

## CHAPTER 14

### SPEECH BY A FIAT WORKER ABOUT 1969

Comrades,

I speak to you as a worker from FIAT-Mirafiori. I want to explain how our struggles started there, how they developed, and the lessons we feel they hold for all Italian workers.

Nobody could say that our fight at Mirafiori developed out of the blue. It was the product of everything that the working class had learned through the struggles of 1968-69, and at Mirafiori the way in which all these experiences came together marked an important step forward in our political growth and understanding.

#### **It's clear that . . . You need organisation and clear understanding**

All this has needed, and will need, organisation. We have begun to build organisation at two levels – both inside and outside the factory. There are groups of workers who get together on the job, and they organise with the students into intervention groups outside the factory gates. Then there are the worker-student assemblies that we have been holding every day in a warehouse near the factory, where we come together to exchange and share news and information from all the different plants and factories in the FIAT complex.

But these assemblies don't only work at the level of coordination. On the one hand we began producing leaflets to tell workers in other parts of the complex how our struggles were going, and we also began to take initiatives in deciding what course the struggles would take. In fact it was in one of these many assemblies that workers and students decided to organise the demonstration for July 3rd of this year, which, as everybody must know, exploded into a great workers' battle.

At this point [July 1969] we are now faced with the coming clash over the renewal of our national agreement, and in the light of this, over the past few weeks, we have been restoring a strong degree of autonomy to the worker-student intervention groups at the gates. The aim of this has been to widen political discussion at a shop-floor level, and to put us all in a better position to begin to consolidate the organisation of all workers at all points in all of FIAT's factories. When the official union strikes begin, this is going to be crucial.

... It's clear to us that if you're going to fight the employers right to the last ditch, you need organisation, and a clear political understanding of what you are going to do. It is a struggle that's going to last for a long time, and you can't just improvise it from day to day. But we do not accept that we should be fed this organisation and this understanding ready-made by the political groups that come round advertising themselves, and who are far more interested in strengthening their own organisations than in helping us in our fight. In the last few months we have seen so many of these groups coming round, particularly when the struggle's all over. But we have had nothing to do with them.

It's for us to create our own organisation and our own political understanding on the basis of our own experience of struggle, continuously discussed and examined among ourselves.

... The employers and the unions use national agreements as a means to keep us down, but we shall transform them into weapons with which the working class will be able to organise and fight. We shall use them to develop the revolutionary political organisation of the workers and of all working people, and we shall do this by consolidating and generalising the lessons that we have learnt from the struggles of the past year. The workers have virtually expelled the union from the factory, and have begun to formulate their own demands, and carry them forward in a fight that is led entirely by themselves [...]

### **A tactical idea: Minimum cost to us, maximum cost to them**

During the struggles of the last year certain demands have cropped up repeatedly. We must take these, and use them as our priority to unify workers throughout Italy. They are:

- Equal wage rises for all, not linked to productivity or any other employer's standard (like time and motion, incentives, plus payments, conditions payments etc.)
- An immediate reduction in working hours, without loss of wages. Abolition of compulsory overtime.
- Abolition of the lower gradings as the first step towards the abolition of all grading divisions.
- Complete parity with the white collar workers.

The sort of strikes that the union intends to call for the Autumn are the sort that cost us the most and cost the employers the least – the sort where the employer has plenty of warning of the strike, and can organise himself so as not to be hit too hard – and the sort that gives us precious little help to get together and organise ourselves. But in the strikes at Mirafiori, and previously at the Pirelli rubber factory in Milan, as well as in many other advanced struggles recently, we have been able to organise in new ways. We have understood that if the factory is the heart of the employer's power, then it can and must become the centre of our power. We have understood that organising and fighting inside the factory allows us to come together to discuss and organise much more than was the case when we all just used to go home for the day. And we have understood that if we use this organisation, arranging to relieve each other by striking in relays, taking it in turns to strike, we shall hit the employers more effectively, and pay less of the cost of the strike ourselves.

### **The general, autonomous organisation of the working class**

This kind of autonomous organisation already exists in many departments at FIAT, and during the strikes for the contracts this Autumn we are going to have to spread it – both to other parts of the plant, and to other factories that it has not yet reached. For us the watchword is “Fight Inside The Factory”, because it is only through fighting inside the factory that we shall be in a position to outlast a prolonged clash with the bosses and the State. We must put them in the weakest position, where *they* will have to pay the highest price, and not us.

Now, the struggles in the Autumn are going to be hard. Nobody is saying that we shall see the final frontal clash of the proletariat with the armed forces of capitalism for the conquest of state power. But over the last year, Italian workers have revealed a certain revolutionary awareness that their problems are class problems, and that the only way to solve them is to mount an attack on the system that perpetuates them, with the aim of destroying capitalism and abolishing all classes. Our problem now must be to use the struggles over the national agreements this Autumn to translate this general awareness into organisation – the general autonomous organisation of the Italian working class.

[Translated from *La Classe* No. 13-14, August 1969]

[Return to Contents page](#)

---

**Translated by Ed Emery**

**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**