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ITALY'S FIAT IN TURIN:  
LABOUR STRUGGLES AND CAPITAL'S RESPONSE

BY HILARY PARTRIDGE  
SUPERVISOR: HUW BEYNON  
ITALIAN SUPERVISOR: FERRUCCIO GAMBINO

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## ABSTRACT

The central aim of this thesis is to examine the mutations of capital's strategy for labour in a single industry and historical context, namely in Italy's FIAT in Turin circa from 1950-1980.

It is argued that the evolution of technology and managerial techniques in this context is not only the product of a linear "scientific" progress in these fields, but also of the dynamic interplay of class forces, and hence of a wide range of culturally and historically peculiar factors.

Three main chronological periods are considered: the 1950s, with the strongly paternalistic attitudes of post-fascist Italian managerial policy in which an intensive exploitation of the national working class gave rise to the profits for mechanization at home and expansion abroad; the 1960s, characterized by the impact of immigration from the rural South of Italy to the large scale factories of the North and a growing political awareness and strength of the working class, and the 1970s, in which the problem of the "ungovernable" giant factory run according to the basic principles of scientific management is approached with new solutions based on modular systems of work organization, advanced technology, an absolute reduction in the labour force and plant relocation.

Key words: FIAT, labour process

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**CGIL:** Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian General Federation of Labour) - dominated by the Communist Party and the largest Trade Union federation in Italy.

**C.I.:** Commissione Interna: shop floor grievance committee elected by all workers, including those who are not union members.

**CISL:** Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Liberi (Italian Confederation of Free Unions) - second largest Trade Union federation after the CGIL, from which it was born from a split by Christian Democrats in 1948.

**DC:** Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) - conservative and Roman Catholic, the major governmental party in a continual dynasty since the second world war.

**FLM:** Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici - united engineering workers' union formed in 1972 to organize workers of the FIOM, FIM and UILM.

**FIM:** Federazione Italiana della Metallurgici - the engineering workers' section of the CISL.

**FIOM:** Federazione Impiegati Operai Metalmeccanici - the engineering workers' section of the CGIL.

**LLD:** Liberi Lavoratori Democratici (Democratic Free Workers) - in fact a company union.

**PCI:** Partito Comunista Italiana (Italian Communist Party).

**PSI:** Partito Socialista Italiana (Italian Socialist Party).

**UIL:** Unione Italiana del Lavoro (Italian Union of Labour) - the third largest union organization, including socialist, social democratic and republican elements.

**UILM:** Unione Italiana dei Lavoratori della Metallurgia - engineering workers' section of the UIL.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis was begun as an attempt to give a theoretical and above all material context to the changing nature of the labour process in a big factory in a crucial industrial sector, the car industry.

The labour process is conceived as that whole process whereby capital attempts to convert the potential to work it has bought in the form of the commodity labour power into work actually done. By following this process in some detail through an arc of about thirty years in one big company, Italy's FIAT of Turin, I have attempted to locate its evolution directly within the historical and sociological reality of class relations and the shifting balance of power inside and outside the factory. In doing this I hoped to avoid some of the problems caused by an abstraction of the labour process from its context of class relations and hence to throw some light on the driving mechanisms behind the evolution of the capitalist labour process.

By maintaining an historical continuum and relying on empirical evidence from the period (trade union and management documents, the writings of FIAT workers and theoreticians closely involved in the struggles, reports in newspapers and journals, personal interviews with managers, activists etc.), the precise articulation of these mechanisms within the complex social reality of which they are a part can be more closely drawn.

A disadvantage of such a methodology is, of course, that the resulting explanation is rather historically



and culturally specific: a FIAT-centric hypothesis whose extrapolation to provide a description of the labour process in the car industry, much less in monopoly capitalism in general, would require extreme care. But this weakness is, I believe, the inevitable other face to the study's main strength: its firm location in one historical reality more readily allows the identification and location of the various factors underlying the success, in a given situation, of one strategy for surplus value extraction, and the decline or demise of another.

This study then, by its very nature, avoids the noted central problem in Braverman's important book: that he presents capital's ideal strategy for labour, as this was conceived by its major theorist, Frederick Winslow Taylor, as a more or less concrete historical event. Such an approach is constitutionally unable to take into account the contradictions implicit in this ideal when it is applied to a reality in which the working class is not the passive instrument of technological and organizational knowledge, but is itself a force in history, capable of moulding and mutating, in more or less conscious, more or less organized fashions, the application of capital's scientific advancement.

## **The Setting**

While the choice of theme was sparked off by a reading of Braverman and his critics, the direction eventually taken by this study was increasingly determined by a growing interest in a complex historical and sociological reality, the FIAT factories of Turin, rather

than by a more abstract intention to attempt to codify the laws of the labour process in advanced industrial capitalism.

Many factors have gone to make the automobile industry in Italy a particularly interesting terrain for sociological investigation.

First, and in general, is the historical position of the car industry as a leading sector in capitalist accumulation and development. The central importance of the car industry and the pressing need for the automobile giants to find a solution to the problems caused by the congregation of very large numbers of workers beneath the rooves of the factories, has made this sector, ever since the advent of Scientific Management as the fundamental catechism of capital, the logical terrain for the mass experimentation and introduction of new strategies for the consolidation of capital's control over its labour force.

Second is the historical peculiarity of the very rapid growth of the Italian durable goods industry from the 1950s. The pressure of this Italian 'economic miracle', led by the car industry and FIAT, gave rise to a highly uneven industrial development in Italy, concentrating pockets of advanced capitalist production in the cities and outlying districts of the Milan-Genoa-Turin 'industrial triangle' of the North, while leaving the great majority of the country, particularly the South, in a situation of 'backward' and largely agrarian production.

Thirdly, and related to this, was the large scale use of 'immigrant' labour from the still mostly agrarian

South. This large scale tapping of the copious pockets of un- or underemployed rural workers led to the formation of a labour force which, while not as yet very experienced in the tradition of struggle in industrial society, was not so legally and culturally precarious as the immigrant labour forces working in other big European car industries. Unlike the Greeks, Turks and Italians working in Germany or France, the Southerners at FIAT constituted a culturally homogeneous labour force which, although subject to the appalling living and working conditions and forms of racism common to immigrant workers were, by reason of their legal status as Italians and shared language and traditions, in a far stronger position than their counterparts abroad.

Fourth is the very high level of theoretical culture and political confidence attained at times by certain sectors of the FIAT working class, a result, perhaps, of the greater porosity of the 'membrane' separating the industrial working class from left-wing intellectuals in Italy. Again, numerous historically specific factors contributed to this greater permeability to radical ideas. Here I may briefly cite the events of the Biennio Rosso, or 'two red years' of 1919-1921, with the occupation of a number of large factories in the North and the influence of Gramsci and the Ordine Nuovo, the rise of the Italian Communist Party and the dangerous years of the anti-fascist and partisan struggles in which, needless to say, the communists played an extremely important role. For Italian workers, then, radical thought and action remained both familiar and feasible, informing their approach to everyday

problems of life and work. To the Italian working class communism was not the ideology of a distant and evil empire, as it has generally been to, for example, its anglo-saxon counterpart, but rather an acceptable, if not universal framework for action. And to this greater familiarity with left-wing ideas we must add the above noted mass arrival of the wilder and more reckless breed of Southerners, whose anarchistic traditions and temperament seemed little susceptible to acculturation by staid Northerners, and whose eroding effect on the more cautious mentality of the North contributed considerably to the militant and combative attitudes characterizing the class struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

Last in this non-exhaustive list, and in large part as a result of the very high levels of combativeness in FIAT, is management's very early and rapid embracement of the new technologies made available from the 1970s by progress in microelectronics. As we shall see, after the 'hot autumn' of 1969, FIAT utilized the new possibilities offered by automation, computerization and robotization for the break-up of the conventional production lines, which had proved to be an ideal environment for workers' organization and were, moreover, extremely vulnerable to all forms of conflict, from individual acts of 'insubordination' to more organized struggles.

All these factors and others have combined to make FIAT a particularly interesting forum for the examination of the interplay of class forces in a large factory, displaying the working class in its weakness,

submitted to maximum levels of discipline; exemplified by the almost military conditions in the factory of the 1950s, to the working class in its strength; the angry, self-confident and informed labour force of the late 1960s and early 70s, which was capable of imposing its own conditions on the employer to a surprising degree. And through all this we find the continuous evolutions of the strategies deployed by management to maintain or regain its often precarious control over the labour process, and hence over productivity and profits.

This, then, is the framework within which the main proposals of this thesis will unfold.

The analysis employs basic marxist concepts, but an attempt is made to be as explicit as possible, in order to avoid the sort of eventually ideological shorthand which too often obscures unproven hypotheses and straightjackets the writer in an off-the-peg conceptual suit often ill-tailored to a complex reality.

### **Braverman and 'The Labor Process in Monopoly Capital'**

Although, as I have already said, this thesis is in no sense a strict critique of Braverman's analysis of the labour process in monopoly capitalism, since this was its original impetus it would be well to begin with a brief examination of this analysis, and of some of the criticisms of his approach.

The central problem for Braverman, as well as for this study is, as I have said, how capital converts the potential to work embodied in the labour power it purchases into work actually done.

This problem, as Braverman recounts, emerges for capital at the moment of its inception, namely from the moment when workers were released from the legal obligations of slavery or serfdom tying them to a single master or lord, to the material obligation to sell the only thing they have - their labour power - on the market. However, 'free workers', obliged by necessity to sell their labour power to capital, have also surrendered any immediate and personal interest in labour. Capital, then, can buy the labour power of men and women, but it also has to devise a means for the efficient conversion of this potential into work actually done. In Braverman's words:

"The coin of labour has its obverse side: in purchasing labour power that can do much (the capitalist employer) is at the same time purchasing an undefined quality and quantity.

What he buys is infinite in potential, but in its realization it is limited by the subjective state of the workers, by their previous history, by the general social conditions under which they work as well as the particular conditions of the enterprise, and by the technical setting of their labour. The work actually performed will be limited by these and many other factors, including the organization of the process and the forms of supervision over it, if any" (1).

The central problem for capital, then, is to reduce as far as possible that limitation on the use of labour power posed by the obligation to use human agents, who

bring to the workplace with them a whole set of subjective needs and desires not coincident with capital's main interest in profit maximization.

Braverman's important achievement in *Labour and Monopoly Capital* was to refocus attention on one of the ways in which capital has attempted to achieve this objective in advanced capitalist industry, namely through the Scientific Management of workers, in which technical and technological interventions on the organization of work are used to transfer control over the skills and knowledge necessary to each craft from the workers to capital. The workers' day-to-day control over the process of manufacture, previously given by their position as the "unique depositories" of the knowledge necessary for the performance of work, was thus stripped from the living worker and embedded in the instruments and organization of labour, the dead products of previous manual and conceptual labour.

Braverman analyses this process of the deskilling of the labour force and the transfer of control over the labour process to management in terms of the marxist concept of the transition from a formal subordination of labour to capital, given by the mere fact of the ownership of the means of production, to a real subordination. The formal control of the labour process, which has always resided in the hands of those who own the means of production and hence set the conditions of employment, allows the extension of the working day, week or year and the reduction of wasted working time through the imposition of regulations, sanctions and disciplinary measures. But in order to achieve an

increasing productivity of labour when working time has been extended to its human limits, that is to intensify rather than simply extend production, capital had to assume the cognitive processes of design and planning involved in work as its own responsibility, leaving the worker with the almost literally mindless task of the execution of previously conceptualized procedures. Braverman analyses in detail the two main means whereby capital implemented this transition from formal to real control over the labour process.

On the one hand, there was a series of experiments on the organization of the labour process. The labour force was increasingly divided into two parts; workers in one place executed the physical processes of production and were segregated from others, to whom the design, planning, calculating and record keeping processes were assigned. In Braverman's words: "The production units operate like a hand, watched corrected and controlled by a distant brain" (2).

On the other hand, there was a development of technology under the sponsorship and supervision of capital to provide machinery which was increasingly able to embody the elements of conceptual work which were still integral to the worker's task, by imposing a preconceived order and pacing on the workforce:

"Machinery offers to management the opportunity to do by wholly mechanical means that which it had previously attempted to do by organizational and disciplinary means. The fact that many machines may be paced and controlled according to centralized

decisions, and that these controls may thus be in the hands of management, removed from the site of production to the office - these technical possibilities are of just a great interest to management as the fact that the machine multiplies the productivity of labour" (3).

The separation of conception and execution, the minute division of labour and its mechanization or automation hence had two main effects: the reduction of the value of labour power through increased work speeds and, more importantly still, the transfer to management of control over day-to-day decisions at the point of production. The whole process of planning and design is 'expropriated' from the workers and embodied in the machinery or segregated in specialized departments, and the workers become the mere 'appendices' of the machines, endlessly repeating a programme of 'parcelized' movements set and paced by management via the machinery.

### **The Critique of Braverman**

The acclaim which greeted the publication of 'Labor and Monopoly Capital' is justified, even in the eyes of most of the book's critics, by its reinstatement of the analysis of the labour process as the fundamental process for capital accumulation, and by its demystification of a mythology, to some extent still current, according to which technological progress has brought in its wake a generalized upgrading and reskilling of the manual labour force. The very importance of Braverman's

study is in fact confirmed by the wide critical debate which it provoked.

Nevertheless, although Braverman's account of the evolution of Scientific Management provides a wealth of analytical detail on the tactics employed to secure control over the labour process through a minute division of labour and the use of increasingly sophisticated technology, his election to concentrate on a description of changes in the technical setting of labour precluded a wider analysis of the factors influencing the outcome of that basic conflict of interest between capital and labour which forms his, and our, starting point.

To restate the problem: while the owners of capital must seek to defend and increase the portion of profit destined for capital accumulation, the working class will attempt to maximize their wage - which represents their ability to consume - and minimize their sacrifice in terms of time, energy and health. However, the arena in which this conflict is played out extends far beyond the point of production, and is influenced by factors far wider than the employer's technical ability to rationalize the organization of labour.

Braverman's apparently conscious limitation of his field of analysis to the technical and organizational setting of work has given rise to two main and inter-related criticisms summarized by Elger (4) in an important contribution to the debate over 'Labor and Monopoly Capital'. These are that in concentrating on capital's strategy for labour at the level of technology and the organization of work, Braverman on the one hand

fails to show how workers' struggles and resistance to work have themselves played a crucial role in the development and mutation of the capitalist labour process, and on the other ignores the implications for the labour process of the wider forms of social, political and economic domination available to capital for the solution of its labour problems.

As I hinted earlier, these deficiencies seem to derive directly from his selection of an abstract approach to the problem of control in the productive process. His study is based on the writing of one man, the somewhat idiosyncratic F.W. Taylor, and implicitly assumes this author's ideal version of the implementation of the theory of Scientific Management as historical reality. Braverman hence attempts to demonstrate his arguments for the success of S.M. as a strategy for labour with sole reference to the evidence of the very person who had expounded and proposed it to capital as the central means for the solution of its labour problems. Capital's appropriation of control over the labour process is hence perceived by Braverman - as it was in Taylor's ideal - as a linear, incontrovertable and more or less universally successful strategy. Although he does in fact admit that this transfer of control is an "ideal realized only within definite limits and unevenly among industries" (5), such limitations are seen largely as ephemeral anomalies: the emergence, in the wake of S.M. itself, of "new crafts and skills and technical specialities which are at first the province of labour rather than management" and "the displacement of labour into other fields", which may create a renaissance of

craft expertise leading to pockets of resistance. In this view, it would seem that the only elements of the working class to have any subjective impact as the point of production are the skilled workers who have, at least temporarily, escaped the inexorable dissolution of conception and execution, but are eventually destined to extinction by the inevitable spread of S.M. In general, so absolute does Braverman consider this process that he no longer sees any place for a working class as such at the point of production:

"The unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind, which capitalism threatened from its beginnings, is now attacked by a systematic dissolution employing all the resources of science and the engineering disciplines based upon it. The subjective factor of the labour process is removed to a place among its inanimate objective factors. To the materials and instruments of production are added a 'labour force', another 'factor of production' and the process is hence forth carried on by management as the sole subjective element" (6).

Hence Braverman is able to make, at the beginning of his book, the by now famous disclaimer:

"No attempt will be made to deal with the modern working class on the level of its consciousness, organization or activities. This is a book about the working class as a class in itself, not as a class for itself" (7).

Explicitly and deliberately, then, Braverman leaves aside any consideration of the interactions of the various forces in play at the point of production, preferring, for analytical convenience, to treat the working class as an "inanimate factor of production" or "a class in itself".

However, what is not explicit is that he in fact refers to a real historical, cultural and geographical context, that of early 20th century America, and that regardless of his conscious decision not to discuss the particular balance of class forces at that time, this balance was central to the form and content, as well as the degree of success, of S.M. as expressed in that context. The cultural disorientation and lack of security of the predominantly immigrant labour force, the large scale unemployment of the 30s and the political repression of left-wing dissent by capital are some of the factors which may have contributed to the formation of a culturally peculiar working class which was perhaps a maleable terrain for the implementation of Taylor's vision; a circumstance which may, incidentally, have reinforced and justified Braverman's initial approach to the working class as the passive object of capitalist strategy.

Interrelated with Braverman's failure to insert his analysis within a general context of the balance of class forces is his consequent silence on the eventual ability of capital to manipulate this balance to create a terrain more favourable to its strategies at the point of production.

Individual capitals and combinations of capitals may at different historical moments exert pressure on the State, or the State may act 'independently' in favour of capital in general, to influence various aspects of the conditions of employment, for example using economic policy to modify the labour market and class composition, passing laws to render trade unions and political dissent less effective, or changing immigration laws to control the availability of foreign labour. Obviously such sweeping, centrally generated strategies are unwieldy; the particular needs of individual capitalist enterprises at any given time are not necessarily coincident, and anyway the ability and desire of the State to influence such important areas of the economy as unemployment, for example, are subject to a very large number of political and economic considerations.

However, in a more problem specific and immediate way, individual enterprises may also manipulate the political, social and cultural context of their labour processes.

Individual capitals and particularly leading sectors of capital have used a variety of strategies to ensure a more compliant labour force. Subject, of course, to the prevailing political and economic conditions, a company may autonomously influence the composition of its workforce in many ways, for example by selective hiring and firing procedures to control the influx of new workers and weed out militants; repression of the formation and spread of trade union and political organizations; identification and isolation of known

'troublemakers', and the imposition of a strict disciplinary hierarchy.

Another strategy which has been employed widely in the car industry is the use of an external labour force recruited from the countryside or 'less advanced' countries. However, perhaps the most exemplary policy in terms of the argument of this thesis is the frequent recourse to wholesale relocation of plants, particularly to 'Third World' countries. Here, extreme poverty and the lack of a working class tradition of struggle not only allow wages to be kept to a minimum, but facilitate the implementation of an extreme discipline within the factory which would no longer be feasible in the factories of advanced capitalist societies. These wider interventions by capital, intended to go beyond the mere technical and technological setting of labour to select and control the very subjective make-up of the workforce, demonstrate capital's own recognition of the importance of the subjective mood and experience of the working class.

The practice of controlling the composition of the labour force, whether internally or through geographical relocation, is a cogent demonstration that the manipulation of the technical and organizational setting of labour is not in itself sufficient to maximize productivity and the extraction of surplus value. In its major strategies of the last decades capital itself has demonstrated that its greatest problem is precisely that subjectivity of the working class that Braverman elected to ignore.

This thesis will show that Taylor's dream in fact became capital's nightmare in a large factory subject to an increasingly sophisticated technological and technical organization. In FIAT, as in many other leading European industries, the principles of Scientific Management time and time again proved insufficient to retain control in the giant factories of the 60s and 70s, declared 'ungovernable' by an exasperated Agnelli. The thesis will show that living labourers subjected to Scientific Management and technological advance have a variety of tactics on hand to 'subvert' the labour process, whether through a withdrawal of labour or through more imaginative individual and group actions designed to thwart the seemingly most fool-proof schemes of modern management and time and motion men. It will show how management is forced to formulate and re-formulate its strategy for labour in the light of labour's strategy for it. And, in conclusion, it will show that capital's only ultimate solution to its labour problem, though not yet practicable, is the eradication of the need for a human labour force at all.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Ibid. p. 125.
3. Ibid. p. 195.

4. Tony Elger "Braverman, Capital Accumulation and Deskilling" in *The Degradation of Work? Skill, Deskilling and the Labour Process*, Ed. Stephen Wood, Hutchinson, 1982.
5. Harry Braverman, op. cit. p. 172.
6. Ibid. p. 171.
7. Ibid. pp. 26-27.

## CHAPTER I I

### THE RABBIT YEARS: FIAT IN THE 1950s

"It's important to understand how weak the working class was at that time. We used to say amongst ourselves, 'We're a load of rabbits'. When you went into the butcher's you didn't say, 'Give me half a rabbit'. You said, 'Give me half a FIAT worker'" (1).

This chapter concerns the first large-scale introduction in FIAT of forms of Scientific Management - a detailed division of labour and mechanization accompanied with time and motion studies designed to maximize productivity within the limits of the available technology. As we shall see this radical modification of the organization of work occurred, at least initially, with the consent and even encouragement of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) which had prioritized post-war industrial reconstruction as a precondition for the emergence of a communist Italy, and albeit unwittingly, established optimum political conditions for the experimentation of the technical and organizational transition. We shall also see, however, that the management of the hated collaborator Valletta (saved from the purging of fascistic elements from all official posts by the Communist Party itself, which feared '... a stripping of the vital nerve centres of the nation') employed as adjuvants to a 'classic' Scientific Management a series of tactics similar to those neatly summarized by Donald Roy as 'Fear Stuff, Sweet Stuff and Evil Stuff' (2).

However, before going on to consider how FIAT management sought to control its Turin workforce, it is necessary to say something more generally about the situation at that time. For in Italy's FIAT in the 1950s, the need to stay in competition and thus for imperialist expansion was combined with the opportunity provided by the alienation of the communist vanguard from the mass of workers, which weakened the ability of the labour force to fight against repressive measures. It was this equation, expedience and opportunity, that was to be resolved by a period of deep repression in the factories, linked with a vigorous mechanization drive using technology largely imported from America to increase the rate of exploitation and build up capital to finance the beginnings of FIAT's imperialist activities.

FIAT's present massive involvement abroad, extending through most of Europe and Eastern Europe, South America and Africa, began in the early 1950s with the inauguration of SEAT, FIAT's subsidiary in Spain. Argentina, Yugoslavia and Rumania followed in the early 1960s and from 1965 a process of expansion in Europe was carried out. Since then FIAT has been responsible for many foreign projects: the building of the huge plant at Togliattigrad in Russia (1966) and the 'prestige' hydro-electric projects in Pakistan, Turkey and Peru, to name just a few.

The money to finance this expansionist policy obviously had to come from somewhere. Since the labour force in the Italian car industry was already subject to a high degree of internal discipline, speed-up etc., the profits gained in the period of the protectionist poli-

cies of the fascist regime and during the arms race were used for recapitalization to increase the rate of exploitation on a relatively unchanged number of workers.

The conditions for a massive increase in investment in the car industry had been maturing for some time. In the period 1937-38 a new Italian prosperity caused largely by the arms race had given the potential for an increased internal car market and the huge Mirafiori plant, opened during the war, was planned to produce small, popular cars in series to exploit just this market. Production was interrupted because of the war, but in the 1950s the first 'Italian Volkswagens', the Vettoretta Democratica, rolled off the line.

In fact the war proved to be a very brief interruption of FIAT's productive development; by 1948 production in the automobile sector, greatly aided by the Communist Party's policy of reconstruction before all else, was already back to pre-war levels, and they were able to replace war-damaged plant in the great mechanization drive of the 1950s. This process really took off from 1953, with a very rapid renovation of plant associated with an extensive mechanization of the productive process, and an 'advanced' technology (mostly imported from abroad) adapted to production in series. The following figures (3) demonstrate this tendency:

	CAPITAL (FIXED AND CIRCULATING)	EMPLOYEES	VEHICLES
1947	61,539	58,000	28,490
1948	66,714	52,016	46,795
1949	89,168	56,321	75,000
1955	322,112	74,885	250,299
1960	571,590	92,891	530,665

Thus the increases in investment did not give a correspondingly large increase in employment but went to multiply the rate of exploitation putting up productivity per worker. At FIAT Mirafiori the index of production per worker more than tripled in the eight years between 1948 and 1955.

1948 = 100

1952 = 206

1955 = 381 (4)

Real wages, however increased very little during the 1950s.

The beginning of the 1950s thus marked the dawning of a new era in the history of Italian industrialization; one of an enormous development of the Italian car industry through a restructuring of production; a process of mechanization and rationalization designed to finance the beginnings of FIAT's imperialist expansion.

The new era brought with it a need for a new sort of workforce. It had to be docile enough to give FIAT a free hand with new forms of work organization. A highly organized and militant working class will question and eventually threaten the introduction of labour-saving methods and machinery - hence organization at FIAT had to be broken. Before looking at the tactics FIAT employed to do this, it is first necessary to take account of the role played in this period by the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the largest worker's party, and the trade unions.

The PCI had found itself in a strange situation after the war. The workforce, emerging from the period

of sabotage and anti-fascist struggle which had been an important part of the Turin Resistance was turbulent with demands for a democratization of work and the purging of fascists from the managerial ranks at FIAT. But ironically it was the PCI which was to do most of the work of controlling and containing the rebellious workforce and restoring order and discipline within the factory. The PCI, underestimating the combined power of the Allies and the Vatican, was trapped in the 'paralysing illusion' that with its participation in the post-war tripartite government it was now at the centre of power. Thus of the PCI's three imperatives: purging, democratization and reconstruction, the latter effectively overrode the former two; the PCI called for industrial reconstruction for a new democratic era before all else.

The following quote from a PCI worker demonstrates some of the confusion resulting from this policy:

"When we began to work and make it understood that to be a good communist you had to produce and do your duty, then they called us fascists! We (of the Commissione Interna) were linked in with the foremen. When the bell rang at 5.15 they'd already been in the cloakroom since 4.00. So I, as a member of the C.I. had to intervene. They called me fascist because I tried to bring in some discipline, because we were working for us now" (5).

Luciano Parlanti, a FIAT worker of that time, talks to Primo Maggio about the confusion generated by the PCI's ambivalent position:

"I remember straight after the war Togliatti came to speak in Piazza Crispi - and then De Gasperi came - and they both argued exactly the same thing; the need to save the economy... We've got to work hard because Italy's on her knees, we've been bombarded by the Americans... but don't worry because if we produce, if we work hard, in a year or two we'll all be fine... So the PCI militants inside the factory set themselves the political task of producing to save the national economy, and the workers were left without a party" (6).

The PCI's obsession with reconstruction was apparently based on the inexplicable belief of the leadership that Italy would come into the Russian sphere of influence after the war and be allowed to retain communist participation in government. But this belief turned out to be very dangerous for the working class. Both the rank and file of the PCI and the labour force were generally weakened, because the PCI acceded to the management policy of mechanization coupled with a new code of discipline. To the new younger workers this strategy of the communist trade unionists was difficult to understand. What was the point of joining or fighting for a union which appeared intent on further tightening factory discipline rather than leading the struggle for their basic needs? The rift was deepened by the different experience of the workforce; the young men with their Southern peasant origins and the older men tempered by a long industrial experience and the anti-fascist struggles. In this situation communication

between the two groups broke down and FIAT's self-elected task of the destruction of all forms of workers' organization was made that much easier.

Industrial working class organization in Italy differed from the UK in that it never took the form of trade unions based on trade or category. Unions in Italy were primarily based on locality, linking workers in local *camere del lavoro*, based on the French idea of *bourses du travail*. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the sudden and uneven development of Italian Capitalism which preceded the formation of guild-type organizations; secondly, the strong influence of political parties which brought with it a tendency towards a purely 'political' activity, as distinct from negotiation over specific 'trade' issues; and thirdly a permanent abundance of labour which had always meant a pressure for a general representation of labour whether in the factory or not (7).

As industrialization increased a need was felt for an organizational form to cope with more specific issues. The *Commissione Interna* (CI), basically a shop-floor grievance committee, developed to fill this role and quickly became a general feature of the factories. The CI was the basis for Gramsci's idea of the factory council system: "Tomorrow, developed and enriched" they were to become "the organs of proletarian power which replaces the capitalist in all his useful functions of management and administration" (8). The CIs were more or less linked into a national trade union federation, the CGIL, although election to the CI did not necessarily entail membership of the union. In 1948

the federation split into the communist-dominated CGIL (with an engineering workers' section, the FIOM), the Christian Democratic CISL (with the FIM) and the largely white-collar union UIL (with the UILM).

This, then, is the context in which FIAT carried out its strategy aimed at rendering all forms of workers' organization in the factory innocuous. As part of this strategy they also encouraged the development of a company union, the LLD-SIDA (9), which with the UIL and FIM replaced the FIOM in the CI after the electoral defeat of 1955. In fact after this date the CI lost nearly every function of dissent in the factory - at least for the time being, Gramsci's dream had died.

The management, headed by Valletta, justified itself theoretically by dividing the workers into 'constructors' and 'destructors'. Below I itemize their tactics under several separate headings, though many of the practices cited do, of course, interlink.

**The Use of the Anti-Strike Bonus.** In these years of high unemployment and low wages, with families often having only one 'bread-winner', extra money was enormously important. The FIAT management was thus able to use very successfully the *premio di collaborazione* or collaboration prize. This practice started after a strike of 1952 when FIAT workers participated in an engineering workers' strike of the whole industrial triangle, Milan-Turin-Genoa. Eighty-five per cent of FIAT workers struck. Those who didn't were rewarded with a bonus of 2,000 Lire. From the end of 1953 the antistrike bonus was introduced as normal practice with

sums of about 40,000 Lire annually given to workers who had not participated in any form of agitation during the year. This bonus was never negotiated with the unions but was given to the workers on the request of the so-called 'democratic unions': the 'yellow' SIDA; the Christian Democratic CISL. This practice continued until 1962, when FIAT broke the unwritten rule of negotiation at a national level between the employers' federation, Confindustria, and the national union federations. FIAT anticipated the national contract and signed a separate agreement which included the incorporation of the anti-strike bonus as part of the basic wage.

**Political Sackings.** The 'reprisal' sacking of militants and known union or party sympathizers began in October 1948. The accusations levelled were: having struck; having led workers' struggles; having distributed union or political publications, even outside the factory gates; having organized meetings; having collected subscriptions to FIOM or the PCI; having struck against the *legge truffa* (10). After 1955 the FIAT management only rarely used such explicit antiunion wording in their dismissal of troublesome workers (the reasons became 'loafing' or 'low production').

The 'mass sackings', when troublesome departments or entire factories were 'punished' for a high vote for FIOM in the elections to the CI, began in December 1954:

In December	1954	630	workers	were	sacked	from	FIAT Aeritalia
"	"	"	320	"	"	"	FIAT Grandi Motori
"	"	1955	250	"	"	"	FIAT di Modena
"	"	1956	380	"	"	"	FIAT Lingotto
" July	1957	230	"	"	"	"	FIAT Marina di Pisa
" November	1957	120	"	"	"	"	Officina Sussidiaria Ricambi (11)

In the last instance all OSR workers were sacked and the department was closed: what Donald Roy would call 'fatal stuff' (12). The sackings and 'internal sackings' (transfers) had the desired effect. At Aeritalia, for example, the FIOM vote in the CI elections dropped from 1340 votes in the 1954 to 77 in 1955 (13). Punishment for union sympathy did not, however, stop when the dismissal note arrived on the doormat. Sacked workers were 'blacklisted' and no Turin or Piedmont company would employ them on the pain of loss of contracts with the FIAT giant. Sacked FIAT workers took the most eclectic work - there were a large number of communist undertakers in this period. Most of the full-time workers at the Camera del lavoro in Turin were ex-FIAT men.

The fear that the sackings inspired was not surprising; few people were prepared to support the union at such a price. The literature on FIAT in this period shows that the workers were afraid to greet or even smile at a known militant, much less talk to one, for

fear that they might be seen by a foreman or 'creep'. Workers caught talking to a militant would be called in to the foreman's office for a grilling and warned off sympathy with such men.

Even after the failure of FIOM in the CI elections of 1955, a systematic attempt further to weaken the working class was made. In the remaining years of repression at FIAT, 2000 men were sacked and thousands transferred. As late as 1962, when the workers' resistance began to re-emerge, about 100 workers were sacked in reprisal against the first strike for nine years. A protest strike organized by FIOM for the reinstatement of the sacked men failed dismally.

**The Quarantine Departments.** As Parlanti put it: "They'd understood that someone who rebelled at work, even if he wasn't politicized, could sooner or later pass on his ideas, his rebellion, to others, and from rebellion clearly organization could be born, and then from organization politics is born" (14). FIAT's understanding of this was important in their control of the workforce in these years. Troublesome and individually rebellious workers were moved away from their friends and workmates to noisy or isolated workposts. Worse cases could be sent to the *reparti confino* or 'quarantine' departments to stop the contagion. If the disease was chronic the worker could then be sacked.

FIAT created many *reparti confino*. The best known was the *Officina Ricambi* nicknamed *Officina Stella Rossa* - 'Red Star' - because of the vast number of communists

and militants who ended their working days for FIAT there (really ended - this was the department that was so heavily left-wing that in 1957 all 120 workers were sacked and the department closed). There were many other such departments, including N°4 in Aeritalia and N° 24 in Mirafiori. These departments had one common characteristic; they were not really designed for production. Workers carried out more or less unimportant tasks or worked with antiquated machinery, often in deserted hangars taken over for just this purpose.

**Racism.** Yet another strategy of management in these 'rabbit years' was the encouragement of the division of worker from worker, and one way to do this was through racism. Especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s FIAT ran a sort of advertising campaign in the South to entice workers to Turin with talk of high wages, company houses, and many other benefits. The Southerners - the **Meridionali** - began to arrive en masse, to join earlier immigrants from the South and the Veneto who had been involved in building the great Mirafiori plant.

Forms of racism against the **Meridionali**, who were largely from a poor peasant background, were and still are fairly common in the North. The lower managerial ranks played on this to create tension and competition between the Piedmontese and Southern workers. Parlanti recalls:

"The foremen had managed to create hatred between Piedmontese and Southerners. When work was over in the evenings you used to see the Piedmontese talking to their foreman, but there was never a Southerner

there. In those days they counted on this hatred to get production figures up. 'Tarrun' (15) the Piedmontese would say - which infuriated the Southerners who'd then push up production to show they were better workers. In those days there was still that terrible concept of North and South, the hatred between us, and very few people realized that the division had been created on purpose by the employers" (16).

In this period there wasn't even one Southern foreman - the Southerners were treated as pure machine fodder with absolutely no chance of promotion. However it was often this most ill-used section of the workforce which sparked off moments of rebellion on the shop floor; but more of that later.

**The Hierarchy and Favouring.** Racism was not the only tool used by management to pit worker against worker, hence increasing production and decreasing the chance of organized rebellion. By hinting at better pay or workposts or more overtime in return for 'cooperation' some workers in a team could be persuaded to work harder, creating pressure for a rising production target for the whole team. Usually the men who most needed the money and most feared unemployment were picked; men with large families to support. Higher management encouraged such discriminatory policies, giving the foremen a free hand in the sharing out of bonuses and overtime, and sometimes providing a special fund to finance favouring.

A formal hierarchy was also used both to control the workforce by brute force and to tempt it to greater

efforts with the chance of promotion. There was a multiple grading of workers into many different levels, from the fuori linea (men who were 'off the line', multi-skilled and able to substitute where needed) up to the capo reparto or departmental foreman. The different grades carried with them different levels of prestige, pay, responsibility and control. This hierarchy also worked magnificently as a 'spy network'; workers who 'told' on militants and union sympathizers were often rewarded with a move up the hierarchy.

In the early post-Liberation years the workers at FIAT and all over the industrial triangle had fought desperately against the reintroduction of wage differentials and incentive schemes. The struggle was lost largely because of the PCI's preoccupation with industrial reconstruction before all else (they made great use of Lenin's writings on Taylorism to back up their arguments). Management thus had a clear road to use a variety of such schemes to encourage even faster work rhythms and create further divisions on the shop floor.

