

“The Workers of Italy and the Revolt In Reggio Calabria”¹

Comrades,

A new, more advanced stage of the Italian social crisis has now opened up. To those who denied the existence of the revolution in Italy, a *new* insurrection has demonstrated its permanence.

From now on, in Italy today, any *pretext* is enough to set a revolt down the path of social revolution: at Caserta it was a soccer match;² at Reggio Calabria, a regional assembly.³ It's not the State that *chooses* to “abdicate,” as the Right-wing press says; on the contrary, the proletariat, through its revolutionary struggles, *forces* it evermore resolutely to do so.

A few days after the bombing of December 12th [1969],⁴ we wrote⁵ that the Italian bourgeoisie was faced with the necessity of *risking* its own present to win its own the future. Now we can confirm that, even if the bourgeoisie risks its own present every single day, it will only win an always more precarious future.

There was a time when the bourgeoisie *humiliated* the proletariat with its victories. But in Italy today, the most miserable bourgeoisie in Europe humiliates itself, provided that the proletariat does not win.

In this new period of crisis, Reggio Calabria is the first example of a town, which, at the heart of capitalist exploitation, has *revolted for more than three months* and has organized its affairs on its own. Isolated by a general wildcat strike and an undeclared state of siege, the town has courageously defended the freedom it has won, firing without restraint on the police forces on several occasions and setting up electrified barricades.

And the Italian State is the first State in Europe that, for three months, has been forced into impotence by a town that has risen up. Even if this insurrection was confused at the start, its duration and the growing violence with which it has affirmed itself now demonstrate its real strength and the *clarity* that it has been able to achieve. True radicalism authorizes every variation; it is the guarantee of every freedom. The game of pure violence is part of the pure violence of *the revolutionary game*.

But in Italy, *everything* is compromised, even the counter-revolution! As if another declaration was necessary for the Italian political class to make itself look ridiculous, Minister

¹ “Gli operai d’Italia e la rivolta de Reggio Calabria,” unsigned, datelined Milan October 1970. Translated into French by Jean-François Martos as “Les travailleurs d’Italie et la révolte de Reggio de Calabre.”

² On 8 September 1969, in Caserta, in response to the penalization of the city’s soccer team due to a match-fixing scandal, the mayor and the town council called for protests. Two days of intense rioting resulted.

³ On 14 July 1970, in response to the announcement that Catanzaro, and not Reggio, would be the regional capital of Calabria, the city’s mayor, Pietro Battaglia (a Christian Democrat), called for protests. Five days of violent protests resulted. The Italian government sent in the Army and the police to restore “order,” but it wasn’t until February 1971 that the revolt was finally quelled.

⁴ The bombing of the Piazza Fontana in Milan.

⁵ In the text *Il Reichstag brucia?* (“Is the Reichstag Burning?”).

Colombo,⁶ has found nothing better to do than to try to pass off the *weakness* of the State as its strength: “No one should confuse the moderation and balance that the State has demonstrated – that is to say, its strength – with weakness”! The realities that the President was trying to hide are the facts that the principle of authority has in these moments been *powerless* to restore order in the streets and that *this powerlessness is its negation*.

As for the Stalinists of the so-called Communist Party, they haven’t stopped slandering the revolt since it began and, “*in a final appeal to the more responsible forces of the majority*,” they called for the government to live up to its “*responsibilities*” and “*sense of duty*” in the face of the continuation of the insurrection. Just as they were the most determined to sabotage the rail workers’ strike that brought a qualitative leap to the revolt by ridiculing the directives of the Italian General Confederation of Labor, the “Communists” are the most determined to demand the massive intervention of the police and the Army against this “fascist revolt.” But, as if *the facts* were not enough in themselves, it was a fascist newspaper that took on the task of contradicting the Stalinists scoundrels: “*This is the revolt of an entire population against the State*”! On October 18,⁷ the so-called Communists of Reggio *admitted only to having missed the train as it departed*, when in reality, they’d also *missed the railroad workers*, as well.

Never before has an event projected its gloomy shadow so far ahead of itself, so active was the participation of the so-called Communist Party in capitalist power!

At the beginning of the revolt, the noisy presence of the vested interests of the bigwigs, the lawyers, the mayor and the archbishop – in short, the whole local *camarilla* – was immediately transformed into direct opposition to the insurrection; they promptly began negotiating with their colleagues in Rome for the “surrender” of the city in exchange for the satisfaction of their paltry demands. The spectacular problem of the administrative center no longer fooled anyone and in fact never truly interested *the proletarians* of Reggio. The initial protest regarding the location of a regional bureaucratic administration ultimately led the proletarians of Reggio to take their administration into their own hands. It is upon their heads – and not those of the bigwigs – that the most severe repression is getting ready to descend. Yet the highest echelons of the political police can no longer hope that a *cold-blooded* massacre, such as the one perpetrated on December 12th,⁸ will stop the revolt, and, in Reggio, they are already prepared to take the *risk* of perpetrating “a hot massacre.” The provocative, police-related bombs of December 12th only momentarily halted the *irreversible* movement that was making a mockery of all the efforts in favor of social peace by the scoundrels of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

In the coming months, many trials will continue the repression. But *the real trial* has already taken place and has been celebrated in the streets of Reggio, and it has lasted for more than three months. Sentence was passed in the third month of the revolt, when the proletariat of Reggio repeatedly opened fire on the police. The government and the Stalinists will pay dearly for their victory over Reggio.

