Workers and Revolutionaries on the Shop Floor:
The Breakdown of Industrial Relations in the Automobile
Plants of Detroit and Turin
(1947-1973)

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Abstract

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This thesis examines in a comparative perspective shop floor politics and workers’ struggles in the automobile industry of Detroit and Turin. Detroit and Turin offer a lens into the dynamics of what Fredric Jameson has called “high” modernism, a period in which Fordist and Keynesian tenets regulated the relation between wages and productivity. The thesis puts forward the hypothesis that rank-and-file movements in Detroit and Turin can be interpreted as part of a larger workers’ uprising that struck advanced industrial societies in the period of maturity of the Fordist-Keynesian system and that heralded its crisis as a regime of accumulation.

Turin and Detroit were two poles in a continuous transfer of production technology and managerial strategies that shaped the point of production in a similar fashion. Similarly, the way automobile manufacturers’ practices of expansion, recruitment and restructuring became the main agent of urban change. In both cases, in fact, the huge influx of Southerners (Meridionali and Southern Blacks) not only re-composed the workforce, but also altered the social and, in Detroit, racial composition of various working class neighbourhoods.

Competition for housing and resources caused tensions between newcomers and established residents. The encounter between Northerners and Southerners, reinforced and reconstructed cultural (and in America, racial) stereotypes. In both cases, tensions in the city eventually exploded inside the auto factories where unions had been particularly inept in addressing the problems of the new protagonists of industrial relations. In this situation radical groups, such as Lotta Continua in Turin and DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) in Detroit, seized, for a while, the lead of the struggle, by exploiting migrants’ alienation from both the production process and the traditional system of labour relations. This thesis looks at how migrants adopted new tactics and forms of industrial action that involved an immediate, face-to-face confrontation with the company and union hierarchy. It is argued that the migrants’ behaviour cannot be easily encapsulated in any political ideology. Often, their struggle represented a moment in their path towards social and individual “recognition”.

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List of abbreviations

CGIL – Confederazione Generale Italiana Lavoro (Italian Confederation of Labour)
CIO – Congress of Industrial Organizations
CISL – Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (Italian Confederation of Workers’ Unions)
DAI – Dipartimento Affari Internazionali (Department of International Relations at FIAT)
DC – Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats)
DRUM – Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement
DUL – Detroit Urban League
ELRUM – Eldon Revolutionary Union Movement
FIAT – Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino
FIM – Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici (Italian Federation of Metalworkers)
FIOM – Federazione Italiana Operaie Metalmeccanici (Italian Federation of Metalworkers)
NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PCI – Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
PSI – Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party)
PSIUP – Partito Socialista Italiano Unità Proletaria (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity)
SIDA – Sindacato Italiano dell’ Auto (Italian union of automobile workers)
SNCC – Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee
SWP – Socialist Workers’ Party
TULC – Trade Union Leadership Council
UAW – United Automobile Workers
UIL – Unione Italiana del Lavoro (Italian Union of Labour)
UILM – Unione Italiana dei Lavoratori Metalmeccanici (Italian Union of Metalworkers)
Introduction

In their respective countries, and worldwide, Detroit and Turin are known as the Motor City and "la città dell'auto" – two metropolises that have grown around the manufactured product that best symbolized modernity: the automobile. Because an extraordinary proportion of car production during most of the twentieth century was centred in these two cities, they have retained this reputation well after the bulk of the automotive industry had actually abandoned them. As I write, Detroit is struggling to entice automobile manufacturers back into town after operations were moved away in the 1970s (as part of a process that started much earlier). Likewise in Turin, most automobile plants have shut down or, as with the Lingotto plant, undergone conversion for the service economy. The flagship of FIAT, Mirafiori, is now undergoing a process of rapid downsizing.

Comparing Detroit and Turin means coming to grips with the forces of modernization that have profoundly shaped the fabric of these two cities: the pre-eminence of manufacturing, the chaotic immigration and urbanization, the relationship between a new and old workforce, and the class struggle between organized labour and manufacturers. Detroit and Turin indeed have much in common, especially because, after the Second World War and the redefinition of the global order, both cities (or rather, metropolitan areas) were part of the core regions of a world economy regulated by a Fordist-Keynesian regime.¹

In both cities, the automobile industry informed the economic, social, and spatial dimensions of the urban space. It was each city's largest single employer, and the fortunes of a subcontracting network of small and medium supplying companies were strongly intertwined with its prosperity. The extent of the hegemony of automobile manufactures over metropolises such as Detroit and Turin was unparalleled in the US or Europe. However, the concentration of manufacturing employment led to dependence, and the destiny of these metropolises became bound to the fortunes and whims of a handful of corporations.