**The Purge on Politics.** Management went to great lengths in this period to keep political and union material out of the factory, and if possible out of workers' hands completely. In his diary of his days as a member of the CI at RIV (a FIAT subsidiary in Turin), Accornero talks of the struggles over the pinning up of L'Unità (the PCI paper):

"At Grossa torneria L'Unità with an article on yesterday's strike was taken down by the foreman

accompanied by two guards. In maintenance the paper was taken down by another guard, who was whistled as he took it away. Another copy was stuck up in the department. After a while the same guard came back but he couldn't find the paper there in its usual place; he walked round a bit and then gave up. It had been stuck to a pillar this time" (17).

Accornero later recalls how the vigilance of the foremen eventually meant the workers had to resort to writing up information on the walls in chalk.

Parlanti talks of later on in the '50s, when things had tightened up still further:

"The guard used to come and look in your locker, even, to see what you kept in it, if you had a newspaper, if you maybe had L'Unità... but in fact nobody read. It was absolutely forbidden. If a worker brought in a comic, say Mickey Mouse, he was sacked straight off. It wasn't a question of Mickey Mouse, but that you could one day go on to bring in maybe a pamphlet or a bulletin, or the paper... they struck straight away so as not allow a politicization of the workers" (18).

**Election-time Harassment.** FIAT's fear tactics made it increasingly difficult to compile the lists of 300-odd names (of candidates, scrutinizers and members of the electoral committee) necessary to present FIOM candidates in election to the CI. The election became an annual confrontation. As repressive and punitive measures hotted up, so fewer workers were willing to

'sign up for the sack' - and those committed few who did, did not usually survive to sign again the following year. Even once the lists had been presented harassment continued: foremen would talk to individual workers promising promotion and favoured treatment to men with the 'right' political attitudes. 'Good' electoral behaviour was rewarded with a bonus for the department and 'bad' behaviour with sackings and transferals. Harassment extended outside the factory gates too. Wives and families of FIAT workers would receive visits or letters from management listing the evils of communism and the union and painting pitiful pictures of the life of the unemployed.

'Soft' Control. The Vallettian management of the 1950s did not, however, only use crude and repressive methods to control and mould the workforce. Whilst they were tightening the screws they were also creating a sort of FIAT hegemony in Turin, reaching into all corners of the workers' private lives. Propaganda about the privileged position of the FIAT worker was, to a certain extent, true. FIAT wages were considerably higher than those of other companies (a FIAT worker could expect from 85,000 to 90,000 Lire as opposed to 45,000 to 60,000 in other factories in the engineering sector). Side benefits, too, were enormous. FIAT workers' families could (sometimes) live in FIAT houses, their children could be educated in FIAT schools and have their holidays in FIAT 'colonies' in the countryside; sick FIAT workers could be treated under the FIAT mutua scheme (a form of health insurance); whilst healthy FIAT workers could keep

themselves fit using FIAT sporting facilities. FIAT even bought its own newspaper (La Stampa) and its own football team (Juventus).

The combined effects of all the above methods of control were, not surprisingly, very effective. FIOM lost its majority in 1955, as the voting figures in the following table (19) show:

	1954	1955
FIOM	32885 (63.2%)	18937 (25.4%)
FIM	13175 (25.4%)	20910 (40.5%)
UILM	5889 (11.3%)	11628 (28.5%)

After this defeat the CI lost virtually all independent character, functioning almost as a body of lower management. The destruction of working class trade unionism at FIAT was utilized in three ways by management: 1) to increase profits by speeding up work rhythms to the physical limit; 2) to introduce new labour-saving technology with a free hand to experiment and to discover how to use it most profitably; 3) to introduce a new sort of labour force of 'virgin' young workers from the South, men who were unskilled and who, at least initially, accepted the killing rhythms for the sake of higher wages and because of their lack of industrial experience.

The first point is self-explanatory. As to the second in the early 1950s the ignorance and underestimation of the new machinery and work methods by the trade union organizations at FIAT much simplified their introduction in the early stages. And as awareness grew,

the union was simultaneously losing power. FIAT's technique was systematically to select workers (on the basis of lack of militancy and work speed) for a long 'experimental' phase on new equipment, a period of time which was never determined in advance. During this phase the optimum rhythms, production, labour complements and skill grading would be determined.

Even when these had been worked out FIAT was unwilling to disclose them. If the worker is in the dark about such things he may be more easily 'persuaded' to produce more, by the simple technique of speeding up the line or taking a man off. In fact during the 1950s and 1960s workers could only have access to information about manning and timing through a long and complicated process; initially a demand had to be put through to management from a worker on the job in question, then this demand would be discussed with the foreman. Only after this could the CI be called in to support the worker. For most of the workers this procedure was too intimidating to face on their own, and anyway might single them out for 'special attention'. The workers, to some extent, developed informal and spontaneous weapons to defend themselves against the new technology. Once again Parlanti recalls:

"In fact a comrade, a Southerner, I still remember it, drew a line on the ground with a screwdriver (the floor of the line was of beaten earth, that dark, black, earth). Neither the foreman nor the charge-hand, no one, understood what that line was. But it was a really strong weapon for the workers...

When the lines go fast, effectively the worker loses his sense of time and he does all the various operations more quickly than normal. You can't even look at your watch, they could even sack you, they thought you were doing it intentionally so you could screw up the timing. The only way you could work out whether you were going faster than normal or not was by comparing the distance you travelled up on the line. And that was what that line on the ground was used for. While he worked, the worker would keep an eye on this line, and when he arrived at it he got off the assembly line..." (20).

However, such spontaneous rebellion was often easily broken. Parlianti concludes the incident: "But then what happened? After a while they moved everyone around... and put creeps in our places. They were afraid of the principle of organization which had been created".

Accornero (21) also demonstrates the failure of workers' organizations to filter and to some extent control the introduction of the technology, even in the days before the total rout of the FIOM (his diary refers to 1953). In this diary he makes frequent reference to a struggle going on in Fucinatura (forging plant), where the men were demanding a bonus, the *paga di posto* (a pay increment for work in unhealthy or especially tiring posts), as new machinery had worsened conditions in the department, increasing heat and fumes. Accornero first mentions the struggle in February 1953, remarking that the agitation had reduced production from 40,000 to 25,000 piston rings per day. Throughout February there

were several brief strikes in fucinatura, a committee of agitation was formed and a 'chequerboard' strike called - the first shift struck on Monday, the second on Tuesday and so on for a week. (In Italy a full withdrawal of labour was, and still is, impracticable, given the almost total lack of strike pay). In the last months of the struggle FIAT employed the tactic of fines, suspensions and warnings to the men involved. The workers were finally forced to accept management's meagre offer. The struggles had, however, cost FIAT a great deal in terms of lost production; they had won in the end, but in this period the FIOM and the CI were still able to cost them time and money.

The introduction of the new machinery was not, however, FIAT's only preoccupation; the workforce also had to be adapted to the technology of the 'new era'. In other words management had to carry out a massive selection and deformation of its workforce in order to create the sort of mobile, flexible and unskilled labour force it needed to exploit the new machinery to the maximum. It also needed a primarily youthful workforce, preferably in their first jobs, young men who would accept the monotony of the new 'parcelized' labour process more easily than the older, skilled sections. Here then, we come to the third way mentioned above by which management sought to utilize the destruction of working class unionism.

After the war the FIAT labour force was mostly composed of older skilled men, and the labour process was still largely based on their knowledge, experience and skill. The war and the Resistance had contributed to

this imbalance by reducing the supply of young men to replace them. From 1949 the phase of rationalization, begun at Mirafiori, brought the first signs of a reorganization of work and it became necessary to phase out the skilled sector. This process was anyway very welcome to FIAT as the older men also tended to be more politically conscious in that period - they were a sort of labour aristocracy, involved politically as well as physically in the labour process. Many of them had been involved in the Resistance and earlier anti-fascist struggles and in the post-Liberation 'occupations' when the newly liberated factories were in many cases run on democratic principles through workers' councils.

Valletta's management used the powerful weapon of what Alquati (22) calls 'internal sackings' (transfers and enforced mobility) to move the skilled worker off the line, and also reduce his political effect. Enforced 'voluntary' early retirement, and of course the sack when an excuse could be found, were also used to liberate the factory of skilled workers and create a new labour force suited to the new mechanization and division of labour.

Management began with the importation of 7,800 workers from auxiliary sectors and the expulsion of 2,000 older or unwell workers through voluntary retirement. A huge de-skilling and demoting process followed, beginning with the reclassification of the majority of workers into the third category, a grade covering unskilled labour. The same package brought in a three-shift system to ensure twenty-four-hour-a-day exploitation. The whole process of de-ranking and the introduction of the

shift system was sold to the workforce at the price of the reduction of the working week (to forty-five hours for first and second shift workers and forty-two hours for night shift workers) at wage parity.

The process of 'weeding out' of older skilled men was carried on through the 1950s as the sackings hit hard at the more politicized and militant workers. A survey published by Deaglio (23) is very interesting on this point. This enquiry was carried out in 1959 among sacked FIAT workers and was aimed at finding out who was the 'vanguard' in that period. The 'typical' sacked worker turned out to be a first category (skilled) man who had a long work experience at FIAT and had a history of politicization usually dating back to 1943-45. He was usually a member of the PCI and/or FIOM. In fact 80 per cent of the men in the survey had these characteristics. Out of 79 sacked workers, 79 were FIOM members and 74 were PCI members. Only 16 were taken on the labour force after the war.

Thus during the 1950s the composition of the labour force at FIAT was changed radically to suit the new technology, and contain militancy. With mechanization and early forms of automation the labour process became 'parcelized'; small elements of the whole product produced monotonously and later, equally monotonously, aggregated into the whole. The skilled and politicized men became obsolete. FIAT needed a labour force which would accept the monotony and which had no experience of organizing to fight for better conditions and pay. The skilled men, the communists and militants, who were ironically the very people who had pushed for discipline

and factory order in the early post-war years before the collapse of communist participation in government, were pushed out of the mainstream of the productive process, transferred to isolated work posts, put to sweeping floors, sent to the 'quarantine' departments, forced into early retirement, or simply sacked.

But even the new young workers with little previous work experience to compare with FIAT and no frustrated pride and skill in work, and who had been enticed to Turin by the news of high FIAT wages, housing and privileges, had their breaking point. FIAT had not, in fact, been able to provide in time an adequate super-structure of houses and amenities; and the higher wages didn't go far with the higher prices of the North and the added expenses of laundering and catering that young unmarried immigrants had to face. Gruelling conditions and heavy factory discipline were coupled with squalid living conditions. Parlanti again:

"But the Southerners, especially, weren't really used to discipline like the Northerners with their school education. They were much more expansive, they talk among themselves, sometimes they didn't give a shit... they didn't understand anything - but precisely because they didn't understand the rules of FIAT, it was really they who began mass discussions, who began to break discipline... So I think it was really the Southerners at FIAT with their 'bad manners'... who started to discuss the problems" (24).

The young Southerners with their 'bad manners' and little education to habituate them to the boredom, routine and discipline of factory life - these were the people who started the movement of strikes and agitations in the industrial triangle in the early 1960s. The workers of FIAT, the most powerful and the largest sector in the industrial triangle, would not, however, join the struggle until 1962; the 'rabbits' of FIAT had to be practically forced out on to the streets by the other Turinese workers, who had recognized how crucial the FIAT men were to their fight. The chronicles of the journal Quaderni Rossi (25) describe how, on 19th June 1962, FIAT workers crossed a deserted, strike-bound Turin on the empty trams to go to work, running a gauntlet of insults, bits of old bread and coins, flung at them by striking workers from other sectors. The FIAT factories were besieged by other workers trying to prod this 'mass of molluscs' into action. But it was not until a general strike on 7th July (called as part of the actions centred around the renewal of contracts for the major sectors) that the car workers, after a 'cease fire' which had lasted nearly nine years, entered the struggle with a vengeance.

After so many years of repression, years in which the instinct to fight back was crippled by the detachment of the union leadership from the 'new' rank and file, the struggle was almost bound to be violent.

On the third day of strikes and picketing, the UIL signed a separate and wholly unsatisfactory agreement with management. It was the last straw. Workers' demonstrations in Turin that day turned into riots, and

police were called in from outside to put down the revolt with baton charges. Symbolically, it was the UIL HQ in Piazza Statuto that came in for most of the violence. And the riots of Piazza Statuto were the first sign of an energetic mass rejection of the old-style unionism led by a labour aristocracy which had lost contact with the rank and file of young unskilled workers.

The period of 'democratization' and the opening of the organization to the shop floor had, however, only just begun; Piazza Statuto was just the first step in the destruction of the legacy of post-war unionism and the creation of a weapon more suited to the changed battle-ground. Commitment to a new form of organization was growing, but the working class at FIAT and all over Italy remained relatively weak in its confrontations with management right up to the great international cycle of struggles of 1968-69.

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9. The LLD (Liberi Lavoratori Democratici - or 'Free and Democratic Workers') were, despite the name, a company union formed by a split from the Catholic CISL. After the destruction of the FIOM in the *Commissioni Interne*, management was often able to impose agreements after consultation with the LLD-SIDA and UIL-UILM alone.
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## CHAPTER III

### CARDBOARD SUITCASES:

### SOUTHERN IMMIGRATION IN THE 1960s

By the late 1950s, the period of post war construction in Italy had finished, and a period of expansion in the favourable market conditions of the 1960s could begin.

Increasing wages in the industrialized countries and the tendency to spend an increasing part of them on durable consumer goods were the basis for the strong development of car production internationally in the 1960s. As can be seen from the following table, car ownership, from being almost a rarity in the early 1950s, had by the 1970s become a common place. Particularly in Italy, where the combination of low wages and rapidly increasing productivity had allowed an enormous drop in the relative price of cars, car ownership boomed:

Table I: World trends in car ownership from 1950 to 1970.  
N° of vehicles per 1000 population

	1950	1960	1970
N. America	226	320	414
W. Europe	18	320	414
France	37	58	155
Germany	11	73	216
Italy	6	73	216
U.K.	43	98	210
Japan	0	3	68
S. Africa	34	55	77
World Total	24	41	65

Source: Code 'perspectives à long terme de l'industrie automobile dans le monde'  
3.2.78.

Throughout the 1960s, then, production figures for car manufacturers rose steadily:

Table II: World trends in automobile production in the 1960s compared to 1953 (in thousands of vehicles)

	1953	1960	1962	1964	1966	1968
N. America	6,477	7,001	7,358	8,313	9,300	9,789
W. Europe	1,514	5,048	5,770	7,218	7,941	8,653
World Total	8,130	12,810	14,110	17,070	19,220	21,890

Source: UNO 'Statistical Yearbook' 1969 and 1979

Within the general context of expansion, Italy's FIAT was also doing well. The 'economic miracle' of the late 50s to mid 60s was under way, with FIAT, the largest private industry in Italy, leading the way. In fact the motor vehicle sector produced one of the highest annual growth rates in Italy in this period, rising from 10.8% for 1953 - 1958 to 24.3% for 1958 to 1963 (1).

The economic miracle in Italy was the fruit not only of the general tendency to expansion in the developed countries, but of some particular home advantages. First among these was the relatively low cost of labour and the abundant supply of 'green' labour in the largely agrarian South.

It was in this favourable context, then, that FIAT set about its strategy of consolidating its position at home and preparing itself for the already predictable increasing competition in the car sector.

The profits gained in the years of industrial peace guaranteed by repression in the factories were ploughed back in the form of new production plants overseas (2) and new technology at home. It also, like its counter-

parts inside and outside Europe, accelerated the process of vertical integration (buying or setting up plants producing the necessary semi-worked materials and components and thus benefitting from the elimination of the added value costs of these materials, ensuring supplies and improving economies of scale) and concentration (buying Lancia and a controlling interest in Ferrarri).

But despite this picture of healthy growth and a rosy future at home and abroad, FIAT was building up serious problems which would eventually rebound against it.

Italy in the 1960s was characterized, as it still is, by a strongly uneven development. In general its economic development was backward, still largely based on an agrarian and peasant economy, particularly in the South. However, it held within it pockets of extremely advanced capitalist development epitomized by such companies as FIAT, Olivetti etc. in the Northern industrial triangle. The 1960s were, in fact, years of great change in Italy. This was a period of rapid modernization of the industrial structure, and a consequent increased concentration of the working class in the industrial centres of the North: over these years the agricultural population dropped from 40 to 25.5% of the population as a whole (3) producing, as we will see later, enormous pressures on housing and services in the cities. At the same time, nearly full employment and the resultant improved affluence (despite relatively low wages) had brought with them expectations of change. The working class, previously held in check by heavy

repression in the factories backed up with the fear of the sack, began to rebel.

After their great defeat in the factories in the mid '50s, the trade unions began a phase of 'self criticism'. They recognized, at least in part, the problems inherent in their centralized structure and bargaining procedures and began to push for local negotiations between the signing of the three year inter-federation contracts.

Various major strikes and struggles began to appear in 1960, for example in the cotton mills of the Susa valley and in the electro-mechanical goods sector. The textile workers in particular won significant wage increases and, perhaps most important of all, a clause retracting all punitive and disciplinary measures taken by the employers during the strike. Throughout the early 1960s the warning signs increased. In 1960, 29,498,000 hours of work were lost through strikes; in 1961, 42,840,000 and in 1962, 126,723,000. Most significant of all were the new sorts of struggle which began to emerge, for example during the struggle at Lancia in 1962, prefiguring the form of the unofficial or 'wild cat' actions typical of the 1968-69 cycle.

The struggles at FIAT broke out slightly later; this was probably due not only to the greater repression within its plants in the 1950s, but also to its policy of exhausting the labour market in the more 'passive' rural areas of Piedmont before turning to the Southerners, with their more violent and anarchoid origins. However, when the first major outbreak came in 1963 it climaxed

in the scenes of unparalleled violence in the 'riots of Piazza Statuto' reported in the previous chapter.

The struggles of the early 1960s, and the later cycles climaxing in 1969 were fundamentally due to capital's failure to adapt its strategy for labour to the new conditions in the more advanced sectors, where thousands of workers were collected together under one roof, performing in series endlessly repetitive tasks. Whilst in the rest of Europe the vulnerability of the new productive system was recognized and social peace was bought with high wages and general social reformism, in Italy there was a persistence of cruder techniques of social control, more suitable to a bygone age of small and medium sized factories run on paternalistic and repressive lines.

While profits visibly increased, lines were modernized and the speed up bit in, wages were held at the breadline or below. According to an Istat estimate made in 1965, the average necessary living wage for a workers' family was 100,000 Lire a month; but in an enquiry set up by the Minister for Labour, Brodolini, the average take home wage turned out to be a mere 70,000 a month (4).

While the organization of work changed, the lines becoming increasingly complex and interdependent, the old repressive methods of foremen, disciplinary codes and the premio di collaborazione (collaboration bonus) continued to be used to get out production. Strong discrimination against political and trade union activists continued in a period when rising expectations were

bringing about a rebirth of generalized discussion and debate in the working class.

Thus the rapid development at FIAT - as in other industries - left management behind the times; unable or unwilling to contain the new contradictions, caused by the massive concentration of the working class and the general deskilling of the work force, through progressive measures designed to channel the growing unrest in formal negotiating procedures. Reformist government policies and the concession of trade union rights might have provided the safety valve which would have reduced the pressure and avoided the explosion of 1969. But FIAT appeared to know only one way of getting out production: threats, blandishments and the inherited high-handedness of the padrone.

### **Great Expectations: The Opening to the Left**

And yet, the problem was in part understood by the more advanced sectors of capital, including FIAT itself. Averted by the working class struggles of the early 1960s, Agnelli and other 'enlightened' industrialists supported the 'opening to the left' in successive governments through the 1960s.

In 1962 the National Congress of the Christian Democrats (DC) gave official consent to the idea of the Centre Left government, in which the Socialist Party (PSI) would participate, and in autumn 1963 the PSI entered the cabinet for the first time since the failure of the post war tri-partite government. A series of limited reforms were proposed, principal among which

were plans for the development of the South through agrarian reform and increased investments, a programme for the nationalization of the electricity industry, educational reforms, railway development, an increase in minimum pensions and a fund to enable peasants to buy land. Some elements of the Christian Democrat government were by now furthermore calling for a more enlightened attitude towards the trade union movement with the recognition by Confindustria of certain basic trade union rights. In this, they were fully supported by advanced sectors of capital, first of all FIAT itself. In an interview with Il Messaggero in June 1962, Valletta, Managing Director of FIAT, commented:

"The Centre Left government is a fruit of the development of our times. We cannot and must not try to turn the clock back... It's my impression, furthermore, that very soon groups within the employers' organization will put pressure on those responsible for the policy of Confindustria for the abolition of certain too rigid positions of principle" (5).

But Valletta was to be disappointed. The development of reforms in Italy - or even of a form of benign conservatism - was hampered by the continued presence of backward 'clients' - or powerful constituents backing particular politicians - and there were many people that had more to lose than to gain from the attempt to defuse the growing labour tensions through the concession of wide reforms. Nationalization appeared, of course, as a profound threat to the private electrical monopolies;

small industries would experience great problems keeping up with larger sectors if wages were to rise generally; the voices of agricultural capital were raised against the idea of providing loans enabling the peasants to buy land and so on.

In the meantime, problems for the Italian economy were increasing.

The workers' struggles of the early 1960s had forced considerable wage rises in many sectors of industry. Wage rises gained in 1962-63 added 25-30% to the cost of labour (6). The credit squeeze, begun in 1962, partially in response to this, resulted in 1964 in a fall in investments of 20.1%, the first fall since the beginning of the 'economic miracle' as investments had been rising by an average of 13.2% annually since 1959 (7). The recession and the threat of unemployment added to the fears of conservative and moderate elements in the Christian Democrat government.

When the moderate minister Pieraccini drew up a 5 year plan for industrial development including plans for the nationalization of industry, increased state intervention, the elimination of backward forms of agricultural production etc., conservative forces within the government rebelled. In 1966 the government was forced to resign, and it was replaced by a far more rigid and conservative one.

The growing 'insubordination' of the working class throughout Northern Italy in the early 1960s had in part been diverted and contained by the illusion of change promised by the Centre Left government. Now even that illusion had disappeared. But in the meantime, the

immigrants from the South were still pouring into the Northern cities in search of a fortune.

Let us turn to take a look at the growing contradictions in the specific case of a city: Turin, and a factory: FIAT.

### **Immigration and Conditions in the City**

FIAT, then, like other companies in North Italy, was hungry for workers to turn out the goods to satisfy the expanding market for durable goods. And like other companies it carried on a recruitment drive in the South, where the backward, largely agrarian economy formed a bottomless pool of labour into which Northern capital could dip.

The sons of the impoverished peasant families of the South, often accompanied by their wives and children, were drawn to the North in search of the high wages and city life promised by the company's recruiting agents in Sicily, Calabria, Puglia and Abruzzo, to be met by worsening conditions in the big cities, where the infrastructures of housing and services were totally inadequate to meet the new needs being created by the population boom. The Financial Times summed up the dimensions of the problem in 1969:

"Internal migration in Italy has leaped to phenomenal proportions as the poorer citizens of the South have travelled to the rich, industrial cities of the North. In the past 15 years, 450,000 from Sicily, 400,000 from Calabria and 400,000 from Puglia have been estimated to have made the trek

northwards. 6 million have made the journey since the war and in recent weeks a new wave of internal migrants has created a sense of allarm in Turin and Milan where vast slum areas are being created" (8).

Some more figures help to give an idea of the dimensions of the migration which turned Turin into the city with the highest concentration of workers in Europe, paralysing basic services and thrusting up ugly shanty towns and ghettos.

In 1968, 121,000 people immigrated to the North of Italy. They were followed in 1969 by 121,024 and in 1970 by 121,508 (9). Immigrants to Turin itself numbered 2,627 in 1965; 10,328 in 1967 and 20,000 in the first 8 months of 1968 (10).

The waves of immigrants to the North caused an enormous upward pressure on population, well above their absolute numbers, because of the resultant changes in the age structure: the immigrants were predominantly young and the birth rate rose sharply. By 1968 the population of Turin had increased from 719,300 in 1951 to 1,145,250; an increase of 59.2% in less than 15 years (11).

The population increase and the problems it caused were most severe in the suburban 'belts' around Turin, as the scarcity of non-luxury accommodation and rising rents in the inner city forced the new arrivals into the expanding ghettos outside the centres, far from the social infrastructure of schools, shops, hospitals etc. In fact, while the population growth between 1961 and 1968 was 7.50% for the whole of Italy and 10.50 and 10%

for Piedmont and Turin respectively, the population increase in the councils of the 'second belt' around Turin was 33%, and in the 'first belt' it reached 67% (12).

The following table gives the absolute and percentage population increases for the local authority areas making up these 'belts' around Turin between 1961 and 1967.

Table III (13)

LOCAL COUNCIL	1961	1967	% INCREASE
BEINASCO	5,511	12,946	134.9
NICHELINO	14,907	36,186	142.7
GRUGLIASCO	13,664	29,202	113.7
RIVOLI	20,253	36,381	79.6
SETTIMO	18,292	34,040	86.0
COLLEGNO	21,282	33,936	59.4

Virtually nothing was done to improve housing and services to meet the needs of the inhabitants of the new ghettos.

FIAT was the major factor behind the population expansion: although new workers at FIAT directly accounted for a relatively small proportion of the increase, to this we must add not only the wives and the children of the workers - according to the council statistics every new worker in Turin brought with him another 3 persons (14) - but also all the new workers in all the productive cycles induced by FIAT and their wives and children. But FIAT effectively washed its hands of the

problem, claiming that the new workers being taken on were largely turn-over replacement.

Public housing schemes, also, were entirely inadequate. The main government housing scheme, GESCAL (financed by a workers' contribution of 0.6% of wages, which employers were called on to match) built a total of 390,000 flats in all Italy between 1949 and 1971. In Turin, GESCAL's building programme of 652 flats in 1963 was already absurdly inadequate. But by 1969 the annual programme had been improved only marginally, to 772 flats, for which 17,842 families were optimistic enough to apply (15).

"... when the massive inflow of immigrants came from the South the only thing they found was a boss, a machine, a wage to be earned, a job to be done. That's all. There were no houses, no health services, no schools, no nothing. There was no attempt to set up the facilities that would make it possible for these people to live as well as work. So that, of course, the city exploded. You can't have people working 8-10 hour shifts in the car factories and then sleeping rough in the railway stations at night without some kind of explosion" (16).

The consequence of the combination of a sudden and severe population explosion and the failure to provide any new services and facilities are all too imaginable. Rents rocketed: in 1969 a family flat cost from 30 to 40 thousand lire a month, while a room in a pensione in the city, shared with 5 others, would cost anything from 15,000 lire a month. This while the average FIAT worker,

with his 'privileged' wage, was earning around 100,000 to 110,000 lire a month. 'Bed sharing' became a common solution:

"In a pensione in Via Barbaroux the beds are rented out on the basis of work shifts; with three workers sleeping alternately on the same bed; one on the 6-2 shift, a second who goes into the factory as his flatmate leaves and a third who works the night shift" (17).

In theory, given wages of about 100,000 Lire per month for a 3rd category (unskilled) worker, rent accounted for about one third of wages; but in practice the situation was much worse. Few workers found it physically possible to earn a full month's wage. Absenteeism was running at about 12-13% in this period (against 5-6% in other industries) which means that most workers took about 3-4 days off a month. Thus although FIAT workers earned relatively higher wages than those in other industries, most of them found it very hard to cope financially. A FIAT worker talks about the problem he faced on arrival in Turin in 1969:

"When we arrived in Turin my wife wasn't working and I was earning 135,000 Lire a month. It was a real drama trying to find a place to live we could afford on my wage: I found accommodation with one room, a kitchen and a bathroom at 25,000 Lire, and, with my money, we could only just manage to make ends meet; we didn't have any savings, I bought all our furniture second hand... As I couldn't manage with

just one wage I looked for a second job. First I found part time work as a painter..." (18).

Another worker confirms this picture in an interview with Luciana Castellina in 1969:

"I get 100,000, but I just can't work the whole month, so in reality I find about 80,000 Lire in my wage packet. At Grugliasco, where I live, I pay 32,000 Lire rent for two rooms. I've had to get a moped because with public transport as it is... it was alright 20 years ago. I'm 34, I work on the line in the 3rd category, I haven't got a career, I can't have children because I haven't got any money; I work to survive. If FIAT burnt down, what would I have to lose?" (19).

And in fact for all of those who left their Southern smallholdings for the North with little other than their battered suitcases, their expectations of the high wages they had been promised - perhaps enough to buy a plot of land or help out with extra money those they had left behind - the story was the same. For mothers, wives and daughters exhausting work cooking and cleaning for the men; attempting to make the best of what little living space the family could afford, and covering for the inadequate services, especially in health and education. For the men, physically and mentally exhausting work in the factories compensated with a wage which was barely adequate to meet the most basic of needs. What, indeed, did they have to lose?

... and in the Factory

In addition to the growing contradictions outside the factory, constituted by appalling conditions of housing and services, another contradiction was opening up in the factory in the form of rapidly worsening working conditions and relatively low wages in a period characterized by high profits, imperialist expansion and low unemployment.

Italian employers, with FIAT in the lead, had begun to introduce Taylorian techniques of work organization in the 1930s, during the fascist regime. But it was not until the late 40s and early 50s that an extreme division of labour and highly mechanized plant became general throughout FIAT. In the 1950s, as we have seen, massive investment in machinery was coupled with the process of deskilling, and the older, more experienced workers were put to work on less skilled jobs or, particularly in the case of the more militant among them, sacked. At the same time a new generation of younger unskilled workers began to be brought in to operate the mechanized assembly lines.

From the mid 50s the transition to automated processes began. With the new automated lines producing small popular cars, such as the new 500 introduced in 1958, costs per unit dropped, and the process of the 'motorization' of Italy began.

But the price of cars for the people was paid in the factory.

From the mid to the late 50s, then, FIAT had pursued a policy of heavy investment in new automated lines

and plant. But by about 1958-59 this process had been largely completed and FIAT was ready to begin a period of intensification of the use of the new plant. Productivity took off sharply from the late 50s, reaching a high point in 1967, when the onset of the cycle of struggles 1968-69 led to its sharp decline. Increasing productivity from 1958 on cannot be explained, however, as it can for the preceding period, by massive increases in new technologies of automation. In fact, the ratio of fixed capital to worker remained very steady throughout the early sixties.

To obtain this vast increase in production on the plant already existing FIAT pushed working speeds up to the maximum, and so called 'porosity', those moments which workers snatch for themselves from the incessant rhythm of the machinery, was as far as possible eliminated. So strenuous was work inside FIAT that only young, strong workers were taken on. Luciano Parlanti talks about being taken on at FIAT in 1959:

"It was difficult just to pass the health check: if you had anything, they didn't take you on. They had to have healthy people if they wanted to exploit them really thoroughly" (20).

The workers now seemed powerless to resist the pace of the machinery, which almost daily crept up. In May 1967, workers on the 124 sports model line in shop 56 Mirafiori produced 60 vehicles per shift. By June 1967, the same complement of workers was producing 112. Between 1965 and 1966 production at Villar Perosa had

increased by 18.7%, while the number of workers employed there was reduced by 3.1% (21).

Pauses and breaks, once an integral part of the work, essential to think out the task in hand, were now dictated by management. The workers were governed by the machinery itself and by strict regulations, which were policed by eagle-eyed foremen. Parlanti again:

"The discipline at FIAT was like this: once you had clocked on you started work, you had no contact with your workmates, you couldn't talk in groups of more than three, you could only eat during the ten minute break. In those ten minutes you could eat and go to the toilet, but there were always huge queues at the toilets because they never gave you a replacement during working hours. They should have given you a replacement to go to the toilet but the foremen never gave you one, instead they told you to work harder to get ahead with the work so that they'd give you maybe a quarter of an hour's break instead of ten minutes. Some people pissed in the car bodies to save time and because they couldn't hold it in any more. I had to piss in the car bodies a lot of times. Then the departmental foreman called us together to tell us that urine oxidized the car bodies and we shouldn't urinate in them any more. So then we pissed into coca cola bottles" (22).

But apart from the increasing monotony, stress and alienation deriving from the speed up, the factory worker in this period was facing worsening health and safety conditions. Pressure was put on workers to work without

basic safety precautions, operating machinery without safety guards etc. The machinery, squashed closer and closer together to save on that precious commodity space, produced increasing levels of noise, fumes and vibrations.

In this situation the workers' only defence against the risk of damage to his or her own body posed by un-guarded machinery, falling loads, flying sparks, noise, vibrations, toxic fumes, dust, heat, poor lighting, poor ventilation etc., is statutory regulation of the working environment. And of this in the 1960s in Italy, there was virtually none. The legislation that did exist was a legacy from the fascist period, and gave no definition of limits to damaging factors: it was helpfully decreed that, for example, machinery should be 'opportunely spaced' etc. Apart from regulations concerning minors, working hours and holidays, then, there was little or no preventive control of the working environment.

Any approach to the question was almost entirely limited to the entitlement to monetary compensation for damage or injury already incurred. Thus if a worker was injured, incapacitated or killed by some work related factor or factors he or she could in some cases receive a monetary indemnity. These were anyway heavily restricted by time limits and the obligation of clear proof of liability of the firm.

Such proof was normally virtually impossible to provide, especially given the pressure on workers to work without safety precautions. For these reasons, in fact, statistics on industrial accidents do not reflect the real situation in the factory in this period.

The callous attitude of management towards danger in the factory in this period is revealed in a comment made by a Turinese engineer, working for a medium size factory. When asked if it wouldn't be better to use a mechanical hand for a particularly dangerous task he replied: "Yes, a mechanical hand could be substituted here for a human one, but if it got caught it'd break the machine" (23).

But how were the workers made to work in these conditions? Braverman has shown us how mechanization, automation and the division of labour is in itself a form of control, taking away from the workers the intrinsic cognitive element in work and hence their control over how a job is done. But as we shall see, mechanized series production, because of its rigidity, is in many ways more vulnerable to the collective or individual rebellion of the workers, as delay at one step in the process of assembly will result in cumulative confusion and delay at all the succeeding steps. The imposition of a speed up of the line is thus not enough alone to ensure the cooperation of a self-confident labour force if the employers' political and social domination over the work force has weakened, as it had in Italy in the 1960s.

As we have seen, the employers were unable or unwilling to provide reformist solutions to their problems of political and social domination of the labour force, for example through an integration and cooptation of workers' representatives.

The control mechanisms FIAT employed in the 1960s were on the one hand the attempt to continue an open

policy of repression of trade union and political forces within the factory, a strategy which had however become insufficient given the new climate of rebellion, and on the other the use of the variable part of wage to privilege 'good' conduct, to divide workers and to sow suspicion in their ranks. The worker was thus incentivated to work first of all by company discipline, and then by the promise of special payments, bonuses and promotion.

### **The Wage and Skill Hierarchy**

The advantages to capital of bonuses and a hierarchical grading system are clear. Firstly, some of the dangers of an increasingly homogeneous working class concentrated in one work place, every day becoming more aware of the similarity of their situation and of their potential collective power, could be averted by creating false divisions, suspicions and rivalry. This concept is more vividly and simply summed up by Parlanti:

"They used the grades to create 'sucking up'. In fact, when someone got the second category you didn't say 'Oh, you've got the second category! How clever of you'. You called him a creep, because to get the second, he hadn't done a series of jobs, he'd given a series of information to the foreman" (24).

Secondly, and related to this, interminable individual controversies over grading could disperse working class energy, redirecting mass struggles into individual

ones. This has a secondary effect of strongly bureaucritizing the unions to cope with the disputes.

In fact, wage calculation had become enormously complex. Lotta Continua claimed in the early 1970s that there was only one comrade in the whole of Turin who was able to read the pay slips (25). This was not only because of the highly stratified grading system, but also because of the enormous importance of the variable element in wages, relating to production bonuses, danger compensation etc.: in fact, in the 1950s and 1960s only about 50% of pay was basic wage (26).

