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## CHAPTER 29

### THE POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS WORKING AROUND FIAT

#### [A] Lotta Continua

There are about 12-13 main FIAT plants in Turin, not to mention the very many smaller supplier companies (see the article Beyond FIAT). Mirafiori is the biggest plant, employing 55,000 workers. Then come Rivalta (18,000) and Lingotto (7,500); Spa-Stura (trucks; 6,000); Spa-Centro (truck parts; about 2,500); Ricambi (components; 4,000); Avio (aero engines; 2,000). There are 3 foundries (at Mirafiori, Borgaretto and Carmagnola). Grugliasco and Avigliana are smaller factories (4,000 and 2,000) producing engine parts and components.

Lotta Continua is present in most of these factories (excluding Spa-Centro: they were present here, but with an old, skilled working class they found it hard to develop the sort of demands that were developing elsewhere in FIAT). They are organised in such a way that they can ensure that external militants are always available every day to go down to the gates, leafletting or discussing with workers. To give an idea of the amount of work that they do: for one shift at Mirafiori, leafletting on as many as 12 separate gates, they require 12-15,000 leaflets. They have been doing this, leafletting for at least 4 days in every week, for the past 5 years. Accounts for the world paper shortage!

Most Lotta Continua members are inside the Mirafiori plant, because it's there that LC started, and it has proved to be the most important plant to organise around. They have at present about 45 members in Mirafiori, mostly in the Body Plant and Press Shop (Carozzerie and Presse). They are weaker in the Engine/Mechanical parts sections (Meccanicche), where there is a different organisation of work, and where workers tend to be more skilled and individualistic. They also have 20-25 members in Rivalta.

Lotta Continua has an office/shop-front at both Mirafiori and Rivalta, as well as 10 other branch offices around Turin. These provide meeting points for leafletting and discussion. Not a mass assembly sort of place. At Mirafiori the office is open every day from 5.00am till midday. Then it re-opens when the morning shift comes out, at 2.00pm. It's always in use. It's also near the Engineering Union offices, and this means that they are often able to hold joint discussions with workers from other organisations and from the Unions. They also have offices near the Orbassano and Spa-Stura plants. Each FIAT section of LC meets once or twice a week, depending on the level of the struggle, to discuss what needs to be done. These section meetings are also the arena in which workers who are not members or aspiring members of Lotta Continua can have political discussion (the others go to occasional cadre schools).

In addition, the Lotta Continua Workers' Commission meets every week in the central Turin office. The Workers' Commission is a national structure, with its own, very fine, bulletin, published monthly. In Turin it brings together all the Turin factories (including the rubber, plastics factories etc). It meets every Saturday morning, and gathers about 40-60 workers, plus a delegate from among the external militants of each "section" (*sezione* – town branch).

At the Lotta Continua Workers' Conference in May this year (1974), they assessed the class composition of their membership. 75% of the Lotta Continua militants at Mirafiori are shop stewards (delegati). The vast majority (95%) are members of the FIOM [FIOM is the CP/Socialist Party part of the FLM Federation of Metalmechanical Workers, which is made up of FIOM (Communist/Socialist); FIM (Christian Democrat/Catholic Leftist) and UILM (some Socialists, Republicans and Social Democrats – not so important).

The FIAT Lotta Continua members are mostly in the 20-30 year age range. Usually married (which is a difference with the early days in 1969). Almost all males. Lotta Continua, in the 5 years since the Hot Autumn of 1969, has had about 250 members sacked from the factories – mostly Mirafiori and Rivalta. Of the political sackings at FIAT, more than 60% were Lotta Continua members. Franco Platania was one among many, framed with a couple of sparkplugs planted in his bag as he was going out of the gates.

In more than 10 cases, Lotta Continua has fought these sackings in the lawcourts, and proved them to be illegal. FIAT loses the case, but rather than reemploy the worker, they prefer to pay them to stay at home. In this way there are Lotta Continua comrades who are paid by FIAT for doing nothing, and they can spend their time on political work. This has been going on since 1970.

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[INSERT PICTURE]

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## **[B] The Union**

The engineering unions in Turin are arranged as mentioned above. In Mirafiori there are 829 shop stewards (del-egati). These meet in the Consiglio dei Delegati and the Consiglio di Fabbrica. The question of whether to work within the Works Committee, and if so, how, is a big question within Lotta Continua at this moment, at national level. Then there is also the Works Executive (Esecutivo) which has members from each Consiglio di Fabbrica. It is divided between the Body Plant, Press Shop and Mechanical Parts sections. The union leadership is trying to give more power to these Executives (i.e. Convenors etc), but Lotta Continua is fighting that.

The unions also have their officials (operatori esterni). Some of these are workers who have been sacked. Others are pulled out of the factory by the union, to become organisers. Others have never worked in a factory. They are paid 200,000 lire per month (?) They participate in the Consiglio di Fabbrica, whose membership is divided equally between the 3 main unions. They often end up running the Consiglio di Fabbrica. They are the bureaucrats of the situation.

The union in Turin is divided into branches – the “leagues” – a historical name – *la lega*. At Mirafiori you have the Fifth League (la Quinta Lega). The lega is a joint, 3-union branch. The engineering workers are the only workers to have this unified union structure, bringing together the various political tendencies. The lega is where the Consiglio di Fabbrica meets, and where decisions are taken about the factory struggle. Propaganda is decided and printed here. Shop stewards come here for news and information. There is an office, with phones, a printing press etc. It is located right opposite the Mirafiori plant. There is another lega office at Rivalta, and a total of 12 in Turin as a whole.

