

CHAPTER 44

THE SACKINGS AT FIAT – SEPTEMBER 1980

21st September 1980

Dear John,

It's a cheery sort of morning. Iraq and Iran are stepping up their war efforts; the new military junta in Turkey is consolidating itself; a rogue Titan missile with a destructive power 7,000 times that of the Hiroshima bomb has just blown itself up in the US; and the Sunday papers show West Ham fans at yesterday's match giving Nazi salutes. And it is raining.

But not all is gloom. This morning I had a call from Turin. The FIAT workers, returning from their summer holidays, have been presented with a Company schedule for mass sackings. They have been organising their resistance, and this coming Thursday should see mass demonstrations in Turin and other cities. I thought it would be worth putting pen to paper, to record some of what has been going on. Se here we go... the history of the past couple of weeks, as gathered from *Lotta Continua* newspaper.

THE SACKINGS AT FIAT

FIAT has announced its intention to make 22,000 workers and 2,000 staff redundant by the end of September. They held a press conference, to comment on the disastrous state of the auto industry. During the coming week we shall see whether the matter will be resolved by compromise (inter-company mobility of labour and layoffs for months on end) or by confrontation. The first 8,000 redundancy notices are all ready to send out. The FIAT-Mirafiori shop stewards committee decides to occupy their factory. It is likely that the sackings will hit FIAT's southern Italian plants hardest (Cassino, Termoli, Sulmona etc).

The announcement of the sackings was preceded by Press conferences and statements to the Press. FIAT's sales in Europe have slumped drastically since the start of the year – despite extensive sales and advertising campaigns. The Company blames the Japanese (for dumping) and their own workers (for 9 million strike-hours in the course of 1979, thereby "driving customers away"). FIAT's intention is to start to reduce stockpiles; to reduce production so as not to increase excess supplies; and to proceed with further automation. Perhaps the crisis will have passed by 1982, but by then there will be no need re-employ the 24,000 presently threatened with redundancy, because new technology will have removed their jobs.

At the time of writing, the possible outcomes include the following: (1) the Company could negotiate with the FLM Union for a number of workers to go into early retirement, or to be transferred to other firms; (2) there is talk in Turin of a plan whereby, under the local council's Housing Plan, 10-20,000 workers will be required in the construction industry; this would provide work for redundant FIAT workers; (3) the Government may intervene with a new law on Labour Mobility.

The Company is not prepared to say which sectors of workers are going to be hit – but it is clear that they already have a good idea, since lists of names have been drawn up at Head Office. So, for the moment, the picture is unclear. [*Lotta Continua*, Saturday 6 September 1980]

“IF THEY ANNOUNCE REDUNDANCIES WE SHALL OCCUPY THE FACTORY”

A comrade in Turin goes down to the gates of FIAT-Mirafiori and discusses with the morning shift. The news of the redundancies came on the second day back at work. The feeling was that the issue would become clearer the following week, when union leaders and FIAT management got round the negotiating table. For the moment, the atmosphere is much the same as ever. As the morning shift comes out, there is the usual bustle and hubbub; the stallholders crowd with the workers fighting to get on buses and the cars racing out of the car-park. But there is a worried look on people's faces, as well as a clear sense that the FIAT workers are determined to resist the Company's plans.

The main feeling is that if FIAT goes ahead with these redundancies, then the FIAT workers will occupy the factories. This feeling is not confined to the more trade-unionised sections of the factories – but it is also not clear what will happen afterwards. It was also not clear *who* would be sacked. One Communist Party militant, a veteran of the 1969 struggles, has his own: "The women.... ever since FIAT took on the women, the heart; has gone out of the situation How's that for feminism! If the Company's going sack anyone, let them start with the women. And the young ones, the news starters... .they've done us no good; they make a lot of noise.... they say all the political parties are the same....and then they do nothing in the factory." [*LC*, Saturday 6 September]

MIRAFIORI WILL BE OCCUPIED, BUT...

