

The workers of Italy and the revolt in Reggio Calabria



Article written in October 1970 by the Milan section of the Situationist International on the violent uprising in Reggio Calabria.

Comrades,

A new superior 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.

In Italy today, any pretext is enough to set a revolt down the path of social revolution: at Caserta it was a football match;^[1] at Reggio Calabria, a regional assembly.^[2] It's not the State that chooses to 'abdicate,' as the right-wing press says; on the contrary, the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat force it to do so evermore decisively.

A few days after the bombing of December 12th [1969],^[3] we said^[4] that the Italian bourgeoisie needed to risk its present to win the future. Now we can confirm that, since the bourgeoisie now risks its present every day, it has only won an increasingly precarious future.

In the past, the bourgeoisie humiliated the proletariat with his victories. But in Italy today, the most miserable bourgeoisie in Europe humiliates itself as long as the proletariat does not win.

In this new period of crisis, Reggio Calabria is the first example of a town (at the heart of capitalist exploitation) that has mutinied for more than three months and organized itself. Isolated by a general wildcat strike and an undeclared state of siege, the town has bravely defended the freedom it has won, firing without restraint on the police forces and setting up barricades connected to high-voltage electricity.

And the Italian State is the first State in Europe forced into impotence for three months by a city 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 show the amount of real strength and clarity it has achieved. True

radicalism authorizes every change and 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 counter-revolution! As if further proof were needed to show how ridiculous the Italian political class is, Colombo, the Prime Minister,[5] could do no better than try to pass off the weakness of the State as its strength: 'No one should confuse the moderation and stability that the State has shown " that is to say, its strength " with weakness.' The reality that the Prime Minister tried to hide are the facts that the principle of authority has been powerless to restore order to the streets and that that powerlessness has been its negation.

As for the Stalinists of the so-called Communist Party, right from the beginning, they never stopped slandering the revolt, and made 'a strong appeal to the more responsible forces of the majority' and called upon the government to meet its 'responsibilities' and 'sense of duty' in the face of the continuation of the insurrection. Just as they were the most ruthless in sabotaging the rail workers' strike, which ridiculed the directives of the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL) and made a qualitative step toward the revolution, the 'Communists' were the most ruthless in asking for the murderous intervention of the police and the Army against the 'fascist revolt.' As if the facts were not enough in themselves, the lies of the Stalinist mob were shown up by a headline in a fascist newspaper: 'This is the revolt of an entire population against the State.' On October 18,[6] the so-called Communists of Reggio not only had to admit that they 'missed the boat,' but the railroad, as well.

Never before has an event projected its gloomy shadow for so long upon the active participation in capitalist power of a so-called Communist Party!

At the beginning of the revolt, the noisy presence of bigwigs and lawyers, the mayor and the archbishop " in short, the whole local camarilla " immediately changed into direct opposition to the insurrection: they began to negotiate with their colleagues in Rome for the 'surrender' of the city in exchange for the satisfaction of their miserable demands. The original spectacular problem of the location of the region's capital didn't fool anyone any more and never truly interested the proletariat of Reggio. The initial protest at the headquarters of the regional bureaucratic administration ultimately led the proletarians of Reggio to govern themselves, while the bigwigs prepared the most severe repression. The political police could no longer hope that a cold-blooded massacre such as that of December 12th could stop the revolt, and they were already prepared to take the risk of open war.[7] The provocative, police-related bombs of December 12th only momentarily halted the unstoppable movement that was making a mockery of all the efforts of the scoundrels of the [Italian] Communist Party (PCI) in favor of social peace.

In the months following the repression, there were many trials, but the real trial has already taken place and has been celebrated in the streets of Reggio for more than three months. Sentence was passed in the third month, 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 may swallow Reggio, but you cannot digest it!

