

CHAPTER 7.2

AGAINST TERROR, HUNGER, DEPORTATIONS

Front cover of *L'Unità* newspaper – 8 October 1944

Throughout occupied Italy, the struggle of the working class and the working masses is continuing, to prevent the Nazi Fascists from putting into practice their destructive plans; with this struggle, the popular masses are preparing their decisive insurrectional battle for the definitive liberation of our Country. Agitation and struggle is becoming increasingly decisive; the SAPs [Squadre di Azione Patriottica] are becoming stronger, and are extending their activities, transforming the struggle of the armed vanguard into a people's struggle; strikes are taking on an increasingly clear political and insurrectional content. The proof of this lies in the major struggle that the railway workers are carrying forward against their armed German overseers, in order that our railway heritage does not continue to be a weapon in the hands of the Nazi warmongers.

The Great Strike in Turin

The assassination of our 7 patriots on 22 October has already been answered by partisan detachments, who have executed 35 Nazi-Fascist prisoners; they have also been answered by the "Gappisti" [Gruppi Armati Partigiani], by an intensification in the execution of their patriotic justice activities, and by sabotage of the Nazi war machine.

The vanguard actions of our Garibaldian advance guard has been followed by broad-ranging mass action by proletarian Turin. Delegates from the major Turin factories have called on the Agitation Committee to organise a large protest demonstration. This led to the Agitation Committee's invitation to workers, technicians and staff to stop work on 28 September. All the major Turin factories, from Mirafiori to Grandi Motori, from Acciaierie to Lancia, gave a compact and united response to the Agitation Committee's directive.

At Mirafiori, a Communist speaker addressed 14,000 workers staff and technicians of Turin's largest factory. A vast crowd of men packed into the main canteen, hanging from bars, beams and windows. The enthusiasm was indescribable.

The speaker, frequently interrupted by thunderous applause, attacked the crimes of the Nazi-Fascists, highlighted the activities of the Patriotic forces, and appealed for the united action of all Italians: "Only insurrectional action by the mass of popular forces will smash the terrorism of the enemies of humanity; only insurrectional action by all our popular forces will save our lives and what remains of our national heritage; only by insurrectional action will we win Italy her freedom, and a place of honour among nations."

At the end of this moving speech many workers had tears in their eyes; representatives of all the major parties flocked to compliment the speaker, while everyone present, in particular the women, crowded round to embrace him.

The SAPs were on a state of alert for any eventuality, but any Nazi-Fascist would have had a hard time if he had dared to confront the enthusiastic Mirafiori masses at that moment.

The Nazis only intervened at Lancia, after the stoppage, during the lunch-break, issuing threats to the workers. But the workers continued their meal, totally ignoring the speakers.

The working masses are continuing, with their agitation and work stoppages, and their struggle for the distribution of food; they are always on the alert, and prepared to react decisively and extensively against Nazi attempts to suffocate and terrorise. The Piedmont Committee for National Liberation gave expression to this desire in its directive of 27 September, declaring: "For every Patriot killed, 5 Nazi-Fascists will die; for every village burned, 50 traitors will be executed. The courageous population of Piedmont has decided to carry forward its battle to achieve total liberation from the Germans and the Nazis. Our people will not bend. The enemies of our freedom and our homelands should have no illusions."

[Translated from *L'Unità* newspaper – 8 October 1944]

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Extracted from: THE BOOK OF FIAT: Insurrection, insubordination, occupation and revolutionary politics at the FIAT motor company – 1907-1982

Published: Red Notes / May Day Rooms

First published in 2020