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A few notes on the revolutionary movement in Italy

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Italy from 1968 to the end of the eighties**

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Historical background

In Italy as in many other parts of Europe May '68 in France marked a great upsurge in libertarian expression, and parallel to this a relaunching of political organisations. There was a great surge towards the anarchist movement but the latter were full of contradictions and many of the young people who turned to it quickly left, disillusioned. An attempt was made to re-organise the anarchist movement through the old rigid structure of the FAI (Italian Anarchist Federation), however it was incompatible with the needs of the moment. At the same time *Servire il Popolo* (Serve the people), a Marxist Leninist organisation, was formed.

In the Hot Autumn of '69 workers in the factories began to organise autonomously in the form of wild strikes, factory occupations, etc, and these are forms of struggle that are still used today, although with no clear continuity.

Lotta Continua was born following the struggles of 68/69 and immediately following it, *Potere Operaio*. December 12 sees the State massacre of Piazza Fontana, a criminal provocation carried out by the secret services and fascists with the aim of putting a brake on the great wave of spontaneous self-managed struggles of the workers and terrorising them into retreating into the controlled structures of the official trades unions and parties. The whole of the extra-parliamentary movement finds unity in the defence of the arrested anarchist comrades and the denunciation of the State's strategy of terror. This marks a new phase, still in course today, of witch hunts against anarchist militants as scarecrows to ward off any manifestation of spontaneous struggle.

1969 saw the start of a chain of revolts in the overpopulated prisons where enraged proletarian and 'political' prisoners who had begun to swell that population from '68 onwards came together in overcrowded conditions. This situation continues today, although the State has tried to separate the two, building special prisons for the segregation and annihilation of revolutionary militants.

During this period the State found itself facing a growing crisis in economic and political structures, resulting in an uncurtailed growth in the unemployed margins of the population who were quite excluded from the production process. This was most acute in the South of Italy, a region which has always been deliberately underdeveloped in order to promote the growth of capitalism in the North. In 1970 exasperation due to this situation led to the popular revolt of Reggio Calabria, which however fell into the hands of the fascists due to anarchists' incapacity to be present in these struggles and oppose themselves to the corporate aims of the fascists.

The growth in the autonomous organisation of the proletariat at the workplace and areas of non-work (unemployed and students), accelerated the move to the right by the reformist left (C.P. and trades unions) who took up the defence of the State and its institutions against all forms of spontaneous struggle. The first clandestine structures were born at this time: *Gruppi di Azione*

organisation with a central direction and a vertical structure. The document made known their position concerning the organisation Prima Linea, claiming that the latter have a non-authoritarian structure, a real presence and adherence in the movement and a natural heredity of contents expressed in '77, and their decision to unite with this organisation.

Such an analysis of Prima Linea cannot be shared from an anarchist point of view. This military formation does not see itself as representing the libertarian content of the movement of '77 which, in its creativity had refused every form of delegate. It is hard to see how a structure with its characteristic of clandestinity and the need to organise at various levels in order to survive, perpetuating a central direction and various active minorities who guarantee recruiting and replacement of militants, could do so. One might ask what the claimed adherence to the mass movement is, when objectives struck are not representative of situations of struggle, but of the analyses of Prima Linea, the need to strike the representatives of power, to take the attack 'to the heart of the State' (analysis common today both to PL and the BR). The action by Prima Linea is against journalists, judges, representatives of the repressive apparatus. This debate, which has certainly not ended, is significant of the level of the clash today in Italy and the problems posed by the struggles of these years.

The anarchist point of view is against a division into roles between the specialists of military strategy and those carry out that have been studied at tables elsewhere, and those who represent the needs of the proletariat, and must express this somewhere other than in artificial counterpositions between armed struggle and social mobilisation.

The point of view of the anarchist movement in Italy in its various articulations is always for direct action, the refusal of the delegate and the negation of any kind of power whatsoever.

Proletaria (GAP) were formed in Genoa around 1970. They were supported by Potere Operaio, while Lotta Continua condemned them and has continued along this road of political opportunism which developed into a squalid gauchisme before disbanding as a political movement in 1975, becoming no more than a small group around a daily paper.

In 1970 at Trento university the Red Brigades began to take form and in '71 started to carry out clandestine actions in the factories in the Milan area. At that time their actions were linked to the workers' struggles through sabotage of the production or attacks on the factory hierarchy. These actions were well received by the working class. Only later did the Red Brigades take on a logic of the Leninist party organising through a political centralised direction and vertical structure of militants on the principle of democratic centralism. Many other armed groups soon developed. The NAP, born in the southern town of Naples were the first to fall under the repression: militants were assassinated or imprisoned. Prima Linea, born as a clandestine movement and open to various tendencies, through time developed a Leninist structure. Azione Rivoluzionaria was of a libertarian tendency and often made explicit reference to anarchism. Its actions were directly linked to struggles in course. Various other combatant nuclei acted in different situations, but through time they came to be part of the afore-mentioned organisations, in particular Prima Linea. State repression and defence from it forced all of these groups including Azione Rivoluzionaria into closed structures that accentuated the rigid model with all the ensuing consequences: distance from the real workers' movement, centralisation of command, in a word, towards Leninism. The clandestine group ceased to be the expression of mass struggle but followed objectives whose aim became its own survival, with the political alibi that they represented the proletarian movement.