Remember October 1979. FIAT had sacked 61 workers because their "behaviour" was considered harmful to the Company and its image. There was a tremendous scandal. There was talk of terrorism – and in fact it turned out that three of the sacked workers had been members of armed organisations; there was fear and suspicion; there were physical attacks and killings. FIAT said that with the sacking of those 61 (whose only fault – or merit – was to have been vanguard militants in the strikes of recent years, or to have been young and troublesome on the assembly lines) peace and productivity would return to the factories. But they were clearly being treated as scapegoats, as subsequent events have shown.

FIAT's disasters cannot be blamed on the existence of a few long-haired workers in the factories, or on the young women hired in 1979- They must be traced to a parasitic management, a weak management with no grip of the situation, a management that has grown up with the easy profits of a company that had grown big simply because of its protected monopoly situation; and lower levels of management who, in Turin, behave like the rulers of a banana republic, doing little deals with smaller factories, exploiting their powers of buying and ordering, and fiddling the order-books. And now we see the results – a massive slump. Nobody buys FIAT cars any more, because other cars cost less, consume less petrol and last longer. And at this point the FIAT management put their hands on their hearts and blame the workers: the workers must be sacked.

24,000 sackings. The largest sackings seen for a long time in Italy. It is as if two whole factories – say Rivalta and Lingotto – were simply wiped off the map, and with them whole working class areas, with their businesses and trade which have grown up,

dependent on FIAT, in the past 20 years. With these sackings there are bound to be drastic repercussions in other plants in Turin. The lucky ones (the unionised ones) will go onto short time; the unlucky and unorganised ones will be sacked. Turin will go the way of the big American auto cities, with their unemployment and their private police forces.

Of course, workers' struggles could change all this. At Mirafiori yesterday the atmosphere was tense. The young workers got out of the plant as soon as they could, leaving behind the older militants on the gates, the older shop stewards who have carried forward the struggles of the past 10 years, and who, more often than not, have been on a winning wicket. But these older workers are worried too. Of course, Mirafiori will be occupied. But what comes after that...? There is uncertainty. There will have to be negotiations, with Union leaders Lama, Carniii and Benvenuto meeting Government ministers in Rome. But after that....?

There is a stirring in the air. The stirring is called Danzig, Poland.... the example of a struggle that changed a government, the image of an occupied factory where all parties were forced to come and negotiate with the workers. And many of the FIAT old-timers have seen all this on the television. So, when the FIAT workers occupy, whose portrait can we expect to see hanging from the factory gates?

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[LC, Saturday 6 September]

A TRADE UNION LEADER SPEAKS

Giorgio Benvenuto, secretary of the UIL social-democratic union confederation, gave an interview to *Lotta Continua*:

LC: If you are refusing to negotiate on the sackings, or the labour mobility, what does that leave you, other than breaking off negotiations completely?

GB: We can negotiate on the control of new starters, on the question of layoffs, on early retirement. But one thing must be me clear: for us the crucial question as regards FIAT's possibility of emerging from this crisis is the question of whether it will be done with or without the Union...

"FIAT is in crisis because over the years it has thought to reduce the strength of the trade unions rather than improving its technology. Then there is this enormous centralisation of decision-making in Turin, which paralyses any possibility of change. In China too, where I have recently visited, they have this problem, and they are aiming to decentralise production. But Agnelli is not Hua-Guofeng...

The Union cannot allow itself to lose at FIAT. We are already in difficulty with the workers. We shall not accept these provocations lying down.

[LC, Tuesday 9 September]

THE NEGOTIATIONS

The negotiations on the FIAT sackings are taking place behind closed doors, in complete secrecy – the opposite of the Lenin shipyard in Poland. Contrary to expectations, negotiations were not broken off on the Monday. The factories, meanwhile, were closed (two days of layoffs) and the workers were at home, waiting for news.

Thus far, the only news was that FIAT had confirmed their need to reduce their

stockpile of 432,000 unsold cars and their need to reduce their workforce by 24,000 (the biggest mass redundancies in Italy's history). They also restated their intention to re-programme production for the coming years, making maximum use of workers' mobility.

