

## “Is the Reichstag Burning?”<sup>1</sup>

Comrades:

The real movement of the revolutionary Italian proletariat leads it towards reaching the point at which it will be impossible – for both itself and its enemies – for any return to the past. While all illusions about the possibility of restoring the “normality” of the preceding situation are all dissolving one after the other, the necessity of risking their respective presents to win their respective futures imposes itself on all parties.

Faced with the ascent of the revolutionary movement, despite the methodical recuperation of the labor unions and the bureaucrats of the old and new “Left,” it becomes impossible for power to once again rejuvenate the old comedy of law and order, this time playing the false card of [artificial] terrorism, in an attempt to conjure away the situation in which it is forced to reveal its game directly to the clarity of the revolution.

The anarchist assaults of 1921 and the desperate actions of the survivors of the failure of the revolutionary movement of that epoch furnished a convenient pretext for the Italian bourgeoisie to instaurate, with fascism, the *state of siege* in all of society.

The Italian bourgeoisie of 1969, powerless though informed by the lessons of its past, has no need to experience great fear of the revolutionary movement, nor wait for the strength that can only be provided to it by the revolutionary movement’s defeat, in order to free itself from its democratic illusions. Today, it doesn’t need the *errors of the old anarchists* in order to find a pretext for the political realization of its totalitarian reality, but seeks to construct this pretext for itself by catching the new anarchists in a police machination or by manipulating the weakest among them in a crude provocation. Indeed, the anarchists offer the best “qualifications” for the exigencies of power: the detached and ideological image of the real movement, their “spectacular” extremism allows power to strike the real extremism of the movement through their intermediation.

### THE BOMB IN MILAN EXPLODED AGAINST THE PROLETARIAT.

The bomb was intended to strike the least radicalized factions in order to ally them with power, and to rally the bourgeoisie for a “itch hunt”: it was not by chance that there was a massacre among the farmers (at the National Agricultural Bank) and only fear among the bourgeois (at the Commercial Bank).<sup>2</sup> The direct and indirect results of those attacks are their clear purpose.

In the past, a terrorist act – as the primitive and infantile manifestation of the revolutionary violence within backwards situations or as misplaced violence on the terrain of unsuccessful revolutions – has never been but an act of partial refusal and, because of this, defeated in advance: the negation of politics on the terrain of politics itself. On the contrary, in the current situation, faced with the advent of a new

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<sup>1</sup> *Il Reichstag Brucia?* was written by Eduardo Rothe (a member of the Italian section of the Situationist International) and Puni Cesoni, signed “The Friends of the International,” and distributed clandestinely in Milan on 19 December 1969 by a group that also included Cristina Sensehauser and Filippo Orsini. Gianfranco Sanguinetti paid for the printing costs. The text was later translated into French as *Le Reichstag brule-t-il?*

<sup>2</sup> Where an unexploded bomb was found.

revolutionary period, it is power itself that, in its tendency to totalitarian affirmation, expresses in this spectacular way its own terrorist negation.

In a moment that sees the rebirth of the movement that suppresses all power separated from individuals, power itself is obliged to rediscover, in its conscious praxis, that everything that it does not kill, weakens it. But the Italian bourgeoisie is the most miserable of Europe. Incapable today of effecting its own active terror over the proletariat, there is nothing left for it to do but attempt to communicate to the population its own passive terror, its fear of the proletariat.

Impotent and clumsy in its attempt to (in this manner) stop the development of the revolutionary movement and, at the same time, to create artificially a force that it does not possess, the Italian bourgeoisie risks losing both of these possibilities in one go. Thus the most advanced factions of power (internal or unofficial, in power or part of the opposition) have made a mistake. Its excess of weakness brings the Italian bourgeoisie onto the terrain of police excess; this is why it begins to understand that its only possible way out of an endless agony goes hand-in-hand with the risk of an immediate end of its agony.

Thus, power must burn, right at the start, the last political card to be played before the outbreak of a civil war or a coup d'état of which it is incapable: the double card of a false "fascist peril" (for the Left) and an "anarchist peril" (for the Right), with the aim of disguising and making possible its offensive against the true peril: the proletariat. Furthermore, the act by which the bourgeoisie attempts to conjure away civil war is in reality its first act in a civil war against the proletariat.

For the proletariat, it is thus not a matter of avoiding or beginning this civil war, but winning it.

And the proletariat has now begun to understand that it cannot win by the use of *partial* violence, but by the *total* self-management of revolutionary violence and the general arming of organized workers in Workers' Councils. The proletariat now knows that it must definitely repulse, with the revolution, the ideology of violence along with the violence of ideology.

COMRADES: DO NOT LET OURSELVES STOP THERE: POWER AND ITS ALLIES FEAR LOSING EVERYTHING; WE MUST NOT FEAR THEM AND WE MUST ESPECIALLY NOT FEAR OURSELVES: "WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS AND AN ENTIRE WORLD TO WIN."

LONG LIVE THE ABSOLUTE POWER OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS!

The Friends of the International  
Sacco and Vanzetti  
via Orsini # 1970

Stolen mimeograph machine.