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## CHAPTER 49

### THESE FORTY THOUSAND; WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

by F. Giustolisi

Translation of an article from *L'Espresso*, describing the meeting called by the trade unions in the Cinema Smeraldo, Turin, to finalise details of the settlement with the company. It reveals the depth of the feeling of betrayal of the FIAT workers' fight against redundancies, and the way the unions had taken fright at the power of the "silent majority".

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**Turin:** A large billboard outside the Cinema Smeraldo, near the Mirafiori factory on the outskirts of Turin, announces its forthcoming attraction: "*Apocalypse Now*". But inside the building the Apocalypse of the trade unions has already started, among the uproar and the shouting, the abuse, the jeers and the insults. It would reach its height the following day, Thursday, during the mass meeting in the factory, with the angry, cold-blooded, determined aggression against Pierre Camiti [t.n. engineering union leader of the federation]. Franco Bentivogli only just saved himself from the same fate. Agostino Marianetti wasn't even allowed to finish his speech; Cesare De Piano could not even start his. Even Luciano Lama had to slip away, to the accompaniment of whistles and jeers, to avoid a clash with raging angry workers.

Inside the cinema, the trade unionists who had come from negotiations with the company sat huddled on the cramped stage, as if they were talking to themselves. With the rank and file delegates they no longer had any dialogue. Camiti shouted himself hoarse, but his every phrase was punctuated by roars of rejection from the floor. Next to him, Lama, red in the face and agitated, turned to the trade unionists sitting behind him. Giorgio Benvenuto, who was to suffer the same violent rejection in the factory assemblies the following day, sat with his head in his hands. "Here they are, the three whores of trade unionism," they shouted from the floor. "Go back to Rome", "Resign!" And then, on the way out, fresh tensions: "Comrade Lama – you remember when it was we workers who escorted you? Well, now you'll have to get the police to escort you!"

To one side stands Bruno Trentin, one of the workers' best-loved leaders: a fortnight ago, at the previous meeting of the FIAT works committee (the "*consigliere*") he tried everything to try and convince the shop stewards to call off this struggle – which had begun as a struggle to the death, and had continued as a struggle to the death. He had called it a sort of suicide. But the militants were calling for a "national all-out strike of the whole country" and "an occupation of all Italian factories", and they did not listen to him. And now his face was pale and tense. Somebody noted – and it was true – that, in addition to the shop stewards in the hall, there were a lot of people with no delegate credentials, such as the tight-knit group of the "61" sacked from FIAT in November last year. But it is also true to say that, even though perhaps not everybody agreed with this show of militancy, nobody was inclined to try and stop it. The same was to happen in the mass meetings: small groups of workers who

disagreed with the settlement tore up their union cards and hurled invective, but the mass of workers remained impassive, neither cheering nor jeering. As if they were thinking: you union leaders have created this situation, you union leaders have brought it about by your acquiescence, your opportunism etc. And now look at you! What's it to do with us? And in this way, under violent attack from the Left, but also under attack (more silently, but more massively) from the Right, the unions reached the high-point of their crisis. There will be a big shake-up in the FLM – definitely in the middle ranks, but probably also higher up, among the national officers in Rome.

The Rome union officials point the accusing finger: You, in Turin, are responsible for this situation. Turin answers: You have betrayed us. And in the meantime, from both Left and Right, there are moves towards setting up alternative unions. This is the general picture.

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**Translated by Ed Emery**

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