From the end of the Second World War to the early 1970s, the automobile industry experienced much expansion. This growth rested on an expanding consumer demand that was buttressed by the fiscal policies of Keynesianism. On the production side, a Fordist approach to the organization of human labour, together with the resultant technological and managerial changes, affected the entire industry throughout the

¹ For an analysis of these concepts see chapter one.
world. As a result, the manufacturing process, (and indeed the very “politics” of manufacturing based on the constant drive for greater productivity) was very similar in Detroit and Turin, as in other automotive centres such as Stuttgart, Billancourt, and Autograd.

Because of the crucial importance of the automobile industry in the postwar national economies, it was in cities such as Detroit and Turin that corporate capitalism elaborated its plans, with effects that would become more than a matter of local interest. But these two cities were also centres of union and radical activism where champions of the working class responded with their own strategies and practices that resonated throughout the entire labour movement. The two motor cities, therefore, were not only the site of the material production of automobiles, but were also the symbolic locus of the struggle between capital and labour – and they carried this latter meaning well after deindustrialization lessened their productive contribution in the field.

Fordism, as any regime of accumulation, exhibited its own economic geography. Through its agglomeration of manufacturing in specific urban concentrations, it created large peripheral areas, both within and beyond the core states of the world-economy that had unemployment, low wages, and a ‘backward’ social organization. The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno both fitted this description. Migration from south to north reached a peak in the 1940s and 1950s in Detroit, and in the 1950s and 1960s in Turin. These relocations involved the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of men and women, many of them unaccustomed to life in an industrialized metropolis.

In both cities, migration re-composed the working class of the plants in the same way that it deeply changed the makeup of neighbourhoods and the social and demographic characteristics of the entire metropolitan areas around these industrial poles. The encounter between residents and newcomers involved both conflict and accommodation. Tensions over competition for housing and resources became enduring urban problems and reinforced cultural (and in Detroit, racial) stereotypes of northerners and southerners, whites and blacks, native and strangers. In the Fordist dual labour market of high-paid steady jobs and precarious low wage occupations, newcomers resided in a marginal position that, most visibly in the case of African-Americans, passed onto the second generation.

In the late 1960s, inequalities and conflicts in housing and in the labour market exploded into the car factories, where unions had been particularly inept in addressing the problems of the new protagonists in industrial relations. In this context, radical groups such as Lotta Continua in Turin, and DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) in Detroit, seized, for a while, the lead of the struggle, by exploiting
migrants' alienation from both the production process and the traditional system of labour relations. Migrants were certainly radical in adopting new tactics and forms of industrial action that involved immediate face-to-face confrontation between the strikers and the hierarchical structure. However, they could not easily be encapsulated by any particular political ideology. Nor were they fighting only over economic issues: often, the struggle represented a step in their path towards social and individual "recognition"; a means to redress collectively perceived injustices.

I argue that the workers' movement that, in the late 1960s, struck industrial centres such as Detroit and Turin is best understood within an international context rather than confined to a national framework, and that the case of the automobile industry is exemplary. Taken as international movement, rank-and-file struggles precipitated the crisis of Fordism as a regime of accumulation (see chapter one) in Western Europe, and the US. These episodes occurred as a consequence of the same growth that had underpinned world capitalism after Second World War. Progresses in 'automation', the automatic transfer of materials between processing operations, rapidly increased productivity in an era of expanding markets, but introduced also a new rigidity in the production process that allowed workers in a single department to exert a crucial leverage on the operations of an entire plant. The prerequisite of a smooth functioning of the system was therefore the minimization of conflict on the shop floor and the exclusion of militant activists from the labour movement inside the factories. The system that regulated industrial relations in the automobile industry as in other key sectors secured just that (although with important national differences). However, this system always worked in a precarious equilibrium that, in order to survive, had to incorporate, or wrestle with, episodes of workers' discontent, managerial attacks, and brief economic recessions, which threatened the virtual cycle of productivity-redistribution-consumption. Although a vast literature has examined the structural forces that conjured to dent this growth, my aim is to engage here with the ways in which marginal workers such as Meridionali in Turin and African-Americans in Detroit, challenged this system. They mobilized on a wider set of issues that evade a simplistic categorization of class to involve the cultural, and racial as well as the class

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dimension. This conflict burst from the very transformations that the industrial growth had prompted.