The enormous variation in wages, then, was a political weapon for the employers. It could be used to punish the so called 'destructive elements', bribe the weaker - the family men who needed every penny they could get - and encourage collaboration. Promotion up the grades, which was not automatic but required the production of the anachronistic capolavoro or masterpiece (although this had become more or less symbolic), was used as a form of bribery, a prize for the 'good' worker.

Thus, when the nearly full employment of the early 1960s made the threat of the sack less effective; when the general political climate (with the Centre Left government and the rebirth of combative reformism in the trade union movement) would no longer permit a crude political domination, the wage and skill hierarchy could still provide FIAT with a point of leverage over its workers.

But this weapon was under threat. As we shall see, the unskilled workers brought in from the South in-

creasingly rejected the link between wages on the one hand and skill, productivity and danger on the other. Throughout the 1960s the falsely scientific notions underlying the hierarchy were uncovered and the workers formulated demands aimed first and foremost at severing this connection. The young immigrants, with their 'bad manners' and their lack of industrial skills and experience, turned FIAT upside down.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE BLOCKED BRAINS OPEN UP: THE 'HOT AUTUMN' OF 1969

Looking back on that explosion of anger and rebellion climaxing in the 'hot autumn' of 1969 it is difficult to arrive at a satisfactory description, let alone an analysis of the events; to distinguish fact from fiction, myth and prejudice in the heated debate among the various 'camps' claiming vanguard status in the unravelling of the events which were to change permanently the balance of power on the factory floor, providing that 'kick in the teeth' as one manager was later to describe it (1) which forced the employers to re-think the entire organization of production in the factory.

For reasons of clarity I have divided the analysis of the class sections and forces involved in the rebellion against capital into three: the 'official' labour movement; the semi-official movement of the delegati and the unofficial movement. It should of course be born in mind that the situation was confused and fluctuating: not all the various actors retained their roles throughout; not all of them even fell into one in the first place.

#### **The Growth of Rebellion and the Official Labour Movement**

The union presence on the factory floor was by now at a low ebb. The official organizations were in fact more often than not pushed into declaring industrial

action, rather than leading or determining the growing opposition in the factory. The Financial Times described the situation like this:

"... (the unions') authority over their members has weakened very seriously. Six years ago unauthorized wild cat strikes were all but unthinkable, but are now an almost daily occurrence.

The loss of authority of the unions is an ominous sign: in the last few months, in many cases, they have been ignored by their adherents. Attempts to recapture loyalty have driven the unions to legitimize and justify, after the event, actions for which they would never have given permission and of which in private the union leaders themselves have been highly critical. Management are often baffled and bewildered because they do not know who to argue and bargain with as the official union leaders admit they are not in control while they refuse to disown sudden claims and stoppages" (2).

Thus the official trade union movement was forced to a certain extent to radicalize. But they nevertheless failed to become a real theoretical and organizational point of reference for the great majority of FIAT workers in this period.

There were of course many factors which helped to determine the unions' weakness in the factory, but first of all was the relative 'backwardness' of their theoretical positions and political practice in relation to other groups working in and around FIAT. Consciously or unconsciously the trade unions had seemingly accepted

the basic capitalist premise that the exchange of labour power for wage is fair, and that the labour process is thus neutral, determined by scientific, technological and rational progress alone. The acceptance of this premise limited the unions' opposition to a re-negotiation of the terms of this exchange - wages, working hours, skill grades and so on. But the workers in 1969 were to launch a series of demands which, taken as a whole, called into question the 'common sense' notion that the labour process is neutral. In this situation the unions' politics and practice were simply less appropriate for many of the workers than were the ideas coming out of the students' movement and the radical groups which coagulated around the struggle in FIAT.

The question thus becomes: why did the unions in 1968-69 not develop a more appropriate line?

The general historical and structural reasons behind the development of an overcentralized and highly bureaucratic organizational form, insensitive to the changing needs and directions of the rank and file are treated elsewhere. But there were also some particular factors both reflecting and aggravating the weakness of the unions inside FIAT.

Firstly the unions at FIAT had not really recovered from the hammering they had received during the 1950s and early 1960s. As we have seen, the unions, and particularly the 'class union' - the CGIL - had suffered a total defeat in the elections for the Commissione Interna in 1953 (3); and they had remained very weak at FIAT ever since, even in comparison to their generally

weak presence in other companies in Italy. In 1969 the CGIL, the strongest union in terms of numbers, organized only 3000 workers out of a total workforce of 140,000 (4). This works out as less than 5%, against the national figure for unionization in the engineering industry of about 15%. At Mirafiori, FIAT's biggest plant, the Commissione Interna in 1969 numbered just 21 members, who were supposed to protect the interests of 56,000 workers. As well as this structural and numerical weakness, the older union cadres had inherited from the 1950s a conditioning which had engendered a sort of natural caution in all their activities, which impeded in turn a qualitative and quantitative renaissance of the union movement in FIAT.

There was also a cultural reason for the unions' failure in the late 60s to create a real rapport with new, younger labour force and to shape and direct the growing frustrations of the workers, especially the young Southern immigrants.

The union federations were dominated by men from Piedmont. The typical trade union cadre in the factory tended to be an older man with a long tradition of industrial work and struggle; many had been union militants in the factory during the resistance period, more than 20 years before. But as we have seen, the composition of the labour force had changed enormously. Some 60% of FIAT workers were now immigrants from the South. They tended to be young, and lacking in any form of industrial experience: their culture was that of the small agricultural village or town of the South. Most of them even spoke what was effectively another language,

as Southern dialects are often virtually unintelligible to the Northerner and vice versa. The political traditions of the Southern immigrants were furthermore entirely 'foreign' to the union cadres of the big factories of the North. As we shall see, the young Southerners were entirely unused to the language of negotiation employed by the unions with management.

The unions, then, were numerically weak and psychologically and culturally handicapped in the development of an immediate dialogue with the new, radicalizing working class at FIAT.

The general weakness of the unions, and the workers' diffidence towards them is illustrated by the following quotes, taken from the account by Domenico Norcia, a FIAT worker, of his first contacts with the union in 1969, on his return from Germany, where he had been an immigrant worker.

"When I talked about union organization they told me that here in Italy the union wasn't up to much; they didn't put too much trust in it because there were people in the union who had 'sold out'. I tried to explain to them that I believed we had to organize because if the union came into the factory certain problems could be resolved. They continued to demonstrate an enormous lack of faith in this argument right from those first days".

Norcia goes on to talk about his first contact with the union in the factory:

"One day I saw a group of workers talking animatedly with a person who was arguing more or less the same things I was arguing in my team. When the discussion calmed down I started talking with him; I told him I was working at FIAT, that I'd just arrived from Germany, and, seeing as he was saying similar things to me, I asked him 'What do you have to do to join the union?' He looked at me, astonished and answered: 'I've been coming here for a month to talk about this with the workers, I'm from the union'. This comrade... was a full-timer, and now he tells me he was really surprised then, when I asked him that question, because there he was trying to get the workers to join the union and then a worker asked him spontaneously" (5).

According to Luciano Parlanti, the Southerners not only did not see the unions as their organization, but actually seemed to treat them as a sort of job bureau:

"(The Southerners) still had a bit of a strange relationship with the workers' organizations. I remember when the Commissione Interna went round the shop floors collecting subscriptions, the Southerners said: 'Eh, I work too hard here, I'll only pay the subscription if you find me a better job'. Everyone tries to use the Commissione Interna to get better conditions for themselves through 'recommendation'. In fact those who took out a subscription, especially with the UIL - as the UIL was privileged by the employers in those days - were often given slightly lighter work. That's why the

UIL won in 1960 in the elections for the Commissione Interna".

Still according to Parlanti, 'recommendations' were, however, about the only thing the workers' organizations were able to provide in the factory:

"But when I joined FIAT in 1959, I saw the blokes there working liked damned men, Christ, there was a vacuum, there was no one there to help them. When I'd been working there a year I still hadn't seen the Commissione Interna; you never saw a bulletin, you never saw anything..." (6).

But if the unions were unable to provide either the theoretical weapons or organizational support for sustained struggle, which were the organizational nuclei in the late 1960s capable of collecting and distributing information and funds, developing debates and overseeing the day-to-day planning of the actions? Because of course such structures did exist, although their relative importance in the development of a theoretical base from which to draw up the demands and alternative strategies for their pursuit, as well as in the day-to-day organization of the struggle, will inevitably remain at issue.

The wave of anger and rebellion of the young shop floor workers in the late 1960s found an organizational and theoretical moment in two main areas: the delegati - roughly similar to our shop stewards - and the assemblies and other contacts with the Students' Movement and

the extra-parliamentary left in general. These 'areas' grew up in and with the struggles.

I will argue that these two organizational moments had different, though overlapping and complementary roles to play in the development of the events of the 'hot autumn'. While the *delegati* and the *consigliere* (the worker-delegate assemblies) were crucial in the daily defense of the workers inside the factory; in the organization of the slow down of work speeds as well as in the day-to-day organization and promotion of the struggle, the worker-student assemblies provided the forum for the discussion and development of a truly alternative line.

### The 'delegati'

The *delegati* were at first autonomous expressions of workers' self organization; neither part of an official workers' organization nor recognized by the company. Many of them were in fact union members, but they were not elected as representatives of one federation or another, and were frequently actually militantly autonomous from the unions. This autonomy was expressed first of all with their refusal to accept membership of a union as a valid label or guarantee of conduct. A reporter for La Rinascita writes about a meeting of newly elected line delegates in June 1969:

"There are about 20 workers, most of whom had been elected as line *delegati* just a few days before, and three trade unionists, one from the FIOM and two from the FIM-CISL. When the draft for agreement on

the delegati is brought up for discussion, there is no mention of the union affiliation of Paolo Delpiano or Franco Serafino. Nobody speaks in the name of their union or even bothers to mention it" (7).

The role of the delegati was first and foremost that of direct intervention on the organization of work in the factory; in the battle, that is, against the peremptory rhythms of the machinery. The delegati were needed, in fact, not so much to lead and direct the political development of the struggle as to find out the labour complements, timings, production targets and so on for each line or shop and use this information to improve working conditions and impose a real slow down of the lines:

"The delegati were in fact born from the need to control the norms governing piece-rates. At FIAT, for example, they managed to impose a real slow down of production. They were also needed to control promotion arrangements, to impede the unilateral assignment of a category by management and break the discriminatory despotism of the company hierarchy" (8).

However, the function of the delegati was from the first ambiguous, particularly in relation to their activities as workers' representatives in negotiations with management. The left groups, not completely without reason, viewed them with suspicion. It was held that the employers, given the absence of a coherent and authori-

tative trade union organization, needed identifiable interlocutors from the shop floor who could be isolated in negotiations carried on behind closed doors. The following account of an incident in which management itself called for the proposal of representatives illustrates this point:

"Monday 19th May. (The workers) strike for the whole of the first shift. For the first time they break through the barrier of the teams and the first all-shop assembly begins. A group of departmental foremen proposes talks with a delegation of workers, but the proposal falls.

Thus it was management that called for the election of delegates.

The assembly answered that it would be more convenient for them if management sent its representatives to the workers' assemblies. This position was a workers' response to those who were proposing the election of a shop floor delegate: 'the most politically conscious, the ablest, most politicized worker on the shop floor'. But classification is not a workers' forte. Nobody is more able than the boss in such matters" (9).

The suspicion was that the employers were hoping to persuade the workers back to more traditional and less damaging forms of struggle with the creation of delegati. It was hoped that the rebellious instincts of the young Southerners could be tamed by a renovation of the trade union movement based on the emergence of a new and more appropriate sort of representative:

"Now, when the agreements were being negotiated in 1969... the bosses wanted to put the working class, and particularly the new fringes of the working class, back under the control of the unions. The main idea that they were bringing forward to do this was the idea of the line delegate. But the delegate system was completely rejected, because it had no material basis for existence in the struggle. It was something that had grown out of the Factory Council movement, out of the ideology of the skilled worker, control over the job etc. It had nothing to do with the traditions of a worker whose first feeling was to smash the machinery, and who would like to kill the boss if he could, the man who throws chunks of metal at the foreman... the new kind of 'mass worker' who exists now in those factories" (10).

In fact, although the delegate appeared as an independent response to a real need for a structure capable of organizing a daily resistance to working conditions under the capitalist labour process, management was from the first aware of their potential use in the domestication of a struggle that was getting out of hand. The power balance on the factory floor had been too radically upset, the workers' attack on capitalist relations of production was too deeply rooted, too capillary and too violent to be resolved with the old combination of 'fear stuff' and 'sweet stuff'. Management was thus forced to resign itself to losing a certain degree of its unilateral power to impose a maximum intensification of production, at least until

such time as the workers' movement could be brought back under control. Management was itself caught in a cleft stick. The 'choice' of favouring the development of the delegati was not a free one, but a decision to make the best of a bad job - to attempt to integrate and contain the real attack on managerial control of the labour process and to lead the struggle back into the more familiar territory of trade union based industrial relations.

The unions, too, expressly desired recognition for the delegati. The federations, especially the CGIL and the CISL, during the preceding years of reflection and self-criticism had recognized the growing detachment of the leadership from the rank and file, and posed the 'recuperation' of their estranged base as the first problem to be resolved. Clearly the delegati, given their close contact with and sensitivity to the shop floor and their meaningful role in the day-to-day struggles of the rank and file, could help to fill the growing gap if they could be brought within the auspices of the official workers' movement. Thus the demand for the delegati, to be elected from the three federations in proportion to their respective presences on the factory floor, was one of the unions' major objectives in this period.

Thus, before the 'hot autumn' was fully under way, and almost as soon as the delegati appeared as de facto organs of workers' power on the factory floor, management conceded them a partial and limited recognition in the company agreement signed with the federations on June 26th 1969.

The agreement conceded the nomination of only 56 delegati (called esperti in the agreement), who were to be nominated by the trade unions in proportion to the respective numerical strengths of the federations on the factory floor. The June agreement, and others following it, strongly limited the scope of the delegati, conceding them the mere 'right of intervention' in internal negotiations - for example over production targets, labour complements etc. - alongside of the old Commissione Interna.

The attempt to 'bureaucratize' and integrate the delegati was not, however, a complete success. Even the officially recognized esperti identified themselves closely in the rank and file struggle, and frequently insisted on democratic election or at least ratification by the other workers: "... I was nominated by the union, the FIOM. But both the union and I asked the other delegati if they were happy with this - if they hadn't been I'd have renounced the post" (11).

The delegati, in fact, continued to be an effective weapon in the workers' struggle. Unofficial delegati di squadra (team stewards) continued to operate alongside the union nominated esperti, and in many cases - depending on the individuals concerned and the balance of class forces in any given situation - together they were able to organize and crystallize resistance and spread the struggle to more 'backward' shops, even after the signing of the agreement:

"These delegati di linea... were born more as an application of an agreement than as the fruit of

popular experience, but they have anyway begun to reveal themselves as an element in the possible structuring of the discontented and disaggregated collision force of the mass of workers. These delegati have begun, in some situations, to organize strikes and go-slows. Management has tried to transfer the more combative among them but the workers defended them" (12).

However, with their new official status and partial integration into the historical organizations of the working class, the delegati lost much of their former effectiveness, an effectiveness which had been based precisely on their autonomy from the moribund official organizations. As they began to lose that autonomy, they also began to lose the trust they had engendered in their work-mates - and hence a large part of their effectiveness as shock troops in the battle for control on the factory floor. As one worker later commented: "We made the delegati, as a direct workers' expression. Then the unions turned them into their thing!" (13).

### **The Unofficial Workers' and Students' Movements**

Perhaps the major vehicle for the generation and spreading of new ideas, the formulation of a platform of demands and the organization of the struggles should be looked for in the activities of the workers' and students' movements working around and inside FIAT from the early 1960s and particularly in 1969.

The struggle at FIAT, especially from 1968 to 1969, was very strongly influenced by the theories and practical activity of various 'external' revolutionary groups, who debated with the workers, published newspapers aimed at a readership within the big factories and helped with the preparation of leaflets etc. In fact, these groups were not really external. Many of the groups were rapidly infused with workers: for example, by the early 70s Lotta Continua ('the struggle goes on') had about 45 members in Mirafiori, mostly in the body plant and press shop, and about 20-25 members in Rivalta (14).

The presence of the groups and the diffusion of their ideas through the workers' struggles - a diffusion which occurred largely through the organ of the 'worker-student assemblies' and the various newspapers - was of an importance which could not be ignored by even the stiffest trade union or party member. The workers, as is lamented from these quarters, went as far as to shout 'Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh', or 'the people are strong and they will win' alongside their more traditional slogans on demonstrations (15).

The diffusion of the ideas of the students' movement and left groups was organized first and foremost through the massive, fluid and semi-permanent organ of the worker-student assemblies, often held in a hospital which had been occupied by medical students and Junior doctors.

The students and members of the left groups seemed to be, if anything, slightly surprised by the immediate success of the assemblies:

"One time the students went down to the factory gates and handed out a leaflet inviting workers to come and participate in a meeting in the hospital, about the health situation of workers in factories. We expected that perhaps 10 workers would turn up, or something like that. But to our amazement, something like 200 workers turned up, along with about 400 students. It was a very crowded meeting, and, of course, the workers didn't talk about health but about the struggles they were having in the factory, the conditions of work, the exploitation, what it was like working on the assembly line etc. And the students were completely surprised. You even had hospital patients coming down to the meeting to see what was going on...

As a result of this, the next day the students went down to the factory again, and again the day after. They began to make contact with the workers. And this was the first time that workers had seen students giving out leaflets, coming regularly to the factory gates at 5.00 in the morning etc. They knew that it was only the students who were prepared to do this... since the unions were absent from those struggles" (16).

The worker-student assemblies were held nearly every day for the three months from May to July 1969. The assemblies were not only a forum for the transmission of ideas but also the centre for much of the practical and strategic planning of the struggle; a place where slogans were developed, leaflets and information

bulletins written etc. The students help in this was directly requested by the workers themselves:

"Every day the assemblies unite workers and students to evaluate the point the struggle has reached, to write the leaflets which will be distributed the following day and so on.

At present, over the last few days, this external-internal diaphragm has worn very thin, it's changing. The workers have decided that organizational problems - not only concerning information but also concerning more directly political problems such as decisions about the way strikes should be conducted, how long they should be protracted, should be discussed in common.

The workers have requested that the leaflets be transformed from an organ of information to an organ which is able to supply slogans, direction and demands for the strikes and the struggle in general. In this way they have involved the students more and more closely in the responsibility for organization" (17).

The assembly was especially important for the generation of ideas and innovations in the struggle, and the crystallization of the content of the demands. The mass discussions with the students allowed the workers to express what they intuitively felt and to clarify their ideas:

"It was in those meetings where you heard the most impressive, most clear and sharp analyses of

immigration, of deskilling, of the history of a new working class coming out from the struggles of FIAT workers. After a few hours of talking and discussion, we would finish the meeting and try to round up some of the people who had spoken, so as to write out a leaflet to be given out at the factory the next day. Then we'd go down to the factory and meet the second shift coming out, and we'd come back to the hospital and carry on the meeting, sometimes till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning! And then preparing another leaflet. This went on for the whole of May, June and July 1969" (18).

The assemblies allowed for the confluence of fresh ideas from outside - the students and intellectuals who participated often came from as far away as Pisa and Rome and camped outside the factory gates to take part in the discussions and struggles. Various different political groups brought to the assemblies the ideas and theories that in some cases they had been developing and discussing for more than a decade: the 'scatters' around journals which had largely developed from the operaista (workerist) tradition; 'La Classe, Potere Operaio; groups from the general Movimento Studentesco (Students' Movement), born from the struggles in the schools and universities in 1968. Another very important tendency that was born from the assemblies themselves, was Lotta Continua which took its name and the title of its journal from a slogan which developed in the assemblies.

The Italian extra-parliamentary left had developed an extremely rich theoretical tradition, particularly in

the workers' struggles of the 1960s and during the students' movement of 1968; and they were able to share this tradition with the workers to a far greater extent than their French counterparts.

The reason behind this close integration in the workers' struggles was a combination of interrelated factors: first of all the general appropriateness of their theories to the unskilled workers in the factory, but also a tighter psychological and physical vicinity to the workers in struggle.

Most students in Italy remain to study in the area they were born and brought up in. The strength of family ties in Italy is in fact due perhaps as much to the general lack of grant support and social security benefits as to traditions of Catholicism, as living at home was and still is a simple economic necessity for many. The students were thus likely to be more in touch with the realities of the workers' lives; were more familiar with them as real people - relatives and neighbours rather than 'political subjects'. Given also that the universities were opened to all during the struggles of the students' movement climaxing in 1968, the students were not the elite that they are in many other countries; many were the sons and daughters of manual workers and themselves future workers, or at best unemployed 'intellectuals', given that there are not enough graduate jobs for all the graduates. Perhaps for these reasons the students were very able to mix with the FIAT workers at every level:

"It was really important that the workers and students were able to organize social things together as well. For instance, a silly example... the Faculty of Architecture was occupied for a period. It's a very fancy place, with gardens and a big fountain. The students removed the fountain and turned it into a swimming pool, and you'd find hundreds of people coming there to bathe, sit around, play guitars and so on" (19).

But these factors, although they may explain why students in Italy neither idealized nor patronized the workers, do not explain the importance of their theoretical traditions to the workers' movement. If the workers, failing to find a point of reference in the traditional organizations of the working class found another, alternative one in the organizations of the Students' Movement and extra-parliamentary left, the explanation must surely be sought in the relevance of the theories and practice of this alternative.

### **The Influence of the Left Groups on the Formulation of the Workers' Demands**

The left groups and the students' movement recognized far more clearly than the unions the changes that had come about inside the factory, both in terms of the influx of a new sort of worker with a different culture and traditions, and in terms of the changes in the labour process, and thus in the sort of work the young immigrants were doing.

The influx of young Southerners into the factories corresponded to capital's need for a supply of young unskilled workers able to stand the speed up in the factory and the monotony of assembly line work. In this context, the traditional working class notion of the defence of skill or 'work pride' were entirely foreign. The confrontation with capital, then, could no longer be based, as up to now it had been, on the claim that the labour power given in exchange for the wage was a rare and valuable commodity whose cost should be proportionate to the years of training and experience embodied within it, as the labour power the new 'mass worker' had to offer no longer required years of training in specialist tasks.

Once the myth of skill, that traditional bargaining weapon of the trade union movement, had fallen, the only moment of power left for the worker was a direct and political confrontation with capital. The workers' strength in this situation comes not from the possession of rarely available skills, but from their ability to organize politically and fight back.

It was not only their objective lack of skill to bargain with that made the direct and confrontational approach of the revolutionary groups more relevant to the young FIAT workers, but also the fact of the more violent and insurrectionary political culture of the South, where so many of the new workers had been brought up. As one commentator later explained:

"(In the South) town halls getting burned to the ground is not something out of the ordinary. It

happens almost every week. It'll happen in one place, and a couple of weeks later people in the town down the road find out what happened, and go right ahead and do the same thing themselves. And to an outsider the issues often seem really trivial - like in one town where they burnt the town hall over the issue of who was to pick the strawberries that summer. The tradition of insurrection is very strong in the South. There's one town in Sicily which had 15 uprisings in two years, after the war. So that when these people come from the South the violence is already in their blood" (20).

The student and left groups had understood, far better than the unions and parties, that the 'new' working class in the big factory had changed in a very radical way. Not only did it tend, given its different traditions of struggle, to oppose itself to capital in an entirely different way, but it actually had to, given the failure of the rarity of skill as a moment of power in negotiations with capital.

These groups, then, offered a different approach in the theory which can be summarized as 'the refusal of work'.

### **The Theoretical 'Offer' of the Left Groups: the Refusal of Work**

With their understanding of the new class composition in the factory, elements of the extra-parliamentary left working around FIAT began to develop the theory of the 'refusal of work'. In reality, this

refusal was not of work as creative activity, but of work as exploitation - of the capitalist relations of work.

According to this theory, the refusal of work first manifested itself among the young immigrant workers in forms of evasion of work: absenteeism, leaving work once enough money had been earned for a long holiday, poor and slow work, and sabotage. As early as 1962 Romolo Gobbi wrote an article on these forms of refusal, for which he was arrested on the charge of 'instigation to criminal activity'. The following is an extract (the underlining is his):

"In their organization of sabotage, the workers express their refusal to return to the previous situation; that is, their refusal of productive normality.

For now the workers reduce their working hours by refusing overtime and holiday work, going off sick continually, or refusing tasks which are not strictly theirs. Or else they only get out 1/3 of the day's production, as happened recently at FIAT Grandi Motori when the workers were told to work on St. John's Day!" (21).

This defensive and individualistic form of the refusal of work developed into more organized and manifest forms. The struggles developed principally around demands for more money and less work. Negotiations launched by the unions for readjustments of the skill grading system, or for proportionate increases in incentives to make the wage 'more fair', were met with

general incomprehension by the workers, who began to extend union called strikes often without the formulation of any claim, or with the demand for equal rises for all or immediate promotion up the grades for the whole team or shop. These claims reflected the underlying demand for a wage detached from all notions of productivity or control, which corresponded, that is, to the workers needs, rather than those of capital. The following extract from La Classe, a journal that developed in part from the focal point of the worker-student assemblies, sets out this idea:

"The working class struggle concentrates its - wholly political - attack, aimed at the destruction of capital in its complexity of social relations, in its complexity of social and productive organization, around two tightly interconnected poles: the refusal of work and organization. The refusal of work, as the highest and most general point of confrontation with capital; organization as a political form of class autonomy... and the refusal of work, of fatigue, of expropriation, means, in positive, the peremptory demand for all power, the appropriation of all social wealth; at this point, the struggle for 'a social wage' (equal for all and linked to the material needs of the workers not to the bosses' productivity) is something qualitatively totally different from the negotiation of wage as a fair exchange for work" (22).

The demands developed within and around the assemblies on the basis of these ideas quickly caught on

within the factory.

### The Workers' Demands of 1969

The demands formulated by the workers closely reflected the theory of the refusal of work.

The first and most crucial element running through all the specific demands was, as we have seen, the attempt to detach wage from productivity, fatigue, unhealthy working conditions and so on. The basic demands which developed out of the logic of the refusal of work and which found a fertile terrain among the young immigrant factory workers, were summarized in the slogans:

MORE MONEY - LESS WORK  
NO TO THE NEGOTIATION OF PIECE RATES  
EQUAL RISES FOR ALL  
NO BARGAINING OF OUR HEALTH

These demands, then, formed a direct and political attack on the capitalist labour process, showing the workers' understanding of the real nature underlying its appearance as a neutral and necessary derivation from technological progress.

**Health Risks.** As we have already said, up until this period safety in the factory was almost entirely a matter for the employers. Preventive care: the regulation and limitation of damaging factors in the working environment (noise, fumes, dusts, chemicals, heat etc.) was left entirely to the employers' discretion. Only when an accident or illness had actually occurred did

the employer find himself under some legal obligation - to compensate the worker or his family with a monetary 'equivalent'. The employers thus bought the workers' health when they bought their labour power.

The struggle for a new approach to health in the factory started from 1969. The notion of monetary compensation was entirely rejected and the workers of many companies, often with the help of sympathetic doctors or medical students, began to inform themselves on the health risks present in their working environment through mass enquiries, normally based on questionnaires. Once armed with this information, the workers went on to demand the abolition of the health risks. The keys to these demands were summarized by Grisoni and Portelli: 1) Health doesn't have a price; 2) It's up to the workers, not to the employers, to evaluate the risks involved in a job; 3) It's up to the employers to eliminate health risks; 4) It's up to the workers to make sure they do (23).

**Skill Grading.** In Italy skill is graded according to criteria roughly based on theories of job evaluation. Up until 1969 the unions, rather than contesting the concept underlying the creation of a hierarchy of skill grades, had fought to make them more complex and refined and to improve promotion chances for individual workers.

In 1969 the rank and file showed their understanding of the arbitrary and unscientific nature of this hierarchy by pressing for its abolition with demands for automatic promotion up the categories, and 2nd category grading for whole shops at a time. The workers also

demanded wage rises equal for all, independently from skill category. The concession of these demands led to the existence of shops where all the workers were in the same category, to a general levelling of pay throughout the factory, and its disconnection from productivity and health risks.

On the question of skill grading, the traditional union stance was immovable. As late as May 1969, in fact, Bruno Trentin, the secretary of FIOM, defended the grading system with the words: "Skill is still an asset, a heritage of the working class; I don't see why, then, the employers shouldn't have to pay for it..." (24).

**The Organization of Work.** An enormous variety of demands and direct actions that directly contested the employers' unilateral control over the process of production arose from the rank and file in 1969 - including, of course, those set out in 1) and 2) above.

First of all were the direct interventions by the delegati to reduce line speeds, production targets, increase the complements of workers assigned to a job etc.

Equally important were the demands centering on information. The workers recognized the importance of knowing the timings that had been set, the agreed labour complements for each job, the number of substitutes to be assigned for each section, the general production targets for the department and so on. They realized that without such information they were even more the simple appendages of the machinery which ground on with no rationale which could be apparent to them; even less

able to know, and thus to some extent to control, the productive cycle; even more at the mercy of the arbitrary decisions of management. The workers demanded access to information in the form of the establishment in each shop of notice-boards clearly displaying the relevant data.

Almost every one of the above demands was in more or less direct contradiction to the previous trade union stance. As we have seen, the national union federations were not sensitive to the specific shop floor concerns, and they remained firmly entrenched in the old faiths, myths and rhetoric with no adjustments for the changing nature of work in the factory or for the changing consciousness of their potential membership. While the factory cadres, the members of the Commissione Interna, were in many cases sensitive to these changes, often to the point of total immersion in the 'new' movement, the ideas and demands arising from the rank and file through the 60s took a long time to percolate up to the federations' national headquarters in Rome.

In this period, then, official union policy on the question of the working environment and health in the factory was almost exclusively related to increasing and facilitating the monetary compensation to the workers or their families for disabilities or death arising from occupational diseases or accidents at work. Thus a document written by FIOM towards the end of 1968 affirms that: "Compensation for health and safety risks at work... now represents the only general gain that can be guaranteed in the work contracts in relation to problems

of the working environment, apart from some exceptions regulating normative aspects (working hours, holidays etc.)" (25).

It was only after the events of the 'hot autumn' that the federations, under pressure from the rank and file, began to change the official policy. Thus at the 7th National Congress of the CGIL, for example, a motion was passed repudiating 'any monetarization of risk' and recognizing that:

"The contestation of specific risk factors must be strictly linked to the contestation of more general factors in the deterioration of health deriving from the organization of work (the division and specialization of tasks, monotony, intensity of production speeds)" (26).

I have argued, then, that the very form of the struggle; its autonomy and the practice of direct democracy, freed the rank and file movement from official dogma (the latter relating as much to the credibility problems of the Italian Communist Party as to the daily welfare of the workers) and allowed them to arrive collectively, through daily discussions in the factory and worker-student assemblies, at a series of demands that went beyond a piecemeal bargaining for specific improvements in this or that aspect of the organization of work to challenge the common sense notion that the labour process had to be organized as it is, that it is a neutral product of scientific progress. The workers were demanding that they should not be made to pay, with

their bodies and their minds, the price of capital's need to accumulate.

However, the autonomy of the workers' movement from the traditional organizations of the working class did not only free it for the development of an entirely new platform of demands which directly contested the basis of capitalist relations of production, but also allowed for the emergence of imaginative forms of struggle.

The struggle for the new demands diffused rapidly through the plants. They appeared for the first time among the 8,000 auxiliary workers at Mirafiori, whose claims for *delegati*, equal wage rises for all, the abolition of the *capolavoro* or 'masterpiece' in promotion through the grades and immediate passage to the 2nd category for all were typical. Even after the first series of agreements were signed on the 28th May, the struggle continued to escalate, spreading rapidly to other sections and plants: Grandi Motori, Spa Centro, Lingotto, Rivalta, Materferro etc. In the 'hot autumn' an incredible total of 84 separate negotiations were opened in the FIAT group.

Management responded on the one hand with apparently generous concessions: as we have seen the *delegati* were quickly given official status, and many other workers' demands were also satisfied, and on the other with the old tactic of the sack. But despite heavy concentration of sackings on the 'hot points', the waves of activity; strikes, pickets, road-blocks, occupations, sit-ins and marches, continued and increased. The use of the 'articulated' struggles paralysed plant with only a

minimal reduction of wages. According to a management communiqué, in one month of struggle a total of 40 milliard of production was lost, while the wage bill was hardly reduced at all (27).

### **The Struggles of 1969: 'Pictures'**

From the 'battle of Corso Traiano' of July 3rd, in which thousands of workers, students and citizens engaged in running battles with the police through the streets of Turin from the afternoon to the early morning of the following day; to the 'kidnapping' of managers; to the tense and noisy cortei interni around the factory, the struggle of 1969 in FIAT departed not only from the ideological control of the union organizations but also from their traditional battle grounds and choice of weapons.

The Southerners, with - as Luciano Parlanti says "their 'bad manners' or whatever you want to call it" (28) - were a whole new concept in 'industrial relations problems'. Their form of struggle echoed the exasperated 'individual' explosions of anger which had been increasingly characteristic within FIAT through the 1960s. The language of the strike, of the corteo, of the violent eruption into the administrative buildings to back up demands with the menace of direct force, was much closer to the hearts of the Southern workers than the more cautious negotiations dear to the Piedmontese union cadres; and in the last analysis, given the absence of real bargaining power, it was also far more effective.

Another departure from union orthodoxy was the location of the struggle increasingly firmly at the point of production. The workers, by remaining within the factory in the *cortei interni*, assemblies, sit-ins and occupations, got to know their fellow workers and the geographical and social lay-out of the factory, and were able in this way to overcome what were perhaps the major problems caused by their relative lack of formal organization: the spread of information and the immediate formulation of a collective response to new situations.

In the belief that a strict chronology of the events of the 'hot autumn' would not only be tedious but would also add little to the reader's understanding of the tensions which underlay them and the forces which shaped them, I restrict myself here to a series of 'pictures' of struggle: of descriptions, selected from various sources, of moments which illustrate the novelty not only of the content but of the form of the struggle of those years.

These excerpts begin with three (edited) accounts of some of the events of the 'battle of Corso Tralano' on July 3rd: respectively a newspaper article, a law court report and the reminiscences of a student who participated. This was the day of a union-backed general strike against housing conditions in the city of Turin. Perhaps frightened by the tension in the city the unions did not convoke demonstrations or rallies; but the workers, students and citizens were not prepared to wait the day out at home:

"The most serious incidents occurred in the afternoon at Mirafiori. At 14.00 over two thousand demonstrators massed outside gates 2 Via Tazzoli and 18 and 20 Via Settembrini. Most of the demonstrators were young, many of them had come from other towns in Piedmont, or from Milan, Rome, Pisa and Trento. They waved red banners with no emblem and wore red kerchiefs of the same colour.

Many workers hold posters. They read: 'Union and bosses. Rip-off agreement', 'Against assembly line work we use assembly line strikes', 'Against the bosses, no production', 'All power to the workers', 'What do we want? We want everything'. The police take over the entrances. The demonstrators, arrayed on the other side of the road, throw stones at the police. A group of about 40 men attempts to disperse the shouting crowd, but fails. Reinforcements arrive and the order to fire tear gas is given...

(In Corso Unione Sovietica), momentarily cleared, a car transporter loaded with 12 cars arrives. The demonstrators suddenly reappear, many of them stripped to the waist, and block the transporter. The driver, hit with a stick, is forced to run away. Some demonstrators get into the transporter and move it to block the road. A heavy rain of stones falls on the vehicles. A '500' is destroyed, other cars are seriously damaged. All have their windscreens broken...

The battle continues. Corso Unione Sovietica is blocked for a few tens of metres at the level of Corso Giambone with cement pipes, equipment from a



nearby building site and the posts of road signs. Further up, at the corner of Via La Loggia, some workers are spreading the road surface with tar. The demonstrators arrive on the run, set fire to the material and block the road. At 19.30 the battle is still raging. In Corso Traiano police race down the road in vans and wagons, sirens wailing. The cars run up onto the pavements, racing up and down the two lanes in a rotary movement. The zone is saturated with tear gas. Tension rises to a maximum. The Carabinieri send a helicopter which flies around above the furious guerrilla war..." (29).

