

CHAPTER 41

WOMEN WORKERS AT FIAT

Question: Today, as in the struggle for the national agreement in July, the women are in the front line of the struggle. Now they're organising against the redundancies that FIAT has announced. Losing your job is a serious matter for anyone, but what does it mean for women particularly?

Franca: When the women workers began to be taken on at FIAT (very many of us in the past two years), new possibilities opened for all of us. Now, though, if they want to send us back into the home, where our husbands will be wanting to give the orders because they're the only ones earning a living, then these possibilities collapse. For me it would be really bad to be cut out of factory life. And then, if they sack me and those women like me who have begun to organise in the factory, then I would be really annoyed, because it means that in FIAT too they want to send us back to the situation (which still exists, but less so nowadays) where the foremen rule the roost and the women are submissive...

I've changed a lot since I started at FIAT in November 1978. I hardly recognise myself now. The other day I stayed out on a picket line all night. This led to an argument with my husband, but I think that he's come to accept the "new" me. He realises that if he tries to stop me doing what I think is right, it's even worse...

Question: What about your little boy?

Franca: Well, at the start I would say that my boy – he's 10 now – found it particularly hard that I was always out. He was used to seeing me in the house all the time. But he's a lot more independent now... Then one time I brought him along to a Works Committee meeting, and he enjoyed himself – everyone was giving him little presents. But I would say that this business with kids is a problem for a lot of comrades. I've already seen quite a lot bringing their kids along to the Works Committee meetings.

I would say that the people who really can't accept me as I am today are my parents. They're always telling me not to get involved so that I don't get sacked, settle for compromises, don't get militant... and this is strange, because my father worked at Olivetti and has always been involved in the struggle.

Question: Let's get back to the redundancies...

Franca: Yes. I wanted to say this: that FIAT obviously plans to get rid of anyone who's "inconvenient" – but it's the women who are coming under heaviest attack. The general opinion is that if a married couple are both working, it does no harm for the woman to stay at home. I even heard this said the other day by a FIAT manager to a woman who was sacked for absenteeism...

For my part, I think that, because women have gone to work en masse, we're living better now. Not only like I said before, because we're more independent, but also because we can do things that previously we couldn't do. For example, when I started work, we had a phone put in, at home, and now, if I fancy going out for a pizza one evening, I can do it. Previously I wouldn't have dreamt of it. I think that women will find it very hard to lose these kinds of things, and that is one reason why we're fighting.

Question: Nearby here there's the INDESIT factory, where a lot of women are fighting against redundancies. Do you have any contact with them?

Franca: Yes, certainly. A lot of them are the wives of men who work with us at FIAT. During the strikes we went to meet them. They're very tough women. I admire them. They were there with their kids, and there's a lot of solidarity among them. I think that we've all got to concentrate on the central issue now – defending our jobs in the factories.

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