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CHAPTER 6

THE STRIKE AT LINGOTTO: March 1943

“On the morning of 5 March 1943, Turin’s anti-fascists, with the Communist Party at their head, dealt a resounding blow to the infamous Fascist Party, by means of a strike which managed to unite the vast majority of the workers. Comrade Chiappo and myself, who were already known as political activists, were apparently excluded from the strike preparations in order not to endanger the organising group and to enable them to complete their mission without problems. However, even though we were not part of the organising group, we continued our propaganda work to convince the workers that the time had come to take action. On this occasion, at FIAT- Lingotto, we suffered no reprisals, whereas at FIAT-Mirafiori Leo Lanfranco and other comrades were arrested, to be released a few days later, with the exception of Lanfranco.

“After the fall of Fascism, 26 July 1943, Lanfranco was released from prison, and immediately returned to his post as area organiser of the Party: it was in these circumstances that Chiappo and I took up full-time our activities as organisers for the whole party membership at FIAT-Lingotto. We formed a committee made up of eight comrades, and within a short time nine cells had been created in the factory, and serious political work could begin. We distributed leaflets throughout the factory, with slogans like ‘Away with Mussolini and Fascism’, ‘We Want an End to War’, and ‘We Want More Bread and Shorter Hours’. Meantime, both inside and outside the factory, GAP and SAP groups, commanded by partisan leaders, were going into action, carrying out operations of sabotage, of disarming Germans, and taking hostages.

“When the fascists were abandoned by the monarchy, they established the Republic of Salo, based on rhetorical programmes that contained a false appearance of a recognition of the rights of workers to meet and elect Internal Commissions. Some politically backward workers gave a hearing to the provincial secretary of the fascist union when, by agreement with FIAT management, he called a meeting of FIAT workers and told them that they had the right to elect their own Internal Commissions.

“However, we managed to show the workers that everything that the fascists were saying and promising was false, and that they could not and should not put their faith in those who for so many years had prevented us from having our rights. So the republican fascist unions ended miserably, while at the same time the people and the workers were continuing to call for economic improvements, for bread, and the end of the war. Meanwhile, the bombings were continuing, and hunger and poverty were affected the workers more each day.

“The strike of March 1943 had given the workers of Turin the courage to unite still further, and to fight together to destroy Fascism and Nazism. In January 1944, comrade Scarpone, member of the Party’s provincial committee, called a meeting of a number of comrades from different sections, together with other anti-fascist forces.

Scarpone explained the Party's plan: this was to call a strike in the industrial triangle comprising Turin, Milan and Genoa. Some of those present, myself included, were from that moment appointed to the regional committee responsible for organising the strike.

“Other meetings followed, to organise the plan in as detailed a manner as possible. The strike was fixed for 1 March 1944. It was a real triumph, because it saw mass action by both manual and white collar workers. The strike succeeded thanks to the work of the comrades who distributed leaflets to the workers and to the whole population of Barriera di Nizza, as well as to the other working class areas of Turin. On this occasion we also had an attempt by two pseudo social-democratic workers to get the strike boycotted, by putting round a rumour that it had been postponed. Chiappo and I had a few words with them, and persuaded them that this was no time for dirty tricks. They took the hint, and we were able to carry on our preparations undisturbed

“On the morning of 1 March 1944, the morning shift went back to work as usual; this was a surprise, since everything was supposed to be at a standstill. But a group of comrades went into action, and all the machinery was stopped. This meant that other shops were shut down too. Only on the ground floor, in the Power Train section, were there problems, but these were soon sorted out. In the department where the Spa workers were working (they had been transferred to Lingotto because their own works had been bombed), they were working normally. Somebody told us of this, and a mass of workers invaded their department shouting: “Viva the Strike”, and the Spa workers all joined us.

“As we came out of the department, I was told that the assembly section had been working as well, but that they would stop at 12.00: we all went over to that section, and I stopped it, myself. In that section one or two foremen tried to put up resistance, but in the end they realised that times were changing. Facing that section were the Administrative Offices, but the white collar workers had already left. Good news was coming in from other sections of FIAT. The workers were all out by 10.30, and the only people left in the factory were the security guards, and our group, waiting for further news. On 2 March a lockout was declared in all FIAT plants, for 8 days, and this was the beginning of police reprisals. Three comrades were arrested; another two fled; one of the three arrested was deported to Germany, and never returned.”

[Translated from]

Translated by Ed Emery

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