In the first chapter I engage with the historiographical and methodological issues involved in this project. Major waves of labour unrest shaped the evolution of capitalism at a global level, but these conflicts were then moulded in different ways at the local level. I suggest a blend of transnational and comparative perspectives to take into account both the world scale linkages of capital and the national and local variables that set the context for workers’ struggles in Detroit and Turin. The transnational approach facilitates our understanding of processes such as the international transfer of technology and management practices, and the impact that the migrants’ struggle had in changing Fordism; the comparative perspective is necessary to contrast the factors that influenced the different trajectories of the workers’ movement in each city. Through a comparative methodology I reassess the explanatory power of variables that have been considered determinant in the respective historiographies of Detroit and Turin, such as the propensity of the postwar Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to accommodate corporate business, and the racial division in Detroit’s working class in the American case; or the prominent role of the Communists in shaping industrial relations at FIAT in the Italian case. As the analysis throughout the dissertation will make clear, my aim is not to refute the importance of these factors, but rather, to use the comparative approach to enrich our comprehension of them.

In the second chapter, I look at how in both cases the pursuit of productivity drove managers to refashion industrial relations and the production process, and the resistance to these changes they encountered from the shop floor. In Detroit, according to the now dominant interpretation, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) entered a social accord with the automobile corporations that guaranteed a lower disruption of production and managerial rule on the shop floor in exchange for constant gains in workers’ remuneration. However, when we focus on Chrysler’s Dodge Main plant, one of the largest and, symbolically, most important automobile plants in the country, we observe that actual industrial relations did not conform to this model until the late

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3 I approached the study of migrant/marginal workers trying to eschew a reductionist conception of class and its traditional notion of class consciousness based on objective material interests. However, I have also avoided a “death of class” approach, which I see as an incomplete instrument of analysis. Rank-and-file struggles in Turin and Detroit are best analysed taking into account the complex interplay between class, race, and culture. For a review on the literature on this question see Neville Kirk, “Decline and Fall, Resilience and Regeneration: A Review Essay on Social Class” in International Labor and Working Class History n.57 (2000), 88-102.

4 For a discussion on these concepts see Marcel Van Der Linden, “Global Labor History and the ‘Modern World System’: Thoughts at the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fernand Braudel Center” in International Review of Social History 46 (2001), 436-438; Research Working Group on World Labor, “Global Patterns of Labor Movements in Historical Perspective”, (Fernand Braudel Center) Review, 10 (1986).
1950s. In Turin, the most enduring interpretation sees FIAT’s growth a result of an authoritarian paternalism based on repression of left-wing militants. By looking at the industrial relations at FIAT Mirafiori, I point out that, in Turin, the company dismissed the alternative of a “social accord” between managers, unions, and workers, only at the end of the 1950s. At a closer look neither in Detroit, nor in Turin, did the conditions of the automobile industry’s expansion rest on unique national or local trends of industrial relations, but rather, as the historiography implicitly suggests, on a common managerial quest for productivity. This emerges even more clearly if we examine at the same time the technological development of the automobile industry in that period. At both ends of the technological transfer, protagonists used the Marshall Plan as both a financial and ideological instrument to obsessively pursue their goal of increased productivity. The consequence of these politics eventually worked against management itself. Contrary to what was happening in Japan, by the 1960s Turin’s FIAT organization of work, so much centred on the large concentration of workers in an increasingly “automated” flow of production, mirrored the rigidity of its Detroit counterpart, Chrysler.