The FLM proposals, for early retirement and a ban on new starters, were rejected by the Company. Also, it now appears that the bulk of the redundancies will be in Turin – and that of the 24,000 "excess" workers, 12,000 might be able to be re-employed in two years time if they were willing to work in FIAT's plants in the South. In other words, the Turin working class is about to come under a massive onslaught, designed to lessen its political weight.

Pio Galli, of the FLM Union, made a counter-proposal: rotating layoffs over a 3-month period for the 70,000 workers in the automobile sector. This solution, he claims, would reduce stocks, and would take the drama out of the situation. However, FIAT seems unlikely to accept this solution.

FIAT SENDS OUT 14,303 REDUNDANCY NOTICES. THE COMPANY THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET

[MISSING TWO PAGES]

There were also shop stewards representing other FIAT-related plants in Turin, like Avio and Iveco.

Some of the biggest surprises, however, were still to come; as for example when an FLM Union official called on the workers to "do as the Polish workers did". And shortly after, in an atmosphere of tense expectation, the workers marched off out of the factory and set off across Corso Traiano towards the centre of Turin. Then, to the accompaniment of shouted slogans ("The sackings will not pass: Occupy the factories and the whole of Turin") and applause from local residents, the workers decided to save their march into Turin for the following day.

[LC, Thursday 12 September].

THE BODY PLANT AT FIAT-MIRAFIORI

A Body Plant worker from FIAT-Mirafiori explains the day's events:

Turin: 11 September 1980: We turned on the radio (yes, the radio, because these days we have a radio station broadcasting in the plant because we need to keep ourselves informed minute by minute what's going on). We wanted to know if Agnelli was going to sack us, or if he was going to wait to hear the Unions' suggestions....No such luck....They want to sack a whole shift... We've got no choice. We've got to fight it. We've got to strike. We've got to be one jump ahead of management. Comrades, when we go back to our sections, we're going to have to strike straight away. It's the only possible answer.

That was the position in the Mirafiori Body Plant yesterday afternoon. That's the reason why we stopped work. We're playing for big stakes now. The lives and the livelihoods of thousands of families are at stake. It was not hard to imagine things coming to this pass. The news that the thin red thread had broken arrived in the factory at about 5.00pm.

Mirafiori was in a state of expectation.... One 127 line had already been on strike since 4.00pm, over manning levels (as had the Metal Finishers some days previously). FIAT

refused to put a single extra man on the job: "Either you accept the situation, or I'll send you home" was the message from the plant manager. "If that's the case, and if you're leaving us two men short, then we're going on strike right now. In fact, we're *already* on strike. You can go to Annibaldi and tell him that we're on strike and that he doesn't frighten us."

The lines were running very slowly. And then the word arrives that management negotiations have broken down. We decided to hold meetings in the canteens. Not much was said, but the words were clear enough. People were eating... it was hard to let the message sink in... hard to digest your food...

The discussions carry on, on the way back to the line. Everyone is talking, the women, the young workers, the older workers, everyone.

"Comrades," says one, "It's the right time. If we're all united we need not be frightened. They want to sack us. We've got to fight it – and if necessary we should occupy Mirafiori". "Yes," says Lucia, "We must occupy".

Three lines further on, the march. An enormous march, with several thousand workers. The slogans are taking shape: "Poland has taught us: Mirafiori must be occupied", "From Termini to Cassino to Mirafiori, our slogan's the same: OCCUPATION!"

An enormous march, with about 8,000 workers, I would say, with red flags and a portrait of Karl Marx. We see some foremen: "Stupid foremen – Down the toilets with them".

"Let's get outside and picket the gates....what are we going to do in here?....People must see that we're ready to do anything....Let's occupy".

We go out into the open air.

We see people out in front of the factory gates. They've realised what's going on. It's a fine march. There's a bit of everything. When we get to Corso Agnelli we line up. The megaphones and the flags go up to the front of the march. We meet up with the workers from Metal -Finishing and from the Paint Shop. We start chanting more loudly, everybody*chanting. We stop the traffic outside the plant.

We invite the workers who are on the trams going home to come out and join us. They come down, and the tram goes back to the terminus. Everyone cheers and whistles.

