

## CHAPTER 21

### “INSURREZIONE” – THE BATTLE OF CORSO TRAIANO

**PREFACE:** The following text is translated from the final pages of Nanni Balestrini’s novel *Vogliamo tutto* [Feltrinelli, Milan 1971]. The chapter is entitled “Insurrection”. Some of the text of the novel is taken verbatim from the *La Classe* article about the riot, suggesting a possible co-authorship.

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So then we decided to go to Nichelino, where the battle had also been going on all afternoon. It wasn’t easy to get to Nichelino, in the sense that you could get there down the usual road, because it was blocked by a barricade of burnt-out cars. The access bridge into Nichelino was also blocked – so we had to get in by a roundabout route. All those immigrants, those thousands of proletarians who live in Nichelino, had built barricades all over the place, using cement drainpipes. They had pulled down traffic lights and laid them across the road. A huge amount of building materials had been brought from nearby building sites, and was piled onto the barricades and set alight.

Via Sestriere, the road that crosses Nichelino, was blocked by more than ten barricades, made out of burning cars and trailers, traffic lights, rocks and timber. The made a huge fire out of wood from a house that was under construction: the whole site was burning. They threw rocks to smash the street lamps, and all you could see was the flames. The police played for time – they didn’t attack, but let us be. In fact, they only attacked at four in the morning, when reinforcements arrived. Almost all the workers were dead tired, having been battling for over 12 hours. The police relieved each other in relays.

The police stayed there, in front of the barricades, waiting for the morning and the arrival of fresh reinforcements. We, for our part, had gone back to the bridge, which was blocked by burnt-out cars, to throw stones at the arriving reinforcements. The reinforcement jeeps and lorries arrived by the back route that we had taken earlier – which meant that we were encircled and had to make our escape. The carabinieri got out of a lorry, and started chasing us, firing teargas as they came.

We ran for it, with the carabinieri chasing us. All of a sudden I saw a line of jeeps heading straight for us. I don’t know how they managed to turn up there, maybe they’d been out on a reconnaissance. Things were looking bad for us. So all of us started hurling at the police. Then I saw that the carabinieri were behind us, so we turned around and started to attack them too. But a lot of police turned up behind them, so we had to run for it, because there were only a few of us.

By now I was desperately tired. As I was running, I tripped against a rock. I stopped to glance at my shoe, and noticed that a lone carabinieri was chasing after me. Then I saw a comrade who had been running with me, jump on the carabinieri. They fought, and the carabinieri fell. Then, at the top of the road, I saw smoke rising. We reached the top, and from there you could see the whole wide avenue, with the battle

going on. You couldn't tell who had the upper hand, everything was so confused. All I wanted was one simple thing – to stop and have a shit somewhere – but I couldn't.

Some carabinieri attacked, and I never made it to the centre of the battle where the fighting was hardest. Just at that moment I heard someone shouting. Then, from the middle of the smoke, the police appeared in their armoured vehicles, with their lights lighting up the proceedings. They started firing off teargas. There was a construction site at the side of the road, and some comrades had started to gather there. The comrade who was with me headed off towards the building site, and I followed him.

A lot of people were running down the avenue. I looked back and saw everyone running and scattering into the side streets. When we arrived at the building site, there were quite a few comrades there. The police fired teargas grenades over our heads, chipping off wood and brickwork. We could no longer see what was going on below, down on the avenue. Nothing but smoke, shouting and explosions. The avenue was hidden by dust and smoke. You could only see shadows, with a loud noise of shouting, sirens and explosions. On my left I heard the revving and the sirens of the police wagons coming up the avenue. Two molotovs burst in flames in the middle of the road.

There was smoke and teargas everywhere – you could hardly breathe. The police came out of their wagons and started running in our direction. They were running through the smoke, with their masks and their shields. I found myself with a good few comrades, running hither and thither, and slipping down the side roads. The police ran after us, and there we all were, mixed together in the smoke that hung over the burning debris. I couldn't see much. I saw one comrade hurl himself at a policeman who had been left isolated, and hit him several times with a piece of wood.

We saw police arriving, running, from one of the side roads. We wielded our wooden clubs and hurled ourselves at them in the haze that enveloped us. I fell on one helmeted cop, and hit him. He cried out, and sprawled to the ground. Then we all went back to the avenue. On the other side of the avenue we saw a group of comrades attacking police as they were returning to their wagons. The police ran away, and they chased them right to the top of the avenue where they had left their wagons with lights and motors running. One cop was waving his arms and groaning. I saw some comrades helping a young lad to his feet. He had a head-wound and was bleeding a lot.

With the aid of their new reinforcements, the police slowly gained ground. They began house-to-house searches, behaving really brutally. But people didn't go away. By now the workers and the people of the area were used to the teargas, and they took it in turns to help build the barricades. I arrived, with four or five other comrades, and the carabinieri at our heels, at the main door of an apartment block, which was shut. I shinned up the courtyard wall, and found a ladder on the other side. I pulled the ladder up after me. I saw other comrades on the roof of the house next door.

The carabinieri had managed to force the door, and they started going into all the flats. From my roof-top vantage I could see them coming out onto balconies, climbing the stairs with their helmets and rifles, and then coming out onto the balcony of another apartment, looking for us. They were waking people from their beds to check their identity papers. After quite a long while we had no idea whether the carabinieri had left or not. Some women from the flats signalled to us that they had gone, and told us to come down. It was almost dawn. The sun was coming up. We were dead tired, completely whacked. For the moment, that would do. We came down from the roofs, and went home.