In the third chapter, I explore the plight of African-Americans in Detroit, and southern migrants in Turin – groups that constituted the majority of the workforce at the Chrysler and FIAT plants. Turin did not have the racial differences that so profoundly shaped Detroit’s urbanization after the Second World War. However, the experience of these two groups is similar in the impact they had on the city, on the labour market, and eventually on the system of industrial relations inside the automobile plants. In the process that gradually transformed migrants into residents, workers, and then (for a minority) radicals, they – as a group – enjoyed the chance to redress the material and moral injustices that set them apart from the native population. I suggest that, while acknowledging the diverse history of marginal groups in industrial societies, it is useful, as philosopher Axel Honneth does, to interpret their struggles as similar moral attempts to attain justice and recognition – which, of course, they do not necessarily achieve.5

In the fourth and final chapter, I turn my attention to the rank-and-file movements that were so prominent in Detroit and Turin during the late 1960s, and to their struggles on the shop floor. Radical groups (of which the two most important, numerically and organizationally, were DRUM, in Detroit, and Lotta Continua, in Turin) represented a minority, but played an important role in mobilizing African-Americans and Meridionali on the shop floor. In the first part of the chapter, I map out the connection between these groups and radical trends in the workers’ movement in the 1950s. Fundamental to the development of the groups, was the opportunity to draw

from a range of ideas generated by the intermingling of different generations of militants. For this reason, the main motive of deindustrialization and decentralization has always been manufacturers’ desire to move production to areas where such conditions do not exist. In the second part of the chapter I show that, in many respects, the trajectory of the radical movements in both cities is similar at the onset, but that they later diverge because of structural factors and because of strategic choices made by the protagonists of those events. By 1973, the year I terminate my analysis, because of the different outcomes of the struggle, working in the automobile industry in Detroit and Turin meant different things.

The sources that I have employed for this study are variegated. Concerning the literature, as I acknowledge throughout the thesis, my understanding has been informed by the work of Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, Steven Jefferys, Nelson Lichtenstein, and Heather Thompson in the American case; and by Giuseppe Berta, Giovanni Contini, Duccio Bigazzi, and Marco Scavino in the Italian one. By making this thesis comparative my aim was also to try to initiate a dialogue between the scholarship on auto workers on the two sides of the Atlantic.

The primary sources on this topic are numerous and diverse. I made use of, where available, company records, such as minutes of meetings, internal reports, and internal statistics. FIAT provides to researchers a well organized archive, although some documents are classified. Chrysler on the other hand has only recently made an attempt to open some archival material, and most of the documents concerning labour relations have been lost or destroyed. However, many documents from this company exist in the Archive of Labor and Urban Affairs (ALUA) in Detroit because they were originally collected by the UAW for their records (in particular in the Research Department collection). The ALUA and its staff have proven an invaluable resource for

my research. From this archive I made use of correspondence between company and
union staff at every level, internal UAW documents and minutes, as well as the records
of Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP). ALUA keeps the records of a number of Detroit’s committees and
institutions, such as the Detroit Commission on Community Relations, as well as
substantial samples of the literature produced by the DRUM, especially leaflets and
newsletters. In the Michigan Historical collection at the Bentley Library in Ann Arbor,
Michigan, I found the Detroit Urban League Papers.

In Turin, the FIOM-CGIL papers are kept at the Istituto Gramsci and the FIM-
CISL papers at the Fondazione Vera Nocentini, no archives exist for the other
two unions that were at a certain point important at FIAT, UILM and SIDA (for the
latter though their newsletter “Il Lavoratore Fiat” is available). However, much of the
dialectics between the different unions can be analysed through the records of the
Commissione Interna at Mirafiori. They are kept at the FIAT archive and parts of them
have been published.7 The Centro Piero Gobetti keeps the papers of the Turinese New
Left, including organization such as Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio, Collettivo Lenin,
PSIUP. As in the Detroit case these are mainly leaflets, newsletters, and other
propaganda material. Some of this material is also at the Fondazione Feltrinelli in
Milan. In both cases I also consulted a number of mainstream newspaper, in particular
the city papers La Stampa, The Detroit News, The Detroit Free Press, but also The
Popolo. Because in this period, in the Italian case, the factory remained mainly the
concern of the unions (why this is the case could be the subject of an entirely different
thesis), I have not looked at the PCI records, but I have studied its official publications
L’Unità and Rinascita, mainly with the purpose of contrasting the Old and New Left
views on the events in Turin.

