

# The Return of the Social Revolution

Or, Well Dug, Old Mole!

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1978

“Bread and roses.”

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

“Molotov, Champagne!”

(Milan, 1977)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since the summer of 1976, the first signs of a different reality have been in evidence. While the sphere of “Autonomia” grows, and the experience of worker’s self-organization is enriched, the so-called Circoli Del Proletariato

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

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

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

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

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

In Rome (February), the leader of the CGIL (Generale Italiana Dilavoro, Communist Party-controlled trade union confederation), Luciano Lama, was chased from the occupied university. Having to propose that the movement jump on the bandwagon of reformism in order to cement its “alliance with the working class,” this union bureaucrat had to depend on the apes of his security squad and on the cops to get him home in one piece. The same day, Mimmo Pinto, the DP deputy, who found himself by chance in the neighborhood, was recognized by a group of Metropolitan Indians and forced to paint his face and participate in the happening against his will. These events

and the following days of continuous debates and assemblies inside the universities, high schools and factories, are extremely important because they measure the widespread consciousness that the PCI and the unions are not simply following the wrong (“revisionist”) line, but represent a specific faction of capital to be fought. Thus the violent attack against the PCI professors is also clarified. The dean of the University of Rome who called the cops to clear it out, Ruperti, is a Communist. With few exceptions all the “philosophers” of historic compromise and of collaboration, who had found precisely in the university their center of power, have been ridiculed there and often prevented entirely from peddling their ideologies.

Far from constituting an “assault against culture,” those acts represent a refreshing try to reappropriate critical thinking. Equally significant were the instruments of this critique: humor and irony, these very sharp weapons, replaced the old sacrificial jargon of militantism. As Radio Alice put it: “Militantism is the locus of the separation between politics and life, it is a voluntaristic substitute for the subject.” Pressured by the material situation into becoming revolutionaries, individuals experiment with a new, exhilarating sociability and little by little invent the necessary organizational vehicles. In numerous demonstrations that have added color to the grayness of urban life, slogans have given way to a mordant and violent detournment of any and all rationalization projects. Sacrifice and austerity are extolled with irony, and people shout “down with wages, up with work.” The dadaists habit of twisting the language of power and stamping it with radical subjectivity has been rediscovered (21). Following the shooting of a Lotta Continua member in March, Bologna was almost entirely in the hands of the demonstrators for three days. Downtown, numerous restaurants and luxury shops were looted: side by side with young proletarians, old pensioners could be seen fleeing happily, pushing handcarts brimful of delicacies. For once in these streets and squares people were communicating. Only armored trucks ordered in by the government with the Communist Administration’s approval could restore order to the city. Over the next few days, police found scores of guns and rifles hidden in improbable places, the fruit of an armory raid... Similar episodes recurred in April and May in Rome, Milan and Turin. Not one aspect of the old world was overlooked: “black labor,” establishment journalists, factories, universities, the supermarkets of ideology as well as traditional ones.

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

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

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

Cospirare vuol dire respirare insieme. (Conspiracy, that means breathing together)

—Flyer distributed at the University of Bologna.

We have mentioned some significant events that marked this year of struggle in Italy. We have tried to bring out their significance. Meanwhile capital has sharpened its knives: terror on the one side, cultural recuperation on the other. The Germanization of the state, like the various versions of the democratic mystification from the historic compromise to the government of the left is simply a moment of the same repressive strategy: “rights” and “culture” for those who acquiesce, the Gulag and extermination for the others. This is no exaggeration. Besides the

assassination of a number of underground militants, new laws against terrorism have been enacted, most of all the ill-famed Legge Reale (see "Aldo No Moro," FE #292, June 19, 1978) that allows the police to search houses and people without warrant and legalizes wire-tapping. There is also growing use of the "confino," an old fascist law through which people considered socially dangerous can be confined to restricted areas—generally a small island—even if there is no formal charge against them. Confronted by the waves of escapes and prison revolts, the state has put forward a new plan which attempts to separate revolutionaries from other prisoners. The former are kept in special ultra-secure prisons and are often prevented from reading newspapers or receiving visits, even from their lawyers.

