turin—that the cadre of *autonomia operaia* must enter into "moments of struggle" as these erupt. But how do these moments erupt and what is the role of the advanced cadre in preparing for them? The Fiat comrades never answered this question. It seemed that they were depending on the spontaneity of the rank and file for answers, that they thrust aside the difficulties posed by the low level of organization among the scattered groups of the workers' autonomy movement.

Pepino, Giorgio and another comrade assure me that the fall contracts aren't final and definitive. In Italy there is still far greater rank-and-file participation in the shaping of the contract than there is in America. The factory councils, which are nominally—and, in cases like Alfa, actually—separate from the unions, have the power to call strikes between triennial contracts, and until now the unions have gone along with strikes which, in America, would be wildcats. An article by Lucio Magri in the June 20 *Manifesto*, however, reports that unions are now talking about assuming all power for calling strikes. This will undercut the power of the councils as these are understood at present. "Up to now," writes Magri, "the right of the workers and of their councils to struggle, not giving the least damn about the political philosophy of the union coalitions, had been permitted to survive . . . moreover, on certain occasions . . . this right had become the basis on which to build a new sort of union. For a long time this was the real, disruptive innovation of social struggles in Italy—not only that the struggles were sharp, and existed outside of the ordinary contractual procedure, but that the unions covered for, or at times even stimulated, such struggles. Today, however, the document [just issued by the unions and entitled, "On the Political Economy and on the Contracts," the subject of Magri's article] clearly states: let's still consult the workers and their councils, but in reality, even on the shop level, let's have the decisions made by the unions."

Apparently this hasn't happened yet, although it seems a logical succession to the earlier strategy of Italian capital, "union unity." As far as I can tell, Giorgio, Pepino and the others assume that rank-and-file wildcat strikes will continue to be endorsed by the unions.

Sunday, June 18, Milan

Pepino, the lineworker comrade, and his wife Maria Teresa (who was asleep on the couch during the meeting the other night) pick me up to take me to Giorgio and Donatella's for Sunday dinner. Maria Teresa apologizes for having been out of it the other evening. As I talk with her and Pepino, my impression of their relationship changes. I had assumed she was entirely subordinate to Pepino, but that is not at all the case. She is the sister of Antonella, who lives with Franco and Margherita. Like Antonella, Maria Teresa used to work at the Borletti factory. She left the job because it was mind-deadening, and it was taking a toll on her health. Now she works as a door-to-door saleswoman, a job she doesn't much enjoy; on the other hand, anything would be better than working on the line. Moreover, since Maria Teresa works for a big chain, there's an established customer list, a regular clientele; she needn't fear being continually turned away when she calls and can even build up friendly relation-

ships with her customers. This is what makes the job not only bearable, but sometimes mildly interesting. While Maria Teresa talks, Pepino listens quietly. He never interrupts, though occasionally, when she pauses, he interposes a remark which is supportive of her and at the same time elaborates her remarks for me.

When we arrive, Donatella ushers us onto the terrace. There, we are seated under parasols in low, comfortable garden chairs. Giorgio and Donatella's little boy is playing with a tricycle. The two other women begin a conversation; they excuse themselves and go to the kitchen while Giorgio, Pepino and I sit outside.

Both Giorgio, who is a technician at Alfa, and Pepino, are intellectuals. They represent a group whose active existence in the States is nearly if not entirely impossible. They are part of a group of people who haven't gone through the mills of "higher education," who work in the factories in either white- or blue-collar jobs, and who clearly constitute a growing working-class intelligentsia that is active in advancing and creating proletarian ideology. Both Giorgio and Pepino, for example, have written material that has circulated widely among Alfa workers generally, as well as among workers in other plants. Some of these remind one of the documents that came out of university strikes in America: for example, "Who Rules Columbia?" and "How Harvard Rules." One document, written by workers at a particular plant, is a lengthy diary, a first-person plural account of a strike that happened a couple of years ago, tremendously moving in its personal particulars and awesome in its analysis of tactics and strategy. Similar Alfa documents discuss the historical development of the firm, its role in the development of capitalism, its power structure—all treated clearly, simply, and humorously. Workers turn at once to cadre like Giorgio and Pepino for political interpretation and for tactical direction during strikes. But of such dependence Pepino, who has been sitting quietly throughout most of this conversation, says: "At this point I try to make myself as unobtrusive as possible. It's extremely important for new leadership to develop. Unless you have the confidence that the other comrades can take over and run things themselves, you haven't done your job right."