In addition to written sources I employed oral ones. I became aware of the
importance of oral history for the study of labour history especially through the work of
Rick Halpern, Alessandro Portelli, Luisa Passerini, and Elisabeth Tonkin.8 At one level

7 1944-1956 Le relazioni industriali alla FIAT nei verbali delle Commissioni Interne, Vol. 1 and
8 Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse
Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality (London: Prentice Hall
International, 1996); Rick Halpern, “Oral History and Labor History: Historiographical
Assessment after Twenty-Five Years” Journal of American History Vol.82, n.2 (1998), 596-610;
Alessandro Portelli, The Battle of Valle Giulia: the Art of Dialogue in Oral History (Madison,
Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Luisa Passerini, Autobiography of a Generation:
Italy, 1968 (Hanover, N.H, University Press of New England, 1996); Fascism in Popular
Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class (Cambridge: University Press,
the use of oral history is necessary to enrich our understanding of industrial work, migration, and rank-and-file struggles through the voices of the actors of those episodes. At another level these oral narratives offer us a unique perspective into the "subjectivity", as Passerini calls it, meaning the conscious and unconscious significance of experience as lived and remembered by the workers themselves.

I have placed a limit to my use of existing collections of interviews when these have already been widely used by other scholars and do not represent original material. This is the case of the collection of the “perseguitati politici”, autoworkers blacklisted for political reasons in the 1950s, at the Istituto Gramsci in Turin; or the case of UAW oral history collection at ALUA, which gathered interviews of prominent officials of this organization. I have instead copiously made use of the collection “Anziani FIAT” – an assortment of about 40 interviews - kept at the FIAT archive, because this originated from an independent project of the archive, not meant for any particular book, and it has been used in a very limited number of occasions. Finally, I gathered a number of interviews myself. Indeed, personal contact with some of the protagonists of the events I have studied represented for me one of the most gratifying aspects of this project. I interpreted these oral sources fully aware that they are the result of an interaction between interviewer and interviewee and that therefore my research agenda has shaped them as much as the interviewees' wish to tell me about their past. But the value of this dialogue between historian and worker was not in providing an objective version of the facts, but to facilitate a better understand of their meaning for those who lived through them.

\[9\text{ Precisely by Marcella Filippa and Luisa Passerini, "Memorie di Mirafiori", in Mirafiori, Carlo Olmo ed. (Torino: Allemandi, 1997).}\]
Chapter One:
Comparing Detroit and Turin:
Methodological and Historiographical Issues.

The Crisis of Industrial Societies at the Twilight of Modernity.

The period between the late 1940s and the early 1970s represented a crucial moment of transition in the history of modernity. A vast literature has interpreted this interval as heralding a paradigm shift between the ‘modern’ and its successor, to which has been attached the loose label of ‘postmodern’. No consensus exists on the validity of these categories - in particular the latter. Because of the variety of interpretations that exists, Ibah Hassan has talked of a “semantic instability” of the postmodern. The postmodern could well be just another facet of modernity. However, the consolidation of this notion in the last twenty-five years confirms at least that changes did occur in the cultural, social, and economic order in the latter part of the twentieth century and that these changes are related to an epochal shift.\(^{10}\)

Although it lacks a single definition, it is uncontroversial to say that postmodernism developed in contrast with the universalising and totalising drive implicit in the practices of modernity. In fact, since its commencement in the sixteenth century modernity promised infinite social and moral progress and justified it with the normative truth of general and universal theories. In the nineteenth century modernity spread along with Western imperialism and the emergence of capitalism in northwest Europe, and developed its more salient characteristics. Modernity brought about a rapid industrialization accompanied by a disordered urban growth, the mechanization of economic activities, an intense class struggle between organized labour and the capitalists (the latter being backed by the increasingly bureaucratised state), the beginnings of the welfare state, together with all the theories that postulated the possibility and necessity for man to control its environment and its destiny. Marshall Berman has aptly characterized this process as the “maelstrom of modern life”.\(^{11}\)

The faith in progress, in the positivistic social theories, and in the rational planning of every aspect of society characterized the discourse of modernity in the

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twentieth century as well. For instance, modernization in Western societies proceeded through the achievement of rational efficiency in production (Fordism, Taylorism), in urban planning (Le Corbusier), and in the regulation of capitalism (New Deal, Corporatism). However, this stage of modernity also led to the tragic experience of the two World Wars and the Holocaust. These events shattered the optimism of the positivistic thinking of a linear progress and opened the way to criticism of universal Eurocentric truths and the order of rationality.\footnote{Worried by how the dissolution of truths can favour a neo-conservative project Jurgen Habermas counter argues that the “project of modernity” requires completion first. The goals of the Enlightenment: “the understanding of the world and the self, the moral progress, the justice of institutions, and even the happiness of human beings” have yet to be fulfilled and humans can direct rationalization towards the achievement of these aims. Jurgen Habermas, “Modernity - an incomplete project” in Hal Foster, ed., \textit{Postmodern Culture} (London: Pluto Press, 1983), whether or not the “completion” of modernity can be achieved one has still to recognize the changes that have intervened in both the “structure” and “superstructure” of capitalist society.}