Countering this project of normalization, a reality is emerging different from and alien to the theater of politics. The movement has overflowed language and politics, this is most feared. Language is a factory for the reproduction of power: the desire to speak out is a moment of its dismantling. Discipline and punish: the simplest and most vulgar operation is to assign guilt. Power, in its infinite paranoia, tries to combat that which is identical to itself: it seeks leaders. But the movement is the product of no conspiratorial vanguard either armed or pacifist, its lairs, pursued by the thick minds of the judiciary and police cannot be closed simply because they have no doors. These "lair" are none other than the reality of hundreds of thousands of workers who hate work, unemployed who refuse wage-labor, students and professors who subvert culture, marginals, madmen, homosexuals, feminists, prisoners. Nonetheless, these rudimentary tactics maintain the old efficacy of every repressive apparatus: the assassination and arrest of activists (or those deemed to be such) circulate further paranoia, sow suspicion, and retard the movement, even if they cannot wreck it.

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

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

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

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

Taking into account the enormous historical differences, the present position of Lotta Continua recalls that of the Maximalists of the Italian Socialist Party in 1919–1921, when they cried out demagogically for insurrection while at the same time repressing any such initiative. Today, more than then, absolute clarity is vital to unmask the

counterrevolutionary positions masquerading behind fine phrases. At any rate, from the beginning it was clear that at Bologna, the different tendencies of the movement would confront one another, and that the meeting would not just be monopolized by political recuperators. Of these tendencies, one of the most important was, of course, the so-called *Autonomia Organizzata* (Organized Autonomy); in the form of groups like *Rosso, Senza Tregua, Addaveni*, *Collettivo di via del Volsci* (*Volscevichi*), and so forth. Some more, some less, they all urged a radicalization of the conflict in the direction of armed struggle.

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

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

In our opinion it is precisely social decomposition which, enjoining mutually-exclusive choices—armed struggle as separate, specialized sphere—and reducing the complexity of the ongoing struggle to a feud between gangs, allows capital to go on exploiting the situation to its profit. If, as far as the *Brigate Rosse* are concerned, for example, we cannot suppress a bit of sympathy for their occasional success in ridiculing and assaulting the state, neither do we forget that their neo-stalinist and militarist program has nothing in common with the modern revolutionary project.

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

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

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

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

Beyond the formal political groups, however, a majority of participants had no rigid organizational ties and expressed a network of different local struggles. These included *Proletarian Circles*, *Factory Committees*, *Feminist* and *Homosexual* groups, squatters, free radio exponents and many others. The importance of the meeting lies precisely in the fact that such different situations sought in Bologna a first moment of encounter, while preserving their specificity. This constellation of needs, wants and desires contributed to the creation of a vivid social

atmosphere. Alongside the official debates, there was everywhere a proliferation of confrontations, encounters, and moments of love, socialized at last. For the first time in years, many people felt the desire and the possibility of talking about their lives and the necessity of changing them in concert with others. And it was this atmosphere, perhaps more than the communiqués of the militaristic sects, that the authorities feared. The day after the meeting's end, the press breathed a sigh of relief to ascertain that the city was still in tact. Zangheri declared: "Bologna won, the PCI won." Behind this cheap triumphalism however lay perplexity and dismay: no one said it, but everyone understood that Bologna had convened forces whose aim is nothing less than the destruction of capital and the liberation of desire.

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

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

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

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

Even forms of self-organization like Workers' Councils which confine social contradictions to the factory, are valid instruments of struggle in periods where capital still dominates the productive process only in formal terms. The moment the transition to its real domination is accomplished, new kinds of struggle and communications must be invented that question not this or that aspect of reality, but the totality of the conditions of social life. On the other hand, if today more than ever the intuition of revolutionaries in the 1920s appears correct—that Revolution is not a question of organizational forms—it is indeed true that the principal defect of the movement is precisely its failure to clearly define a basis for struggle adequate to the present needs.