Since Giorgio is a technician, I'm eager to ask him how much radicalization there has been among white-collar workers. I ask him about his own politicization. Before 1969, Giorgio tells me, he wasn't politically active. Like most white-collar and technical workers, his consciousness was professional. He felt he had a specialty that distinguished him from the masses of workers who had no control over their jobs. By 1969, he continues, it had become clear to him that this distinction was illusory. Indeed, technicians and the mass of white-collar workers had no more control over the terms of their work and what they produced than did workers on the line, even though white-collar work seemed nicer, cleaner, and was performed at a desk, which gave one a false sense of importance. In 1969, some white-collar workers like himself were ready for radical political activity and entered eagerly into the upsurge of rank-and-file strikes that became known as "the hot autumn." Putting oneself on the side of the lineworkers was a conscious decision, continues Giorgio. He talks about a technician he knows, professional in con-

sciousness up to the long strike at Alfa in 1970. One day after certain white-collar comrades had helped the lineworkers to throw scabbing officeworkers out of the offices (a daily strike routine), the comrade had approached Giorgio and said: "You know, till now I used to go out to the assembly lines just to check the machines. Now I've begun to see that there aren't just machines there. There are men, too. From now on it will be different for me."

How widespread is such radicalization? Not very, says Giorgio, but what there has been is extremely significant. Together with other white-collar workers who have adopted a left perspective, he has been working among the office workers, trying to organize. The task is slow, but it's clearly possible.

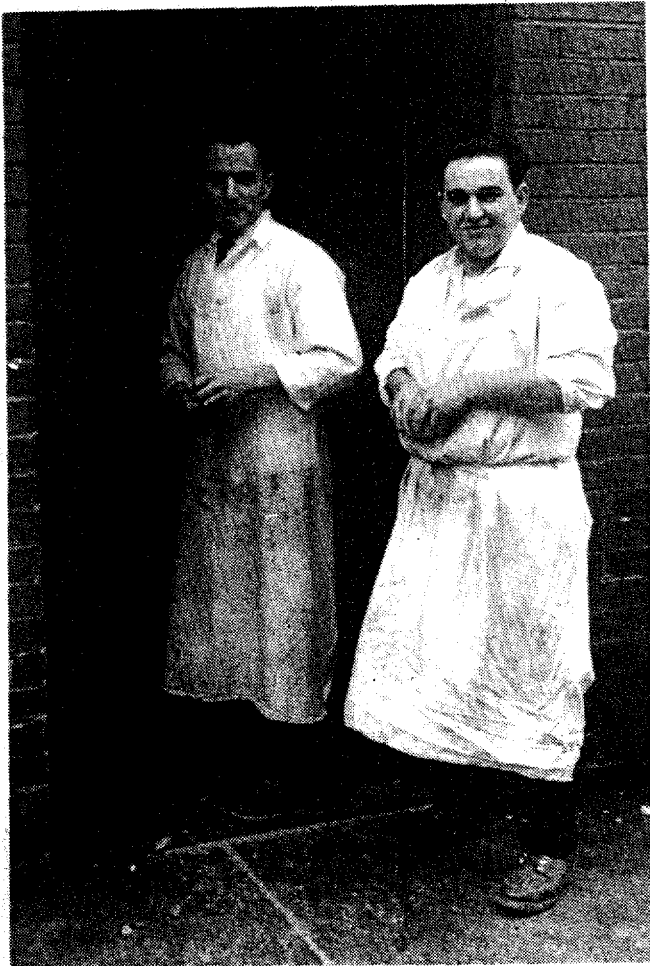
In their dealings with me, both Giorgio and Pepino are very comradely and seem remarkably unsexist. But Giorgio's relations with Donatella are traditional; in the household sexual division of labor is sharply defined. Donatella apparently defers in all ways to Giorgio, does all the housework, raises the child, and recreates herself daily as a lovely package—finely, subtly mascaraed, coiffed, and dressed. On the other hand it seems that Pepino and Maria Teresa have made some effort to equalize responsibilities at home. The fact that both of them work seems to have prompted such a move.