The period under examination represented the last stage of the “project of modernity”, the one in which it reached its apogee, but which also contained the seeds of its decline. My view here is informed in particular by the work of Fredric Jameson who has explicitly linked the rise of a postmodernist culture with the state of multinational capital after the 1970s.\footnote{Fredric Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism} (London: Verso, 1991).} Jameson defined the post-war period as the moment of “high” modernism. In this period the apex of modernism as an aesthetic movement coincided with of the hegemonic influence of the US in the West.

After the war, Western European economies were reconstructed along the lines of a Fordist-Keynesian system inspired by the American policy-makers. This system was at the root of a prolonged economic boom that lasted until 1973. Keynesianism was the regulation mode that allowed Fordism to realize its full potential by providing the social institutions and the economic incentives to sustain mass consumption. Fordism, in its ‘productive aspect’ - a system of organizing mass production through a blend of ‘scientific management’ and machine-dictated pace of work - fully developed already in the first two decades of the twentieth century.\footnote{Benjamin Coriat defined in this way in \textit{L’atelier et le robot: essai sur le fordisme et la production de masse a l’age de l’electronique} (Paris: Christian Bourgois,1990), 20.} However, Antonio Gramsci, who wrote his notes on “Americanism and Fordism” in that period, presaged that the “Fordist fanfare” was still only in “its initial phase” and that it required to overcome resistances both inside and outside the dominant class “to achieve a planned economy”.\footnote{For the frist quotation I use the translation in the \textit{The Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected writing 1916-1935} ed. David Forgacs (New York: NYU Press, 2000) 279; the second quotation “organizzazione di un economia programmatica” is only in the Italian edition \textit{Quaderni dal Carcere}, III, Valentino Gerratana, ed. (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 2139.} In fact, the steep increase in labour productivity realized in this way led to a problem of
overproduction, which resulted in the Great Depression of the 1930s and in a crisis of the capitalist system.

According to the scholars of the ‘régulation school’, to realize its potential as a regime of accumulation\(^{16}\) Fordism had to discover a new mode of régulation with which to adjust rises in consumption to rises in productivity.\(^{17}\) Although it took fifteen years and a world war to prove it would work, Keynesianism provided just the solution. The key to the success of Fordism-Keynesianism was the relation between wages and productivity. Collective bargaining, minimum wage, and welfare state, differently organized across Western Europe and the US, provided a social wage that expanded internal demand as the economy grew.\(^{18}\)

Fordism as a regime of accumulation – a macroeconomically coherent phase of capitalist development - rested then on a complex balance between different factors and social forces. The state had to take on institutional powers to influence redistribution; corporations had to constantly innovate to keep a high productivity and had to be enlightened enough to accept, even if grudgingly, the system of redistribution; organized labour had to act moderately buying into this system and co-operating in the discipline of the labour force whose reliable performance was the most important component of the productivity effort.\(^{19}\) There was nothing innate in the logic of this balance: it was the result of struggles and compromises: of history. The existence of a welfare state, in particular in the US, was always contested, and it involved continuous defence from its supporters and attacks from its enemies. Likewise the purge of radical forces from the labour movement was the result of a historical process that after the Second World War gave leverage to conservative forces.

\(^{16}\) Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard define a regime of accumulation as “the social and economic patterns that enable accumulation to occur in the long term between two structural crises” in “A Summary of regulation theory” in Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard, eds., Régulation Theory. The State of Art. (London: Routledge, 2002), 36.

\(^{17}\) The founding work of this school is Michel Aglietta, A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: the US experience.\(^{16}\) cit.; but since then there have been several contributions to this line of thought, in particular from French scholars De Vroey M., “A regulation Approach Interpretation of the Contemporary Crisis” in Capital and Class, 23; Alan Lipietz, “Reflection on a tale: the Marxist foundations of the concepts of regulation and accumulation” in Studies in Political Economy, 26 (1988); I shall not dwell here into the limits and critique to this theory. I address the reader to Robert Boyer, The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction (Columbia University Press New York, 1990); Bob Jessop, “Regulation theories in Retrospect and prospect” in Economy and Society, 19:2 (1990) 153-216; Tickell and Peck, “Accumulation, regulation and the geographies of post-fordism; missing links in regulationist research”, Progress in Human Geography 16:2 (1992), 190-218.