We cross Corso Traiano again, then Corso Unione Sovietica. We're shouting slogans. "We don't want to be sacked," explains a forty-year old worker to a lady in a car.

Going towards Corso Tazzoli. There's a mass meeting. A Union official is speaking. Nobody pays much attention. "We'll occupy, but we must prepare well for tomorrow's strike. We must discuss and involve everybody, we must become the reference point for the whole working class of Turin and of the country as a whole." He suggests that everyone returns to their place of work. "What place of work,....they're going to sack us" said one group of workers as they headed for Gate 2, "We must occupy....there's no choice."

Nobody's sure what to do. Some say yes, some say no. That occupation seems like a cursed word. Nobody's prepared to say it out loud, nobody's taking it to the point of action. It's impossible to explain....there's a definite shortage of people who could act decisively... it would be different if the sacked 61 were still with us... It's not easy to understand what the Communist Party comrades are up to...they want to occupy, and

then they *don't* want to occupy. Let's hope that the strike happens tomorrow, because it's pretty chaotic here. We'll be screwed otherwise.

[LC, Thursday 12 September]

ITALIAN WORKERS BACK THE FIAT WORKERS

The total all-out strike at FIAT is now in its 25th day. And the struggle, far from falling off, is gaining momentum. Once again, this morning, thousands of laid off workers came to the factory, and entered, through the gates, in defiance of FIAT's ultimatum. Having made this symbolic gesture, they then stay around for the various meetings and discussions: the factory gates are still crowded with groups of workers and supporters manning the picket lines.

Every day now the Union gives a Press Conference to announce the latest developments – and today they report on the nation-wide solidarity fund that has been set up through the Unions. This fund is reminiscent of the organising efforts in support of the strikes after World War II. The Unions and the Communist Party are setting up a number of fund-raising networks. The National Union confederations have promised 5,000 lire for every waged worker; they are also calling on town councils, workers' cooperatives and the public to make their contribution. Union leaders are calling for every trade union official (full-time) to contribute 30,000 lire (£15), and since there are 20,000 officials in Italy, this could bring in £300,000. The Communist Party, meanwhile, has contributed £25,000, and is working to get contributions from the traders and business people of Turin. Furthermore, £2,000 has been collected at Gate 5 of FIAT-Mirafiori, the official coordination-point of the struggle.

Solidarity is also taking a more "material" form. The Verano Cooperative has sent 1,700 litres of milk for the strikers and their families. The Nichelino Cultivators' Cooperative has promised free fruit and vegetables for the People's Canteen which has been set up at FIAT-Lingotto. There have also been moves towards "twinning" of Turin with other Italian cities: Bologna will be the first, and will doubtless contribute handsomely. Finally, preparations are being made for a programme of culture and entertainment at the factory gates, starting with Franca Rame at Mirafiori on Thursday morning, and Robert Benigni!, the comedian.

THE FIGURES FOR THE REDUNDANCIES

Press Shop	-	1,974
Engine Plant	-	4,410
White Collar	-	2,281
Teksid	-	1,090
Subsidiaries	-	1,000
Assembly	-	14,000

Most of those to be sacked are from within the Turin area, and most are concentrated in assembly operations in volume car production.

THE DAY'S EVENTS AT FIAT-MIRAFIORI

Yesterday Turin saw a big – and in part unexpected – march by FIAT workers from the afternoon shift, into the streets surrounding the Mirafiori and Lingotto plants. Then, today, a larger demonstration, of over 10,000 workers – militant, well-organised and determined – crossed Turin, on their way to Piazza Castello in the heart of town. Here a workers' delegation went in to speak with the regional authorities of Piedmont. At the same time there were mass pickets of thousands of workers on all the gates of

Mirafiori and Lingotto. Meantime, other FIAT plants saw other forms of action – FIAT-Rivalta, for example, was the scene of large internal marches inside the factory, with a large number of workers taking part, who at one point decided to march across town to FIAT-Mirafiori (in the end they didn't). FIAT-Aviation (which is not affected by the sackings, since it is involved in arms production – a profitable business these days) was on 100 per cent strike for the second day running.