After lunch we are joined by another couple—a man who seems in his fifties, and his wife, who looks about twenty years younger. They have their child with them, a little girl. The woman, Cristina, turns out to be Giorgio's sister. Her husband, Alberto, is an academic who teaches German literature at a university in Turin. He's on the editorial staff of the *Quaderni Piacentini*, which seems to command respect among some of the comrades I've met here.

Cristina immediately and eagerly enters our conversation, which is about feminism. Donatella has just finished describing her life as a housewife. She obviously chafes against it. Within the lovely doll she makes of herself, feelings are brewing. She talks about the continual round of mindless tasks she does around the house, about the ceaseless child-tending, about conversations she has with other housewives in the park. "Everyone feels the same way," she concludes, pushing her chair back from the table and folding her arms decisively, looking at us shrewdly.

Giorgio leans towards her, his dark, heavy face grave. "I know these conversations go on all the time," he says, "I understand the grievances. It's true," he continues, in reference to a reflection Donatella has made on the fact that her work is unpaid, "that you perform labor for nothing. But those conversations in the park, what makes them political? Why do such grievances, all of those psychological gripes, have to do with class struggle?" Donatella flushes, withdraws: "It's true, it's really only gossip," she says, reverting to the self-deprecation and the deprecation of her sex that is her usual mode.

But Giorgio's sister intervenes. Her women's group in Turin, she says, has the same sorts of conversations as the housewives in the park, but in the group the conversations have a clear purpose. They put the individual anxieties, frustrations and misery of the women into social and economic perspective. Such a perspective is illustrated by the group's



Bleecker Street, New York City

understanding of the unpaid labor of women at home. In response to Donatella's half-jesting complaint that she works more than eight hours a day for nothing, Cristina proposes that the housewife's husband is actually being paid for the labor of two people; hence the home is the focus of a double exploitation of labor power by capitalism. I later learn that Cristina has read both Margaret Benston's article ["The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 21, no. 4 (September 1969), reprinted in pamphlet form by the New England Free Press] (fairly well-known now in the Italian women's groups) and other American documents. (It should also be noted that at least some of the women's groups in Italy are beginning a Marxist analysis of women's socio-economic condition at a far earlier stage in their development than the women's movement did in the States.)

When Cristina has finished, Pepino interposes quietly: "But surely there's a difference between the wife of a worker on the assembly line and the wife of a professional. For instance the wife of the lineworker doesn't have the time to sit around having such discussions. And what about the woman who does work in a factory?" Cristina hotly defends herself. She recognizes the truth of what Pepino is saying, she says, but she maintains that the sorts of discussions that her group engages in are legitimate political forms, and help immeasurably to raise consciousness. Alberto, her husband, in-

terposes: "Yes, but at the same time you can afford to hire a woman to look after the child and the house. Therefore you must admit you have certain privileges." At this Giorgio explodes at his sister, "How can you sit there and pretend to be in favor of women's liberation, if you exploit a working-class woman? I can't see it!" An argument ensues between the two. It grows hotter and hotter, and bitter, too. The rest of us listen, uncomfortable. I glance from time to time at the gentleman of *Piacentini*: the thought has obviously never crossed his mind that *he* might be helping his wife. Finally it's Pepino who steps in, relieving the tension with a casual observation that sums up and defuses the debate.

There's a moment of silence. I recall certain remarks Giorgio made earlier this afternoon about the difficulty of rallying the clerical and general office workers at Alfa to strike. I use this occasion to ask him whether many of the office workers aren't women. "Yes," he says, "and that's really been on our minds. The organizers are all men, and it's a problem." Giorgio says he could see an important role for the women's groups to play in the area of clerical organizing. But in fact the women's groups don't seem to have been doing that, as far as he can tell.