Stalinists, gentlemen of the government, bigwigs: You might swallow Reggio, *but you cannot digest it!*

In short, Reggio is the first real *insurrection* of the Italian revolution. Insufficient,

⁶ Emilio Colombo (1920-2013), a Christian Democrat, President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic from August 1970 to February 1972.

⁷ The day the rail workers went out on wildcat strike.

⁸ The day on which the Piazza Fontana and other locations in Milan were bombed.

incomplete, often confused and, above all, *calumnied*, it has the merit of bringing to a close the stage of quickly repressed, simple revolts, like the ones in Battipaglia,⁹ Caserta and the prisons, and it has finally begun the period of *armed* insurrection. At Reggio, for the first time in Italy, the State saw itself *ignored* for a period of time that was as prolonged as it was scandalous, and then attacked directly. So there's no need to be surprised by the many real weaknesses of this insurrection, but rather we should marvel at its strength. The best thing that this uprising produced is its example, which is destined to be transmitted and reproduced.

Having said this, we don't know for what else the proletariat of Reggio can be criticized.
Comrades!

Now the outcome of the current crisis is in the hands of the wildcat strikers of the North. The revolutionary crisis of Italy will continue to grow in complexity until it opens the way to its radical *simplification*.

While the revolt in Battipaglia was met everywhere with the farce of Platonic solidarity among all the Leftist political groups, from the PCI to the Maoists, no group of politicians has dared to support the insurrection in Reggio, because none of them dare to admit their own refutation. And so, they become the slanderers and active opponents of the very movement that will unmask them. It is no coincidence that, at the very moment that the Army and the police's reinforcements arrived to repress the revolt, the pro-Chinese militants of *Lotta Continua*¹⁰ descended upon Reggio in order to recuperate the movement, thus once more making themselves look ridiculous. There is no greater insult to *the purveyors of lies* than to speak the truth.

The abusive presence of fascist provocateurs, which has been insufficiently combated from within the revolt itself – fascists are no more numerous in Reggio than anywhere else in the country – has proved very convenient for the Stalinists of the PCI, who, very slow to denounce them as such, seized the occasion of their presence to call the revolt “reactionary and fascist.” But speaking the truth is the *advantage* and the *right* of the revolutionary press. We say it clearly: the intervention of the Army and the declaration of a state of siege are *the real victories of the prolonged insurrection in Reggio*. Why in fact was a state of siege declared? Because a city rose up in revolt and took up arms. *And so, long live states of siege in every city!*

The other victory of the Reggio revolt has been to clearly demonstrate to the workers of both the North and South the essentially repressive and police-like roles of the so-called Communist Party and the union bureaucracies in this revolutionary epoch. On October 18th [1970], observing the overwhelming defeat of the unions' police forces, the Minister of Labor, Donat-Cattin,¹¹ proposed the formation of a genuine special corps of “work police.” Once this is established, Italy will have nothing left to envy in Maoist China, where it is the Army that forces the workers to work.

Comrades!

The government has long been prepared to violate the laws of its own State because, in a moment of revolutionary crisis, when the very existence of the State is at stake, the government

⁹ Between 9 and 22 April 1969, in response to the announcement that two local factories would be closed, workers and residents of the city rioted, destroyed government buildings and occupied the factories in question.

¹⁰ *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Struggle) was a Maoist extra-parliamentary organization, founded in 1969 and dissolved in 1976.

¹¹ Carlo Donat-Cattin (1919-1991), a Christian Democrat, Minister of Labor and Social Security from August 1969 to July 1972.

has but *a single and inviolable law: the survival of the State.*¹²

We have never forgotten it: “Our terrain is not *the terrain of law*, but *the terrain of revolution*. The government, for its part, has finally abandoned the hypocrisy of the legal terrain; *it has taken its stand on the revolutionary terrain*, because the counter-revolutionary terrain is also revolutionary.”

Comrades!

The *practical problem* that Reggio and all the other bloody battles of the last 24 months has *objectively* posed to the workers isn’t the problem of disarming the police, *but that of arming the proletariat*.

The power that currently exists could only have been wrested from us, and therefore only we can take it back. We owe nothing to anyone, because we own *nothing*. But it is precisely because of this that we are the most menacing creditors!

Comrades!

The police aren’t our only target: there are also the Stalinists of the PCI, the union bureaucrats and the Maoists.

Where revolutionary violence begins, the end of reformism begins.

Soldiers!

In such circumstances, we will not ask you to disobey; it is the *reason* and the *honesty* of the proletarians whom you will be summoned to repress who *impose* such a decision upon you!

Long live the revolutionary proletariat of Reggio Calabria!

Long live the wildcat strike of the railway workers!

Long live the enraged prisoners!

Long live the comrades who in factories all over Italy are tearing up their work cards issued by the PCI and the unions!

Long live the wildcat strikers of the factories in the North!

Long live the absolute power of the Workers’ Councils!

[The Italian section of the Situationist International]

Milan, October 1970

¹² Karl Marx, “The Trial of the Rhenish District Committee of Democrats,” speech delivered on 8 February 1849 and printed in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* #231-232, 1849.