At 8.00am the thousands of Mirafiori workers and Lingotto workers set off in a march. The demonstration was led by the women workers from Lingotto's Assembly plant, carrying an enormous banner. All the way down the 6 miles into town they kept up a rhythmic chant – "*Potere operaio*" and "*Se la FIAT licenzerà, occupiamo la città*" ("Workers' power" and "If FIAT sacks us, we'll take over the city"). In front of them were 20 or so cars, with the red flags of the FLM engineering union hanging out of their windows, and with horns blaring. "Danzig, Stettin, we'll do the same in Turin!", "Hands off our jobs", "From Mirafiori to the South of Italy, our slogan is the same – jobs!" These were the main slogans, together with calls for a national general strike, and various colourful insults regarding members of the Agnelli family.

For the first time since the struggle started you could see numbers of young workers – the new starters of the last 2 years – involved in the struggle. And the pavements were crowded with people watching the marchers going by. The Mirafiori Body Plant went by with a poster of Pope Woytila raised high – an ironic comment on the workers of the Polish shipyards. The march finally reached Piazza Castello, and ended with a meeting below the offices of the Piedmont regional Council.

[LC, Friday 12 September]

SWITCH ON YOUR RADIO. YOU MIGHT FIND THAT FIAT HAS BEEN OCCUPIED

Yesterday afternoon negotiations between FIAT and the FLM engineering union broke down. The attempt to barter layoffs and redundancies outside of any control by the workers, and with the exclusion of workers and shop stewards from the negotiations, has failed. The FLM is now proposing handing things over to the Government and the national trade union confederations. FIAT's immediate response is that tomorrow they will be setting the wheels in motion for the mass sacking of thousands of workers. A day of tension and uncertainty for the people of Turin.

At FIAT-Rivalta and at Lancia there are big strikes, and demonstrations by the workers. Mirafiori nervously awaits the latest developments. "We're worried, but we're at the point of exploding". In the evening FIAT's main union organisations meet together, after the shop stewards have spent the day arguing against the negotiations being carried out in Rome. They want the negotiations brought North, to Turin. This is the line being put by the Communist Party. It's worth quoting the Party in full. All over Turin posters have been appearing (special thin posters, suitable for fly-posting on lamp-posts!) headed "Berlinguer on FIAT" and flanked by a photo of the Party secretary. It reprints Berlinguer's speech to 1 million people in Bologna on September 14th, a speech which opportunistically unites the struggles of Polish workers with those of FIAT workers, to draw a lesson as follows:

"The crisis is real, but we do not accept, and will never accept, that the workers....should be made to pay for this crisis... The negotiations must not be allowed to take place with the workers in the dark. The workers, and public opinion, must be able to follow the various moments of the negotiations and the positions of the various parties as they develop. We have a lesson, in the method that was followed in Danzig. There the negotiations took place directly in the shipyards, in the sight and the hearing

of all the workers; with loudspeakers that transmitted the things that were being said during the course of the negotiations; and with public opinion being kept continuously informed. So why don't the management's representatives, the employers, the Unions and the Government, instead of negotiating in Rome, go and negotiate in Turin, under the eyes of the workers? Why do they not adopt a negotiating-method and a method of informing people I similar to that followed in Danzig?"

Plant-level Union officials have decided on an occupation of the Mirafiori and Rivalta plants. Everyone is trying to keep the working class out of any possible decisions on its own future. But, in the final event, the only hope will be if the working class can push itself into the front line of the battle.

[LC, Friday 13 September]

FIAT KEEPS UP THE HARD LINE, THE MANAGEMENT REFUSE TO ACCEPT LABOUR MINISTER FOSCHI'S ARBITRATION

FIAT's main reason for rejecting Labour Minister Foschi's proposals is that they do not accept the principle of external labour mobility here and now. In other, words, FIAT still wants the absolute right to get rid of one tenth of its workforce, on its own terms, to shunt them over to jobs in other sectors (where it is doubtful if these jobs even exist, given the levels of unemployment), and to run down an important part of its Turin operations. In other words, a massive attack on that vanguard of the Italian class struggle which, in the past 10 years, has been represented by the FIAT workers. This is not a case of "get rid of the key militants". This was done last year, with the sacking of "the 61" (and it was the way in which the Union and the PCI allowed these sackings to go unchallenged that allowed FIAT a clear run to the present challenge to Turin's organised labour). No, this is a "mass execution".