In this conversation, what is different from others I've had with male comrades here is an openness on the parts of the men, at least to entertaining women's liberation as a serious question. The more usual reaction was illustrated by some young men I met at the Turin *Manifesto* office; when I talked about feminism they immediately began tittering and making sexual, half-bawdy allusions. They produced the usual slur, which has come to bore me mightily in my stay here, that the women's movement is merely an extended psychiatric session for middle-class women who've got nothing better to do with their time. By comparison, Giorgio and Pepino seem more serious and attentive, though their predisposition to listen quietly might be good-natured tolerance. But I would like to believe that these comrades, so unusual in other manifestations of their knowledge and practice, might be unusual in this too.

On separating this evening, we all embrace; both Donatella and Maria Teresa kiss me and tell me with real feeling to keep them up on what's happening in the States. Once alone, I feel strange, at once sad and buoyant. How fragile these two movements coming into being here! A women's movement still struggling to be born, existing only in scattered groups, and destined for an opposition and ugly ridicule hard to imagine in the States (though we've had our share too). And the workers' autonomy movement, larger, perhaps, than the nascent women's movement, but scattered, with no uniform direction. It has already experienced attack and repression. Pepino told me earlier this afternoon that the police are sending Fascists (members, that is, of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, the Fascist party in Italy) to take jobs at Alfa. The *avanguardie*, the leaders in the factory council, plan to make large wall-poster photographs of the spies and provocateurs, with rich descriptions of their party affiliation and activities and purpose at Alfa. They will post these photographs around the plants. This is a regular routine, inaugurated during the 1969 and 1970 strikes, when photos of notorious scabs were posted all over the factory to embarrass them. But

it is clear that a struggle, and an ugly one, is already well underway.

* * *

What will happen? More pointedly, what will happen this fall? The triennial fall contracts constitute a moment of enormous importance in Italy. The left is clearly in a precarious state, for all its high degree of development and sophistication compared to what's going on in the States. In Milan, I attended a mass meeting on repression. All the *gruppi* (the extraparliamentary left groups) were there, after a year of intense factionalism and bitter in-fighting. Apparently, only a moment of such grave danger sufficed to bring them together under the same roof. Call after call for solidarity was made at this meeting. Yet who can say whether rhetoric can obliterate rancors that still run high?

Besides repression there are still other, longer-range problems. At this same meeting on repression, which was attended by some 1500 comrades or more, speaker after speaker mounted the platform to assert the primacy of the workers' struggle. Most of the speakers weren't workers, but were rather students, or older intellectuals. Finally, a burly, dark, bear-like man mounted the platform. As he turned and waved to the audience, I felt a repressed surge of feeling run through the mass of people packed around me. From a piece of paper held with apparent awkwardness, the man began reading—haltingly, it seemed. He looked out appealingly over the dark, expectant mass before him: his arms opened in a gesture of helplessness. "Comrades, I am a worker. I am not accustomed to speak in fine language." The mass sighed happily; comrades around me were smiling in grateful encouragement at the man on the stage, who, meanwhile, had let the paper fall idly to the podium. His voice assumed strength, timbre, depth: "I am a proletarian. I haven't much time to read Marx or Lenin. I am not educated as intellectuals are educated." The mass rippled joyously. "But I know one thing," thundered the man on the platform, gesturing eloquently with raised fist, "it is the proletariat that will lead the revolution! It is the proletariat, we who work in the factories, who are the heart and guts of the struggle. We must unite, yes. I agree with all the comrades who have spoken today," he continued in a humbler vein, his voice lower but still resonant, thrilling. "We must forget our differences. Let us forget them: we must cast out sectarianism. But let us also remember that the proletariat will lead the battle."