The *lega* is a strong base of decisionmaking. The Mirafiori *lega* is a place for political discussions. For a long time there were attempts to get Lotta Continua kicked off the *lega* and to exclude Lotta Continua shop stewards from the Shop Stewards Committee. In the end Lotta Continua won. External militants are allowed to attend

meetings at the Mirafiori lega, and even if you've been sacked out of FIAT, you still maintain the right to speak in the lega. The Union has approached LC comrades and offered them organisers' jobs, organising the Union, in other parts of Italy.

### **Other Union Structures**

[1] There is a general meeting of the Consiglio di Fabbrica once a month. There are never more than 350 out of the 829 shop stewards present. They usually meet outside the factory, sometimes on University premises, sometimes in a church hall. Here the leadership and the Union officials give the official line. There is general discussion, and in theory this meeting can take decisions. Many times, though, they take a vote (eg for an 8-hour strike) and go along to print leaflets at the lega, and the lega refuses to print them.

[2] The National Coordination of FIAT Shop Stewards. This is not open to all shop stewards. Usually open to shop stewards nominated from the Executives? All officials also attend. And only 2 delegates from each section of a given factory can attend (eg Body Plant, Press Shop etc). This is a dead structure, made up of officials and right-wingers. It meets to decide on platforms of demands and to make decisions about national FIAT issues.

[3] The Engineering Union in Turin (FLM) is based on a central place – the Camera del Lavoro – Chamber of Labour. This is the Communist/Socialist base (CGIL Union). The UIL and CISL have their own places. But the Camera del Lavoro is the more important of the three. It's run by an ex-FIAT worker, Pugno, who was sacked in the 1950s, a supposed Leftist. It is the CGIL base for the Turin region, and covers the outlying regions (Pinerolo etc). It would meet to decide on things like regional general strikes, how many hours the strikes should be, etc. They take these decisions in conjunction with the other two Union structures in Turin – CISL and UIL. Most decisions of this sort are joint decisions. The Camera del Lavoro has no control over the struggle at FIAT or other factories, who decide their own policies through the local FLM branch.

For a general strike, the Consig di Fabbrica of each of the different factories (and other work places) meet. They decide their individual positions – FIAT, Pirelli, Michelin, hospitals, etc – and then go along to tell the Camera del Lavoro, where another meeting is held, and the final position is thrashed out. On occasion the Camera del Lavoro also has mass meetings of shop stewards in the Turin Sports Stadium, to decide policy for general strikes.

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[INSERT PICTURE]

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### **[C] The CUB**

The CUB are the Base Committees (*Comitati Unitari di Base*). They are the main organisation at Mirafiori apart from Lotta Continua and the union. They are a revolutionary organisation, and function as a wing of the Trotskyist group Avanguardia Operaia (Workers' Vanguard) who have links with the British IS. This is the usual Trotskyist split between the political party and the rank and file group. (Unlike Lotta Continua which operates as a political party inside the factory). AO is the second largest revolutionary organisation in Italy after Lotta Continua, and has grown markedly in recent times. They are stronger than LC in Milan and Porto Marghera. They are not so strong in Turin, but have considerable power within Mirafiori.

The CUBs have a different organisation structure from LC. They are only a factory organisation. Members of CUB are not necessarily members of a political organisation. They may be sympathisers. The CUB deal with factory issues, while Avanguardia Operaia, as the party, puts out separate leaflets dealing with more general political issues. They attract the left wing trade unionists who are not very happy with the Union line.

The CUBs are a rank and file organisation. There are CUBS in Mirafiori, Rivalta and Lingotto. Also in other industries and factories. AO is building CUBs among students, factory workers, communities, hospitals – many different sectors. The political line for the CUBs comes from AO.

The majority of workers organised in the CUBs come from the FLM Union. Some are also Union leaders in the FLM, whereas LC at Mirafiori and the rest of FIAT is generally within the FIOM. There is a general meeting of CUB members once a week. They have no branch offices near the factory.

#### **[D] The Manifesto Group**

Manifesto is a group that split from the left of the Communist Party a few years ago. They are absent from the factory – having 3 members inside. They don't sell their paper at the gates, but they do a (general) leaflet once every 10 days or so. They have formed links with the PDUP (ex-PSIUP) – Democratic Proletarian Unity Party – which does not exist as an organisation of workers at FIAT, but which does have a lot of TU officials. Many TU officials in Italy are PDUP members.

#### **[E] The Communist Party**

The CP has 250 members at Mirafiori. This is very low compared with other factories. In 1969 the whole Mirafiori CP branch had only 45 members. This was partly the result of the purges and sackings in the 1950s. But also, until 1969-70, the CP largely ignored FIAT as a place to organise, since they didn't want to organise unskilled line workers. They have more members in the Mechanical Parts plant, where the work is more skilled, and fewer in the Assembly plant. The CP shop stewards act in a very disciplined and united manner. They are capable of pushing a very hard line in the Factory Council. However, the CP presence in FIAT is not monolithic. There is a lot of internal tension, especially with the CP members who are lineworkers, against the Party leadership.

In general the CP is weaker in the motor industry. However, in the Pirelli factory they have apparently 1,000 members, and the situation at Pirelli is similar.

[Possibly 1974]

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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**