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CHAPTER 19

ON WITH THE REVOLUTION!

By Summer 1969, the capitalist press was no longer able to ignore the fact that something was beginning to happen in Italy

"The new Italian revolutionary Left received its baptism of fire on FIAT's doorstep in Turin on July 3rd. For more than ten hours a crowd of several thousand fought 2,000 riot police in the worst outbreak of street violence seen in N. Italy for many years. The demonstration took place during a 24-hour general strike called by the unions in protest against rising rents but it at once assumed an anti-union character. Police prevented the demonstrators from marching round Turin's working class areas, so that the disturbances did not spread significantly. But barricades went up, and it took the whole afternoon and the best part of a night to restore calm.

"Italy's revolutionaries are still a tiny minority, but their progress is evident. For the past two months, unofficial strikes have been slowing down FIAT. Few FIAT workers took part in the riot, but even the thousand who were there would not have taken any interest six months ago. The notion that students and workers cannot find common ground was disproved when the hard core of student revolutionaries was joined on the barricades by large groups of young workers. Even workers loyal to the union notice that pay increases won through the unofficial strikes are much greater than those gained after regular management-union bargaining.

"The revolutionaries claim the support, of tens of thousands of industrial workers all over the country. A national congress of revolutionary workers groups is shortly to be held in Turin to 'work out the goals of a new phase of class struggle which must affect the whole fabric of capitalist society'. It sounds like a traditional Marxist blurb, but it works. Unrest is spreading to other FIAT plants and many other factories besides.

"To the official leaders of the trade union movement this spells disaster. Repeatedly they have tried to ride the revolutionary tiger by joining in the unofficial strikes and by proclaiming huge national strikes. But these strikes have failed to win the younger workers over. They receive only lukewarm support, while unofficial stoppages, and possibly violent demonstrations, arouse enthusiasm. In Turin itself things have reached the point where union officials dare not enter certain workshops."

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