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

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

"The spring of 1977 has been followed almost everywhere with the rather pious interest reserved for struggles on another continent...What most comrades have not understood is that Italy is not some midpoint between Europe and South America, but the vanguard of the class struggle in Europe. Spring 1977 was not a struggle of students and unemployed, backward strata tied to pre-industrial activities and cut off from the labor market, but the struggle of the proletarian layer that represents the social concretization of living time freed from work, and therefore the point expressing the greatest contradiction between the capitalist system and the post-industrial communist movement. Capital's interest is to subtract from the Italian class struggle its purposeful character. The movement's interest is to demonstrate once and for all the purposeful character of the Italian struggle, emphasizing that Italy

is in any case, the future of France, Spain and Britain.” (Manifesto circulated in France and Italy by A/Traverso-Radio Alice, June 1977)

In the meantime (February '78), the movement seems to be ebbing. The reformists catch up: well known post-stalinists like Althusser and Colletti talk about the “crisis of marxism” (*L'Espresso* No. 4, January 1978). The necessity of superseding the experience of the workers' movement slips in an uncritical rejection not only of Lenin but also of Marx. At the same time the state delivers a quite unprecedented attack, concentrated mostly in Rome where the movement most strongly expressed itself at the end of 1977 and where all the demonstrations of *Autonomia* are now prohibited. On February 4, a demonstration was held in Rome to protest the “confino.” While the groups of *Democrazia Proletaria* bowed to the police prohibition, the *Autonomia* claimed their right to dissent and had to engage in furious street fights with cops. Barricades spread over several points of the city and use was made of guns and molotov cocktails.

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

Finally we will try to draw some provisional conclusions. The '77 Italian events suggest the emergence of a new anti-capitalist opposition. Its most important lineaments are: 1) the quest for new, non-recuperable forms of communication and class struggle, and 2) the violent attack against official and non official left. Several aspects of the movement permit us to hazard the guess that its recuperation will be as easy as in the past; its irreducibility to some list of demands, the economic context it is embarked upon. In our effort to outline what is going on, we have made great use of the categories of the critique of political economy, in particular of the marxian theory of the falling rate of profit and of the key concepts of formal and real domination of capital. The mandarins of the PCI (& friends) have tried to put down the movement by appealing to the authority of an embalmed Marx. However, the appearance of a tendency reaffirming the communist program of the old workers' movement, but breaking with its forms of expression holds to the basic dialectical views of Marx himself.

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

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

**Related:** see the FE staff's introduction, “Revolution & Counter-revolution in Italy,” in this issue.

## Notes

1. “Capital is the moving contradiction, (in) that it presses to reduce labor time to a minimum, while it posits labor time on the other side, as the sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labor time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form, hence it posits the superfluous, in growing measure as a condition—a question of life and death—for the necessary.” (GRUNDRISSE p. 706, trans. M. Nicolaus)