The next account of the same day is taken from a report to the Turin law courts:

"In the early afternoon of 3rd July 1969 several thousand people gathered in the vicinity of gate 2 of the FIAT Mirafiori plant in Corso Tazzoli. On the same day in Turin a strike was proclaimed by all the trade union federations (CGIL, CISL, UIL, SIDA, CISNAL) to call the authority's attention to the housing crisis, a problem which was particularly felt by a large number of Turinese workers and which had led to a massive adhesion to the strike by all categories of workers.

The union federations had not foreseen a march, but numerous groups of workers and students, extraneous to the parties and the traditional union organizations, had by means of leaflets and posters invited the citizens of Turin to gather in Corso

Tazzoli in the vicinity of the FIAT plant in order to march along the roads of Turin.

The public security authorities, who had not been given prior notice of the meeting or the march... had placed a large force formed of Carabinieri and police agents, brought in many cases from towns distant from Turin. The enormous number of demonstrators who occupied part of Corso Tazzoli and were refusing to keep it clear induced the commander of the forces of law and order to order the crowds away on several occasions between 15.00 and 16.00. Most part of the demonstrators, who had already been directing insults at the forces of law and order, resisted, throwing stones at the agents proceeding to clearance of the crowds. As the hours passed the situation assumed increasingly serious aspects; groups of demonstrators set up barricades particularly in the region of Corso Traiano where they had been pushed back by the charges of the forces of law and order. In the late afternoon the situation became dramatic; vehicles were set alight, shop windows smashed and building materials from nearby sites taken to construct barricades. All attempts to restore calm were in vain, despite the flow of police reinforcements, the firing of tear gas cannisters and continuous circuits by police vehicles.

The riots reached their height near the Faculty of Architecture of Corso Massimo D'Azeglio and towards night spread to the adjacent local authority areas of Moncalieri and Nichelino.

During the numerous and violent clashes very many people, about 200, were taken into custody as a result of acts of vandalism, resisting arrest, blocking the road or attempting to block the road" (30).

Lastly, the account of a participant in the riots of Corso Traiano:

"Now I'd like to say a bit about the riot in Corso Traiano in July 1969. This was on the occasion of a general strike that the unions had called for housing reform - part of the pattern of the union in those days, calling workers out on general strikes for reforms. At that time we had given out a leaflet suggesting that everyone should meet in front of the gates of the FIAT factory, and then have a big march so that we could spread the news and the contents of the FIAT struggle into the town of Turin itself. The slogans on the banners were: 'From the factory to the town'.

On the morning of the strike there were thousands and thousands of people in front of the gates. Don't forget that the Mirafiori factory alone employs about 55,000 workers. And the police were there in force, and took a hard line from the start. They didn't want a workers' march into the centre of the city, so they did everything they could to stop us forming up. They came in with their riot shields and batons, clubbing people and the whole thing turned into a riot.

Anyway we managed to form up the march in the street outside FIAT - a street where a lot of people live who work at FIAT. The march started off down the street, got as far as 3-400 yards, a crowd of people going down the street, no discipline, and in front there was a worker with a poster saying: 'What do we want? We want everything!' After 400 yards we found barricades set up by the police, with armoured vehicles and everything, intended to stop us. These forces were both police and Carabinieri - and you should know that both the police and the Carabinieri have their own riot squads. The police have the notorious Padova battalion, a real bunch of hardnuts, and the Carabinieri have the special squad from the officer school at Moncalieri - all volunteers, and anti-communists to a man.

We met this barricade at about 4.00 in the afternoon, and rioting started again. The first time the police and Carabinieri had managed to clear the place. Everybody had cleared off and scattered. As a result, we, the students, had thought it was all over for the day. So we gathered our forces and went back to the Faculty of Architecture to discuss what to do next. By the time we got there, the police were there as well, and there was rioting again, with tear gas grenades coming in through the windows and everything.

Now, when we finally got the meeting together, people were coming in saying that there were riots going on in Mirafiori and Corso Traiano. Of course, we didn't believe them because we thought it was all

over. By this time it was 6.00 p.m. and we decided to go back there. And the sight that met our eyes was incredible. There were thousands of people - old people, women, children - just rioting in an area of 2 kilometers around the factory. And those riots went on through the night till 4.00 a.m., and spread right through the Northern zone of Turin.

This was a very victorious fight. In at least two places there were squads of police who surrendered, waving white flags. We had exchanges of prisoners with the police. And the weapons were stones and petrol bombs, and barricades. Barricades of cars set on fire etc." (31).

The following extracts refer, instead, to a few instances of struggle inside the factory during 1969. The first is a newspaper report of a strike, corteo and demonstration which took place on October 29th:

"It's been another day of serious violence, brawls and acts of vandalism in the big engineering factories during the articulated strikes for the contract renewal negotiations...

The worst events of the day took place at Mirafiori. Yesterday morning, during an articulated strike, about 250 workers left the various shops brandishing iron bars, sticks, railings and steering wheel columns. The demonstrators invited other workers to follow them and a corteo of about 1,500 workers formed up and proceeded through the internal roads. Along the way the strikers upturned parked cars, broke windscreens and threw iron bolts. They then

gathered in front of the administration block and shouting appeals and slogans called for the office workers inside to abandon work. To avoid incidents management had the buzzer sound early for the end of work. But only a few of the office workers were able to reach the gates; the rest were blocked inside by the strikers.

In the meantime the 250 workers of the corteo inside the factory had decided to leave the factory and proceed to the car exhibition rooms where the opening ceremony was in progress. At the gates they were stopped by the police and asked to leave behind their sticks and bars. Only if this were done could they leave the factory. There was some verbal resistance. In the end the sticks were deposited and the police allowed the workers through. The demonstrators moved down Corso Traiano towards the 'Valentino'. At the junction with Corso Unione Sovietica, as they had not been followed by other workers from the corteo... they re-entered the factory. It was 11.00 a.m. About 50 demonstrators set off for the canteens where they upturned the food warmers containing the workers' lunches.

Another group of 100 demonstrators set off for the bodywork shop. Here they smashed completed bodies with iron bars; about 30 are now complete write-offs. The strikers then blocked the assembly lines for the 850 and 600 models. With blows of their iron bars they smashed the windscreens of two cars and damaged others. Boxes full of bolts and

components and heaps of tyres were upturned and the materials scattered through the shop...

The company reports that during the invasion of the paintshop groups of agitators armed with oxy-acetylene tanks and a blow torch attempted to sever the pipes connecting the reservoirs of paint to the spray plant...

At the beginning of the second shift one production line was unable to function due to damage, and could only be brought into production after 2 hours. At 12.15 calm returned to Mirafiori, and in the afternoon work went on undisturbed in the shops where articulated strikes were not called.

Other incidents occurred at FIAT-Rivalta. Yesterday the articulated strike was to finish at 10.00 a.m. But at 10.30 the factory's 6,000 workers abandoned work once again. They were incited to this action by a group of extremists who went around the various shops calling on the workers to strike. The demonstrators damaged painted and dented cars in the park with blows from their bars. They also entered the canteen and overturned the food warmers containing the workers' lunches. The Carabinieri claim that 3 workers were stripped naked by the strikers. At the end of the shift a group of workers stayed inside the factory to impede the recommencement of work activity. The company states that production was at a complete standstill in the afternoon.

Another group of workers stayed outside the factory where, in the meantime, a group of extremists from

Potere Operaio had gathered. At about 1.00 p.m. a coachload of workers from Cumiana arrived at Mirafiori. The demonstrators forced the coach to stop, surrounded it and let down its tyres. The coach was stranded between gates 7 and 9, Mirafiori. In the meantime other extremists formed road blocks along the main road, which remained closed for 2 hours.

The sides of the coach, stranded with its tyres flattened, were used as a sort of blackboard on which the extremists wrote slogans: 'Mirafiori, Lingotto we are with you; Rivalta workers in revolt' 'Potere Operaio', 'Unity in struggle'...

During the afternoon tension mounted and the news reaching Turin from Rivalta began to cause alarm. Some provincial level trade union officials hurried along to call on workers not to cede to the provocation of extremists calling for the occupation of the factory. At about 4.00 p.m. things quietened down.

At FIAT-Stura a corteo of workers from Spa broke down a gate and got into the components shop. At the starting motor plant some workers got into the administration block through the canteen roof. In the subsequent brawls a supervisor suffered severe bruising.

FIAT has made a rough estimate of the damages caused by the day's disorders; from which it seems that about 100 cars and car bodies have been damaged" (32).

The next extract, once again from an eye-witness account, is a description of a one night occupation of Mirafiori:

"The workers' response (to a mass lock-out due to a small strike by skilled workers) was to call an immediate 8 hour strike. First of all, the workers formed up and tried to get through to where the white collar workers were still working. They smashed up everything in sight... cars were tipped off the lines... everything was smashed up. Then they decided that they were going home. The police arrived in front of the plant - and at this time we had an absolutely mad chief of police in Turin called Voria. This man came in and ordered his men to start shooting their tear gas inside the factory. And the workers answer inside the factory was that every single car was turned off the lines and smashed. You could even hear the noise from outside the factory. And there were other people outside the factory, throwing stones at the police.

There was one fine moment, when the police arrested a comrade there. They took him and put him in a Black Maria. All at once, the workers who were sitting on the factory wall jumped down into the street and went into the wagon and freed the comrade. He was handcuffed to a rail inside the wagon, but they just tore the rail, and pulled him into the factory. Then, so he wouldn't be recognized they gave him a FIAT workers' overalls...

The occupation carried on, and of course, it wasn't easy, because that place has 25,000 workers on each shift, and you had a lot of people who didn't really understand what was going on... they just wanted to get home to their wives and kids. But one of the best things that happened during that occupation was that the workers were able to walk around inside the factory and began to know what it looked like. Before, nobody really knew anything apart from their own sections. And they discovered all sorts of ways to get through to other parts of the factory. It was a great situation. People were sleeping there; women were going in with their blokes; people were fucking inside the factory... and the occupation went on through to 5.00 next morning, when the last battalion of workers emerged in the morning fog, 250 strong (everyone else had gone by that time, shinning over the factory walls in the dark), every one of them shouting the slogan 'lotta dura senza paura' - We'll fight hard, We have no fear'" (33).

But the events of 1969 were not, of course, always so dramatic. Literally hundreds of brief 'articulated' strikes were carried out, nearly always accompanied with forms of internal activities: marches, sit-ins, assemblies and so on. The last of these 'pictures' is a brief, randomly selected, newspaper report of one such incident:

"At FIAT Mirafiori Avio the factory's four hundred white collar workers were unable to get out at lunch break: a group of strikers, formed of about 300

people, had a sit-in in front of the office block. Sitting on the ground and on the steps the workers blocked the 12.15 exit. The peaceful seige lasted until 16.15. Only at this time did the demonstrators move off allowing the office workers to go and eat" (34).

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## CHAPTER V

### THE NEW WAY OF MAKING CARS

#### FIAT and the Crisis of the 1970s

Much has been written in recent years about the crisis threatening the car industry, the single most important sector in advanced industrial economies by reason both of its direct affect as a producer and its indirect effect as a consumer.

The car industry is at the centre of a vast occupational 'wheel' inducing employment in spheres such as the component, distribution, repair and servicing industries and consuming a lion's share of all rubber, iron, steel, plastic etc. produced. It has been estimated that in Western Europe about 25% of workers in all non-agricultural industries are affected to some extent by the car industry (1). In Italy between 1970 and 1974 the car industry employed an average of 200,000 people (four per cent of the total active industrial labour force) to which must be added the 1.8 million in related and affected industries, giving a total of 2 million jobs (2).

The decline of this enormously important industrial sector is due to a series of relatively distinct factors. First amongst these is the problem of the increasing saturation of the market.

From the annual growth rates of over 15 % recorded in the 1950s the market of the 70s has stagnated to such a point that most estimates agreed world demand for cars would grow at no more than 3% annually between 1980 and 1985, with an even lower growth rate in the European

market. This, in the face of increasingly strong competition from Japan and to a lesser extent European-based American producers could not but mean bad news for the smaller European manufacturers. As early as 1975 the British Central Policy Review Staff forecast a 35% over-capacity in the Western European car industry leading to intense competition and low profits (3). The problem of saturation became even more severe with the general decline in buying power in industrialized countries; a second car or the early replacement of an ageing model are sacrificed first in a general climate of economic decline.

Pessimism about the car industry became acute during the severe crisis following the oil price increases and the contraction of the oil supply to the Western world in 1973. Between 1972 and 1974 oil prices quadrupled (and the effects of this were even more acute in Italy due to the unfavourable Lira/Dollar exchange rates). For the car industry this meant not only higher production costs but also, of course, a drop in demand as consumers sought to economize on petrol. In the first months of 1974 world demand dropped by about 40% whilst production fell by about 11% in the E.E.C. member countries, 14% in the U.S.A. and only 2% in Japan (4).

However, as has been underlined by others (5), the long term realization crisis in the industry and the short term, though serious, crisis directly related to the oil price rises of 1973 must be seen as separate phenomena. In 1976 the car industry had at least apparently recovered from the oil crisis and the car began 'pulling' again on the international market, even

experiencing a minor and temporary boom (see fig. 1). But the problems of saturation were still very much present, rocking the foundations of even the giant Ford empire, throwing the European industries such as British Leyland, FIAT and even the comparatively strong looking Volkswagen into acute crisis, and causing an increasing concentration among producers, with mergers such as those leading to the formation of the European giant Peugeot-Citroen-Talbot.

Although the process of concentration or collapse of the weaker producers was considerably slowed by the interventions of national states (national governments are clearly extremely reluctant to allow their home-based car industries to die given their enormous importance for employment figures, and have generally shown themselves prepared to sustain such industries even at vast losses), it became increasingly clear that the market would only support a limited number of large and highly competitive corporations. The smaller European companies were handicapped in the increasingly bitter contest to remain among the survivors by what is known, euphemistically, as 'poor industrial relations' as well as disadvantages in terms of economies of scale and research and development finance. The effect of these disadvantages shows up clearly in tables I-II and fig. 2 setting out production figures and productivity for the major producers.

After the big drop in production following the oil crisis, the stronger companies were able to recuperate or nearly recuperate peak levels by 1977, although the annual rate of increase was considerably lower than in

the years preceding the crisis. As can be seen from table I the two weaker among the major European producers, Italy and the United Kingdom - both notoriously plagued by industrial relations problems - underwent a steep relative decline in the European market over the ten years between 1968 and 1978.

This, then, is a brief overall picture of the situation of the car industry in the 1970s. The specific economic and social context of FIAT's strategies for its labour force in this period can now be drawn.

Throughout the 1960's, FIAT's position in the European car market was extremely secure. It's strength was largely based on the very low price of labour in Italy plus high productive rhythms and industrial peace achieved through repression inside the factories. As was said in a previous chapter, FIAT used this period of high profits based on the productivity of a cheap and repressed labour force to pursue a policy of imperialism. It moved into Spain with SEAT (at present 51% owned by FIAT), into Latin America (where its big production plants profited from an even more repressed and badly paid workforce) and began using Italy's special relationship with Eastern European countries, due mainly to its large Communist Party, to begin producing on licence in Poland, Yugoslavia and at the Russian town named Togliattigrad in Italy's honour. This early expansionist policy gave FIAT a head start in the still expanding markets of the 'developing' countries, as well as guaranteed supplies of components in case of trouble at home (during at least one major strike FIAT attempted to ship engines into Italy from Spain and

elsewhere), and the availability of a cheaper and less recalcitrant workforce.

In 1970, FIAT was still the strongest car producer in Europe. Out of approximately 6,660,000 cars registered in the nine in this year 1,268,000 were Italian, and FIAT held about 18% of the European market. Even as late as 1974 FIAT still held first place in the 'league' of European car manufacturers.

However the results of the growing industrial relations problems in FIAT's home-based plants were soon to make themselves felt.

As the political and industrial movements of the 1960s swept through Europe culminating in the Italian 'hot autumn' of 1969, FIAT, with its indogenous and increasingly politically conscious labour force, was hit even harder than other car industries. Whilst the German and French industries could rely on Turk, Slav and Italian immigrant labour to maintain relative competitiveness through high productivity, FIAT was faced with a profound and durable change in the consciousness and organization of its workforce, which consisted largely of Southern Italians. As Luciano Parlanti put it: "The blocked brains suddenly opened up" (6). Or as Giorgio Benvenuto, Secretary General of the UILM preferred: "...the whole concept of authority in the factory was put into crisis" (7).

Thus FIAT entered the crisis of 1973 even less able than its competitors to weather the storm. From 1973 it was overtaken successively by Volkswagen, Renault and Ford of Europe, at last ceding even fourth place after the formation of the Peugeot-Citroen-Talbot conglo-

merate, to take a place among the very weakest car producers. By 1978 FIAT's share of the European market had dropped to under 10%, and its share of world production had deteriorated by more than two percentage points to 3.9% (8). All this despite heavy investment in new plant and technology (see fig. 3) and comparatively low labour costs (on 31st December 1979 FIAT workers earned an average of 7,402 Lire per hour - index 100 - against 8,971 Lire - index 121 - and 11,375 Lire - index 154 respectively for French and German car-workers) (9). FIAT's productivity in fact declined progressively in this period: the number of cars, scaled to the 128 model, produced annually per worker dropped from 18.4 in 1973 to 13.8 in 1979, figures which compare extremely unfavourably with its major competitors. This is illustrated in the comparative statistics for productivity reproduced in table II and fig. II. As can be seen, Italy's car industry has the worst productivity record of all major producers in both absolute and relative terms. FIAT's relative decline in market penetration (table III) was certainly due to its poor productivity performance. Over the 1970s wage rates rose steeply, the working week shrank (see figs. 4 and 5), and a whole series of trade union rights and de facto workers' powers were consolidated; but most important of all, however, was the breakdown of authority in the big factory.

The authority of the factory hierarchy and the strength of the foremen, so important in the high productivity of the years of the 'economic miracle' was gradually eroded over the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Unlike in many other countries, managerial discipline could not be replaced with a manageable trade union carrying out the rules of collective bargaining as a representative of its membership, given the historical weakness of the official trade union movement in the Italian factory.

### **The End of the Taylorian Dream**

"Mirafiori was the symbol of the future, and anyone who talked about the factory took it as their model. The reason for this was that this sort of plant, based on high levels of division of labour, on continuity, on mechanical pacing in the productive process, on a numerous and powerful factory hierarchy, allowed the maximum degree of exploitation, control and stratification of the labour force. It seemed that the individual will of the workers had been annulled in the big factory... the scientific organization of work, piece rates and foremen guaranteed the maximum intensification of work; and the maximum extraction of surplus value coupled with a maximum social stability were the fundamental variables in capitalist behaviour. But this 'marvellous' mechanism has by now been shattered... For some years now the big factory has no longer been able to guarantee all this. In fact, it has become a weak point for capital" (10).

The giant factory, from the dynamo of profits and productivity it had been in the 50s and 60s, had by now become a giant headache for FIAT.

Table I: Production as a percentage of E.E.C. total

	1968	1978
Italian industry	19.5	14.0
British	21.0	13.0
German	31.0	38.0
French	24.0	31.0

Table II: Productivity in the automobile industry. Index Nos. 1972 = 100

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
G.B.	98	91	92	96	93
FRANCE	103	101	100	124	124
GERMANY	107	103	112	119	126
ITALY	95	93	83	89	88
SWEDEN	107	117	109	97	100
JAPAN	106	97	107	126	135
U.S.A	92	88	85	97	108

Table III: Percentage of FIAT's car marketing penetration

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
ITALY	67.8	62.8	55.8	57.3	54.7	53.9	53.9	48.6	46.5
EUROPE *	6.4	6.4	6.1	6.3	6.0	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.2
U.S.A. **	2.9	3.9	3.0	2.9	3.6	3.4	5.1	6.2	4.1

\* excl. Italy and Spain  
 \*\* on imports

Source FIAT

Fig. 1: World Automobile Production (in Thousands)

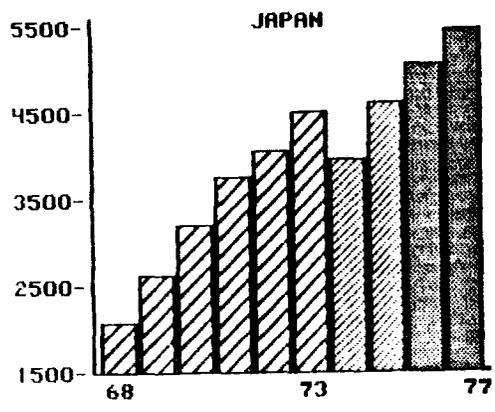
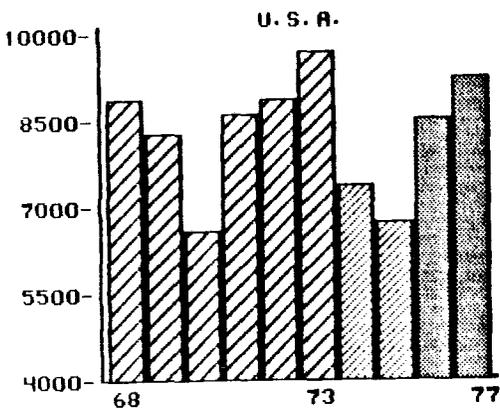
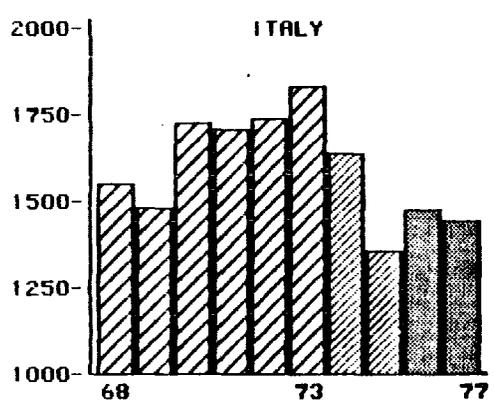
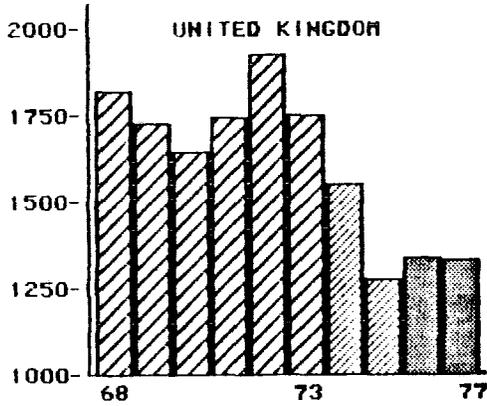
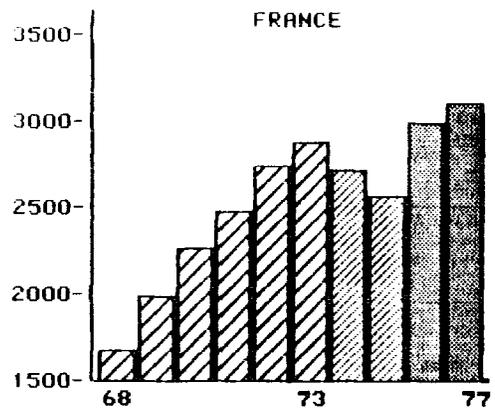
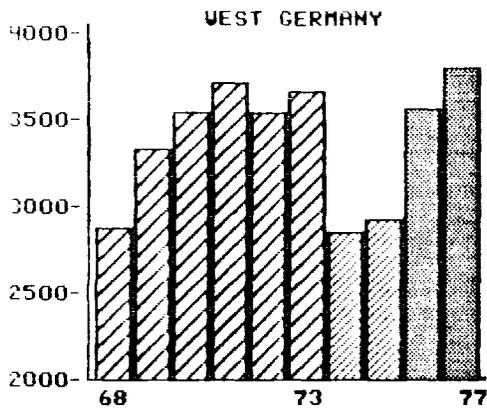


Fig. 2: N° of Cars Produced per Worker - 1978

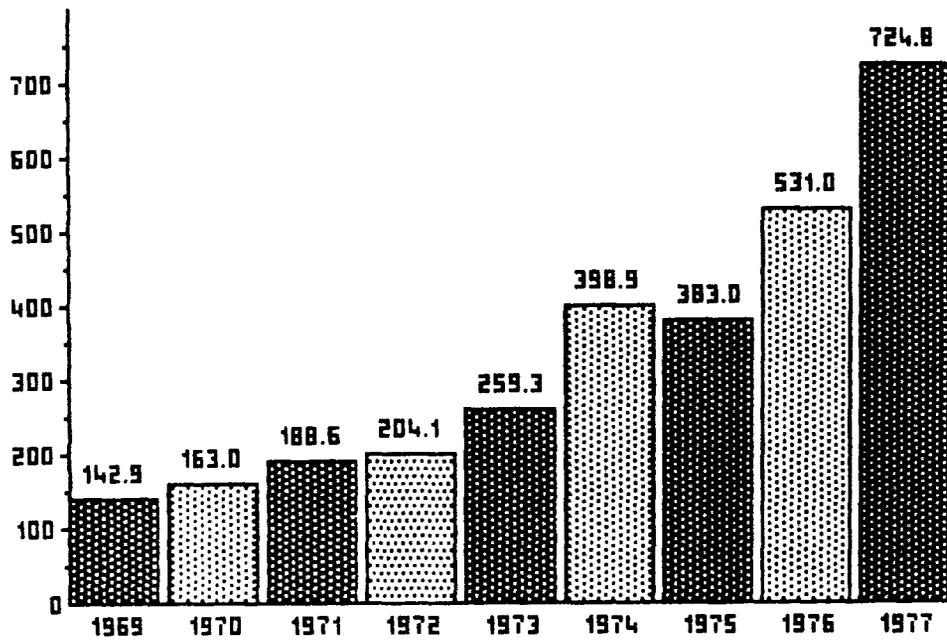
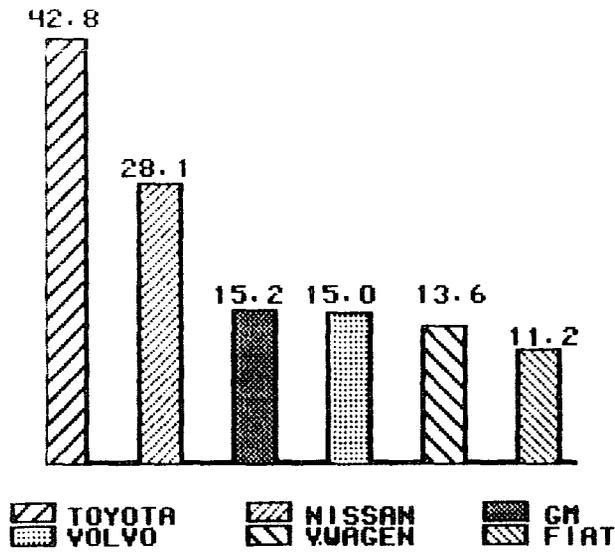


Fig. 3: FIAT's Investments: Milliards of Lire

Fig. 4: Average Hourly Cost per Worker in Lire and Percentage Increase on Previous Year

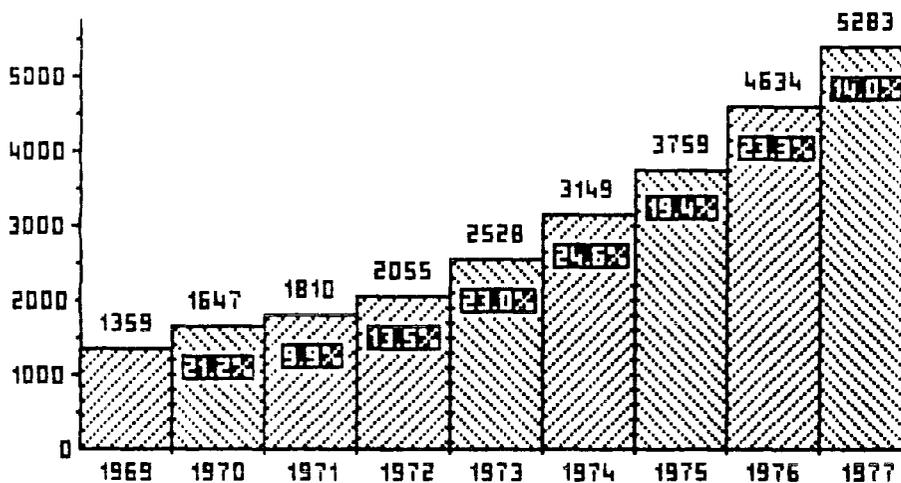
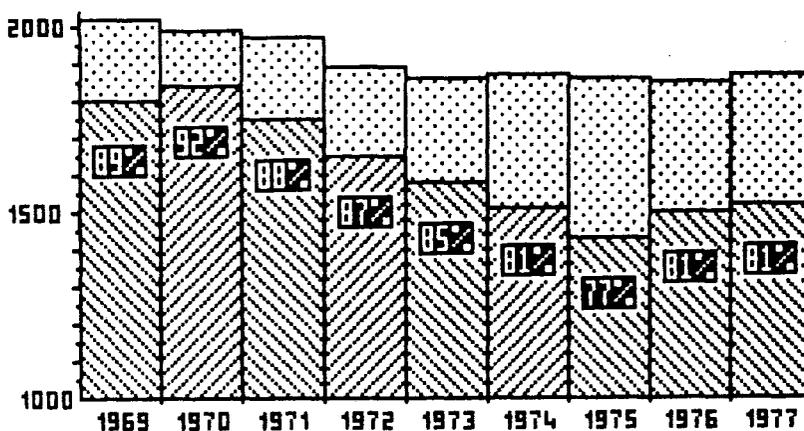


Fig. 5: Contract Hours and Percentage Effectively Worked (Hours per Worker per Year)



Source for all Figs.: FIAT

In a period in which the car industry was suffering from a long term saturation problem, exacerbated by declining buying power in the major economies, the smaller European industries had the worst of the situation as the productive Japanese and to a lesser extent American companies sought market outlets and set up new productive bases in Europe. It is the contention here that the viability of these competitors depended not only on their greater financial and productive resources but also, and perhaps principally, on smoother industrial relations. The concept of Scientific Management may still have been functional in the somewhat calmer context of American industrial relations, but in Italy the rigidity implied by the sequential recomposition of minutely fragmented tasks had rendered the big factory intolerably vulnerable to the expression of working class disaffection with work. FIAT had to look for a new solution: a 'new way of making cars' which could resolve this problem of inflexibility without sacrificing economy of scale.

### **Work Organization, Technology and Control in the FIAT Auto Group**

The following pages constitute, first and foremost, a description of FIAT's experimentation with various forms of work organization in the 1970s, as it will be necessary to have a fairly complete idea of the physical reality of the 'new way of making cars' being experimented by FIAT before any theoretical analysis of the underlying issue of control on the factory floor can be made.

We have now seen that FIAT is a company in which conflict and its containment, redirection and control have become crucial issues, not only because of the combative and imaginative tradition of the Italian working class, but also as a result of the particularly acute economic problems which it faces. The containment of conflict has thus become an issue of survival in the car industry as to remain competitive each company must reorganize production to get cars off the production line as fast and as cheaply as possible.

A first premise in the achievement of such increased efficiency has been the confrontation of two orders of problems. Firstly, the 'defensive' or non-organized and non-class-conscious refusal of work. Clearly the monotonous and repetitive work of a modern car factory does not evoke a spontaneous desire to produce; the instinct of most workers is to 'escape' from the production line as much as possible, an instinct which leads not only to the enormous problems of absenteeism, but also much 'dead' or non productive time during the working day. Such 'porosity' is manifested not only in institutionalized (and therefore programmable) periodic breaks, initially wrested from management through struggle but by now almost universally accepted as a necessary evil, but also in non-programmable moments of respite seized by individuals in defence of their physical and mental health, for a cigarette or a read of the newspaper, and spontaneous reductions of working speed. Secondly, productive time lost through active and organized conflict ranging from

brief, wild cat, stoppages to full scale union backed strikes.

The way in which management chooses to confront both the 'defensive' and the more organized forms of rejection of factory work and conditions can only be understood in the framework of the conditions of class struggle both within and without the specific factory. Forms of control practicable in Japan would be impossible in the British car industry, whilst the policies of British Leyland would have no sense in Italy. A particular policy of control is born out of a particular balance of power between the employer and the working class; the employer is forced to re-postulate his control according to changes in that balance, in a continuous process of resolution of the problems posed by the imagination and strength of the working class.

In an earlier chapter I examined how FIAT workers in the 1950s were 'made' to work through a policy of fairly overt repression, 'bribes' and the large scale introduction of forms of Taylorism and Fordism. This sort of control was then undermined by the radicalization of the immigrant Southerners during the 1960s and dealt a final blow by the workers and students movement of 1968-69 culminating in the 'hot autumn' of 1969.

1969 was crucial for FIAT in that it proved that the combination of the use of a 'green' immigrant labour force with the sort of terror tactics and anti-union activity employed in the 1950s had become much more difficult to implement and often even counter-productive in the 1970s given the increased strength and unity of

the trade union movement and the new confidence of the working class. A new managerial policy had to be evolved in line with new political and social conditions both inside and outside the factory, a policy which is epitomized in the catch-phrase 'a new way of making cars'.

It can be hypothesized that this new philosophy was born in part voluntarily, through an intelligent re-appraisal of the situation by the management (11), and in part because of increasingly strong demands rising from the shop floor but articulated through the trade union for:

- 1) a democratizing of the factory through a strengthening of the trade unions on the factory floor,
- 2) a greater degree of control over wages and thus speeds and rhythms of work, and
- 3) a refusal of the 'monetarization' of health risks and the demand for a better working environment.

The strong shop floor feeling for better conditions in the factory, then, gave a common denominator on which both unions and management could work, and through which they could find an uneasy peace. The most unpleasant jobs would be vastly improved or even in some cases eliminated, and the factory would become a cleaner, pleasanter, quieter place to work; the workers would have more control over what they did and how long it took them to do it, wage packets would be less susceptible to external fluxes in market conditions etc. The reality was to be a little less idyllic than the theory, and showed how superficial was the coincidence

of interest between management and workers in 'the new way of making cars'. FIAT's interest in improving conditions in the factory was real only so far as these improved conditions could also improve productivity; through relieving the climate of tension in the factory and using new technology and new work methods to improve flexibility and efficiency. During my first visit to FIAT in October 1979, for example, the paint cabin workers were disputing a 50% cut of the periodic half hour break that had been conceded for the noxious conditions in which they worked before the introduction of new spray tunnels. The improvement of conditions thus permitted management considerable savings; and as we shall see, when they didn't, the work experiments were shelved.

The new managerial direction was, then, at least superficially in line with demands arising from the shop floor in the late 60s and early 50s, but its realization within the factory was imposed unilaterally by management with the aim of increasing efficiency and tightening control over production. The face, but not the heart of the old authoritarian factory of Valletta's days was changed. This was illustrated well in my talk with Dr. M., a senior member of FIAT's personnel management, who, referring to the changes in the company's management commented: "Once they were all ex-colonels, much more, you know, authoritarian. Now they employ sociologists like me". He went on, however, to say with no embarrassment that the unions are not consulted over the introduction of the new forms of labour organization and technology. A group of Leyland personnel managers

who visited FIAT in 1977 were also to pinpoint this duality: "FIAT management style has changed significantly from autocratic towards participative. They see this change continuing but they do not feel there is a need to formalize participation in Italy or FIAT" (12).

FIAT's strategy in the 70s can thus be summarized as an attempt to turn to its own advantage the forceful workers' demands discussed elsewhere for: 1) democratization 2) changes in an egalitarian direction of the retributive structure 3) improvement of the working environment. The resulting strategy has been a combination of:

1) A recognition of the democratic expressions of the working class that emerged in '69 (the delegati, CUB etc.) in an attempt to incorporate them with the trade unions and render them more predictable and controllable.

2) Changes in the retributive structure which give an appearance of satisfying workers' demands (for example for a more homogeneous wage structure reflecting the real homogeneity of the work performed) whilst in reality tying the unions up in a complicated series of individual grading disputes and simultaneously introducing an enormous degree of mobility 'through the back door' as a condition of automatic promotion.