No other speech was greeted with the deafening applause this one got. I was disturbed by it, even as it thrilled me, for it demonstrated the same tendency towards slavish working-class tailism that has manifested itself in France, in Germany, and in America. When I recounted it to Pepino and Giorgio, they smiled in recognition and said, "*Operaismo*" (workerism). What is disturbing is obviously not the existence of a proletarian perspective, but rather, the oversimplification and sectarianism of that perspective and the fact that it may preclude examination by the growing professional and white-collar classes of their peculiar roles in revolutionary movements under advanced capitalism. Though some of the best writing on the changing nature of the work force in advanced capitalism has come from the pen of Lucio

Magri, it isn't clear that his ideas have become popularly accepted in his own country. Ironically, they have been much more widespread and have exerted far greater influence among American intellectuals on the left, young people working as teachers, and workers in other jobs. And though Italy is the country of Gramsci, whose provocative and penetrating commentary on the role of intellectuals and on culture have influenced us deeply here in the States, he is dismissed by many in the Italian extraparliamentary left groups. It isn't clear whether intellectuals on the Italian left are *generally* considering their function as anything other than a tail to a workers' "vanguard"—a vanguard, moreover, that is as yet quite hypothetical. Last but not least, *operaismo*, a vulgar proletarian perspective rather than a rich, inclusive and flexible one, can be used and is being used to denounce the movement most akin in the wellsprings of its feelings to *autonomia operaia*: the women's movement.

A brighter possibility for the left seems to lie with groups like Giorgio and Pepino's at Alfa, rich as they are in a reflective leadership, one that seems at least potentially to combine the better elements of broad intellectuality with the capacity to act promptly, strongly and creatively. Such a possibility doesn't seem to lie with groups like the one at Fiat, which seemed to lack care and circumspection, to be ultra-leftist.

In the women's groups, difficult tendencies will almost certainly develop as they did in America. For example, there is the latent radical feminism of the young woman in the Turin group who stated, "You may all be Marxists, but as for me I'm a feminist, and that's enough for me." There is also a tendency towards the pedantic dogmatism and sectarianism that riddle the extraparliamentary left as a whole in Italy.

As I am writing this conclusion, the fall contractual procedure is just beginning, and will finish only in December. Recently I heard that several hundred comrades in Turin were indicted on a vacuous "probable plan to conspire" charge, in an obvious move by the ruling class to ward off another "hot autumn." The struggle continues. Let us hope our side emerges with enough gains to give new breath and vigor for the next round of the fight.

TELOS

An International Cultural Quarterly
Table of Contents: Number 13, Fall 1972

Articles:

SERGIO BOLOGNA: Class Composition and Theory of the Party
KAREL KOSIK: Our Present Crisis
LUCIO COLLETTI: The Theory of the Crash
RONALD ARONSON: The Root of Sartre's Thought
MAYNARD SOLOMON: Marx and Bloch
GIOVANNI PIANA: History and Existence in Husserl

Notes and Commentary:

MAXY BEML: William Burroughs and the Invisible Generation
CONSTANTIN SINELNIKOV: Early "Marxist" Critiques of Reich

Subscription Rates: \$6.00 individual for one year (4 issues);
\$8.00 institutional. Address all correspondence to:

The Editor
TELOS
Department of Sociology
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri 63130

POSTSCRIPT ON THE CURRENT ROLE OF THE FACTORY COUNCILS

I have just returned from a second trip to Turin and Milan in January and February, 1973. At this moment nearly all the contracts but that of the metalworkers have been signed. Ownership, and the center-right government of Andreotti, Italy's equivalent to Nixon, want to force upon the metalworkers a contract that would limit the right to strike, curtail or eliminate the factory councils, and increase production at the workers' expense. The situation is tense, volatile, marked by dozens of daily job actions, walkouts, demonstrations, strikes. Repression by the government and the local police is incredible. Dozens of factory council delegates and other rank-and-file leaders have been arrested, thrown in jail. Students have been shot at in Turin, in Milan, and in other cities: two have been killed. Guido Viale, one of the heads of *Lotta Continua*, languishes in jail while petitions soliciting his release have been signed by major figures all over the country. The largest demonstration of workers since the Second World War took place in Rome at the beginning of February; over 300,000 metalworkers and workers supporting them converged on the city.