2. GRUNDRISSE, op. cit., p. 748



3. THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE, Progress Publishers. Part II p. 527.
4. "Capital invested in the means of production advances relatively faster than capital invested in labor power. Because surplus value is surplus -labor time, the reduction of labor time relative to the growing mass of unproductive capital leads to a fall in the rate of profit since this rate is measured on total capital, i.e. on both the capital invested in means of production or constant capital, and that invested in labor-power or variable capital. The tendential fall of the rate of profit is just another expression for the accumulation of capital and the increasing productivity of labor." (Paul Mattick, MARXISM AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL, Root and Branch pamphlet p. 5)
5. "I (...) call capital of circulation, capital pertinent to the process of circulation, to a change of form by means of exchange (a change of substance and a change of hands), hence commodity-capital and money capital, as distinguished from its form pertinent to the process of production, that of productive capital." (CAPITAL, II, p. 192—International Pub.)
6. The rate of exploitation or rate of surplus value is measured by the relation between surplus value and variable capital (wages):  $s/v$ .
7. The relation between constant capital (c). and variable capital (v). Measures growth in productivity of labor.
8. In the section of CAPITAL relative to the "results of the immediate process of production," Marx talks about two different periods of capitalist domination: "the form based on absolute surplus value is what I call the formal subsumption of labor under capital. I do so because it is only formally distinct from earlier modes of production on whose foundations it arises spontaneously (...), on this foundation it now arises a technologically and otherwise specific mode of production—capitalist production—which transforms the nature of the labor process and its actual conditions. Only when that happens we witness the real subsumption of labor under capital (which) is developed in all the forms evolved by relative as opposed to absolute surplus value. With the real subsumption of labor under capital a complete revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between the workers and capitalists." (CAPITAL, pp. 1025 & 1034, Vintage Books). For a further examination of these concepts, see: Jacques Camatte, IL CAPITALE TOTALE, DEDALO LIBRI (Bari 1976) and Gianni Collu, "Transizione" in Cesarano Collu, APOCALISSE e RIVOLUZIONE (Bari, 1974).
9. In the yearly LE MONDE report on the world economy we read that at the end of 1977 in the OECD countries there have been some 700,000 unemployed more than at the beginning of the year. (SUPPLEMENTS AUX DOSSIERS ET DOCUMENTS DU MONDE—January 1978)
10. This has been lately observed by Lama himself (secretary of the CGIL—the Communist controlled union) who in a recent radio broadcast, talking about the end of marginal sacrifices and beginning of the real ones (!), supported the necessity of relaunching capitalist accumulation and re-establishing some kind of mobility of labor (see CORRIERE DELLA SERA, January 27, 1978). Lama is thus supporting the positions of Agnelli an Confindustria (an employers union).
11. The ensemble of phenomena which the economists call "stagflation" (stagnation plus inflation, the simultaneous rise of prices and unemployment and the decline of production) is an involuted way of expressing the perennial difficulty capital has in reproducing itself on a larger scale, and another way of expressing the fall in the rate of profit. These data represent the theoretical.
12. "With the development of interest-bearing capital and the credit system, all capital seems to double itself and sometimes to treble itself, by the various modes in which the same capital or perhaps even the same claim on a debt, appears in different forms, in different hands. The greater portion of this "money-capital" is purely fictitious." (CAPITAL III, p. 470—International Pub.). "The actual process of production (...) gives rise to new formations in which the vein of internal connections is increasingly lost, the production relations are rendered independent of one another." (p. 828)
13. Amendola himself, the most outspoken PCI member, in a recent interview (CORRIERE DELLA SERA, Jan. 4, 1978) talked about the continuity between the PCI policy and the Risorgimento.
14. "In reality the system of exchange value, and better still, the monetary system, is the system of freedom and equality. The contradictions that arise in its later development are immanent to it; they are implications of this property, this freedom, and this equality. In actual fact, the latter are transformed, here and there into their opposite. To imagine that exchange value does not develop from commodities to money, into capital, or that work

that produces exchange values does not result in wage labor, is wishful thinking and foolish besides. (Marx, Urtext GRUNDRISSE pp. 1111–12 Italian edition).

15. This is not the place to broach in any profound manner a critique of democracy. Others in the old workers movement have done radically enough already: for instance the Italian left (Sinistra Comunista) and also to some extent the German left. Here it suffices to note that democracy along with its system of representation is the political expression of commodity alienation: as such it is an historical category bound to be suppressed with the suppression of capital. As for antifascism the history has proved it to be a trap, thanks-to which capital has been able to cannibalize hundreds of thousands of revolutionaries. Regarding this, Bordiga was to declare: “The worst product of fascism is antifascism.” To demand democracy means to demand the process of value’s autonomization; fascism and democracy are only different political forms for the same content: the dictatorship of capital.

16. Referring to this, consider the recent massacre of the remainders of the “BaaderMeinhof” group (Red Army Fraction—RAF).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Claudio Albertani  
The Return of the Social Revolution  
Or, Well Dug, Old Mole!  
1978

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