In short, Reggio is the first real insurrection of the Italian revolution. Insufficient, incomplete, often confused and, above all, calumniated, it has the merit of bringing to a close the stage of easily repressed, straight-forward revolts, like the ones in Battipaglia,[8] Caserta and the prisons, and has finally opened the period of armed insurrection. At Reggio, for the first time in Italy, the State saw itself scandalously and enduringly ignored, and then directly attacked. So there's no need to be surprised by the many and real weaknesses of this insurrection, but rather there's good reason to 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 be complicated until it opens the way to a radical simplification.

If one witnessed the farce of Platonic solidarity between all the Leftist political groups, from the PSI to the Maoists, during the revolt of Battipaglia, no group of politicians has dared to support the insurrection in Reggio, because none have dared to admit its denial of them. Instead, they have all calumniated and actively opposed the movement that unmasks them. In any case, never before did the pro-Chinese [Maoist] clowns of Lotta Continua make themselves more ridiculous than when they arrived, with the Army and police reinforcements, to recuperate the revolt for the sake of their movement. There is no worse insult to the inventors of lies than to tell the truth.

The abusive and not sufficiently combated presence of fascist provocateurs within the movement are no more numerous in Reggio than anywhere else in the country " was very convenient for the Stalinists of the PCI, who, instead of denouncing the fascists as such, took the opportunity to call the revolt 'reactionary and fascist.'

But telling the truth is the privilege and the right of the revolutionary press. We say firmly that the intervention of the Army and the declaration of the state of siege are the real victories of the long insurrection in Reggio. Why in fact has the state of siege been declared? Because a city has risen and taken up arms. So, let states of siege live in every city!

The other victory of the Reggio revolt has been to clearly show to the workers of both the North and South the precisely repressive and police-like role of the so-called Communist Party and the union bureaucracies in this revolutionary epoch. On October 18th [1970], having acknowledged the overwhelming defeat of the union police, the Minister of Labor, Donat-Cattin, proposed the formation of a proper corps of 'work-police.' Once that is done, Italy will have nothing left to envy in Maoist China, where the Army forces the workers to work.

Comrades,

The government is ready to break its own laws because, in a moment of revolutionary crisis, when the very existence of the State is in jeopardy, the government has a single and inviolable law: the survival of the State.[9]

We have never denied 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 terrain of the law; it has taken its stand on the terrain of revolution, which is the terrain of both counter-revolution and revolution.'

Comrades!

The practical problem that Reggio, and all the other battles of the last two years in which blood has been split, has objectively posed to the workers isn't the problem of disarming the police, but that of arming the proletariat.

Currently existing power could only have been taken from us, and therefore only we can take it back. We owe nothing, because we own nothing. But precisely because of this, we are more dangerous than any creditor!

Comrades!

Our target isn't only the police: it's also the Stalinists of the PCI, the union bureaucrats and the Maoists. Where revolutionary violence begins, reformism begins to end.

Soldiers!

In such circumstances, we don't ask you to disobey; the cause and the honesty of the proletariat whom you will be summoned to repress dictate it!

Long live the revolutionary proletariat of Reggio Calabria!

Long live the rail workers' wildcat strike!

Long live the Grand Duchy of Sbarre![10]

Long live the comrades who in every factory in Italy are tearing up the 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!

[signed]

The Italian Section of the Situationist International
Milan, October 1970

[1] On 8 September 1969, in response to the demotion of the city's soccer team due to a bribery scandal, the mayor and the town council called for protests. Two days of intense rioting resulted.

[2] 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 deferral police to restore 'order,' but it wasn't until February 1971 that the revolt was finally quelled.

[3] The bombing of the Piazza Fontana in Milan.

[4] In the text *Il Reichstag brucia?* ('Is the Reichstag Burning?')

[5] Emilio Colombo (born 1920), a Christian Democrat.

[6] The day the rail workers went out on wildcat strike.

[7] *una strage a caldo*: 'a hot massacre.'

[8] 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.

[9] 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.

[10] A radical neighborhood in Reggio.

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