3) Changes in the physical reality of production to improve working conditions whilst attempting to increase productive flexibility and reorganize political 'hot points' where wild cat disputes threaten production.

The first of these points receives general treatment elsewhere in this thesis. The following sections will deal respectively with points 2) and 3).

### **‘Inquadramento Unico’, Job Rotation and Flexible Use of the Labour Force at FIAT**

"FIAT recognizes that large factories are poor from the human angle. This is revealed by people's attitudes to their work and the company and often manifests through industrial disputes and mal-practices... Such a climate reduces the overall efficiency of the establishment and cannot be tolerated by progressive management. FIAT thought part of the answer is to provide jobs which are more acceptable to individuals. However, as this often entails enlarging the job, a secondary problem emerges, that of the requirement to pay more for doing more.

Fortunately FIAT's unified grade structure is sufficiently flexible to accommodate this problem to some degree" (13).

Thus the unified grade structure (Inquadramento unico) provides for 'enriched' and more varied jobs, whose (slightly) greater costs to FIAT are, however, offset by a breakdown in demarcation lines, a much higher degree of labour force mobility and a consequent more efficient use of the workers available on the shop floor at any given moment as well as, debatably, the added bonus of reduced industrial relations problems.

Inquadramento unico was in fact inspired by the workers' rejection of the claim that job evaluation and skill grading were based on scientific criteria, and introduced as a result of centrally important battles in the late 60s for automatic promotion up the grades. As we shall see in the following sections on work organization and technology, this is only one in a series of examples of how management may actually turn working class initiatives to their own advantage.

In Italy a strong 'skill fan', or hierarchy of wages and skill levels, had been evolving since the period of post-war reconstruction. The development of this hierarchy was in fact, as we saw, supported by the workers' parties and the unions in their policy of reconstruction before all else, as a system of incentives was held necessary for healthy industrial development. Thus skilled male workers in Northern Italy in the leading industrial sectors steadily increased their position of relative pay privilege. Periods of 'wage drift' were followed by an incorporation within the skill structure, leading to an increasingly complex and hierarchical skill grading system.

This tendency was further accentuated after the great defeat of the working class organizations in the 1950s, when forms of job evaluation spread throughout Italian industry (although it was only formally adopted at Italsider and ENI), formalizing and consolidating this runaway process. Thus, as the real skill content of jobs was gradually degraded and homogenized by the spread of Taylorian work methods, forms of job evaluation were

adopted to create artificial divisions in skill based on apparently 'scientific' and 'quantitative' methods designed to measure and 'weigh' elements such as responsibility and training for various tasks in respect to a base level. The factors taken into account were:

- 1) Education levels required for mental preparation to grasp training.
- 2) Training and professional experience.
- 3) Mental skills.
- 4) Manual skills.
- 5) Responsibility for materials.
- 6) " " tools and machines.
- 7) " " labour process.
- 8) " " safety of others.
- 9) Mental and visual effort.
- 10) Physical effort.
- 11) Working environment.
- 12) Risks.

The factors concerning responsibility were given the greatest weight, factors 5, 6 and 7 accounting for about 50% of the total possible score. Thus manual and mental skill, length of training etc. took a back seat to the concept of responsibility for the care and running of expensive capital machinery, and a real reduction in skill content could be hidden in a new hierarchy based on the enigmatic notion of responsibility.

The grade structure based on this evaluation was extremely complicated. Workers were divided into operaio comune (O.C.) or unskilled manual; operaio qualificato

(O.Q.) or semi-skilled manual; operaio specializzato (O.S.) or skilled manual and impiegato (imp.) or office worker. These classes were further sub-divided into various categories. The following table shows the various categories and the percentage of workers in each category:

CATEGORY	CLASS	PERCENTAGE EMPLOYEES		
		% of Workers	Special cats.	% of Office Staff
OC2	1-2	2.22	-	-
OC1	3-6	12.26	-	-
OQ	7-11	33.90	-	-
OS1	12-17	30.81	-	-
OS2	(1-5)	-	1.51	-
Imp 3	(1-5)	-	-	3.34
OSI		1.00	-	-
OSI	(6-10)	-	2.58	-
Imp 2	(6-10)	-	-	9.04
Imp I	(11-13)	-	-	-
Imp I Super	(14-16)	-	-	3.34
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>89.19%</b>	<b>4.09%</b>	<b>15.72%</b>

(14)

The advantages to capital of such a hierarchical system are clear. Firstly, some of the dangers of an increasing homogeneity of the working class, concentrated under one roof and becoming every day more aware of the similarity of their situations and of their potential power if united, could be averted by creating

false divisions, professional jealousies and the idea of a workers' career among the working class. Secondly and related to this, the interminable individual controversies over grading could disperse working class energy, re-directing mass struggles into individual ones. This also has the 'spin-off' effect of strongly bureaucratizing unions to cope with these formal disputes.

It is understandable then that the workers' call for an abolition of the complicated wage hierarchy and for an increased control over wages, manifested through slogans such as "equal rises for all" and "automatic promotion up the grades", was not at first welcomed with open arms by management.

In the years between 1969 and 1973 the workers' 'instinctive' understanding of and opposition to the capitalist organization of the labour process was perhaps most intensely felt in the modification of the grading and retributive structure. In 1968 and especially 1969 entire lines and entire teams, sometimes even entire shops composed largely of operai comuni (unskilled workers) began presenting the Commissione Interna with long lists of names for promotion, and often accompanied them with autonomous stoppages. These disputes were directed not only against management but against the Commissione Interna and working class organizations that generally refused to back such claims, holding that they were not technically justified. The slogan "La seconda per tutti, tutti qualificati" (Second category for all, everybody skilled) appeared at Alfa Romeo and FIAT in the spring

of 1969. The struggle was highly successful. At the Mirafiori Bodywork (Carrozzeria) section between 1971 and 1972, the percentage of workers in the 'first' and 'first super' categories increased from 2.5 to 3.0%, those in the 'second' category from 16 to 30%, whilst the percentage in the 'lower third' and 'third super' categories decreased from 81.5% to 67% (15). Paintshop workers, amongst the most militant, had ensured the first or second category for 52% of their workers by 1972 (16). Management perceived this uncontrolled egalitarian tendency as a danger that had to be relocated within a predictable and normative context, even at the cost of compromise with the trade union movement.

Since the 1960s the trade union movement, under pressure from the rank and file, had been discussing plans for possible ways of revising the grading and retributive structures in a more egalitarian direction. It was from these discussions that the idea of *Inquadramento unico*, a single skill structure encompassing both blue and white collar workers was born. In 1966, *Inquadramento unico* took its place in the negotiating platform for the national engineering workers contract. The 1966 negotiations were weak but the union demand for the enlargement of the number of categories was accepted. By increasing the number of categories the unions could not hope to solve the issues of skill, job evaluation etc., but only mollify individual workers by increasing the chances of promotion up the skill grades.

However, the general questioning of the relationship between work, mechanization, the use of technology and skill grades became increasingly more insistent during 1968 and 1969. The young 'first generation' industrial workers from Southern Italy had little interest in protecting skill levels when their unconditioned eyes could see that work was pretty much the same all over the giant mechanized factories. Whilst the older Piedmontese 'union men' still saw skill grades as a working class heritage to be defended at all costs, the younger men had no status as a labour aristocracy to defend, and saw no reason to maintain it for others in the face of increasing deskilling of work in the factory. A sort of impasse was reached. It could hardly be hoped that the older, skilled workers predominant in the unions would give up all notions of skill recognition, won through so many hard battles in the past. But the young immigrants were many, and equally immovable.

The result was on one side a disillusionment with the unions by the young workers with an autonomous rank and file struggle for a more egalitarian system, and on the other some compromise thinking or 'leading from behind' by the trade unions. It was this thinking which led to the full development of the concept of *Inquadramento unico* which was to be a unified grade structure allowing for promotion on the basis of the breadth of work experience rather than the elusive concept of skill. It was here, then, that the idea of job rotation as a substitute for a linear worker's career entered the union concept of skill. Rotation was

conceived as a means whereby the worker could secure promotion by learning a number of varied tasks, and as such as an attack on the capitalist division of labour, as each worker could thus experience the whole of the labour process, up to and including non-manual areas, rather than a mere fragment of it.

The union men were surely honest in their intentions to find a new grade structure which would be both more egalitarian and a reflection of real skill, but some were already half aware of the possible dangers lurking in the idea of *Inquadramento unico*:

"In my opinion it's time to analyze what job rotation really means, because if job rotation is just a line worker who moves from one post on the line to another, to tell the truth it interests me very little".

However, this speaker at the XVth Congress of FIOM continues on an optimistic note:

"... the issue is to forge a link between the question of skill and that of education, to build a collective capacity within the working class to oppose the capitalist organization of labour... in such a way as to call into question the whole capitalist division of labour inside the factory" (17).

It was thus that in the early 1970s the combination of management fear of the increasing anarchy in the factory hierarchy and the union resignation to the hopelessness of attempting to defend the traditional

skill structure gave the conditions for a gradual acceptance of Inquadramento unico in Italy as the flames of 1969 began to die down. The first agreement came in December 1970 at Italsider. By 1971 Inquadramento unico figured in several other company agreements, and by 1972 it had assumed a central role in the negotiation of the national contracts.

In the engineering industry, the national contract incorporating Inquadramento unico was signed in March 1973. The relevant section of the contract reads:

"The workers are to be graded within a single classification articulated in seven skill categories and eight retributive levels with equal minimum monthly tabular payments... The single classification outlined above does not modify the attribution to the workers of special normative and economic treatments... which will continue to be provided for clerical workers, special categories and (manual) workers according to the law, the confederal agreement and the collective work contract" (18).

The table below sets out the new categories against the corresponding old ones.

New Categories	Categories as given by 1970 work contract
1st	Op. 5th - Op. 4th
2nd	Imp. 4th - Op. 3rd
3rd	Imp. 3rd - Op. 2nd
4th	Imp. 3rd - Op. 1st - CS. 2nd
5th	Imp. 2nd - Op. 1st Super CS. 1st
5th super	Imp. 2nd
6th	Imp. 1st
7th	Imp. 1st super

Op. (Operaio) = manual worker, Imp. (Impiegato) = clerical worker, Cs (Categoria Speciale) = special category worker

Promotion from the first to the second level was automatic on completion of four months of satisfactory work. However, promotion from the second level required a period of employment of four years and the satisfactory completion of a series of tasks.

Thus, largely due to the pressure from PCI dominated elements in the unions, the concept of skill and a 'worker's career' was retained in the new grading system, even though this was now to be tied to the more neutral notion of the length and breadth of working experience.

Inquadramento unico, then, was from the start an equivocal notion. It passed into the contract because it seemed to be a step towards the satisfaction of two central workers' demands: the elimination of the 'false' skill hierarchy based on job evaluation, and automatic promotion from the lowest category. It first appeared before the climax of workers' refusal of Taylorism in the factory; submerged again during the 'hot autumn' (replaced by a virtual rank and file de facto seizure of control over the grading system) and re-emerged in the 1970s as both unions and management sought to re-stabilize the situation and re-assert their respective spheres of power. It was sought by the unions as it allowed for the retention of the notion of promotion based on skill, but in a 'fairer' more 'objective' definition of the horizontal enlargement of the workers' knowledge of the productive process. It was accepted by management because it gave a breakdown of demarcation and increased opportunity for labour force mobility, a

fact that was overlooked or regarded as unimportant in the union analysis.

### **Changes in the Physical Reality of Production**

The changes in the organization of work since 1970 at FIAT can be roughly divided into two categories: Firstly the experiments designed to alter the workers attitudes to their jobs, by attempting to reduce monotony through a 'richer' or 'larger' job content, or by giving a greater degree of responsibility and autonomy to the worker. These changes I have characterized as 'sociological' as they are largely based on ideas coming out of schools of industrial sociology and psychology. Secondly, experiments using both technological and organizational changes to bypass or defuse any workers' refusal of work, replacing as far as possible manual labour with automated processes, and increasing productive flexibility in such a way that disputes affecting particular sections will not halt all 'downstream' production. These changes I have characterized as 'technological'. Some experiments, of course, attempt to combine both styles, as in, for example, the 'Digitron' facility.

### **The Sociological Style**

FIAT's flirtation with job enrichment, job enlargement, autonomous work groups etc. is oddly reminiscent of the middle class couple who invite a token black man to the dinner party. The experiments have an air of

being gestures of appeasement which tend to crumble quickly in the face of hard economic reality. By now FIAT has ceased to even pay lip service to 'Volvo style' large scale experimentation with this sort of organization of work. A FIAT personnel manager remarked to me about the semi autonomous work groups at Volvo's Kalmar plant: "It's just a shop window. Their real production comes off traditional assembly lines in other plants".

In fact, the sociological experiments, as far as they were set up, have in almost every case failed and have been dismantled at FIAT, as they proved not to improve production speeds, to be extremely costly and to require a great deal of space. Thus Cesare Annibaldi, the chief personnel officer at FIAT, comments on what he describes as a micro-organization of work (that is interventions designed to increase the skill content of individual jobs): "... this sort of intervention seems to have exhausted any propulsive capacity for the enlargement of its range of application". On the question of group work experiments, designed to reduce the importance of the figure of the individual skilled worker, reduce the hierarchy at work and find space for a level of autonomy in small decisions concerning the work being performed, he is not much more enthusiastic: "... the organizational reality of productive processes, technologies and products is restrictive and makes these interventions possible only in limited and relatively marginal areas" (19).

The fact that experiments with the sociological style of intervention in the factory have had no great success and evoked no great enthusiasm at FIAT (or in

Italy more generally) is not surprising. Such experiments in other countries have normally been carried out with a high level of participation and cooperation by the trade unions involved; a factor which is totally missing in Italy given its traditions of autocratic management and highly conflictual working class. As Annibaldi remarks:

"... the objective of giving space for self determination through a different organization of work risks - in the present state of industrial relations in Italy - being a retreat forwards. This in so much as the example from other countries shows that experiences of this sort have concrete possibilities of actuation and development in the context of industrial relations more attuned to the involvement of the trade unions. Because of this, in Italy such an issue would have to be confronted in the much wider context of different attitudes in relations between social parties" (20).

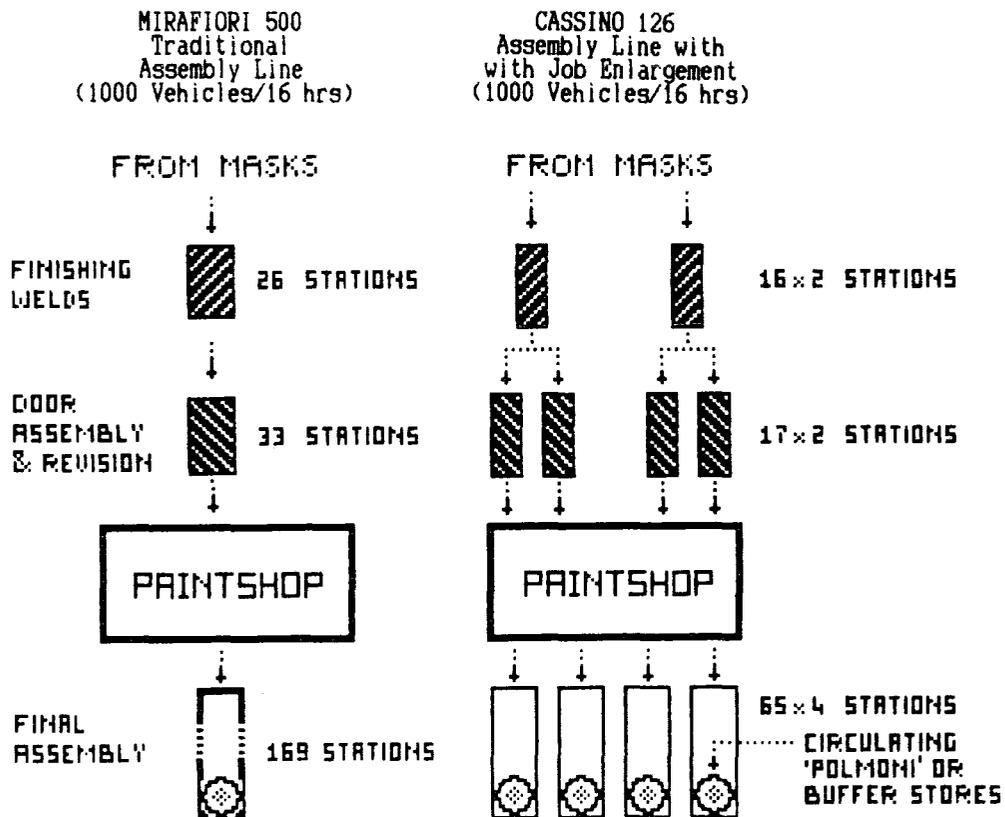
Without a high level of cooperation and involvement by the workers involved, from their moment of conception and throughout their realization in practice, experiments designed to allow workers a degree of autonomy in day to day decision making are almost bound to bring only the disadvantages of the extra costs and space demanded, without bringing the advantages hoped for in terms of stronger motivation to work, lower rates of absenteeism etc.

In order to understand better how and why FIAT has had little success with this sort of intervention we

will now turn to an examination of the actual experiments which have been carried out.

1) Experiments in 'job enlargement'. Example: the FIAT 126 model at Cassino.

In the Southern Italian plant at Cassino a large scale experiment in 'job enlargement' was carried out. The concept is simple: the number of assembly lines was quadrupled, each line being 1/4 of its original length and moving at 1/4 of its original speed, thus increasing the number of operations to be performed by each worker by a factor of 4.



This form of work design shows very clearly some of the ambiguities that can arise between the cup of the sociologists' conception and the lip of managerial actualization. An experiment sold to the unions on the basis of its enlarged job content in fact had the principal result of enlarged productive flexibility. Breakdowns etc. in a four line set up are unlikely to affect more than one line, leaving three on which production can be continued normally. Furthermore, absenteeism, one of the biggest management headaches in the modern car industry, can be better managed, as available workers may be distributed among the various comparable work posts in the most efficient possible combinations, and the lines moved at independent speeds. Four lines may also give a greater degree of flexibility of production: the original idea was that different model versions could pass down each of the lines, as happens at some Ford plants, allowing a greater economy of scale and facilitating the alteration of the proportions of the models produced according to market demand. This was however impossible to realize because of technical problems of programming in a relatively small plant like that of Cassino.

In those ways management benefitted enormously, but what of the worker and the much vaunted job enlargement? It was here that this experiment backfired. Since a worker performing four minutes of work instead of one will require four times as much material to hand, the result is that four times as much space is required; and space is expensive. A profit orientated firm obviously cannot permit this sort of expenditure without a return,

in this case in terms of reduced absenteeism, porosity etc.; and there was little return (as can be seen from the production figures included in the diagram, an increased number of stations gave no increase in production). Apparently four minutes of boring work quickly become just as monotonous as four times one minute of the same.

In this context the lines were lengthened and the number of operations per worker reduced (job shrinkage?) thus maintaining the advantages of flexibility without the costs of space wastage.

2) Experiments in semi-autonomous work groups: The 'islands' at RIVALTA (body assembly) and TERMOLI (engine assembly).

The theory underlying such work groups is that they allow workers to participate as a group in the building of a large part of a car rather than acting repetitively on one small fragment of the whole, thus relieving boredom and alienation.

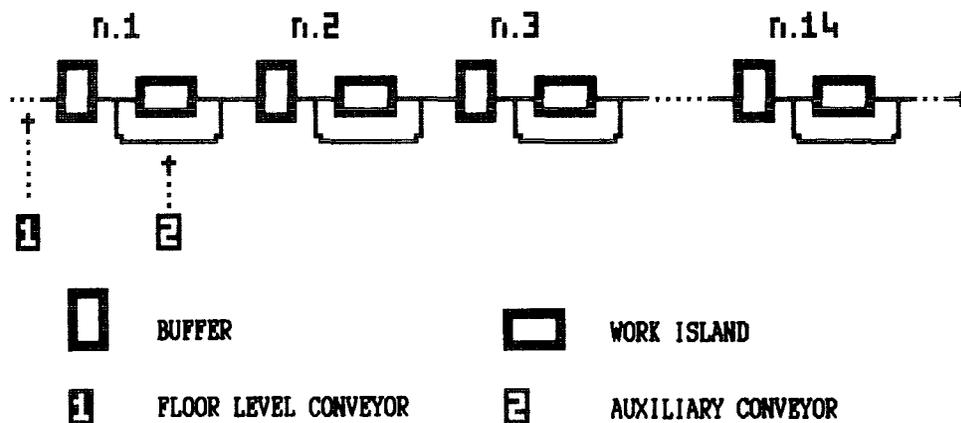
FIAT has carried out two major experiments with fixed work stations (islands) operated by semi-autonomous work groups.

At Rivalta in 1973-74 an attempt was made to replace the traditional assembly lines for body assembly with a series of 14 fixed work stations where teams of workers would carry out an extended number of operations on each car before sending it on to the next station. The work cycle is thus enlarged, and workers are to some limited extent freed from the rhythm of work imposed by the traditional assembly line (the 'buffers' or storage

spaces between the islands facilitate this relative autonomy). With these technical changes to traditional plant FIAT proclaims "the surmounting of Tayloristic criteria of sequential linkage on the assembly line" (21).

Whilst the 'island' system constitutes a substantial change to the traditional assembly line (see diagrams below), the claim would seem a little exaggerated. If the operations performed per worker are a little more varied, and the buffer storage system allows some autonomy from line speeds, the work is still 'parcelized'; and output is still determined externally by pressure from 'up-' and 'downstream' (which is only mitigated, not removed, by the the buffers) and by negotiated production targets.

RIVALTA: New Body Assembly Line with Islands



The experiment was not a success. Two of the 14 work stations were made operational for a while and a

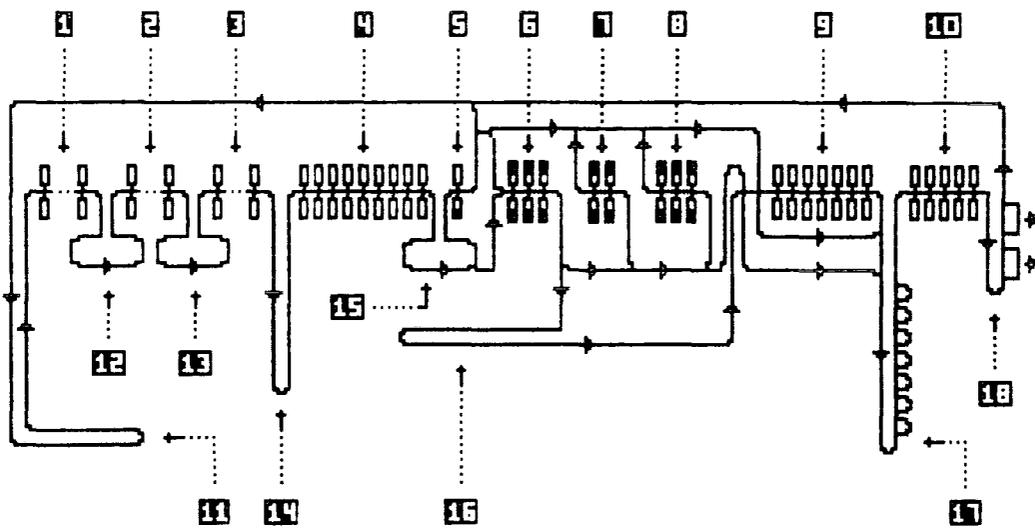
third was put together but never operated. By the end of 1974 the whole project had been abandoned. However, the Rivalta scheme had been conceived purely as an experiment, and its failure in economic terms did not come as a great surprise. The Rivalta experiment showed up two major problems with this kind of technique; firstly, as at Cassino, the space required was something like four times greater than for a traditional assembly line. Secondly, the costs involved in the transfer of the car body from station to station were much higher.

Whilst the autonomous work group experiment at Rivalta was experimental and born out of the general push to find new ways of working, the islands at Termoli, this time for engine assembly only, were designed first and foremost for production. Here, a traditional assembly line was used with the islands connected into it. Six islands were created, the first four for engine assembly and the last two for quality control. Each work post aggregates from nine to twelve minutes of work on each engine.

This form of production has several advantages for management. Work on the islands gives the worker a high degree of 'responsibility' for his or her particular operations, which can easily be traced back, thus giving a psychological and material disposition to good and speedy work. However the Termoli experiment, like that of Rivalta, was not a success. The plant at Termoli is more expensive than the traditional line and has not resulted in increased productivity. Furthermore, it is much more expensive to maintain, and uses more space. To

quote once again from the FIAT dossier: "In economic terms, a comparison with a traditional assembly line shows that in relation its greater cost the new system does not give any possibility of recuperation through efficiency and productivity" (22).

TERMOLI - New Engine Assembly Line for the 127 Model.



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1</b> Group 1: Engine bed - tubes - connecting roads - pistons - engine shaft - distribution shaft</p> <p><b>2</b> Group 2: Fly wheel - oil pump - oil cup - conducting pulley</p> <p><b>3</b> Group 3: Cylinder head - compensation - brakes -clutch</p> <p><b>4</b> Group 4: Air inlet - petrol pump - carburettor - distributor</p> <p><b>5</b> Group 5: Cylinder head cover - air filter cover - fan belt - air filter</p> <p><b>6</b> Group 6: Start motor</p> <p><b>7</b> Repairs</p> <p><b>8</b> Quality control - engine cold</p> | <p><b>9</b> Quality control - engine hot</p> <p><b>10</b> Revision</p> <p><b>11</b> Buffer</p> <p><b>12</b> Buffer between Group 1 and Group 2</p> <p><b>13</b> Buffer between Group 2 and Group 3</p> <p><b>14</b> Buffer between Group 3 and Group 4</p> <p><b>15</b> Buffer between Group 4 and quality control</p> <p><b>16</b> Buffer between quality control and Group 5</p> <p><b>17</b> Buffer Group 5 - Group 6</p> <p><b>18</b> Transfer</p> |
|---|--|

However, FIAT has not yet totally abandoned the idea of islands. They do have an advantage in that they are generally preferred by the workers. In fact FIAT evolved the Termoli experiment using less technologically sophisticated plant and reducing the wastage of space by cutting down the number of operations performed per worker from 9 to 12 minutes to about 4 minutes in a new design introduced in 1980-81.

3) 'Job recomposition' - seat assembly at CASSINO, MIRAFIORI, RIVALTA and LINGOTTO etc.

'Job recomposition' is basically a form of job enlargement with job rotation. Whereas in the traditional work method a series of tasks are performed by a number of different workers often with different skill grades, in this form of experiment all the tasks are performed by all the workers, who each have the same skill grade.

In the traditional seat assembly system seats are loaded onto a circular overhead conveyor or giostra (roundabout). They are then assembled by four 'category two' workers, quality controlled by a 'category three' worker, and repaired by a sixth 'category three' worker. In the new system the whole job is completed at a fixed work station. All workers are now in 'category three' and perform quality control and repair tasks as well as assembly. Similar experiments have been carried out for cable assembly, paintwork, panel repairs and areas of the foundry, using periodic change-overs around the work posts and a unification of skill grades.

These experiments are inexpensive, requiring little or no technical change in the plant involved. They have

the advantage to management of further eroding the concept of job demarcation and to workers (as well as the arguable advantage of 'richer' jobs) of promotion of all workers to the highest category available in the series of tasks to be recomposed.

#### 4) 'Job rotation' - throughout FIAT

We have already looked at examples of job rotation, where workers move from post to post in a sequence of work (e.g. in paintwork from the spraying of the undercoat to the spraying of the final coat). However, job rotation in FIAT is not confined to rotation through a sequence of connected operations; it is used much more widely. Thanks to Inquadramento unico virtually all assembly line work has become 'interchangeable' in this system, allowing management an enormous degree of flexibility in day to day production decisions. Union cooperation in this has been obtained as rotation through a number of jobs for defined periods of time gives the right to automatic promotion through the categories; one of the more urgent of trade union demands. I will do no more than mention job rotation here, as it has already been mentioned in the section on retributive structure and promotion systems. Suffice to remark that the 1969 shop floor demand for 'equal rises for all' has evolved in an extraordinarily positive way for the management of the 1970s.

## Automation and Advanced Technology

From all that has been said it will have become clear that the 'sociological' style of intervention on the organization of work, with the exception of interventions such as rotation, which anyway did not require any change in work methods, has been largely a failure at FIAT. This failure can be explained both at a technical level (the costs involved in the modification of plant, the extra space required etc.) and at the level of the concepts themselves (it is apparent that the workers quickly found their new 'enriched' and 'enlarged' tasks just as boring and alienating as before, as the interventions were not able to increase productivity or decrease absenteeism). The particular context in which such experiments were introduced may also have contributed to the failure: FIAT's underlying autocratic managerial philosophy means that any modifications in the organization of work tend to be imposed from above without any involvement by workers or their representatives at any stage of their planning or realization.

FIAT, probably to a greater extent than any other European car manufacturer, has chosen a different strategy as the principal element in the 'new way of making cars', a strategy which not only for FIAT but also for all car manufacturers, must be destined to be a decisive element in the success or failure of such industries. This strategy is the application of new technologies towards an automation and robotization of

the assembly process intended to reduce personnel and increase productive efficiency. As Cesare Annibaldi, head of personnel at FIAT, has stated:

"A line of alternative action along which Italian industry has been moving for some time is that of the macro-organization of work, consisting in interventions on plant with the intention of modifying, at times radically, the productive arrangement, in the direction of a replanning of work and automation" (23).

Annibaldi's remark is echoed by Guido Carli, the leader at that time of Confindustria:

"Over the last few years we have carried out a policy which does not tend to favour employment. Given the greater rigidity of the Italian labour force, we have preferred investments which tend to save on labour and which place greater importance on fixed capital, investing in technology much more than is generally thought: in fact after Germany we have the most modern and least obsolete machinery in Europe" (24).

In other words, the main intention of the new technology is to reduce as far as possible that troublesome element of the workers' subjective presence on the factory floor.

The application of new technologies, aimed at the reduction of personnel, the intensification of production, the bypassing of industrial conflict and the speeding up of model changes is of fundamental im-

portance for an industrial sector in the throes of a cutthroat battle for markets, and developments in the fields of micro-electronics and robotics (and here I leave aside the discussion of the relationship between scientific innovation and industrial progress) have made this strategy possible. As Nicola Tufarelli, head of FIAT automobile sector remarks: "Technological innovation is Europe's choice to improve industrial and commercial competitiveness" (25).

FIAT's leading position in European automation was initially stimulated, then, by the need to solve the problems caused by its turbulent workforce. This much is admitted openly by management: "The engineers involved in our automation have capitalized from the kick in the teeth they got from the workers in '69" (26). "In our country, where we have only a national labour force, the ability to organize dissent is much higher. This situation has accelerated the introduction of new technologies, the only way we have to recuperate productive flexibility..." (27)

A FIAT Auto group expert explains the particularly high level of automation in the bodywork stations largely in terms of conflict: "Some of the more significant technological innovations at FIAT Auto are concerned with bodywork, that is the work which presents perhaps the biggest problems for the company... because of the concentration of trade union activity..." (28). The British Leyland report concurs: "FIAT have been experimenting in and establishing the beneficial outcomes of work in job design and work organization for more than five years. Experiments centred on 'people

problem' working areas initially". Discussing the reasons for the introduction of the Auto Assembly facility for uniting the power train and body (Mirafiori 131 line) the first given in this report is that: "Traditionally Body and Power Train assembly areas were sources of Industrial Relations problems within FIAT" (29).

In fact, the first areas to be automated and robotized were predominantly within the big Northern factories where industrial conflict was strong (for example the welding lines at Mirafiori and Rivalta, engine to body assembly at Mirafiori) and where work was particularly heavy and noxious and hence also subject to frequent industrial action (for example in paintwork, where workers worked in narrow fume-filled tunnels).

More recently, roughly since 1977, the introduction of new technologies has been extended to the newer, smaller Southern plants such as Cassino and Termoli Imerese.

As a result of the introduction of new technologies, work at FIAT has become in many areas, as the unions demanded it should, cleaner, safer and often linked to human rhythms rather than the machine made ones created by the forward march of the assembly line.

The labour process has also become easier to control and check (a result of sophisticated information technology); more flexible internally and thus less liable to be blocked by handfulls of workers (the double and triple lines, buffer storages, and new transfer technologies such as the robocarrier); and in some cases completely eliminates the need for workers with their

irritating tendency not to work, to work slowly and to produce sub-standard or even sabotaged goods.

For all these reasons, then, FIAT invests each year more than 200 milliard Lire (approximately £100 million) in research, and the same again in technological innovation. In 1978 Tufarelli revealed that more than 750 milliard had been spent on the renewal of products and plant over the preceding 4 years, and 2000 milliard more would be spent in the following 5 years on product innovation (30).

### **The Digitron Facility**

The digitron facility, which operates only at the Mirafiori plant, was an attempt at a resolution of the problems involved in earlier experiments with semi-autonomous groups, and in effect is a sort of automated analogue to the 'island' work method.

The digitron, like the robogate, employs 'robocarriers' - computer controlled carriers mounted with removable power train assembly jigs - which run along tracks formed by under-floor induction loops. Approximately 16 of these robocarriers carry the power train units from the 'buffer' storages (capacity 2 times 28 PTs) to the body to power train unit assembly stations, which are arranged in five sections of four stations each. The power trains are assembled at 24 assembly bases by teams of 4 workers each.

The PTs arrive at the Body to PT assembly stations via the robocarriers. The body is lowered into position over the PT and the jig, holding it ready for the

automated assembly process. Transfer sequencing throughout the whole system is computer controlled by the Digital Computer Company System, which is also used for monitoring and quality control in the assembly areas (at station 2 there is a mimic electronic display and audible warning signal for missed operations or malfunctions).

The digitron facility has various advantages and disadvantages both for management and for workers.

A combination of manually operated clearance buttons and 'buffer' storage areas freed the workers to some extent from pacing by machinery (although time limits were imposed after extensive T & M analysis). The elimination of overhead conveyors led to quieter, less dangerous and better lit working areas and the fixed stations meant that workers no longer worked in uncomfortable 'raised arms' positions. Furthermore, work was carried out in teams of four, allowing some social contact during working hours. The extended working cycle seemed not to have much relevance since even management reports that after an initial period of learning the new system, monotony quickly returned. The digitron led to no reduction of personnel; the workers squeezed out by automation (e.g. the Auto-assembly facility for uniting the power train and body) were easily offset by the indirect work created by the system itself - electricians, toolmakers and maintenance workers were in constant demand as it was rather prone to breakdowns. The digitron was well accepted by both workers and unions, a fact demonstrated by union requests for its extension into other plants.

For management too, the digitron facility had some undoubted advantages over the traditional assembly line. Computer monitoring allowed a high level of control over the entire labour process - the information system automatically controls the speed and routing of the robocarriers according to the available information on production flows at all points, number of PTs in the various buffers, breakdowns etc. The computer guides the robocarriers throughout the entire production area sending signals along the under-floor induction loops; controls identification and subsequent loading of the PTs and pallets; matches the correct PTs and bodies using magnetic identification codes, and manages the various buffer storages. The only areas into which computer control does not completely extend are the work stations themselves, where workers may set the pace of work independently within the negotiated limits.

As well as increasing productive flexibility and control over production from a purely 'technical' point of view, this form of organization of work once again served to increase management's control over its labour force. The Mirafiori assembly lines were a 'hot point' at FIAT, one of the most highly organized and militant areas of the auto group; and the digitron experiment largely came out of an attempt to resolve the problems of the 'giant' factory, necessary for economy of scale, but disastrous in terms of industrial relations. It was hoped that the use of fixed work stations and assembly bays would bring the 'human dimension' back into work in the large scale factory by dividing the monster assembly lines into smaller working units, whilst avoiding the

problems of low productivity concomitant with other such experiments (see Volvo, Kalmar for example), through the use of a combination of computer control/monitoring, robocarriers and automation. The digitron facility also effectively improved material working conditions on the shop floor, removing many of the causes of discontent.