It is clear that FIAT has not budged an inch from their original ultimatum. There has been a meeting at Government level, between FIAT management, Union leaders, and Prime Minister Cossiga – at which Minister of the Interior Rognoni was also present, as if to underline the "threat to law and order" that could ensue with these redundancies. It is to be expected that the Government would prefer to avoid a situation where factory occupations are breaking out all over the place.

In a sense, it is as well for the Unions that FIAT rejected Foschi's proposals; Union acceptance of the provisions for total layoffs and 15,000 redundancies (via early retirement and natural wastage) would not have been well received in the Turin factories.

[LC, Thursday 25 September]

THE COMMUNIST PARTY ARE INTENT ON BRINGING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. THEY BRING ALL THEIR EFFORTS TO BEAR

"These last few weeks the Communist Party seems affected by an almost maniacal syndrome: its political line can be summed up in 3 words: "Cossiga Must Go!" A Communist MP summed it up in Parliament: 'Every morning, Communist Party militants, instead of saying their prayers, say: "What.... Cossiga's still here!he must go before tomorrow". And since the end justifies the means, the PCI is in favour of anyone who can make the Government fall....and at this moment, that means the situation at FIAT."

[LC, Thursday 25 September]

THE GENERAL STRIKE IN SUPPORT

OF THE FIAT WORKERS. 25 SEPTEMBER 1980

The general strike called by the engineering unions in Piedmont yesterday was a tremendous success. An act of solidarity with the FIAT workers under threat of losing their jobs. Four enormous marches of workers progressed through the centre of Turin, to arrive at a huge mass meeting in Piazza San Carlo, where there were two main speakers – Enzo Mattina, national secretary of the FLM engineering union, and Pierre Carniti, for the national Union confederation.

There were many delegations of workers from other plants and other parts of Italy – from the Italsider steelworks in Genova, the Breda factory in Porto Marghera, Alfa Romeo in Milan and the smaller factories of Milan.

The Mirafiori march started at 9.00am in front of Gate 5. At first the numbers were not enormous, but the march grew to tremendous proportions as it went down the 6 kilometres of Corso Unione Sovietica. It was led by dozens of cars, with the red flags of the FLM hanging out of the windows, and with horns blaring. In the lead were the banners of the various Works Committees at Mirafiori – the Body Plant, Press Shop, Engine Plant. Men and women workers arm in arm in the hazy sunshine, with a tremendous din of whistles, beating drums and slogans – against the sackings, for an 8-hour general strike, for jobs, and for unity between North and South.

There were many posters – including a big portrait of Che Guevara carried by the workers of 76 Shop. Behind them came a splendid banner of the Trade Union Women's Coordination, a brightly coloured message to Agnelli that women were not prepared to be sacked from FIAT and driven back into the home. (The previous day the women had held a packed meeting at FIAT-Rivalta, concerning the position of the women factory workers. This is particularly important in these days, in the event that FIAT tries to make the women bear the brunt of the redundancies).

Then there were the workers from FIAT's numerous sub-contractor plants, almost all women, who will be badly hit if the FIAT sackings are allowed to go ahead.

Having once arrived at Piazza San Carlo, the marchers packed the square. But the Mirafiori delegation, for instance, did not stay together as a tight presence – they mingled with other crowds of workers and red flags in the square. In fact we can say that the only tight presence in the square was the organised presence of the Communist Party militants, who occupied the space in front of the speakers' platform. Carrying that day's copy of *L'Unità* like a poster, they cheered the CP mayor of Turin, Diego Novelli, as he mounted the rostrum; they booed and whistled Carniti as he spoke; and maintained a respectful silence for Mattina. Their interest in the situation was obvious from their slogans, heard more than once in the course of the demonstration: *È ora, è ora, è ora di cambiare! Il PC deve governare!* ("It's time for a change – The Communist Party must govern").