In '72/'73 began the progressive and irreversible failure of the political and organisational project of the Marxist-Leninist groups that were well known in '69 (Lotta continua, Avanguardia Operaia, MLS) and structured as parties on the model of democratic centralism. What gave the final blow to the so-called 'small parties' was a) the growing contradictions resulting from clandestinity, and a perpetual ambiguity between legalitarianism and anti-institutional struggle; b) the birth of the feminist movement that emerged from left-wing cultural currents to become a real mass movement and virulent accuser of the hierarchical, bureaucratic and sexist structures of the traditional left groups; c) the growth of anti-authoritarian and libertarian values and structures (committees, collectives, spontaneous circles, defined by social struggles in specific areas) are an expression of the refusal to enter organisations with preconstituted political programmes.

The reviews *Rosso* and *Senza Tregua* (founded on the disbanded Potere Operaio) become the mouthpieces of the so-called 'area of autonomy', an expres-

sion of the movement in where different currents and tendencies unite and co-exist, but all defined by a workerist component and a presence in the big factories in the North through 'workers' political committees' and 'workers' autonomous committees'. It is from the coordination of these organisms that the project of *Autonomia Operaia* took shape, with an analysis of the new revolutionary subject who refuses work and the factory hierarchy, and practices violent struggle in opposition to the unionised, reformist worker.

The years leading up to 1977 were a long period of struggle. The refusal to be ruled spread, individual forms of struggle such as absenteeism generalised to sabotage and production boycotts. Mass illegality led to a general rebellion against the State drawing in the unemployed, the non-guaranteed, the employed proletariat and various other strata of the population.

The Communist Party and trades unions couldn't guarantee to restore social peace as the mechanism of the revisionist dialectic claims/reforms was clogged up due to the constant work of destruction by the revolutionaries.

The State responded to the generalised situation of ungovernability by mobilising the Secret Services in various plots for coups, another massacre (the explosion on the train *Italicus* near Bologna), and the introduction of liberticide laws (the Reale law which, through the police, was responsible for the deaths of dozens of comrades during demos and occupations).

The movement responded by intensifying mobilisation, as did the recently formed armed groups that were defined within a precise strategy. From the end of '75 an infinity of small groups, expressions of situations of struggle, and individual militants, carried out actions of sabotage and attacks on the centres of production, the factory hierarchies, the centres of social control (employment offices, social security offices, etc), the centres of police repression (army barracks, police headquarters, etc), creating a diffused, constant guerilla. This movement was anarchist in its very essence and in what militants were expressing, their choice of direct action and their refusal to be represented by any organisation that reproduced hierarchical mechanisms that suffocate the subversive charge.

In 1977 the violent refusal of all institutions and the armed opposition to the military became a historic insurrectional possibility. The Italian revolutionary movement has had to pay a very high price for not having known and in large part not been able to take this on.

On the one side the State reacted with an aggression of incredible proportions, coagulating various social sectors around itself and drawing the Communist Party and trade unions into the project of the annihilation of the revolutionary movement. On the other, the movement of '77 was distorted by an authoritarian component that saw revolution as a simple question of a politico-military strategy and claims to take the place of the real proletarian movement.

In 1978, while the movement was still absorbed by questions raised by the dispersion of the insurrectional occasion produced by the struggles of the preceding year, saw the most clamorous of the Red Brigades' actions, the kidnapping and elimination of Aldo Moro, president of the Christian democrat party, so enacting the Leninist logic of the vanguard party which represents the interests of the proletariat. From then on the Red Brigades, and *Prima Linea* behind them, increasingly reveal the nature of their authoritarian structures, destined to reproduce themselves on the political scene and confirm their presence by engaging in spectacular actions against the war apparatus of the State.

In much of the revolutionary left there is widespread impotence and lack of faith in the struggle, while the only problem seems to be whether to adhere to clandestine armed struggle or not.

The disorientation in the response to the attack of the State and the mystification of the equation 'armed struggle equals clandestinity', leaves the real movement paralysed under the increasingly heavy blows of power.

1979 saw the instauration of a climate of terror in Italy through the criminalisation of every form of struggle, the construction by the media of the scarecrow of terrorism, political censorship with the shutting down of papers and reviews, the launching of 'special laws against terrorism' which led to the arrest of hundreds of militants on 'suspicion' alone, leading to summary sentences. In fact the movement is 'outlawed', criminalised, accused of terrorism; continual blitz operations lead to persecution and intimidation. The whole 'area of autonomy' is under inquest, its publications are shut down, its presumed leaders arrested en masse. Then it is time for the libertarian area: false evidence is construed to close the review 'Anarchismo' and to arrest its collaborators. (A frame-up that was to collapse, above all thanks to its very inconsistency). In the field of armed struggle power plays the card of total liquidation, the 'laws against terrorism' are applied quite arbitrarily and any pretext whatsoever justifies reclusion for years in the State's special concentration camps. When it has no evidence or cannot invent any against the comrades, it plays its most revolting card of all, creating 'repentant terrorists', a handful of squalid individuals who, often lying and inventing in exchange for a promise of 'pardon', sells the state the lives of dozens and dozens of comrades and opens the way to the most vile campaign of extermination. Half destroyed in their organisational fabric and many of its components physically eliminated, the clandestine groups have continued the debate on armed struggle from inside the prisons and small groups of comrades outside have continued to spread this among the movement which at the end of 1980 is partially dispersed and on the defensive.

The communique put out by a group of comrades belonging to *Azione Rivoluzionaria* has led to much discussion within the anarchist movement and the movement of political prisoners in general. They are the clandestine group who from the beginning made reference to libertarian values and refused party