Despite the great advantages of the digitron experiment from the technical (computer control of production flows etc.) and social (reduced industrial relations problems) points of view, the experiment has not been an unmitigated success and will not be repeated, despite trade union requests for its extension. The digitron has several major drawbacks. It is very expensive; about five times the cost of comparable traditional assembly lines. The expected higher productivity levels have not come about: the capacity of the facility is 50 model 131 units per hour (giving 800 units in the two shift working day) (31), but production has remained at about 600 models per day, about the same as for the traditional lines the system has replaced (32). There was thus no increase in productivity to justify the much greater plant cost. Furthermore, the plant cannot be used for more than two shifts (even if the unions were to allow night work, to which they are strongly opposed) as the robocarriers must be recharged for a period of 8 hours in every 24.

Another very major disadvantage of the digitron is that unlike the robogate it is model specific. The 131 model had to be designed specifically for it, and no other model could be produced on it. This makes the cost of changing or redesigning models virtually prohibitive,

in a market in which the ability to get new models out has become increasingly important.

Management was openly disaffected with the digitron: Cesare Annibaldi called the new assembly system, with its cost of millions of pounds, "a high technology toy". Another management representative commented: "It needs 4 times more space than traditional lines, and this is already one big drawback. And anyway it breaks down too often; it's too sophisticated. A car made completely on the digitron would cost the earth". A journalist describes an incident during a lecture on the organization of work at FIAT: "Images of the digitron equipment flowed across the screen... while a voice off-screen described the sequence of the various operations and the advantages of digitron, a FIAT manager seated just behind us mumbled: 'Right, by now the Japanese have assembled 7 Toyotas complete with mudguards and a hooter'" (33).

The digitron facility will not be repeated when the 131 goes out of production.

## **Robots**

Although the development of industrial robots began in the 1960s they were used to replace human labour in very limited tasks such as the measurement and checking of manufactured parts. The potential of robots to perform more complicated operations began to be actualized on the factory floor only in the 1970s.

Robots are "... an extension of a computer into the real world - the means whereby a machine capable of cal-

culating, in awful abstraction, the rate of growth of a tree, can actually experience that tree by moving around it, looking at it and touching it..." (34). The robot, then, as the 'body' to join the 'intellect' of the computer, is now capable of complex operations such as welding and spraying in inaccessible places like the internal areas of a car body. As their cost gradually drops many manufacturers are using them to replace human labour in such jobs. Italy, with its two 'home grown' robotics industries (OSAI of the Olivetti group and COMAU of the FIAT group) has not been slow in realizing the industrial potential of robots, and at time of writing is Europe's third user of them after West Germany and Sweden (although Japan and the USA are still streets ahead of their nearest European rivals).

Robots were first brought into FIAT in September 1972, when the American UNIMATE welding robots were introduced on the 132 line at Mirafiori. 18 robots in a double line 40 meters long perform a total of 540 symmetrical welds. Each robot has a 'memory' enabling it to learn and repeat tens of operations in logical order. The entire line cost 810 million Lire, with the robots alone costing 550 million Lire (35).

Since then robots have been developed for various uses other than welding (particularly in the foundries and paintshops) and the 'last word' in automation, the robogate, has been introduced in the bodywork section at Rivalta.

ROBOT IN USE - FIAT AUTO GROUP - 1978 (36)

FACTORY	DEPARTMENT	
	<u>Paintshop</u>	<u>Bodywork</u>
MIRAFIORI	1st spray N° 6	131 line N° 23
LINGOTTO	" Lines 242 & 238	
RIVALTA	" N° 6	RITMO line N° 44 (Robogate)
CASSINO	" N° 6	RITMO line N° 44 (Robogate)
TERMINI	Powder spray N° 4	

Although the first robots used at FIAT, the UNI-MATES, were of American origin, the more recent models (for example those in use on the robogate plant) are home grown, designed and produced by the FIAT subsidiary COMAU. These models, the POLAR 6000s, can incorporate the transformer, reducing the number of cables and making them more manageable on-line. They have an immense freedom of movement allowing them to perform extremely complicated welding operations even inside the car body. They are moved hydraulically and have static memories capable of holding 400 to 4000 elements of information subdividable in 8 programmes. They have been sold to other European car manufacturers such as Alfa Romeo, Volvo, Peugeot and BMW.

However, the role of robots is still limited. A robot usually replaces the jobs of only a few workers and thus has a smaller effect on manning than other forms of automation. There are also intrinsic technological limitations to their use. A FIAT robot expert comments:

"The nearly complete robotization of the assembly line, where tens of thousands of workers work, is

still very distant. The technology needed to realize such a huge restructuring still doesn't exist, and we aren't able to foresee how and when it will. Experimentation at the moment is within the rather more limited horizon of the extension of the use of robots to the paintshops where work is heaviest and where FIAT can't use Yugoslavian or Greek workers as they do in the German automobile industry" (37).

Thus the chief use of robots has been to replace human labour in especially dirty and arduous tasks, where industrial conflict has been a big problem, and for which no 'Yugoslavian or Greek workers' are available as an immigrant labour force limited in its possibility of industrial action by its poverty and precarious existence on host soil.

As well as the robogate, two robot lines are in operation in bodywork at Mirafiori. The 132 Unimate line, the first robots to be used at FIAT, has already been briefly described.

The 131 line is larger and technologically more sophisticated, although it performs a similar function. It was designed by M.S.T. (Machine Speciali Torino), part of COMAU, using a more sophisticated version of the reliable American Unimate. The line consists of over 20 robots arranged in stations along a 120 meter line, and at 80% efficiency is capable of producing 68 bodies per hour (38). Although during a Leyland visit to the plant only 310 units per shift were being produced, FIAT claimed the line has an average overall efficiency of

76-77% (39). The line can work on both the two door and four door versions of the 131.

The bodies are first 'stapled' together to hold the parts in approximate position for the welds. They are loaded onto the line automatically, and are moved through the stations on 25 circulating pallets which are returned to the loading station after completing a cycle. Three giant 'masks' or multi-welders automatically perform the tacking welds, and the remaining welds are then completed by robots.

Robots are also being used increasingly to replace manual labour in one of the nastiest and unhealthiest tasks possible in a car plant, paint spraying. This job, in traditional systems, is performed in confined fume-filled tunnels or cabins. It has always been one of the most problematic areas from the point of view of absenteeism and industrial relations.

The most advanced of the robot paintwork lines is the powder spray at Termoli Imerese, where the 126 model is entirely sprayed by robots; Termoli was the first plant in the world to achieve this. On this line, the only jobs left for human intervention are maintenance and quality control. The special highly resistant paint powder, made of very fine positively charged particles, is sprayed onto the negatively charged body by 'anthropomorphic' robots which simulate the wrist, shoulder and elbow articulations of a human arm. After spraying, the body passes through a furnace where the powder is fused into a layer of polymers forming a plastic coating over the body.

## **Press Shop Automation**

Both the Mirafiori and Rivalta press shops have been highly automated. The first area to be automated was the loading of sheet steel into the large press lines, and this was followed by the perfection of an automatic transfer system between the presses. Once again, human intervention is reduced to functions of control and maintenance.

The automatic press lines are very flexible, as very different parts can be produced on the same lines with only minor adjustments to the machinery. At Rivalta, special automatic presses able to carry out the complete moulding cycle have now been installed.

## **The Robogate**

The robogate is the most advanced piece of assembly technology existing at FIAT and almost certainly in Europe. It became famous in England through the television commercial for the Strada showing it in action. Its function is the complete automation of car body assembly and welding. At time of writing it is operational on the Ritmo (Strada) lines at the Rivalta and Cassino plants. It was developed with the help of COMAU, the FIAT robotics sector, and employs the POLAR 6000 robot mentioned earlier. Its two major advantages over traditional forms of body assembly are firstly the extraordinary level of flexibility it allows (both in daily production programming and in eventual changes of model) and secondly the elimination of workers from a particularly 'hot point' of the production process.

The following description is compiled from: the FIAT production journal Made in FIAT; documents from a day study conference of Confindustria, the foremen's paper Qui Capi and a dossier from Magazzino as well as discussions with a FIAT production engineer and a personal visit to the plant.

To begin with I quote from a FIAT document for the Confindustria day of study:

"... From first sight the new body shop is something completely different: a visitor from outside would have the feeling of being caught up in a science fiction film. Carriers which move around the factory with no drivers, robots moving in silence and with a precision which allows no margin of tolerance, a work area which has become silent and safe as overhead loads have been eliminated. All hard manual work has been completely eliminated: workers are there only to check the operation of the machinery and intervene in the case of a breakdown". (40)

The description is fairly valid. The robogate itself emits only faint hisses and the odour of welded metal (though the noise from the surrounding areas, from the presses, final welding and the overhead conveyor belts further down the line is so loud you can hardly hear the silence of the robogate). The most immediately obvious characteristic of the equipment is the last mentioned, the almost total absence of human labour. This entire area of the factory apparently operates independently from human intervention. A few maintenance engineers in distinguishing maroon overalls stand

chatting by one of the stations; but apart from these, manual labour has been eliminated from the cycle from the moment when the various panels come out from the presses to be 'tacked' together on the robocarriers, until the welded body rattles away on the overhead conveyor for the few remaining manual welds that the robots are so far incapable of performing efficiently. The plant is piloted by a computer which, as for the digitron, regulates the traffic of the robocarriers and the selection of the model-specific pallets and pilots the welding cycle.

The robocarrier is identical to that previously described for the digitron system. It is a simple carrier mounted on four wheels, with built-in antennae which receive electrical impulses from underfloor cables guiding it along trackways according to the commands from the central computer. 25 of these carriers can be used contemporaneously in the present systems. The robocarrier collect the correct pallet from one of the stores, identifying it by means of an electronic signal. The pallet is a metal structure provided with model-specific clamps which hold the parts of the body in position during the various welding operations. The floor, side and roof panels are automatically loaded onto the pallet, which identifies the particular model it carries to the computer throughout the whole process, enabling the robots to carry out the different welding programmes for the two or five door model as each passes through the 'gate'.

The robocarrier brings its load of pallet and body panels to the first robot station, or gate. Two clamps,

once again specific to the model to be welded, automatically lock the body into position, and the robot extends hydraulic 'concertina' arms to perform the first 'tacking' welds. The first two stations are identical and the body passes through one or the other indifferently. It then proceeds in sequence to the remaining four stations where welding is completed. At the end of the welding process the body is unloaded automatically onto the conveyors, and the robocarrier either re-enters the cycle directly or is sent to the store to pick up a new pallet if it is to change model.

It is the extreme flexibility of the robogate system which makes it unique in the vanguard of automatic car making. If there is a breakdown on one of the stations, production is not stopped as the robocarriers are simply re-routed through the other stations while repairs are carried out. The robots are capable of carrying out a vast range of programmes; as an engineer commented during my visit: "We could make dishwashers on this if we wanted". A FIAT publication enthuses:

"FIAT can produce the new 'Strada' in its 3 or 5 door versions in any sequence with production programmes which can be varied for each of the two body versions... In future its flexibility can be increased, producing a new vehicle with the same plant with a relatively modest expenditure... It would only be necessary to add the appropriate clamps to two stations for alternating use with existing ones. An adequate number of new pallets would also be necessary..." (41).

In fact, the cost of a model change would be extremely low. Only 20% of the total cost of the plant derives from the 'specific' components; parts which would have to be changed with a change of model would be the clamps, parts of the pallets, about 30% of the welding pincers, and the computer programming. These specific tools, once made ready, could be changed in just a few hours. This is clearly of great importance when the right model in the right place at the right time has become a major aim of all car producers.

The extreme flexibility of the robogate system extends to the point of allowing the production of different models in different proportions according to demand (a goal already pursued without success, it will be remembered, on the quadruple lines of the Termoli plant).

One last factor in productive flexibility is the modular arrangement of the plant lay-out. The robot welding gates can be added or removed at convenience with very little disturbance to the rest of the productive arrangement.

The second major advantage of the robogate plant is, of course, the elimination of human labour and all the problems that it involves. Automation resolves at a stroke decades of management headaches about control over the labour force, 'porosity', absenteeism and industrial conflict.

## The New Productive Arrangement as a Strategy for Control

It will be seen, then, that the new productive arrangements stimulated by "the kick in the teeth" of the workers' struggles of 1969 on, and further accelerated during the oil crisis of 1973 and the resultant race for competitiveness in the car industry, were designed to bring about several important results. The first among these is a new flexibility, control and supervision of the organization of labour. The diverse experiments in the restructuring of the labour process all have in common the intention of re-instating control in the big factory through the replacement of the traditional assembly lines with more manageable areas whose relative autonomy gives a great deal of protection to overall production flow, confining the effects of disputes, breakdowns and technical stoppages to the single sections concerned.

This restructuring of the labour process has made it more difficult for workers to influence production effectively with the familiar range of collectively organized tactics such as 'chequerboard' strikes etc. As well as the relative autonomy of the various parts of the productive cycle, an increasing technical complexity and centralization of command over the labour process opposes the workers, making resistance both more difficult to organize and less effective. The extensive use of computers has facilitated the fragmentation of the labour process, allowing the use of islands or of teams working, at least to some extent, independently

from the insistent rhythms of the assembly lines, but under the direct surveillance and direction of the information systems. "Exactly because computers increase the capacity of centralized command, reinforcing the substance of unified control, the firm can take the form of decentralization, of islands, of 'free' work, or 'independent units of production and profit'" (42).

A major tactic in the general strategy of breaking up the labour process into relatively independent sections are the buffer storages and rotating polmoni, capable of giving several hours of cover during strikes, breakdowns or localized production slow down. These storages are strategically placed around the factory. Additional flexibility is given by innovations in transfer technology such as the robocarriers, which can be re-routed, according to the precise productive conditions, via the computers. In other cases lines are tripled or quadrupled, once again providing cover for stoppages.

Technological innovations have ameliorated the problems of economy of scale which would have resulted from the tendency towards the 'modular' factory. As well as the possibility of retaining central control through information systems, several of the new technologies in use (for example robogate and the automated presses) are capable of producing more than one model or part with little or no modification of the machinery involved. Very long lines are no longer a necessity when a diversity of models can be passed down the same one.

Alongside the increase in productive flexibility has come the attempt to replace as far as possible

manual labour with automatic. The most dramatic examples of this are the robogate, the automated presses, the robotized paint spray and the automatic body to the PT unit assembly on the 131 line. Although no worker has been directly made redundant as a direct result of new technology in his or her department, as retraining for new jobs must be made available under the terms of agreements with the trade unions, clearly jobs are being cut by automation.

The total effect on manning of the new technologies is difficult to determine - and this must be in part intentional. The united engineering workers union, the ELM, estimates that FIAT has reduced its Turinese workforce through non-replacement of turnover by about 10 to 12,000 workers a year over recent years (43). FIAT's own figures also reflect an overall drop.

N° of Manual Employees in  
all FIAT's Italian Factories (44)

1973	161,900
1974	156,900
1975	154,100

(The data given for the following years refer to the new, larger FIAT holding and are thus not comparable). A large proportion of this reduction is, however, obviously due to the severe crisis of the industry in these years.

Perhaps more pertinent are the following figures showing the drop in employment in various sections of the company between 1973 and 1975 (45).

	Sept 1973	Sept 1975	Difference	%
MIRAFIORI BODYWORK	18,362	15,587	-2,775	-15.11
MIRAFIORI MECHANICS	17,163	14,116	-3,047	-17.75
MIRAFIORI PRESSES	8,704	7,622	-1,082	-12.43
RIVALTA	17,980	12,988	-4,992	-27.76
MATERFERRO	1,827	1,703	-124	-2.3
AGES	1,127	1,101	-26	-2.3
FERRIERE	6,925	7,106	+91	-
OSA-LINGOTTO	6,697	6,535	-162	-2.4
SPA CENTRO	2,613	2,455	-158	-4.37
ARIGLIANA	3,796	4,054	+258	-
METALLI	416	412	-4	-
RICAMBI	1,872	2,125	+253	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88,482</b>	<b>76,714</b>	<b>-11,768</b>	<b>-13.</b>

It can be seen from these figures that by far the greatest percentages of job loss have occurred in departments which have undergone the most intense restructuring; e.g. Rivalta and the three Mirafiori sections. Once again, however, this cannot be attributed solely to automation, as production is also being decentralized away from the big factories such as Mirafiori and Rivalta to smaller sites in the South. One last source of evidence comes from a consultant report to management on the organization of work. This document gives a total of 1,400 jobs lost in the FIAT auto sector between 1971 and 1973 due to "interventions on the organization of work"; 750 in Bodywork, 460 in Mechanics and 190 in the Press shops (46). Whatever the exact figures, however, it is clear that a replacement of workers by machine is occurring and will continue to occur.

As well as eliminating a certain number of workers, automation has proved to alter the characteristics of the labour force involved. The workers who work with the

new technology replacing assembly line workers are highly skilled: maintenance workers, toolmakers, electricians etc. Training for work, for example with the robogate, is intensive: internal electronics courses are run at Rivalta for workers holding diplomas from high school or the FIAT school Centro di Formazione Professionale Giovanni Agnelli; a number of workers and foremen are sent on specialist courses for work with computer hardware and some foremen have even been sent to England for preventive maintenance and robot 'first aid' courses. An article in the FIAT foremen's paper described the robogate maintenance team as follows:

"'input', 'output', 'software', 'hardware' ". Those who are speaking are neither engineers nor space technicians. We are in the computer control room for the robogate and these strange terms 'season' the conversation between a group of young workers and Oreste Raimondo, in charge of maintenance programming. Times change. The stereotype image of the resigned and indifferent worker has been destroyed. This above all as far as concerns maintenance work... In this key sector technicians in white collars and those in overalls have followed almost analogous training courses" (47).

It is of interest that Volvo has also discovered that work with robots tends to produce entirely different attitudes to the factory, rescuing at least this one happy spin-off from the debacle of Kalmar. The Economist writes of the Volvo experimentations: "... the experiment was not entirely wasted. Volvo found that

employees who work closely with robots (like maintenance men) tend to become the most loyal of all, rarely missing a day's work. The company... says it would now apply many of the Kalmar methods in plants without group production" (48).

This 'new sort of worker', then, tends to be considerably less trouble to management. Dispersed around the factory floor it is more difficult for them to organize themselves and their privileged and high status position differentiates them from other workers. More importantly still, they seem to develop a sense of pride in their highly skilled work, and rarely take a day off or take part in the 'non-work' so common throughout the rest of FIAT.

FIAT itself stresses this trend in its literature, propagating the notion that automation brings in its wake a new 'professional worker' with clean hands and interesting and varied tasks:

"On the basis of our experience I can affirm that the introduction of automated processes brings a growth of skill in two directions: on the one hand by eliminating or reducing the more simple and repetitive work posts they raise the average skill level; on the other they call for a greater knowledge of integrated production programming and control systems... and of plant maintenance, bringing the introduction of new skills or the enrichment of old ones" (49).

The number of people concerned with maintenance, programming etc. has in fact risen with the increasing use of sophisticated equipment - already in 1977 11,000 people were responsible for quality control and maintenance in the Mirafiori engine plant (50).

However, the appearance of a limited strata of highly qualified maintenance and electronics experts is only one side of the story: on the other side are the many more workers who are even more thoroughly de-skilled by the new 'thinking' machines; whose intervention in the labour process has become even more purely manual and mechanical. The separation between conception and execution within the labour process is not ameliorated but rather made absolute by the introduction of numerically controlled devices and computerized control of production flow. This 'other side of the coin' is expressed, appropriately enough, in an earlier issue of the same management publication from which the above quotation from Tufarelli was taken:

"Studies carried out in departments where the greater proportion of work activity had been automated demonstrate, in fact, that the work of the (unskilled) workers had become more monotonous, and, further, their chances for promotion were reduced. The fact that, in an automated production process, work at the operative level is often characterized primarily by the lack of direct involvement of the worker would seem to exclude any possibility of 're-skilling' the tasks" (51).

Thus if the average skill level of the whole factory is pushed up by automation, this is the result of a reduction in the number of unskilled workers (pushed out by new machinery) rather than a re-skilling of the whole labour force and may anyway be countermanded by a de-skilling of remaining workers. Nevertheless, the creation of a strata of highly skilled workers and its reflection in an absolute reduction in the numbers of unskilled workers is an undeniable result of automation, and one which may well prove to be convenient to the employer.

This new class sector, if such it may be called, may have made a relevant contribution to the silent procession of low level management, chargehands and skilled workers making up the 'march of the 40,000' that, as we shall see later, was an important immediate factor in the failure of the decisive strike of 1980.

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11. Cesare Annibaldi, FIAT's chief personnel officer, in fact explains the combination and synthesis of factors acting towards the evolution of the organization of work as being:
  - \* The management prerogative to combine in an efficient and creative way the factors of production, or rather to rationalize the relationship between investments and labour power through recuperation of productivity.
  - \* Trade union pressure to include dynamic elements in skill grading through the reflection of work organization in skill grades or rather the demands for promotion often hidden in wage claims.
  - \* The ideological pressure from the trade union movement to influence... high level company decision-making, or rather the attempt to control through 'how' to produce also what and where to produce.

(Cesare Annibaldi, "Il ruolo dell'Organizzazione del Lavoro

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE UNGOVERNABLE FACTORY

"Mirafiori is the biggest city-factory in the world. It is a huge rectangle just outside the centre of Turin. The short side looks out over Corso Giovanni Agnelli, a huge road leading up into the valley of Pinerolo. It has a surface area of three million square metres, half of which is covered by the plants. The surrounding wall is seven kilometers long, broken by thirty two gates. At the beginning of the 70s you could read here the slogans of workers' contestation, written in letters one metre high and more: 'The only music the bosses can hear is the sound of the shut-down machinery' - 'We want the sun in Turin too' - 'Agnelli at the presses, the workers in the hills'.

Inside Mirafiori there are fifty kilometers of railway tracks and two hundred kilometers of overhead tracks (that is railway tracks suspended in the air, along which travel a bit of everything: some say that there are even 60 radiators for the old '600' model, forgotten for more than 10 years, which no one knows how to get down without stopping the whole factory). And there are thirteen thousand pieces of machinery (from the simplest to the most complicated) and six hundred and sixty six presses (the biggest are the size of a small family house and make a hell of a din).

From this city of iron, cement and machinery up to three thousand vehicles a day can come out from six

in the morning until ten at night. Nearly three cars a minute, one every twenty seconds. This, anyway, is what the FIAT publications say. Today, instead, only one thousand five hundred to one thousand seven hundred emerge each day, one every thirty five seconds. The energy consumed at Mirafiori is about that which would be produced by burning two hundred and ninety thousand tonnes of oil per year.

In the past, this city-factory is reputed to have held as many as 65 thousand workers, but this figure is uncertain. Nor can we be sure how many workers there are today. The PCI talks of 57 thousand people, but according to FIAT there are nearer 59 thousand. The company explains that in the auto sector (mechanics and bodywork) there are 44 thousand workers today of whom 7 thousand (16% of the total) are women. There are 10,500 white collar workers (of whom two thousand five hundred are women). In the foundry there are 900 white collar workers (250 women) and 3,530 blue collar workers (40 women). The total is then 58,930: a fairish size provincial city... Seventy per cent of the workers are between 25 and 45 years of age (the percentage is more or less equal for men and women). 20% of male workers and only 9% of female workers fall in the twenty-twenty five age group. Approximately one in two workers at Mirafiori are between twenty and thirty five years old... Workers above the age of forty five are less than nine per cent of the total" (1).

This was a journalist's impression in 1980 of Mirafiori, that realization of the half-mad world of 'Smallcreep's Day' dubbed by Agnelli as 'ungovernable', and the setting of a peculiar revolt against work of the late 1970s that left management, with all its sophisticated technology and models of work organization, with no recourse but the court of law and, eventually, mass sackings.

### **A Bit of the Outside World**

By the late 1970s, then, the organization of work had already undergone considerable mutation, rendering less effective the forms of struggle which had become traditional within the big Italian factories: 'chequer-board' and 'hiccup' actions and informal negotiations restricted to single departments or line sections but effectively making chaos of the work cycle as a whole. It would, of course, require a further retrospective study to ascertain the extent to which management's strategy was successful in disarming the working class. It may be relevant that these more articulated tactics were renounced in the strike of 1980 (briefly covered in a later chapter) which took the form familiar in for example the U.K., but until then practically unknown in Italy, of a mass 'everyone out' strike effectively closing the factories for a protracted period of time. It will be remembered that this form of struggle is difficult to sustain in Italy in view of the lack of strike funds, and the strike in fact concluded with a near total defeat for the workers.

In the meantime, however, I wish to report some new and surprising behaviours that emerged in FIAT in the late 1970s.

These behaviours were probably not directly linked to the 'new way of making cars' - although they do illustrate the point, central to this thesis, that the success of the most carefully laid strategies of management is strongly conditioned by the kind of working class subjectivity they must confront, and hence by whole variety of other historically and geographically specific factors. For even FIAT's most sophisticated strategies for control proved inadequate when faced, in the late 1970s, by the expression of a new sort of presence on the factory floor.

By the late 1970s, changes in the regulations governing the employment of new workers forced Italian companies to take on a more or less random sample of the available labour force through lists of the unemployed held at the various job centres. When, in 1978, FIAT decided to take on approximately 10,000 new workers (perhaps with the intention of relaunching production on the basis of the recent large scale investments) it was hence forced to absorb a representative selection of the unemployed: including women (about 65% of the new intake) and young people for whom the factory was a mere stop-gap solution prior to or during the continuation of studies (the open university system in Italy allows all persons with a secondary school diploma to frequent the universities, often on a part-time and/or irregular basis, and rarely with financial support).

The new young workers brought with them into the factory a breath of important events outside: the mass identification of young unemployed, irregularly employed and students with the 'non-organization' of *autonomia* (2). With them came a re-postulation of the 'refusal of work', ironical attitudes towards the unions and workers' parties and a general disillusionment with the classic working class terrains of struggle. The following examples of slogans having some currency at the time may render the idea, although they admittedly lose something in translation.

"Has bread gone up? (Noooo...!) Has petrol gone up? (Noooo...!) Have wages gone up? (YEEEEES...! WE'RE TOO WELL OFF, WE'RE TOO WELL OFF)"

"Now we're being good, may we talk to the unions please?"

"Fewer houses for the people and more nuclear plants!"

And from the women:

"Work is not very feminine, give us more sewing machines"

"Giving birth is beautiful and cheers you up; it reinforces the family and that's what's MOST important"

Some quotations from young FIAT workers will further illustrate some of the 'flavour' of this new element on the factory floor.

"Anyway, we young ones go in to the factory... with a different kind of experience, a less serious way

of seeing things; a bit of the outside world comes into the factory with us and even if it doesn't change it, this feeling exists and sooner or later it is felt... Perhaps we've got a different way of seeing our lives, the eight hours we spend in the factory are like between brackets, when you get out even if you're a bit tired, you don't go home. For example I buy about two books every week, I'm interested in psychology even though for the moment I've got no intention of going to university. Many of the others are already at university, I think a lot of them already have diplomas or study in the evenings...

We work as workers, but we're not; I, at least, don't feel like one, I'm hoping to get out fairly soon, and anyway after the first 15 days I'd organized my work as I wanted it, without getting too worried about it and no one says anything. On the assembly line where I work for example, there are no fixed work posts, you can change over, and straightaway in the morning there's a scramble for the quietest jobs, they even play cards for it... there're even those who arrive a few minutes early, before six, to get the job to their taste, and there's always the chance of being fuori linea (a substitute), and in that way you avoid a good bit of the work. There are those who use the few minutes' break to choose the work post, and those who try and draw it out. All of this allows us to regulate our effort to a certain extent, but often at the expense

of those who were obliged to work more that day..." (3).

The young, and particularly the women, are often disenchanted not only with the work, but also with the working class culture they find inside the factory. A woman worker comments:

"I thought I knew the mythic working class. I've met some chauvinists here who look at my arse, who make heavy remarks if I tell them I've been singing and playing guitar with my friends, who are happy just polishing up their 127s. As soon as I can I'm getting out" (4).

This lack of 'seriousness' and identification with the factory puzzles the older workers:

"We hoped the new workers would bring with them a fresh wave of struggle, but it's still the old ones from ten years back who have to try and convince the young ones to stick with us. It's always us, with ten, thirty years of factory work behind us, who are here during the struggles" (5).

The older generation who had experienced the struggles of 1969 accuse the younger ones of individualism, a privatized and 'American style' attitude towards work. The same worker continues:

"... the young people have other interests, they're not interested in the factory, you see. They climb over the walls (during strikes) you see? And it's us older ones who have to stand firm, they don't seem

to understand that we're playing for everything here in the factory: our working rights. They know we're struggling for them as well" (6).

Tom, an FLM full-timer and another 'sixty-niner' confirmed to me:

"In our days, at election time, there was a much greater renewal of the delegati, now it's difficult to find a delegato who's worked at FIAT for less than two years. The leadership of the FLM is all around the 30 year mark now. We joined the union to participate in it, to struggle; now, although they still join the union, they see it just as a form of guarantee, they see the unions as guaranteeing wage rates and so on. There's been a fall in our sort of values all over the West, I'd say. The young workers are much more privatized, more individualistic, like the Americans".

He went on to remark, however, that although the young workers were less interested in direct involvement in union affairs, there had not been a drop in the level of struggle:

"I Wouldn't say there's been a drop in the level of participation in struggles. The young are interested in different things, they're particularly interested in questions relating to the organization of work, there's been a noticeable increase in activity over this. They've got a much higher level of schooling, they feel the alienation in the factory much more strongly than the older workers. They don't want to

go on working in the same position for years. They very quickly look for a new job".

The lack of identification with the traditional concerns and preoccupations of the older workers has in fact led to some interesting trends. A study on FIAT by two sociologists revealed that the normal pattern of low absenteeism on days of industrial conflict was reversed in this period, absenteeism increasing to as much as 40 to 50% on days of national general actions (7).

However, whatever the opinions of some of the older militants, there can be no doubt that the young workers had an impact on FIAT's ability to control its labour force. Not all of the behaviours illustrated below would be accepted by everyone as manifestations of class consciousness as in general they arise from attitudes of individual revolt against work and a desire to enjoy life rather than work in a factory. On the other hand, perhaps this definition of class consciousness is as good as many others; in the last analysis, the headache it provided for FIAT was just as big.

So big was this headache, in fact, that FIAT eventually took the unheard of step of firing 61 workers and later taking them to court. Many of the following examples are in fact provided by FIAT's lists of charges against the 61.

### **The 'New' Forms of Disaffection with Work**

Refusal of the Factory Hierarchy. The following quotes are translated from an extensive interview with a

foreman, who desired to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal:

"I'm in the factory from nine to eleven hours a day. And every day I ask myself: to do what? You'll have heard of production planning, of quality control? Right, that's my job in the team. I come in at the start of the shift, I count the workers who work with me, I know that to make a certain production target a certain number of men are needed, I know that in order to sell, the product must be trustworthy... In other words I carry out the interests of the company that pays me. It's not what I want to do, it's what I have to do. In another era I would have said: 'It's my duty'... I've done this work for a long time. Now I don't do it any more...

'Capo', don't piss me off or we'll strike. 'Capo', fuck off. 'Capo' you're a bastard watch out because I know you, I know where you live and I'll get you once we're out of here. 'Capo', don't report me or else... We just have to take it... It's not gone too badly for me, they have not even burnt my car, I always park in a different place.

We foremen have given up. It's only left for us to go into pension, but it's as if we already had. I know that if the client has brakes which don't work or a scratched piston it's our fault as well, but in these times it's difficult to behave according to the rules... When someone asks me who I am and what I do, I don't know what to answer. Am I a foreman? No, not anymore. I'm just someone who does his work

badly, or rather, who doesn't know what his work is" (8).

The words of this foreman who is no longer a foreman are echoed by others:

"Look, more than three people working on one body is really forbidden. It's been shown that the work done is sub-quality, that confusion results, then the whole thing has to be rejected. But the foremen are not here to make discipline respected. You don't see the violence but it's here, everywhere. It's present in the fact that we've given up command. We come to some agreement and get on the best we can" (9).

The young workers themselves explain the relationship with the foremen in rather different terms:

"On the line - says Mario, 22 years old, a worker in the Mirafiori bodywork section - there are people who quote Foucault, and the creeps explode with rage because they haven't even heard of him. There are the gays. They blow them kisses, and write 'long live Renato Zero' on the walls. Others roll a joint and laugh as if they were crazed. The feminists, too, giggle everytime a man tries to give them orders. The FIAT foremen have never seen the workers laughing and they get really angry" (10).

Sabotage. Although difficult to document this seems to be fairly common, as in most car firms. It ranges from a simple lack of interest in work tagged 'cumulative sabotage' - a practice based on a sort of negative

cooperation which, adding 'absent mindedness' to 'absent mindedness' in the working and quality control of a semi-worked article, progressively reduces it to waste... (11) - to acts requiring a greater degree of dedication and imagination: "at Rivalta, in the paint-shop a new form of sabotage with a highly artistic value has been invented, the result being a series of multi-coloured 128s which would have pleased and excited Andy Warhol but did less for Agnelli despite his well known passion for modern art" (12).

There are also more traditional forms of sabotage: the incorporation of a minor but irritating defect into the finished vehicle, 'Inexplicable' equipment breakdowns and so on are widespread. So is a more purely vandalistic form, resulting for example in rows of shiny cars with broken windscreen wipers. Of a different sort again is the damage sometimes done to buildings during violent *cortei interni* and internal strikes.

Violence. In its lists of charges against the 61, FIAT cites a total of 29 episodes of violence occurring during the course of *cortei interni* and demonstrations. Three of the sacked workers, nicknamed the 'red kerchief band' because of their habit of covering their faces with red scarves during demonstrations, are accused of having been "armed with iron bars" and of committing "acts of violence on foremen and office workers" during *cortei* on the days of the 6th and 11th July, 1979. 25 of the sacked workers are accused of intimidating workers not participating in the *cortei*. Another is accused of

forcing foremen and office workers to carry banners and placards and lead the cortei.

The 'exuberance' of the cortei and demonstrations, as well as the practice of forcing foremen and office workers to lead them are confirmed in other reports:

"There are two sorts of demonstration close to the hearts of the young workers: the silent procession of 50-100 which suddenly, unanimously, suspends work in one shop and walks through into another breaking glass and cases; or the big, carnivalesque and violent procession in which they advance beating keys against car panels and herding the foremen ahead with kicks in the behind. In both cases the demonstrations are against and outside the control of the unions" (13).

Of 35 charges of verbal and non verbal intimidations most reduce to simple insults to foremen who were the subject of epithets such as jackal, clown, slave, idiot and turd. Some more sinister remarks were reported, however: "we'll shorten your legs for you", "I've never seen so many people so happy to die young", "Our organization knows your car number plates and address".

Unilateral Reduction of Work. Under this expressive sub-heading FIAT listed 48 accusations, most of which concern late arrival, premature departure and negligence. One worker is accused of having "frequently abandoned the work post and worked insufficiently with results of the poorest quality". Another worker

apparently responded to a reprimand for sub-standard work with the words: "Just the fact of getting up in the morning and coming into work amply covers the wages I get".

Forms of this 'revolt against work' are described in other reports:

"Non-work; something peculiar but real. At any moment the people intent on work, screwing in bolts and assembling mudguards are few. Many others are walking up and down the line with the slightly distracted air of one marking time. Every 7-8 meters there are benches, like those in public gardens, where an old worker reads the 'Gazetto dello Sport' a youth younger than 20 leafs through strip cartoons, and two girls chat in low voices" (14).

**The Organization of Non-Union Struggles.** This charge brought 23 of the 61 in for other accusations, 3 of them being held responsible for the organization of more than 120 stoppages causing loss of production and the suspension of work activities on the lines. 26 of the 61 are under the extremely serious charge of "participation in armed groups", six of them allegedly propagandizing armed nuclei within the factory.

**'Creative' Activities.** FIAT accused one worker of having "abusively occupied an area close to the shop where he worked, and using it habitually to cook food destined for an alternative restaurant". Another worker stood accused of "abandoning his work post, sometimes for long

periods of time, during which he sold table-cloths and sheets".