In the meantime, the rest of the crowded main square seemed to have no particular interest in taking part in the proceedings. In the event, the speeches from the platform ended at 11.30am – a lot earlier than should have been expected for such a day of national mobilisation. Already people were drifting off out of the square – and the tail end of the marches was still arriving on the scene.

In short, the demonstration was a tremendous expression of workers' power, and presence. But it was a dumb, somehow passive expression, in a sense. We walked those 6 kilometres, but somehow there was a lack of imagination, of creativity, of a sense of where we go from here. A sense of separation of the "official" level (of negotiators from Rome, of Party speakers etc) from the rank and file level.

[LC, Friday 26 September]

THE DAY OF ACTION (Cont.)

Meanwhile, the Day of Action in the South of Italy was very badly represented. Only 15,000 workers attended the demonstration called in Naples, compared with 50,000 for the 1978-79 engineering contract negotiations, and the 500,000 of December 12th 1975- A number of factories hit by redundancies were there – Italsider, Sofer, FIAT-Cassino, Indesit-Sud. Pio Galli spoke for the FLM, and made a clear rejection of workers' mobility and the blackmail of redundancies.

The biggest "absentees" from this struggle were the workers of the Alfa- Sud plant in Naples, which has just signed a new deal with Nissan Motors of Japan, for a joint production programme. Their jobs are now assured for a further period.

COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY BERLINGUER GOES TO TURIN. THE FOLLOWING DAY THE COSSIGA GOVERNMENT FALLS. FIAT MANAGEMENT POSTPONES THE REDUNDANCIES.

Just at the moment when the space for mediation appeared non-existent, and when the redundancy letters for 14y thousand FIAT workers had already been sent out, FIAT today made a surprise move and threw its weight behind the political forces which have brought about (by one vote) the fall of the Cossiga Government.

A brief communiqué issued to journalists today let it be known that FIAT management had suspended, for a period of 5 months, the machinery for the biggest collective sacking in the Company's history.

Instead they will go ahead with the measures already discussed and in large part agreed with the Unions: (a) special layoffs for 24,000 workers, some of whom will be on full-time layoff, and some on a system of rotating layoffs; (b) declaration of a state of crisis at FIAT; (c) a block on new starters – natural wastage; (d) early retirement. FIAT's communiqué makes no mention of the question of external mobility – which was the big sticking point in the negotiations. However it does accuse the FLM engineering Union of having "prevented an agreement by its unwillingness to put into effect the provisions of the engineering workers' national agreement" (i.e. the clauses regarding external mobility in case of extensive layoffs).

The Company gave the resignation of the Government as their reason for postponing the sackings – since, apart from the heightening of Italy's economic and social crisis, there would be dangers in allowing further aggravation of the atmosphere of tension in the country. FIAT claims to have acted "responsibly" in postponing the sackings – and hopes that the Unions will do likewise.

Berlinguer, speaking in Turin yesterday, made it clear that the main objective of the PCI, and of the working class, was to bring down Cossiga's Government. For the first time in a long time, the PCI was prepared to give open support for an occupation of the factories, if this was decided by the Union. The PCI's formal position was to respect the Unions* autonomy of action, but in fact this was an open invitation to action, a direct pressure. The Party was strongly criticised by the DC leader, Piccoli, and by the head of the CISL union confederation, Pierre Carniti. They spoke of "adventurism" and an attempt to "raise the level of tension in Italy".

But Berlinguer has shown himself to be a better strategist than many of his adversaries. Some people are even speaking of a direct agreement having been

reached between FIAT and the Communist Party, inasmuch as both have, in a certain sense, emerged from this battle as victors (at least, for the moment).

Contrary to appearances, FIAT has won a lot more than the Union was previously prepared to concede: full-time layoffs; thousands of workers removed out of the factory (with no major dramas); and the question of labour mobility still hanging in mid-air, with the expectation of a new government law being brought in. The "Japanese-style" transformation of the factory can go ahead in peace....in theory at least.