The information that follows is the fruit of conversations I had during this period with rank-and-file workers in general and with members of two autonomous rank-and-file organizations in particular, the Coordinamento Politico Operaio of Turin (Workers' Political Coordinating Committee) and the Collettivo Politico Operaio di Milan (Workers' Political Collective). There is increasing contact and much political agreement between these two groups; I will refer to them both in the remarks that follow as the C.P.O. In both cities the C.P.O.s have put out some of the most interesting literature I have read on the capitalist organization of work in the factories; on new divisions of labor evolving out of capitalist development; on current managerial and union strategies to deepen and mystify such divisions; on the beginnings of potential rank-and-file counter-strategies and propaganda; on the matter of blue- and white-collar workers' parity. What makes such writing different from neo-Marxist writing already familiar to intellectuals in the U.S. is that it is the fruit of collective debate not among academics but among rank-and-file workers. I also find it significant that "A," the Turinese worker of spontaneist politics described in my first article, is now a member of the Turin C.P.O. together with people whose politics have historically been much more like that of the two Alfa Romeo council delegates described earlier in this article on Milan. This indicates to me that people whose politics have been quite different in the past are now getting together, in however small a way, in serious efforts to create a new political line and strategy, the focus of which is the factory councils.

All the comrades with whom I spoke agree more or less on the following points. Whereas in 1969 it had seemed as if the extraparliamentary left might possibly provide an alternative politics to those of the unions and of the traditional political parties of the working class, it became evident very quickly that this was not to be the case. In the 1972-73 contracting it has become abundantly clear that the masses of workers still look to the unions for their economic security. But at the same time, in certain plants—particularly

among sectors that have historically been vanguards for the class (e.g., the metalworkers)—the rank and file look to the factory councils to provide progressive leadership and to act as a spearhead for struggle against the union bureaucracies. This is particularly evident now, as in daily demonstrations, job actions and strikes, the metalworkers and their supporters resist the efforts of Italian capital and of the government to impose an unfavorable contract on them. At such a moment it is evident that the relation between the councils and the unions is very much in flux; it is clear, however, that the cadre work within the councils not to create an alternative organization to the unions, *but to contend for power within them*. Ever since their genesis in 1968-69, the factory councils have been in continual struggle against the union bureaucracies lest the latter impose upon them conditions inimical to the interests of the rank and file. For example, a partial though hardly unsalvageable defeat for the workers at Pirelli, Milan (rubber), has been the imposition by the union bureaucracy of a certain number of union hacks as council delegates; the councils retain revolutionary potential, of course, only in the degree to which rank-and-file cadre participate in them.

I spoke with council delegates from Fiat in Turin and from Alfa Romeo in Milan. In these two factories it is impossible to schematize the relationship of the councils to the unions, despite the fact that the union bureaucracy has given the union card, official recognition, and certain responsibilities to the delegates in obvious hopes that the councils will become absorbed by the union apparatus. What sort of decision-making powers do the councils have? How far are they able not just to express rank-and-file opinion, but to impose conditions on the unions? To what extent will they be able to create a different political line or lines within the unions? These are major questions that have not been solved. They are being hashed out daily, not in committee rooms but on the shop floor, in the daily strikes, job actions, workers' assemblies and debates that are occurring at present around the contract. As for the political function of the cadre within the councils, a Turin C.P.O. document comments:

The task of the workers' vanguards during the present time is . . . not only to struggle to transfer real decision-making power to the delegates' councils, it is also, and above all, the task of beginning to construct with and within the councils the first foundations of a new political economy that will inform future demands by the rank-and-file; the first elements of an alternative political program to the one imposed by the bureaucracy.

By "an alternative political program" it is not yet clear what is meant. One major goal is to build a single industrial union over which the rank and file will maintain firm control via the councils.

The relation between autonomous groupings like the C.P.O., the councils, and the union bureaucracies may be better understood if I briefly describe the debate that's currently going on around the question of *inquadramento unico*.