The practice of some workers of leaving their posts to sell things around the factory is also confirmed from other sources. The following is taken from an interview with a 56 year old maintenance worker:

"Do you know for example, that Mirafiori is like Porta Portese (a huge street market in Rome). Everything's sold here, apart from locomotives, and that only because they couldn't get one into the factory.

Controband tobacco, tights, biros, ties, food. I know someone who comes in in the morning with 30 brioches and during the break, he goes round selling them. And among the sacked workers there's one who cooked food in the press shop: the alternative canteen he called it, at 2000 Lire (£1) a meal" (15).

**Having Fun in the Factory.** One symptom of the breakdown of discipline in the big factory has particularly fascinated and scandalized the press and public. It is apparently fairly common to find used prophylactics littering empty car bodies:

"Some years ago a personnel chief was shocked to hear that a man and a woman worker had been discovered making love on the back seat of a 130 (Do you know what I mean? A 130! Our flag-ship, a 3 litre engine!) Now this sort of thing is not in the least surprising. One tries not to see, but the

evidence is there: closed doors, couples disappearing for minutes on end, condoms abandoned on the floors" (16).

And in another interview: "Yes, of course there are those who screw. Now there are a lot of women in the factory, and when straw is left near fire..." (17).

Although reported in the press with a certain eye for scandal and the natural focus of that profession on sex and violence, these new behaviours also had a real effect on the quality of work within the factory, resulting in very ample job timings and a relaxed rhythm within the factory.

Inside Mirafiori I, too, saw the 'park benches' where workers read newspapers or talk among themselves; the little groups aggregated around the vending machines; workers smoking disinterestedly by idle machines. I stood and watched while hooks lowered the side panels into place on the flooring and two workers unhurriedly clipped them for welding then turned away to sit or talk for a seeming eternity before the line moved on and the next set of hooks and panels slowly descended. My guide's explanations were simple:

"They have about 40 minutes break a day each, on average, which they can take when they want... But there is a certain number of substitute workers - we call them 'jolly workers', who take over, so you see there is an informal control over the break-time they take. And as you see, the work timings are not very fast. Workers can choose whether to take a

rest, perhaps smoke a cigarette, between pieces, or whether to accumulate time and take a longer break later on".

When I later commented on the relaxed production rhythms inside the factory to a group of delegati and trade union full-timers at the Quinta Lega (fifth branch) of the FIM, it caused a great deal of mirth. "Yes - commented one of the older delegati - that's a sign of our strength, we're proud of it". They went on to explain the increasing control the workers have gained over production rhythms since 1969.

"Before, the Southerners, who were new to the factory, would get very nervous when the time and motion men would come round with their stop-watches. Now, of course, the attitude is completely different, they have to be grateful if they see any work at all. In some cases the T and M men have to negotiate with the delegates to catch them working".

A further example of this sort was recounted to me by a young foundry worker taken on at FIAT's Carmagnola plant in 1978 and elected as delegato after a few months. Carmagnola is a relatively small plant, having a workforce of about 1500 workers, in the countryside outside Turin. Conditions in a foundry are amongst the heaviest and most unhealthy to be found in industry and until shortly beforehand the workforce had been composed largely of local agricultural labourers keeping up small farm holdings in a system of 'double work' and frequently absenting themselves during harvesting and sowing

seasons - whilst still managing to maintain below average levels of absenteeism. These workers tended to put up very little resistance to the near infernal conditions in the foundry and a peaceful and paternalistic system evolved. As the young worker told me:

"They used to accept all the heavy work. It was a big problem for management when the young workers came in; they'd say - 'pick this up? You must be kidding' - when the workers from the countryside would pick up anything they were told to. The old workers had a respectful, timid attitude towards management".

When, in 1978, 150 new workers were employed (a renewal amounting to 10% of the total workforce), things changed rapidly. One important factor in this was that the majority of the new workers were women, who were not only legally prevented from doing the third (night) shift, then in operation, but also many of the other operations required in the work process. The result was, naturally enough, a degree of friction, as the men had to take on a disproportionate amount of the night shifts and heavier work. Interestingly enough, however, this friction was overcome in the generalized struggle to improve conditions for all: working conditions were generally improved and in particular the shifts were reduced to two. The entrance of women in the factory was thus used as a successful 'lever' in negotiations, leading, after a prolonged period of struggle, to greatly improved conditions for all.

The example of these young workers thus shows how a simple attitude of rebellious intransigence, a 'revolt against work', even when not located in the context of trade union militancy or formal negotiations, was able to defeat even the most complex, technologically sophisticated and carefully designed organization of the labour process. The situation of 'ungovernability' in the factory, in fact, eventually forced FIAT to the older and more straightforward strategy of repression, first with the sacking and exemplary trial of 61 of the workers, and later with mass lay-offs, so definitively closing this peculiar parenthesis in the history of working class struggles and the evolution of the labour process at FIAT. It is also important to note that this open resort to fear tactics was made possible by a more general repressive climate in Italy, in which anti-terrorist policies had effectively 'criminalized' large sectors of the non-parliamentary left: for reasons of space, however, it is unfortunately impossible to treat this wider connection of the strategies of individual capitals to the State and its judiciary and repressive wings.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Giuseppe Turani in *La Repubblica*, Tuesday 19 February 1980.
2. Autonomia was not an organization but a loosely linked network of collectives, magazines, radio stations and

individuals in one very extensive 'area' of struggle.

3. *Magazzino*, N° 2, May 1979, pp. 66-67.
4. *Ibid.* p. 62.
5. R. Buttaferro, M. Revelli, N. Scianna "Cosa Succede a Mirafiori? Uno Sciopero Istantivo", *Lotta Continua*, 10 May, 1979.
6. *Ibid.*
7. M. Berra, M. Revelli "La Fabbrica Negata", *Sapere*, N° 821, August 1979, p. 52.
8. *La Repubblica*, Thursday 11 October 1979.
9. *La Repubblica*, Thursday 21 February 1980.
10. *L'Espresso*, N° 43, 28 October 1979.
11. *Collegamenti per l'Organizzazione Diretta di Classe*, N° 5, November 1978, p. 12.
12. *Ibid.* p. 17.
13. *La Repubblica*, Monday 15 October 1980.
14. This and all quotes unless otherwise specified taken from an account of the charges brought by FIAT against the 61 in *L'Espresso*, N° 8, 24 February 1980.
15. *La Repubblica*, Wednesday 20 February 1980.
16. *L'Espresso*, N° 43, 28 October 1979, p. 14.
17. *La Repubblica*, Monday 15 October 1980.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHERE ARE THE WORKERS? EVOLUTIONS IN THE OFFICIAL LEADERSHIP

"Scalfari: Are you pleased about the EUR line?

Giovanni Agnelli: I'm extremely pleased about it, but unfortunately it hasn't broached the factory gates yet. Lama knows this and it's a thorn in his flesh too" (La Repubblica, 20 October 1979).

Previous chapters have shown how FIAT, as a first condition for an increase in productivity, has attempted to reinstate control and authority on the shop floor. As we have seen, three main strategies have been employed in this attempt. These are:

- 1) Changes in the organization of work aimed at securing not only an intensification of production rhythms, but also a greater degree of flexibility in the use of labour and plant and a greater control over the labour process as a whole.
- 2) The decentralization of production away from the giant Northern factories such as Mirafiori and Rivalta to smaller, modern and more 'governable' centres such as Cassino and Termoli Imerese in the South.
- 3) The re-proposal of the direct disciplinary and authoritarian management style which had been broken by the struggles of the late 1960s - early 1970s. This strategy has manifested itself in many ways, but is particularly clear in the dual aims of the waves of sackings of the late 1970s which were directed not only at the elimination of surplus labour force, but also hit selectively

to rid the factory of 'disruptive' elements, and issue a general threat to the survivors.

### **The Governed Factory**

By the 1980s, these strategies appeared to have enjoyed considerable success.

The use of the sack and *cassa integrazione* with no guarantee of re-employment, the block on turn over, early retirement etc. resulted in an enormous reduction of the workforce, a reduction which has almost exclusively affected the North. This reduction/redistribution is unlikely ever to be reversed. There was also a very clear change - at least for FIAT for the better - in the climate inside the factory. Conflict, at least temporarily, had abated. An illustration of this comes with the fact that management's normally lengthy daily reports on industrial relations problems had, according to a foreman, been reduced to a few pages or become actually unnecessary.

Although it is too early, of course, to talk of a permanent 'return to governability' in the big factories of the North, the climate of fear which was produced by the employers' heavy attack gave FIAT the breathing space it needed on the one hand to reinforce authority, largely in the form of the foremen, and on the other to use the new work systems to the full, habituating the workforce to levels of productivity which would have been out of the question before. Giovanna Sordello, a woman worker sacked from the Carmagnola Foundry (Teksid) put it like this:

"... the situation in the factory has become very heavy: exploitation has been increased through work speed-ups, there is an atmosphere of fear and resignation amongst the workers, in part due to the mounting arrogance and increasing use of repressive systems by the foremen... Even in the CdF (factory council) nearly all the surviving delegates are feeling hopeless and disillusioned, and management is having an easy time getting its line implemented, even if this means ignoring previous agreements" (1).

Another testimony of the new situation in the factory comes this time from a foreman from Mirafiori:

"Up until last Autumn 30,000 people worked here. Now there are 20,000, one third less. And believe me, it wasn't the 'little virgins' who were the first to go. We've got rid of those who caused trouble... Now Mirafiori is just a factory like all the others in the rest of Europe, in Germany, in France. Things have changed to the point that when we do the evening production account we can hardly believe it. Having lost about one third of the workers we were expecting an enormous drop in production, but 20% more cars than we had foreseen are being assembled" (2).

The figures for the months following the 'crack-down' support the widely acknowledged talk of a new climate in the factory. Absenteeism dropped from an average of 15-16% for the first 6 months of 1980 to 5-6%

in October–November, to under 4% in January 1981, and levelled out at about 5%. But more extraordinary still are the production figures for the first few months of 1981: despite the 20% reduction in the labour force, production dropped by a mere 5%!

But where are the organizations of the working class in all this? Why is capital's project for industrial reconstruction and the restoration of command in the factory passing with so little opposition? Why has no clear working class response emerged?

The largest part of the responsibility for the working class' failure to develop a theoretical and political response to capital's project must lie with the trade union organizations, which appear to have assumed the role of a consultant doctor advising on the necessary course of treatment for sick industry.

### **Working Class Demands: the Anti-Capitalist Content**

To say this merely raises another question: what mechanisms underlay the blunting of the oppositional thrust of the working class - which included some layers of its organizational expressions - of the late 60s and 70s? Before going on to an examination of the transformation of a trade union which, at least at those levels in close contact with the rank and file, was capable of sustaining and encouraging the imaginative and intransigent struggles of those years, I would like to pause to examine the real content of these struggles. This is important for the demonstration that the current failure of the unions to find an interlocutor in the

working class has its roots not only in a simple process of stagnation, fatigue or even bureaucratization (although this too plays its part), but in a deliberate disownment of the oppositional content of the working class demands.

Starting from the 60s the working class began to unmask the real, ideological nature of Scientific Management and oppose it. A series of extremely important victories - which capital could not afford - were won as a result of this opposition. These were: the statute of workers' rights; the reduction of the working week to 40 hours without loss of pay, the right to 150 paid hours off work for education, the abolition of overtime and piece rates, equal index linked rises for all workers, the reform of pension schemes, the concession of large wage rises (particularly to the lower skill grades) in all the major industrial sectors, and so on. The situation in the factory had changed radically and to many it must have seemed that the peremptory power of the padrone had been smashed once and for all.

But already by this point FIAT management had realized that, as much as it hated the idea, the only way to reach a compromise with its workers (the full satisfaction of whose demands would have meant the complete overturning of the capitalist organization of work) was to reinforce the role of the trade unions as the only possible mediator. Thus, in order to avoid complete disaster FIAT was forced to the unwilling concession of recognition to the unofficial organizational expressions

of the class struggle which had emerged during this period.

This was the starting point for a series of complex mechanisms that prepared the terrain for the eventual taming of the working class response, however partial, uneven and fluctuating.

The unions had been to some extent radicalized by the struggles of the late 60s. The shop floor level of the union was strongly democratized, in practice becoming indistinguishable from those it 'represented', so quickly were new delegati and factory councils appearing and disappearing according to the needs of the moment. In this way the whole of the local union structure tended to be pushed forward onto new terrains: terrains which were of real and immediate relevance to the workforce, and union theory and practice was gradually permeated by issues such as the organization of work which until then had been largely foreign to it. This permeation was to outlast the period of fluid and spontaneous creation and recreation of the lower ranks of the union hierarchy, and be carried by the newly official delegati etc. into union policy even in the early stages of the perhaps inevitable sclerosis which was shortly to set in. Thus as management began to accept the institution of the delegati, recognizing them as a necessary evil if the demands of the working class were to be mediated and controlled, it was also forced to accept an initial questioning of its unilateral right to determine the labour process within the factory.

This is evidenced by the first few annual contracts negotiated after the 'hot autumn' of 1969.

The FIAT company agreement of 1971, for example, amongst other things established that: The company would place at the unions' disposal all the relevant information (work speeds, number of personnel required, any effects on the working environment etc.) on new machinery, work methods or modifications of existing ones before putting them into action, thus permitting a much higher degree of control by the workers over working conditions and environment. The same agreement also recognized a committee for the negotiation of line speeds and work rhythms in general. The 1972 National Engineering Workers' Contract, as well as agreeing wage rises which were tendentially equal for all, allowed for a series of workers' checks on the working environment to be carried out independently from the company; the definition of maximum levels of potentially damaging factors (chemicals, heat etc.), which were to be controlled by the workers or others chosen by them; the elimination of various causes of danger or discomfort; and the definition of a new and independent role for medical personnel in the factory. The National Engineering Workers' Contract of 1973 established a new grading system, the Inquadramento Unico (see chapter 5) which - at least on the face of it - reformed the false hierarchy of skills and placed manual workers on an even footing with white collar workers.

Management, then, had been forced into a series of concessions which it could ill afford. But on the other hand - although the labour force for a long time

remained vigilant, alive to the behaviour of its representatives and to management's implementation of the contracts - the terrain of the conflict had largely returned to the safer one of negotiation between management and the representatives of the labour force.

At the same time other mechanisms, which were radically to alter the nature of trade unionism in Italy, were going into motion.

### **The Historic Compromise and the Trade Union Movement: the Repudiation of Anti-Capitalism**

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) had seen in the growing economic crisis the opportunity to offer itself as a credible and healthy alternative to the decadent Christian Democratic dynasty - perennially shaken by scandals and the exposure of corruption. This opportunity seemed even more real after the elections of 1976, in which the PCI came very close to toppling the Christian Democrats (DC) from power. The PCI desired to renew its image as the only party able to reform industry and motivate production within a more 'just' social and economic system. But in order to do this - before it could even hope to mount an effective electoral campaign - it would first have to convince capital, the Americans and the whole world of its good intentions. The PCI redoubled its efforts to demonstrate that it did not wish to expropriate industrialists or institute anything remotely akin to Soviet or any other communism in Italy. Rather it stressed that it would be able to 'manage' the crisis better than the hidebound opposition, and achieve the full cooperation of the

working classes with a 'national interest' that could be identified in a slightly more socialist future. And the leadership of the communist dominated CGIL, the majority union federation - tied closely to the mother party's apron strings - naturally enough was called upon to demonstrate the real benefits which industry could gain from a communist participation in political power. Pointing to the real gains made over the last few years, the union leadership called for restraint and patience, for time for the cake to grow again - while Party and union looked into how it was baked.

The call for restraint found some immediate response. As The Economist put it in 1977:

"The improvement in Italy's economy owes much to the restraining hand of the communists on Italy's unions. The party's strongly centralized control of the unions, and its growing direct stakes in commerce, finance and industry, have helped to ensure that Italy's wage restraint, unlike Britain's, has had some sticking power" (3).

Such a shift by the trade union leadership to the overt call for moderation and restraint in industrial relations would certainly not have been possible in the context of the late 60s, or even early 70s. At that time the union bureaucracy was forced by the activism and vigilance of its membership to hold to the contents and directions of the struggles in the factory. So how was it possible now?

The answer lies largely in the fact that the class whose interests the trade unions had grown up to protect

and defend was undergoing very important changes, and the trade union hierarchy not only appeared insensitive to these, but was structurally unable to adapt itself to them.

The export of entire production processes abroad and the tendential decentralization of those remaining into smaller units, ranging from cottage industry and boite production at very low wages and appalling working conditions, to small very high technology plants was radically affecting the structure of the labour market. Those thrown out of work, or unable to find a first job in the traditional centres of employment were now 'getting by' with part-time, casual or seasonal work - often in the 'submerged economy'; a vast and growing sector in Italy. This applies particularly to the young in search of a first job. Unable to find work, or at best finding only 'precarious' jobs without contracts or guarantees, the young have tended to continue their education, a tendency which is facilitated by the fact that entrance to university in Italy is open. A new sort of proletariat has thus been emerging, one which rather than being concentrated in large factories tends to be 'diffused' over the country; one which tends to have higher level of formal education; one which at present is dominated by the young, who are no longer funneled into a 'job for life', but who live from day to day, drifting in and out of the submerged economy or making ends meet with temporary or part-time work. The traditional subject of the trade union - the waged factory worker guaranteed by a series of rights and contracts - is increasingly in a minority in the Italian

proletariat. The unions are incapable of defending this emerging working class sector, not only because the very diffuse, fluid and often isolated nature of the work makes it impossible for a national and highly centralized body to inform, organize and protect the workers, but also because of the enormous difference between the 'traditional' working class culture and that of the new 'diffuse proletariat'. Even those young people who find work in factories tend to have a very different relationship to work and to the unions, as we saw in the previous chapter.

This general and continuing mutation in the characteristics of the working class has resulted, in Italy as elsewhere, in attitudes varying from puzzlement to denial; unions and party have lost their traditional point of reference, their *raison d'être*, and, unable to adjust to the new situation have increasingly acted as independent, power-seeking agents. Their only justification for existence seems to have become largely that they do exist; and their main purpose in life appears to be to consolidate that existence. The results of this loss of a dialectical relationship with the working class are clear in the debates which have been taking place within the union and party hierarchies over the last decade.

### **The 'New Course' of 1978: From Conflict to Cooperation**

In the context of a new political climate in which the PCI seemed to have a real chance of gaining a foothold in government, it was logical that the majority

union federation, dominated by the party, would seek a new image and philosophy which would not be in contradiction with the PCI's pretensions to political power. This new climate coincided with the increasing isolation of the trade union leadership from the working class with the emergence of a new sort of proletariat, and also with the general debilitation of the working class movement which was suffering from the increasing threat of unemployment and steadily worsening conditions in the crisis ridden factories.

From the mid 70s then, as we have said, the trade unions have been moving towards a new image and philosophy: an image of responsibility - towards the workings of the crisis ridden Italian economic and political system, and only afterwards towards the interests and conditions of the working class; and of maturity - in their analysis of the roots of the crisis and their undertaking to 'pull together' with government and the employer to find a remedy.

The transformation occurred gradually, only coming to full public expression at the beginning of 1978, when these concepts were first discussed openly in various congresses, discussion documents and trade union literature.

The first official expression of the new philosophy of the national trade union federations came on January 13-14th 1978, with the document of the united union federation CGIL-CISL-UIL, prepared by the national leadership for discussion in factory assemblies and provincial and national conferences of the delegati. The document - proposed by Pierre Carniti, the national

secretary of the CISL - was entitled "proposte per una svolta di politica economica e di sviluppo civile e democratico" (proposals for a new course in economic policies and for civil and democratic development). This document was the first and most complete disquisition of the theory behind what later came to be known as the svolta dell'EUR: the 'volte face' at the EUR congress rooms.

The document opens with a recognition of the crisis of capitalism and the declaration of the need for a new course in economic policy: a course which could revitalize ailing industry and thereby provide the necessary conditions for a return to full employment. The document declares that:

"The national Federation CGIL-CISL-UIL firmly believes that the risk of worsening conditions for the workers and people in terms of employment, real wages, job security and social services must be parried with a decisive change in economic policy... (In order to realize the objective of full employment) it will be necessary to bring about the conditions which will enable a return to a high and stable economic growth rate..." (4).

However, since it was recognized that new investment alone would not suffice to bring about this objective of healthy industrial expansion, the union stated its intention of exchanging its role of back-seat criticism for that of co-driver. In this context it promised to remove those obstacles to healthy industrial

life which it had itself sometimes been guilty of posing:

"... a high and stable industrial expansion will permit the removal of that complex of defensive strategies in which the various social groups, sometimes not excluding the trade unions, take refuge when faced with the threat of stagnation and recession" (5).

But not only must the obstacles caused by the defensive activities of the working class be removed, but real and positive efforts must be made to hasten the revitalization of the economy. The federation thus puts forwards a series of proposals for the 'new economic policy' including: Plans for a policy of systematic investment in the South and for selective investment in industry, in which priority is to be given to the building, energy, agriculture and transport and communication sectors; new policies for the employment of youth; the re-organization of the public sector industries; taxation reforms; reform of the police force (including its unionization); the reform of the education system including the prolongation of compulsory education and the closer 'matching' of education to the requirements of industry.

But interspersed with these fairly general calls for reform, the trade union made some proposals which are, on the face of it, somewhat surprising.

On the question of wages, the Federation called for a new predictability and restraint in the bargaining process:

"The union, confirming that behaviour which it has already practised in the contract rounds both at a national and articulated (company) level over the last few years will adopt a line fully coherent between its own economic and normative demands and the general strategy for the development of employment, the improvement of working conditions, the unification of the labour market and the following of an egalitarian policy...

This coherent conduct will be translated over the next three years into a policy in the contract renewals in which a responsible restraint in wage claims, and their priority orientation towards a further equalization and towards the improvement of the quality of work, will be accompanied by the realization of a staggering of the burdens resulting from new contracts, and the search for solutions which might reduce the repercussions of the growth of direct wages on the general cost of labour..."

(6).

Wages rises, then, were to be staggered - not only to distribute the impact of the burden for employers, but also to make them fully predictable to the government (and of course, capital), thus facilitating efficient economic planning: and anyway were to be 'responsible' and 'restrained'. In effect, the union was proposing a self-imposed wage policy.

More contentious and even extraordinary were the proposals put forward under the heading of 'labour force mobility', the results of which were discussed earlier.

In the interest of a rational and fully efficient use of labour, a complete fluidity of the labour market is prescribed, with workers mobile not only between work posts within the factory or company, but actually between different firms and sectors:

"The federation reconfirms its orientation on job mobility: mobility in the context of a current programme of development is a necessity, both within companies and between companies, and even between different sectors of economic activity" (7).

This, given the difficulties which would be involved in creating a mechanism through which workers could be guaranteed a new job before being made redundant from the old one, sounds very like a union blessing for lay-offs. In any case, this renunciation of all forms of demarcation is a very handsome gift to the employer.

The unions' proposals for the mechanisms of this mobility were rather vague, but included a reform of the law governing job centres and the institution of re-training courses to ready workers who were expelled from one firm or sector for jobs which are optimistically expected to open up in other, more vital sectors.

But this is not all. According to the federation, workers who find themselves out of work as a result of this policy should not expect to rely on the State and employer for subsistence in the form of the *Cassa Integrazione* - roughly the equivalent of our dole - for more than a maximum of one year after being made redundant. Luciano Lama, in an interview which will be quoted more fully later on, warns:

"... the whole mechanism of the Cassa Integrazione must be revised from top to bottom. We may no longer oblige companies to keep in employment numbers of workers above and beyond those required by their productive capacity, nor can we continue to expect the Cassa Integrazione to assist the excess labour force permanently. In our document we propose that the C.I. should be given to the worker for one year, and no longer, except in very exceptional cases, which must be deliberated on their individual merits by regional commissions for job placement... In other words, effective mobility of the labour force, and the end of the system of permanently public assisted unemployment" (8).

If Margaret Thatcher suggested it there would be an outcry!

The union also has some surprising plans for the state budget, proposing a 'ceiling' of 24 thousand milliard Lire for the balance of payments deficit. Within this ceiling, any changes in the destination of public money must be made towards investment in industry, along the lines of the selective investments already proposed by the union. In this way, for the first time, the union comes out strongly against increases in public spending destined for the improvement of social services.

The federation also notes the deficits in the various state subsidized services and commodities (such as, for example, transport and energy), and prescribes price

rises, along with the reform of these sectors, in order to reduce these deficits.

The document, then, really is the departure from traditional trade union thinking that it claims to be. The three most crucial elements of the defence of working class interests: job security; the pressure for higher wages; adequate social services and welfare assistance, are almost completely renounced, and they are replaced only by general and idealistic notions of trade union participation in a reformed and revitalized industrial capitalism. This participation was to be realized in part through union participation in company decision-making, but more importantly through the acquisition of political power by the PCI, whose increased weight in the shifting alliances of the Italian government was to be bought with the cease-fire in the class war.

The principle which underlies the document is, of course, the overt recognition and acceptance of the basic stability of the capitalist economic and political system, whose recurrent crises are no longer conceived as stages towards its inevitable downfall. Having deduced that the only means to improve the conditions of the working class is to revitalize capitalism, the union turns to an analysis of the latter's ills, and for the first time comes to the conclusion that it itself must accept a large part of the burden of responsibility for spiralling inflation, the collapse of industries and mass unemployment. Unemployment and inflation will be reduced only with recovery from the crisis, and the pre-

condition for this recovery is the restraint of working class demands. As two social historians appreciatively comment:

"What is new about this debate? There are many things, but they may be summarized in one single concept: The 'system' must no longer be fought and obstructed, its stability must be recognized. It is also admitted that it is fruitless to oppose certain of the system's ways of functioning. Rather opportunely, it is understood that the best way out of the crisis suffocating Italian society is that of reviving mechanisms (such as the mobility of the workforce) which had been blocked by the impetuous growth of the trade union movement between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s" (9).

With the acceptance of capitalism as a stable and lasting economic and political system, the union implicitly denies the existence of any inherent contradictions within it, and thus of any necessary conflict between the interests of the major classes (denominated social groups in the new parlance). Having passed, without pause for discussion, over more than a century of marxian economic theory, Carniti and the other members of the union leadership are free to postulate the common interest of capital and proletariat in the revitalization of industry and the reconquest of international competitiveness - and as its condition and precondition, the end of class struggle.

For the benefit of any workers who remained in doubt after the release of the admittedly rather

obscurely written initial document, Luciano Lama - the national general secretary of the majority federation, the CGIL - clarified the real meaning of the theoretical and practical 'about turn' embodied in it in an interview with La Repubblica some ten days later. This interview, from which I will quote quite freely, illustrates very well the significance for the working class of the union's 'new course' of 1978:

"La Repubblica: You have said (the trade union) policy document contains a point relating to the workers' behaviour. Do you mean the sacrifices the workers are being called on to make?

Luciano Lama: Yes, this is what it's really all about: the union is proposing a policy of sacrifice to the workers. Not marginally important sacrifices, but substantial ones.

L.R.: And this is the point which has given rise to conflict?

L.L.: Yes. This is natural, of course".

Lama proceeds to explain that until the problem of unemployment, then running at 1 million 600 thousand, has been resolved, all other objectives - including the conditions of those in work - will have to take second place; and this is where the sacrifices will be necessary. He shows no embarrassment when La Repubblica presses him later to explain these sacrifices in concrete terms:

"L.R.: Let's go back to the question of mobility. Many people say that this word serves to hide a

rather threatening reality, that is, lay-offs. You believe that a lot of companies have a labour force in excess of their productive necessity?

L.L.: There are a great many companies which are over-manned... We're talking now in terms of many tens of thousands of workers. This creates a very serious human and moral problem, as in Italy economic development is stagnant and workers who have lost their jobs have the well founded fear of not finding another one. And also because it is nearly always the big companies, whose plants are situated in important urban centres: this increases the social and political problems involved. We are anyway convinced that imposing excess manning on companies is suicidal. The Italian economy is being driven to its knees as a result of this policy. For this reason, whilst all of us realize the difficult nature of the problem, we believe that companies should have the right to lay off workers when a state of crisis is ascertained.

L.R.: You furthermore propose that the Cassa Integrazione should not be made available to workers for more than one year. Why?

L.L.: Because we don't want to transform productive work into welfare benefits. And also, often workers on the Cassa Integrazione find another job, in the black economy, contemporaneously - benefiting from the wage made available from the Cassa. Such phenomena are fairly widespread, especially in the North. And they must cease..."

Lama remains adamant that sacrifices by the working class, especially in the shape of renouncing any pretension to job protectionism, provide the only possible solution to the economic crisis and thus, in the long run, employment:

"L.R.: Do you think a shortening of the working week could be a solution?

L.L.: It might contribute towards one, certainly. But let's not forget that this country ranks amongst those with the fewest effective working hours amongst evolved industrial countries... The tendency amongst all capitalist countries is towards a shortening of the working week, but other countries must reach our level before we can move on again. I repeat: our problems can only be resolved with a healthy industrial development.

L.R.: Thus with capitalist accumulation?

L.L.: Yes, capitalist accumulation, carefully planned by the state and directed towards the maximum possible growth of occupation. This is our line" (10).

Dissent to the 'new course' among the various components of the federation was limited. The strongest 'attack' came from the traditionally radical engineering workers union, the FLM; but although this union questioned some of the practical proposals contained in the document, it left the general logic of the 'new course' undisturbed.

Rather than a straight limitation of new public spending they favoured increased taxation of the higher tax brackets to pay for social services etc. and argued

strongly that the subsidization of some services and commodities should be maintained. On the question of mobility, they voiced reservations on the idea of a complete deregulation of the employer's power to expel labour and dip into the labour market as they pleased, although they did not really dig in their heels for job security. According to the FLM, mobility should be allowed, but should take place within a framework of processes of negotiation surrounding industrial reconversion and restructuration. They also came out against the idea of the creation of 'job agencies' to promote this mobility, claiming that these would in reality be simply 'parking lots' for the unemployed. On the question of wages they argued that a staggering of wage increases could only be foreseen for specific negotiating platforms and only with the consensus of the workforce. In general they came out against the idea of national industry-wide contracts, favouring articulated negotiations leading to specific company agreements. However the FLM was successful in pushing through only a few of the amendments it wanted at the final congress.

The next important confirmation of the 'new course' came from the Communist Party convention on workers' participation, organized by the Gramsci Institute and the Lombard Centre of Documentation and held in Milan on 4th-5th February 1978. The apparently academic theme of the convention was immediately belied by Gianfranco Borghini, regional (Lombard) secretary of the PCI, in an introductory speech restating the case for the union's 'new course':

"We must fully understand and ready ourselves to confront all the problems posed by the crisis, beginning with the most difficult, those relating to a relaunching of accumulation on a new basis, to the reconversion and widening of the productive apparatus and to the increase of productivity and revitalization of industrial concerns" (11).

In this convention, the PCI reaffirmed its new 'sensitivity' towards the needs of industry, particularly towards sectors in crisis. The need for a restructuration of production through a wide-ranging technological renewal and the increase of productivity in order to recuperate international competitiveness was underlined. This process would also, it was foreseen, include the mobility of the labour market and the decentralization of some productive processes.

Following the union federation's lead, the PCI for the first time at this convention theorized working class struggles as a real (although not exclusive) cause of the economic crisis. Having admitted this, the next logical step for the PCI was that the necessary precondition for the 'renewal' of the country and the reformation of the bases of economic development was the containment of conflictuality. Workers would have to recognize their interest in healthy industrial growth, and throw their energy and imagination into this objective rather than into 'defensive activities' deleterious to the company. The mechanism for this new community of interest in productive renewal was to be workers' participation, in the form of 'productive

conferences' which would unite workers, technicians, white collar workers and management and deliberate decisions ranging from investment to technological renewal. Such bodies would render conflict superfluous as:

"... once this objective has been achieved (even if this must be through struggle), the workers must then assume their own responsibility, in the sense that their behaviour taken as a whole must be such as to guarantee not only that these decisions are realized, but above all that they are realized with a conservation of efficiency, productivity and economic viability" (12).

The debate within the unions on the 'new course' officially concluded with the famous assembly of the EUR delegates, from which the 'new course' took its common name, the EUR about-turn. The final document ratified by the assembly did not substantially differ from Carniti's original proposals, although some of the FLM's objections were included, resulting in a qualification, in the sense of the FLM's objections, for example of the lines on mobility and wage increases.

The 'new course' of 1978, was thus, as it affirmed itself to be, a clear about-turn in union thought and practice. The debates within the union and party during 1978 produced an entirely new theorization of the role of working class union and party. The defence of class interests - job security, improved wages and working conditions, better social and welfare services and so on - was no longer to be pursued with an antagonistic,

conflictual approach; with struggles against lay-offs, and strikes over wages or working conditions. Instead, the stability of the capitalist system was to be fully recognized, and workers themselves were to cooperate and participate in the revitalization and reform of this system for the common good of all.

The obvious effect of the union preoccupation with the state of industry and general economic planning is that it lost contact with the every day problems of the workers on the factory floor. While the union leadership was concentrating on the general maladies of the economy, the rank and file, with its specific and immediate problems, was slipping out of its control. The every day shop floor need to confront the issues, such as wages, work speeds, job security, the introduction of new technology and so on, which most closely concern the workers during the eight hours they spend in the factory each day, was by now outside the scope and seemingly even the comprehension of the trade union leadership. The general secretary of the FLM, Enzo Mattina, noted with some surprise in an interview with The Times that:

"Our members are turning their attention inwards to the factory floor. They are directing their efforts at salary negotiations, working conditions and other easily identifiable local problems.

This has lead to a growing gap between the shop floor and national leadership. For example, we know that all sorts of local and completely unofficial agreements between shop stewards and management exist" (13).

But the 'growing gap' noted by Mattina is hardly surprising when the unions' major concern had become the resolution of capital's economic crisis and the new battle cry of the union leaders was productivity and efficiency, even at the price of worsening conditions on the shop floor. By now this subservience of immediate shop floor concerns to the goal of economic renewal was evidenced in virtually every public statement made by members of the union leadership; but a couple of examples will serve to illustrate the point. Lama, at a national conference on FIAT called by the PCI in November 1980 is typical in his statement that: "Today's objectives are not only those of improving wages and intervening in the organization of work, but are also concerned with productivity and efficiency" (14).

Marianetti, speaking at the assembly of the union federation CGIL-CISL-UIL in Rome on 4th November 1980 confirms:

"The biggest knot to be untied now is how an expansionary policy may be reconciled with a steadily falling demand. There is a transition here which cannot be short-cut: we must assume clear choices of productivity, competitiveness, efficiency; in short, the returns possible from work. And these themes cannot be faced if we remain dug into the trenches of inflexibility" (15).

The calls for increased productivity and the end to 'inflexibility' in the workers' attitudes were translated into concrete terms with, for example, the calls

to give up advances already made in the direction of reduction in working hours as part of the solution to unemployment, a popular workers' demand. Enzo Mattina, talking to La Repubblica:

"The union has been too ideological over these problems, the time has come to say, for example at FIAT, that if we have to, we're ready to keep the plants open throughout August... and to keep them working on Saturdays, Sundays and national holidays" (16).

And Giorgio Benvenuto adds:

"Don't look on the Saturday holidays as one of the biggest gains of the last years" (17).

The mass use of absenteeism, a form of struggle which, as we have seen, had become extremely diffuse, also came under fire from the leadership. The union proposed a much tighter control of the 'work shy', suggesting unannounced visits by doctors to the houses of absentees. Enzo Mattina went further, publicly supporting the idea of a bonus to be given to non-absenteeists (an idea launched following the acceptance in late 1980 of a 50,000 Lire (roughly £25) monthly bonus for attendance by 50% of the workforce of a small engineering factory, the Eredi Gnutti). Mattina approved the plan with the comment that: "It's just the introduction of a regulation to penalize anomalous behaviour" (18).