The PCI, on the other hand, wins on all fronts: it wins against the Christian Democrat party; and it gathers around it a degree of workers' consensus, at the expense of the trade unions. As they say, Berlinguer, in one day in Turin, was able to achieve what the Unions had not won after weeks of struggle.

So, is the game played out? Far from it. But for the moment normal service is being resumed. The negotiations will almost certainly return to Turin; and the General Strike is being called off.

THE BALANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS

The government, the second under Prime Minister Cossiga, was composed of Christian Democrats (DC: 15 ministers), the Socialist Party (PSI: 9 ministers), and the Republican Party (PRI: 3 ministers). It was formed on the eve of the local council elections of June 1980, and fell at its first important fence – the package of economic measures to deal with the crisis. It had lasted 135 days. The Socialist Party supported this Government (a government which claimed to be able to restore the country to "governability") – and took a lot of stick from the Communist Party for their class betrayal. The Communist Party, in this period, was "in opposition" – i.e. no longer giving tacit support to the Government. If there is a loser in the situation, it is the Socialist Party (PSI) under their leader Bettino Craxi (who is trying to establish a social-democratic party on the model of Britain's Labour Party). And if there is a victor, it is the Italian Communist Party (PCI) under Enrico Berlinguer, whose avowed aim was to bring this Government down, at whatever cost.

AGNELLI NOMINATED FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR MEDICINE

The first reaction to FIAT's 14,500 sackings among the workers was that the whole thing was a bluff. No....the firm would probably settle for 3–4,000 redundancies in the end, taking it out on the habitual absentees. So, the immediate effect has been a dramatic drop in the number of workers going sick. You see it in any doctor's surgery in Turin – even workers who are sick now want to get back to work as quickly as possible, for fear of being sacked for absenteeism. And the word going round Turin is that Agnelli has been nominated for the Nobel prize for medicine – for having miraculously cured so many workers.

THE PROBLEM OF ABSENTEEISM

We've already noted how the Alfa-Sud workers were barely present in Thursday's Day of Action in support of the FIAT workers. Alfa has just signed a special deal with Nissan, offering the Japanese firm joint production rights in Italy (much to the disgust of FIAT's management and Unions, who see this as a Japanese "foot in the door"). But the Alfa were not only absent from the struggle – they also have a high level of absenteeism in the factory. The national press has been whipping this up into an anti-worker campaign – and the Communist Party and Unions have made it clear that they stand firmly on the side of productivity.

Lotta Continua newspaper interviewed Enzo Mattina, head of the FLM engineering union, at a Press Conference shortly before the Government fell. He is a man who can be counted on to open his mouth and put his foot in it. He stated his opinion frankly:

"I've said it before and I'll say it again. There are layabouts employed at Alfa-Sud, a minority, perhaps 20%, who treat the factory like going to a football match: they never work, and they ruin work for everyone else – i.e. the majority. In these cases I am in agreement with Massaccesi [head of Alfa-Sud]: they must be identified, and sacked. And if there are shop stewards who are abusing their powers to pursue their own personal interests, they must be expelled from the Union and stripped of the protection that the Union offers. I say to Massaccesi: 'You have the means to get rid of these layabouts. Be more rigorous. You have already sacked some people for absenteeism. Use your powers. We won't defend them.' "

His opinion was echoed this morning by Foschi, the Minister of Labour, in a communiqué which stated:

"...the phenomenon of absenteeism, such as exists at Alfa-Sud, must be rooted out by legislative means if necessary, so that we can rid the factories of these pockets of non-productivity".

And immediately the results are seen at Alfa. At the Alfa-Pomigliano plant – after "record" absenteeism of 41% on Wednesday, and a high level yesterday (reducing the "normal" production from 400 to 257 cars per day) – 25 workers were sent letters, sacking them for absenteeism. And the Union will do nothing to defend them.

An odd situation, when the leader of the main engineering Union demands that management sack 20% of the workforce in a major car plant!

[LC, Sunday 28 September]

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