But perhaps most telling of all has been the union's attitude of acritical approval of management's strategy

for the restructuration of the car industry, including the increasing use of new technologies and work organizations in the context of smaller decentralized plants. In close agreement with FIAT's propaganda on the subject, the new technologies are being put forward as uniquely beneficial to workers, capable of producing a 'new quality of life' in the factories through the abolition of repetitive, boring, heavy and dangerous jobs, the reduction of environmental risk - noise, heat, fumes etc., and the general improvement of the working environment (light, ventilation etc.). According to the union the problems of absenteeism, diffuse conflict and general disaffection with work could be largely solved with new technologies conceived as a transcendence of the assembly line which would provide new, more interesting and higher skilled jobs in maintenance, programming etc. The union's lack of analysis of the real problems involved with new technologies was expressed in comments such as this fairly typical one from Raffaele Morese, secretary of the FLM:

"For a union which does not limit itself to regulating the price of labour power, but wants to determine the quality and quantity of work itself, the problem of going beyond the assembly line is a great challenge to take on" (19).

The call for the faster introduction of new modular technologies into the factory was first made official in the FLM's proposal for the 1980 contract presented in May of that year:

"The path we must press for is that of investment in new technologies which may produce - with the realization of wide economies of scale - a product combining low consumption and durability. A product which will be built using techniques which transcend the assembly line and machine paced work, and give an organization of work which is more flexible and better adapted to new needs, and which provides a positive response to the pressures from the new and old working class" (20).

In a document on the problems of the auto sector drafted shortly before this, the FLM delegati were also enthusiastic about the use of new technologies, calling for, among other things, the extension of experiments already under way, such as modular engine assembly and alternatives to the assembly line in final assembly. But this document was a little more qualified in its approval, recognizing some of the dangers implicit in restructuration:

"The relationship between the organization of work and machinery is certainly central. We must not forget the fact that the solutions of flexibility and productivity, insistently proposed by FIAT, cannot be realized outside of this relationship. But it is completely unrealistic... to think of overcoming the basic inflexibility of the present mechanical solutions at FIAT (mechanized lines) with a flexibility which is obtained wholly at the expense of the workers... rendering them 'nomads' rather than mobile within the factory" (21).

But the reservations concerning mobility and job security expressed by the delegati had virtually disappeared from union language by the early 1980s, to be replaced by a fulsome approval which was appreciatively noted by the right wing financial journal Mondo Economico.

"The principal function of the robot, at least as far as FIAT is concerned, is, then, the replacement of the generally discontented and 'absenteeist' workers without angering the trade unions, in fact actually obtaining their praise."

And later:

"... the unions in Italy, at least up to now, have never pitched themselves against robotization and automation. The FIAT experience and others prove it" (22).

The unions wholehearted and naive approval of new technologies contrasts rather strangely with Luciano Lama's simultaneous contemptuous dismissal of the popular slogan, once embraced by the unions "Lavorare meno, lavorare tutti" (Less work, everyone working) as 'illusory and simplistic'.

The unions have extended their general approval of FIAT's plans for restructuration to cover the process of decentralization to small, high technology and more governable plants. At the PCI national conference, attended by large numbers of union executives, the vice president of the Communist Party members of senate, Colajanni, stated: "We need a line which can tie the

interests of the company to those of the working class and the country in general. As far as FIAT is concerned, it should build smaller and therefore more governable and productive factories..."

The national and provincial leaderships of the federations have thus behaved with increasing insensitivity towards the real problems of the working class at FIAT and elsewhere; the problems, that is, of conserving work posts, earning a living wage in a period of intense inflation, and of developing a strategy to gain some control over the introduction and use of new technologies and work methods. Unsurprisingly, this lack of contact with the immediate interests of the working class has resulted in an increasing alienation of its membership, an alienation which manifests itself in many ways.

### **Absentee Leadership and 'Individualism': the Unofficial Struggles**

The increasing lack of commitment to and involvement in the unions in the late 1970s, especially among the latest recruits to FIAT, has already been discussed in the chapter entitled 'The Ungovernable Factory'. Here we saw how the working class inside the factory had increasingly chosen forms of struggle which are not only outside of the control of the trade unions but are often actually disclaimed by them: the violent *cortei interni*; the refusal to keep up with the prescribed work rhythms, the mass use of absenteeism and so on. The use of forms of struggle which were not endorsed by the unions was in fact extremely widespread. Pietro Marcenaro, in his

introductory speech at the convention "Vecchi e Nuovi Operai alla FIAT" (Old and New Workers at FIAT) explains:

"Over the last few years participation in strikes by FIAT workers has maintained an extremely high level, despite the over-generality of the union platforms and the frequent lack of concrete results. This potential for struggle, which is not satisfied by the agreements, the workers use every day inside the factory in a network of informal conquests. The intervals between the institutional struggles are filled by a daily initiative which is changing the material face of the factory. Clocking in at the beginning of the shift before changing, leaving the work post before the buzzer signals the end of the shift, leaving the shop floor to move around other shops and many other rights practised by the workers are not sanctified by any contract, by any agreement, by any law, but anyway constitute some of the conquests which the workers hold most dear" (23).

This informal conquest of power is confirmed in the few words, reported earlier, of the delegato I interviewed at the 5th Lega. Commenting on the conquest of relaxed production rhythms at Mirafiori; he said: "Yes, that's a sign of our strength, we're proud of it".

The union has on the whole failed to understand, much less take part in leading, these 'informal' struggles of the working class, tending to write them off as the 'individualism' of youth. The following

extract from an FLM bulletin shows the puzzlement of a union faced with a class which is clearly ready to fight, and yet refuses the hegemony of the traditional organizations of the working class movement:

"(The involvement of youth) in the union's initiatives and struggles is not ruled out, in the sense of their clear opposition to the logic of the bosses, but often in the cultural environment of the youth of this country a mentality negating the factory as a terrain of struggle and dreaming impossible utopian solutions has prevailed, and this relationship to the concrete conditions of the working class may translate itself into solutions of individual defense (a certain use of sickness pay, the desire to escape from the factory etc.) and not of collective transformation" (24).

The power of the union structure inside the factory varies quite widely, in fact, depending largely on the desire and ability of shop floor representatives to connect with the workers and their struggles. However, one factor seems common to all the shops: the tendency to 'use' the union as far as this is possible, but to 'go beyond it' in the negotiation or de facto appropriation of informal rights. This instrumental approach to the unions was expressed to me by T., the FLM official responsible for FIAT: "(The workers) still join the union, but conceiving them as a form of guarantee - they see the unions as guaranteeing wage rates and so on..."

Most of the time, then, the relationship of the greater part of the rank and file to the union structures was one of general adherence to the union led struggles, while conducting their own, 'informal' ones for rights and control in the factory, without reference to the official structures. However, this peaceful coexistence often tended to be strained, particularly during major union led contract negotiations, when the workers' suspicion of their provincial and national representatives often manifested itself not only with extensions of the struggles well beyond the point endorsed by the unions, but in outbreaks of frustration and violence against any trade unionist seen as putting the brakes on. Giancarlo Santilli, of the Colletivi Operai of Mirafiori, Rivalta and Lingotto, describes and explains one such moment:

"The struggle exploded in June/July, and not because, as someone said yesterday, the workers had understood the nature of the contract (which included the clause on mobility) but because they were really sick of that sort of agreement, of what was going on; and once again the workers surprised those who were proposing symbolic roadblocks 'to inform the people'; who were trying to promote equally symbolic pickets, by their very hard forms of struggles. I don't think I'm saying anything new when I talk about trade unionists or trade union officials who had to run away from the blocks after they tried to say they should be symbolic, and not real mass barricades, as the workers wanted. The

people from the union can confirm about the stones they felt flying around them. This is not a new thing; things like this have happened very often at FIAT..." (25).

The decisive struggle at FIAT of autumn 1980 provides an illustration of the unions' general failure to gain the consensus of the workers and give a consistent direction and lead to their struggle in the course of a major battle with FIAT over lay-offs.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HOT AUTUMN IN REVERSE: SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1980

By 1980 the time was ripe for FIAT to wage a decisive battle on the workers' power base in the factories, in the knowledge that the official trade union organization, pledged to the salvation of the economy, could only play a weak and vacillatory role in defence of the FIAT workers.

On the return to work after the summer holidays, at the beginning of September, tension in the factory was high. Management had for some time been crying crisis, and already, throughout the summer, FIAT had been carrying out a selective policy of redundancy. Very many more workers were in the 'limbo' of the Cassa Integrazione; and it was clear that this was only a beginning.

On Friday, 5th September, Cesare Annibaldi - the chief personnel manager - announced that FIAT needed to lay off a further 24,000 workers, of whom one half would never be re-employed, or at the very least put them on the Cassa Integrazione for 18 months from 1st October. In this way FIAT hoped to resolve its over-production problem, reducing production by about 25% over the next year and a half. And in the meantime, as a press release from management headquarters in Corso Marconi stated: "We can look into how production might be re-organized".

FIAT's plan, then, was to reduce manning in the factory immediately and proceed to a further techno-

logical and organizational restructuration for an eventual relaunch of its products.

Its hand forced by the threat of redundancies on a massive scale, the union found itself in a difficult position. The tension in the factories made it obvious that the workers were not prepared to swallow easily another defeat. Over the preceding year they had already seen the collapse of the struggle for the reinstatement of the 61, the acceptance of a 0.50% 'tax' imposed on wages for a 'solidarity fund' for industries in crisis, and the lack of reaction to the sacking of 1500 workers for 'persistent absenteeism'. Now, faced with the threat of mass lay-offs, the already uneasy atmosphere had become explosive.

The tension in fact began to manifest itself as soon as the factories re-opened after the summer break in a series of actions including strikes and demonstrations in various of the Turinese plants.

However, the FLM had already agreed to the concept of 'external mobility' - a euphemism for lay-offs - not only in the guidelines theorized in the 'new course', but in practice, in clause 4 of the engineering workers' contract signed on 15th July 1979 (1).

This clause defined the conditions for a system of 'mobility'. Workers expelled from one company during periods of "productive restructuration, reconversion and company crises of particular social importance" would be put on a list for preferential employment by other companies in the scheme. Workers who did not accept the offer of the job at an equivalent skill level in a

company operating within 50 km of the local authority in which they resided would not be entitled to a wage from the Cassa Integrazione after the termination of the period for which it was originally authorized. Workers not receiving job offers would be compulsorily retrained to qualify for the work that was currently available in the system of companies involved in the scheme.

Since the signing of the contract the idea of a renovation of industry with the full participation of the unions in decision making had proved to be totally unrealistic, especially given the climate of repression and renewed attacks on jobs by the employers. Clause 4, the unions hastened to explain, had not been intended to be experimented on such a large scale; or, it should be added, in the context of such clear cut management prerogative in the operation of its mechanisms. But, however embarrassing, the clause had been approved and signed, and it put the unions in an extremely ambiguous situation at the negotiation table.

Desperate to mediate the situation and if possible avoid a direct confrontation, the FLM reaffirmed its willingness to allow FIAT a free hand to manage the crisis in any way it could without resorting to the sack, offering internal mobility, a freezing of turnover, early pensioning and retraining courses to match skills to the available work. Various union officials, including Pio Galli - the national secretary of the FLM - even went so far as to declare that, on condition that the crisis would not be used as an excuse to reduce

labour force permanently, the union was not a priori prejudiced against 'external mobility'.

### The Hour of the Lion

But despite the union's desire to avoid confrontation and its willingness to go more than half way to meet management, FIAT was intransigent. A strike would, in fact, ameliorate its immediate problem of over-production and besides this, perhaps an open conflict, in this period of weakness of the working class organization, might actually break the militants' power within the factory and allow the restoration of productive order. FIAT thus had little to lose and everything to gain by entering into a test of strength with the organizations of the working class - a match in which the winner could reign undisputed in the factory. And so, despite the conciliatory attitude of the unions and the urging of the government - which needed an immediate and happy ending to the dispute - FIAT pressed ahead with its plans for the mass lay-offs.

FIAT was not only intransigent over the need for the lay-offs but manifestly displayed its determination to smash the workers' power base in the factory by dismantling wherever possible their moments of organization.

When, later, the letters advising workers of their suspension from work began to pour through the letter-boxes of Turin, this strategy became clear.

The 24,000 lay-offs left unscathed the small plants of Desio and Termini Imerese, where the saleable Panda

is produced. The lay-offs were concentrated in the big plants of Turin; where, in almost every case, the more strongly organized sections of the factory and the more politically aware individuals were hit. A journalist for La Repubblica reports:

"Yesterday, a trade union official from the Quinta Lega, Mirafiori, told me that after seeing a dozen of the suspension letters he could predict with near certainty the names of those to be suspended in the other shops, because instead of objective criteria, linked to the crisis of over-production of certain models, an 'ad personam' choice was being operated, linked to the level of political and trade union involvement of the individual workers" (2).

In many shops the suspensions smashed the internal trade union organization, leaving whole shops (i.e. Shop 72, Mirafiori Bodywork) or individual shifts (i.e. the press shop night shift) virtually bereft of delegati. The delegati belonging to the PCI and PDUP were particularly favoured for redundancy. Other people to be singled out were those who had been able to form informal links between delegati and the rank and file, especially among the women. Women who had been particularly visible in the assemblies and cortei interni were almost inevitably on the suspension lists. Women, in fact, particularly those taken on in the new intake from 1978, were the worst hit by the lay-offs, about 60% of the total number of the redundancies involving women.

The figures quoted by the trade union speak for themselves on FIAT's strategy: whilst the ratio between delegati and rank and file workers is about 1:70, the percentage of delegati layed off was enormously higher than could be expected from a random selection. At Mirafiori 145 delegati in the Commissione Interna were made redundant, at Rivalta 67 and at Lingotto only 9, although almost all the workers enrolled in the PCI section received letters of suspension.

FIAT claimed that the workers to be made 'mobile' could be absorbed in local industry, provincial building programmes and public works - a claim which they backed up with reams of statistics and data of which the unions were justifiably suspicious, given not only the general crisis but the probability that many more dependent industries would fail or have to reduce their workforces in the wake of a reduction in production by FIAT.

### **The Occupation from the Outside**

The unions were left with no alternative. On Wednesday, 10th September 1980 talks broke down, and Cesare Annibaldi, the chief of personnel, announced that procedures for the lay-offs would be set in motion that day, or at latest the next.

At Rivalta, Lancia di Chivasso and Mirafiori Bodywork unofficial strikes were immediately called and pickets were formed. The struggles of the workers of Danzig in course in Poland were frequently invoked. The events occurring contemporaneously in Poland were, in

fact, to become a sort of symbol of the hard and intransigent struggle the FIAT workers knew was to come.

In contrast to the almost revolutionary fervour, fanned by the news from Danzig, already manifested by the workers and militants of the larger FIAT plants, the CGIL was at best luke-warm. On this same day, Pierre Carniti told La Repubblica that the FLM did not want a 'frontal struggle' with FIAT and affirmed that the union's path should be the use of the 'solidarity fund' for industry in crisis set up with the 0.50% tax on wages to 'manage' a part, however small, of the economy.

But the trade union leadership had been pre-empted. By now the choice between cooperation or confrontation was no longer theirs to make. On the following day, the 11th September, the 3 hour strikes called by the union were prolonged to the end of the shift at most plants and cortei of angry workers were formed. The incoming shifts took up the struggle in their turn: the 37 day long seige of FIAT had begun.

The form the struggle took was completely new for the FIAT workers, and in fact for the Italian working class. Perhaps because of the inspiration from Danzig, perhaps because of the many insults that had been swallowed, but mostly because it seemed the only possible response to the high-handed and aggressive attitude taken by management, the struggle quickly took the form of an all out strike with 24 hour picketing of all gates, amounting, as one union leader put it, to: "an occupation from the outside". The lack of strike funds which had previously determined a more articulated form of struggle was surmounted first by the spontaneous

aid of the people of Turin, who brought food and wine to the picket lines, and later with an emergency campaign to raise money for the strikers and their families. The strikers settled in for a long seige: on one gate a notice appeared stating "We are now accepting bookings for the Christmas dinner" (3).

Deeply worried by the events at FIAT, the government was intervening in the dispute. The Minister of Work, Foschi, proposed a compromise: the various measures already proposed by the union - the freeze on turn-over, early retirement, internal mobility etc., should be tried until the 30th June 1981, and if these failed to resolve FIAT's problems, the question of external mobility could be looked at again. The FLM accepted the government proposals as the basis for discussion, but FIAT contemptuously dismissed them. Talks once again broke down.

By now the dispute had sedimented a complicated stratification of stances. FIAT was holding to its guns: 24,000 to be layed off immediately, at least half never to return. Foschi, for the government, vacillated, first tentatively claiming that the workers layed off could be re-absorbed in the Piedmontese economy according to the statistics produced by FIAT, then later declaring himself prepared to resign if the lay-offs were carried out. Members of the national leadership of the FLM continued to promote the idea of a negotiated external mobility into guaranteed posts outside the company, and the union as a whole continued to insist on its alternative solutions. Meanwhile, the workers assemblies passed motions consistently confirming their readiness

for a "struggle to the bitter end". The following motion, passed on the 15th September at Lingotto, is an example:

- 1) Immediate retraction of the lay-offs.
- 2) No external mobility.
- 3) No to the Cassa Integrazione at zero hours.
- 4) All negotiations to be held in Turin.
- 5) A national general strike (4).

Similar initiatives followed from factory assemblies and consiglianti (mass assemblies) of the other plants.

One of the most striking factors in the struggle was, in fact, the workers' very real suspicion of the trade union executive, which became manifest right from the start. Worried by the generous offers made by the unions of internal mobility, a freeze of turn-over replacement, the Cassa Integrazione and so on, and angered by certain members of the executive who were felt to be 'trying out' the idea of external mobility, one of the first demands made by the workers was on its own leadership; for all negotiations to be carried on in Turin, where the proceedings could be more easily supervised. The mounting suspicion of the workers soon transformed into vociferous criticism and sometimes even violence against members of the national leadership. At a huge assembly called on Wednesday 24th September on the Mirafiori testing track to hear the views of the various political voices in the arena, it was not only the exponent of Christian Democracy who failed to make

himself heard above the storm of whistles and slogans. A journalist gives this account:

"... the workers' anger, often degenerating into displays of insufferance towards the leaders of the trade union movement, in a meeting characterized by a mixture of disillusionment and irrational behaviour, and the cold welcome given to the secretary of the CGIL, Agostino Marianetti, are the most obvious features the journalist might note during this confrontation with the political parties, which... developed and concluded in a way which has deeply perplexed even the most optimistic in the ranks of the union leadership" (5).

The day after, the 25th September and the 16th day of the strike, was the day of the engineering workers' national general strike in support of the FIAT workers. 100,000 people gathered in an enormous demonstration in Turin. Once again, union leaders experienced considerable difficulties in making themselves heard. Pierre Carniti was given the hardest time, forced by an angry and suspicious audience to conclude his speech hurriedly. At the end of the rally a group of workers climbed onto the platform and began to chant: "Né Mobilità, né licenziamenti/occupiamo gli stabilimenti" (no to mobility, no to the sack, occupy the factories) and "ci piace di più/un governo in tuta blu" (we want a government in blue overalls).

The union leadership's increasing difficulties were not alleviated by the fact that the PCI was rather opportunistically taking an increasingly 'hard line' in

the dispute. The following day, in fact, Berlinguer (then leader of the PCI) was to make his famous declaration of support for an occupation of the factory (6).

In the meantime, the struggle was radicalizing even further. The news that the letters of suspension had actually been sent off to 22,884 workers coincided with the consiglione of Mirafiori held at the Teatro Nuovo on 3rd September. The assembly, enlarged by contingents from other plants, decided on an immediate strengthening of the pickets and their extension to all the gates: the factory was now truly under seige, and the gates, decorated with huge red and black posters of Karl Marx, became the centres of the workers' meetings and discussions. A 'people's canteen' was set up, and a coordination centre organized in a coach parked outside gate 5 Mirafiori. In the evenings and on Sunday, entertainment was organized in the form of plays, shows and films. Continuous information centres were set up in various parts of the city.

But at the same time another and very new factor was emerging in the complicated dynamics of the struggle. Bands of capi (foremen and chargehands) had begun attacking the pickets, declaring that they were tired of the struggle and wanted an immediate return to work and normality. During the night of 8th October, a band of about 50 foremen managed to get through gate 0, where the picket line was weakest. Several picketers were injured in the clash. A short while later a similar attack was made on Gate 11 but this time was unsuccessful. At Rivalta, foremen succeeded in entering

the factory, but were forced to evacuate the following day, under heavy escort from the police. Later on, however, a silent procession of about 6000 foremen and office workers marched to the office block at Rivalta.

It is almost certainly true, as most workers and their organizations claimed, that many of these capi were bribed by FIAT (?) but it is also true that never before had scabs been brave and numerous enough to try such tactics, with or without bribes. The very fact that the bosses found a terrain available for their tactics is symptomatic of the emergence of a 'right wing mentality' among certain class sectors, a factor already hypothesized at the end of chapter five. Despite the claims of the left, anxious to apologize for the apparent class split which led to the disastrous closure of the dispute, it would appear that these sectors were not confined to foremen and lower management, but also included an appreciable number of workers at the highly skilled and waged level.

But the anti-strike activities of a limited number of workers did not, at least in this period, deter the struggle of the rest. The national general strike called on 10th October found enormous support all over Italy, and over 40,000 people formed a mass rally which marched on Mirafiori. Pressure from the workers had by now forced the national executive of the union into taking a much harder line, at least in its rhetoric, in defence of the workers' interests. A group of FIAT workers explain in a book written immediately after the struggle:

"Benvenuto had to take a much harder line faced with an attentive square full of people who would not allow him to slip up... In a discussion with a worker, to whose query about how the dispute would end he replied: 'There are two possibilities, either FIAT will give in or we'll give in' and the worker replied 'no comrade Benvenuto, either FIAT will give in or FIAT will give in'" (8).

In the context of this demonstration of the extreme solidity of the struggle and of the solidarity with the FIAT workers displayed throughout the strike, not only by workers from other factories and industries but by other class sectors, the conclusion of the struggle just 4 days later in what was perhaps the most crushing defeat for the working class since 1954 seems extraordinary.

On Tuesday 14th October, the 35th day of the struggle, the foremens' coordinating committee met at Teatro Nuovo. At its end, a long, silent procession formed up. The 'march of the 40,000', however many of them there really were (9) was on its way. The FIAT workers quoted earlier describe the scene:

"Groups of workers and delegati are... in the streets. In Piazza Castello they shout slogans directed against the silent demonstration which is unravelling towards Via Garibaldi. There are strikers in front of the Town Hall too. Coins are thrown at the much larger block of foremen. Tension is high as the workers block the doors. In the end the foremen, despite their greater numbers, roll up

their banners and go away. They leave their placards on the ground, and the workers take them: re-painted and with improved wording they could be used again, starting with the women's demonstration fixed for Saturday: they are good quality and robust - we haven't got any more money: why waste them?" (10).

But the placards were never to be used. At 10.30 that same evening, the secretariat of the CGIL-CSIL-UIL and the FLM hurriedly met with management, with the announced aim of drawing up the guidelines for an agreement.

The following morning the pickets were bigger than ever. Rumours were circulating of an injunction to clear the pickets, and police intervention was expected. And besides, the news of the impending announcement of an agreement between unions and management had got around. Thus, when in the early afternoon the national TV and radio networks announced the arrival in Turin of the national executive to refer the proposal for an agreement to the Consigliere at an assembly at the 'Cinema Smeraldo', a large audience was assured.

When the union leaders arrived at the cinema, they were greeted by an audience which was already largely hostile and suspicious. The first slogans to be heard set the tone for the rest of the assembly:

"Lama, Carniti, Benvenuto, il posto del lavoro non va venduto" (Lama, Carniti, Benvenuto, our jobs are not for sale).

"E' ora, é ora di cambiare, la segreteria se ne deve andare" (It's time for a change, the executive must go).

The worst of the workers' fears were soon confirmed. Perhaps, far from the 'front line' in their offices in Rome, the union leaders were genuinely convinced that the 'demonstration of the 40,000' was a manifestation of a majority desire for a return to work. Or perhaps they were simply profiting from it to withdraw from a confrontation which, as we have seen, they had never wanted and did not expect to win. Whatever the case may be, the proposed agreement conceded FIAT practically everything it had stood out for. As many workers pointed out, the same agreement could have been signed at the beginning of the struggle more than a month before.

The agreement did in fact revoke the lay-offs, but it allowed the renewable use of the Cassa Integrazione for 23,000 FIAT and Teksid workers from 6th October 1980 - which was, in fact, FIAT's original demand. According to the agreement, FIAT would not have to re-employ those workers who hadn't found a job until 30th June 1983. The agreement furthermore foresaw incentivated voluntary redundancy, a block on turn-over, voluntary early retirement, internal mobility within the FIAT group in the Piedmont region and voluntary retraining courses.

After their traumatic experience at the Consigliere - which they declared non-valid - the union leadership were subjected to even more harrowing episodes of opposition, and even violence, by workers at the factory gate assemblies called to ratify the agreement. Lama, Carniti and Benvenuto all had to be hustled away to safety after physical attacks by the angry and

frustrated crowds of workers gathered to hear them. Pierre Carniti suffered the worst. A journalist reports:

"A group of workers forces Carniti up against the wall. Some brandish umbrellas like sticks, while others try to hit the general secretary of the CISL with their fists. G.F., the young Turinese PCI official, decides at this point to get Carniti away... but just outside gate 18 the workers start throwing stones. The leader of the CISL incurs a slight injury to his head... Carniti flees to a waiting car. 4 or 5 workers arrive simultaneously and stop him from getting in, bodily moving the FIAT 127 and causing the chauffeur to run for it..." (11).

Lama and Benvenuto received similar treatment. At gate 3 Lama was met with whistles and cat-calls and a barrage of insults. He, too, was forced to flee to his car, protected by a group of union officials, after the vote. Benvenuto, after admitting that "the union membership has voted against the agreement" (12) was saved further embarrassment by the provident intervention of a police car.

### **The vote**

The events at the factory assemblies and the final voting reflected the complex course of the struggle: the new militancy of organized sections of the 'silent majority' - in fact not a majority and made up of a new labour aristocracy of foremen, skilled workers, tech-

nicians and white collar workers - who turned up en masse at the moment of the vote to add their weight to the 'ayes'; the opportunism of a trade union leadership determined at any cost, even that of bulldozing motions, to close a conflict which threatened to wound it fatally; and the angry reactions of the strikers to the closure of the dispute, ranging from violent hostility to resignation and confusion. In fact, the final results of the voting varied widely from place to place, according to the vitality of the struggle, the presence of white collar workers and foremen, and the way in which the agreement was presented by the unions.

A clear 'yes' vote was obtained almost exclusively in the smaller plants, removed from Turin and the epicentre of the struggle, which the mass lay-offs had left virtually untouched. The afternoon shift, which had had time to recover from the initial impact of the desertion of the official trade union and to digest the real meaning of the agreement, came out much more strongly against it (13).

Despite the lack of clarity of the results, a communication issued by the union that evening announced that the CGIL-CISL-UIL considered the agreement ratified, and later that night the pickets were dismantled.

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- Contract), 15 July 1979, Art. 4. p. 13.
2. *La Repubblica*, Tuesday 7 October 1980.
  3. Adriano Alessandria et al. *Con Marx alle Porte - I 37 Giorni della FIAT*, Nuove Edizioni Internazionali, Milan 1980, p. 107.
  4. Ibid p. 18.
  5. *La Repubblica* Thursday 25 September 1980.
  6. To a question from the *delegato* Norcia, who asks what the PCI would do if the factory were occupied, the late leader of the Communist Party responded that the workers' decisions would receive unqualified backing with the mobilization and support of all party organisms.
  7. It appears that FIAT organized the foremen with the use of a pyramid system of telephone calls from members of management to immediate inferiors and so on down through middle and lower management (*Con Marx alle Porte*, op. cit. p. 110) and also, according to verbal reports, offered money to workers from the Southern plants to come and participate in the 'march of the capi'.
  8. (*Con Marx alle Porte*, op. cit. p. 38.
  9. This mass anti-strike action by a sector of the FIAT workers came as such a shock that the actual numbers became the subject of endless discussion, ranging in the various reports from as low as 10-12,000 to the more frequently cited official figure of 40,000. Whilst many militants believed that they were all foremen brought in from plants all over Italy, it seems probable that a large number of skilled workers was in fact also present.
  10. *Con Marx all Forte*, op. cit. pp. 41-42.
  11. *La Repubblica*, Friday 17 October.
  12. Ibid.
  13. From voting records published in *Con Marx alle Porte* op. cit. pp. 47-48.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis I have argued that the question of control over the workforce is of crucial importance to the car industry. To maintain competitiveness, not only must the product be exactly suited to the market but also costs must be sliced to the very limits. This means that there can be no 'porosity' in the labour process, no 'non-work'; no moments when labour power, the greater part of capital's investment in a labour intensive industry such as the auto sector, stands idle.

And in order fully to apply labour power, management's control over its labour force must be maximized. For decades management's major means to achieve this goal were the methods of Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management, which had divided up the labour process into the smallest possible units and chained the individual worker to a single operation or short series of operations - repeated mindlessly to the insistent rhythms of the production process 'up' and 'down' stream. The real meaning of Scientific Management: the division of a complex task into its simplest elements, the separation of conception from execution in these simple tasks and thus the expropriation of any intellectual involvement or decision-making from the worker, has been amply discussed for example in work done by Ranziero Panzieri in the 60s (1) and by Harry Braverman in the 70s (2).

But management must face not only the problem of improving the technical and organizational setting of labour to maximize the extraction of surplus value, but

also that posed by the subjective actions of its labour force, whether these are the conscious, organized and collective responses of a 'class for itself', or the defensive, individual actions of the worker who refuses to submit his or her will entirely to the logic of the machinery and sequential timing.

This thesis has shown that in Italy this 'subjective element' among the 'factors of production' has proved a continuous problem, underlying and determining every area of managerial decision-making: from plant location, to attitudes (antagonistic or conciliatory) to the organizations of the working class, to technical and organizational modifications of the labour process.

In Italy, the concepts of Scientific Management as applied in the factories of the North were not a total or even sufficient answer to the problems caused by labour.

During the 1950s management was able to apply successfully a strategy of division of labour and mechanization coupled with a fiercely repressive policing of the workforce designed to prevent the spread of political or trade organizations. They were successful in this strategy for a variety of historically specific factors: the prioritization of industrial reconstruction by the Communist Party and its trade organizations; the fear of unemployment; the forms of racism that divided and weakened the working class.

By the 1960s, however, the situation had changed both inside and outside the factory. Improved affluence, reduced unemployment and, most of all, the rebellious

and anarchistic instincts of the Southern immigrants ended the Taylorian dream.

The giant factories required by the principles of the division of labour and mechanization create various problems for management. Their sheer size makes it difficult to know, control and plan all aspects of the labour process simultaneously. The large number of workers, all reduced to a homogeneously 'deskilled' condition and gathered under one roof, provide an ideal terrain for the development of politicization and militancy. The boredom and monotony of the work make the notion of pride in work an absurdity, and the workers continually look for possible ways to escape it. The interdependence of each task in the productive cycle with the tasks preceding or following it make the labour process easy to block even by a handful of workers - either by organized action or more spontaneous forms of disaffection. At a certain point, under certain political, economic and social conditions, the giant Taylorian factory is thus likely to become 'ungovernable', as the example of Mirafiori and many others have proved.

In the late 1960s in Italy this 'ungovernability' began to manifest itself very strongly. FIAT's working class was in the vanguard of a movement beginning to express what was in many ways a direct criticism of the Taylorian and Fordist organization of work.

Throughout the 60s and early 70s the rank and file challenged several essential elements of Scientific Management. It challenged the wage and skill hierarchy with the demand for equal rises for all, automatic

promotion to the second category for all workers, and parity with white collar workers. It refused the notion of bonuses tied to effort or danger; productivity deals, or extra money for 'dirty' work, danger, asocial hours etc. The major slogans of this period were "NO ALLA CONTRATTAZIONE DEL COTTIMO" and "PIU SOLDI E MENO LAVORO" ("No to piece rate negotiation", and "more money, less work"). The working class attempted to regain the control usurped by the machinery on the machine paced lines by demanding delegati or line stewards, with the right to information and intervention on speeds, rhythms and labour complements.

What was required was a new technical and organizational setting of labour, a 'new way of making cars', able to transcend the form of Taylorism whilst retaining its basic principle of the separation of conception and execution.

During this period, perhaps not coincidentally, left and liberal ideas on new forms of work organization had become fashionable. The assembly line with its repetitive 'parcelized', machine-paced work was to be abolished and replaced with work methods with a 'human dimension'. In these theories, work would be performed in groups at stationary islands. The rhythm of work would no longer be determined from outside by the rhythms of the machinery, but would be decided individually or collectively by the workers themselves. The labour process would no longer be divided into its simplest elements, each element to be performed repetitively by a single worker who would never know the

process in its entirety, but would be 'recomposed' into complete cycles of work. The workers would supervise each other rather than work under the authority of a foreman or chargehand. A degree of decision-making would be devolved back to the workers, with participation in a more 'open' system of management. The information which guides managerial decision-making would be open to all.

Clearly such ideas could not be used wholesale by management, at least not in a capitalist society. Under conditions of competition capital must control the labour process to control profits; it certainly cannot hope to sacrifice productivity in exchange for a socially beneficial modification of either production or the product, and survive.

But perhaps piecemeal parts of these theories could work? Perhaps elements of the various critiques of Taylorism put forward by the workers and the theorists could be used to get round some of the increasingly acute problems arising under Scientific Management itself?

Throughout the 1970s FIAT experimented with new forms of organization of work. Experiments which did not give results, i.e. did not, in the last analysis, increase productivity, were soon abandoned, and only those concepts which were still possibly functional were salvaged to be tried out again in another context. Job rotation, job enrichment and job enlargement, for example, all took on a new meaning in a flexible use of the workforce, the break-down of demarcation and the movement of workers from job to job more or less at

will. This 'Trojan horse' tactic was also used in the introduction of automation: unpleasant or unhealthy jobs were to disappear, the general skill level in the factory was to rise and workers were to be freed from machine pacing. But the real result was the absolute reduction of human labour and the further subordination of human to machine for those who remained.

The vaunted 'new way of making cars' adopted by FIAT was, then, not the transcendence of Taylorism, but the crowning of it. It is a sophisticated adaptation of the principle: control = productivity to new social conditions within the factory and new developments in technology outside of it.

The Taylorian way of making cars relies on 'parcelization' and machine pacing to achieve the separation of conception from execution. The 'new way of making cars' relies on a new flexibility in the labour process combined with the breaking up of the big factory into a more modular system and an absolute reduction of the workforce through the replacement of human labour by machinery, in an attempt to render the factory less vulnerable to the subjective and active presence of the working class.

Real control over how much is produced and how has been strengthened by:

(1) The use of advanced computer systems for centralized information gathering, surveillance and control of complex production flows. These systems can identify and follow individual parts and direct their movement all the way through the productive cycle, identify and

signal faults, keep a complete record of production data - which may then be used to organize production and calculate the job timings, labour complements etc. required to achieve maximum efficiency - and will even keep track of the productivity of individual workers.

(2) The replacement of traditional assembly lines by a system of independent modules. Production in each section is rendered autonomous from that in preceding and successive sections by buffer stores which contain several hours worth of the necessary for production. Such a system is much less vulnerable to the control a worker may exert over the labour process by blocking it; that is by withdrawing labour in one way or another.

(3) The introduction of a more flexible use of human labour power through job rotation and related concepts, allowing management a freer hand in deciding how the labour power available at any one time will be used.

It is the contention of this thesis that this radical reconceptualization of the technical and organizational setting of labour in FIAT was forced on management by the particular forms of labour organization and class consciousness in Italy. The rebellious nature of the working class in Italy was rendered more, rather than less, dangerous to ordered productivity by the weakness of its official organizations, which at most 'led from behind' and during many periods actually called for the restoration of productive order in a stakhanovistic attitude deriving largely from that 'paralysing illusion' of the major federation of

participation in political power by the mother party. These organizations were never, in any case, able to channel and restrain the oppositional thrust of the working class in ordered processes of negotiations. The situation of 'ungovernability' deriving from this combination of a rebellious working class with weak official organizations has resulted in a sophisticated and imaginative re-organization of the productive process to equal the strength and imagination of the working class.

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