\(^{18}\) Alan Lipietz, Mirages and Miracles. The Crisis of Global Fordism. (London: Verso, 1992), 23-45 provided me with a good synthesis of this process.

\(^{19}\) A good overview on this is contained in David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (London: Blackwell, 1990), 121-189.
Although Fordism-Keynesianism existed in a precarious equilibrium, it worked well for over a quarter of a century. The industries that had most benefited technologically from the two global conflicts – automobile, steel, rubber, domestic appliances – led the postwar development. This unprecedented economic growth concentrated on some major productive regions, for instance: the American Midwest, the Ruhr-Rhineland, the Tokyo-Yokohama region, the Italian North-west. These regions were connected by their financial links to the big American lending institutions, and integrated through a constant exchange of information, technology, people, and capital, across national boundaries. Together they represented the core of the world-system. But this regime rested on an international basis. For the core to expand (and thus survive as a core) it needed an increase in the world trade and the international investment flow in the periphery and semi-periphery. Hence the function of the Cold War to stabilize and expand the world market for capitalism.

However, this system implied also a high degree of rigidity in fiscal policies, corporate investments, and labour markets. During the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the balance between the several elements of Fordism-Keynesianism – the investments necessary for an industrial regime of high productivity; the requirements of a system of industrial relations that could regiment the workforce; the burdensome commitment of the welfare state – began to crumble. All these three major components of the regime of accumulation started to fall apart, it is difficult to establish a causal priority as they were highly interrelated. From our point of view, we are interested in enquiring the role of the labour force in the core regions of the world-system in the demise of this regime. Workers’ struggles compel capitalist forces to restructure. Labour and capital co-exist in dialectic and it is legitimate to read changes in the mode of production as responses to international cycles of working class struggle. In these regions, in the concluding stage of Fordism-Keynesianism, it was the marginal workers who were the protagonists of this new episode of struggle. This meant that although organized labour functioned in regimenting workers in a way organic to the regime, and although unions had sometimes to take into account the feelings of their rank-and-file, they were...

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22 I take encouragement here from Antonio Negri’s reading of Marx in “John M. Keynes e la teoria capitalistica dello stato nel ’29” in Operai e Stato. Lotte operaie e riforma dello stato capitalistico tra rivoluzione d’Ottobre e New Deal (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1972).
increasingly troubled from outside, from the underprivileged categories that did not fit into the agenda of the three pillars of Fordism.  

The US had emerged from the Second World War with a great productive advantage over the European and Japanese economies. At the height of the Cold War, it established its hegemony politically, culturally, and financially. The US sought to establish an international order based on multi-lateral economic integration. The Bretton Woods agreements assigned a central role to the dollar, and the establishment of GATT, the IMF and the OECD served to guide Europe outside the balance-of-payments problems and towards the market economy. However, over time these institutions also allowed the Western European and the Japanese economies to catch up and become collectively as strong as the US. At the same time, the relatively lower productivity of US corporations undermined the role of the dollar as a stable international reserve currency. In 1971, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreements—definitely abolished two years later—and the introduction of a flexible exchange rate between the dollar and the other currencies signalled the anticipated end of the “American Century”, as Henry Luce had defined the twentieth century in 1941. By 1973 the growing inflation, the petrol crisis caused by the OPEC countries, and the diminution of American military expenses after the end of the Vietnam War caused a worldwide recession and a reorganization of capitalism.

Sociologists Claus Offe, Scott Lash and John Urry have characterized this transformation as the end of “organized capitalism” and the emergence of a “disorganized” one. In the “organized” capitalism corporate power and units of production were concentrated to achieve economies of scale, while the state acted as a broker between the diverse class interests that fit into the national agenda. The essential characteristic of this type of capitalism—the administration of national economies by corporate and state bureaucracies—was confronted in the 1970s, by an increasing

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dispersal and de-centralization of corporate power leaving capitalism as a mode of production in “disorganized” state.\textsuperscript{26}

The concept of “disorganized” capitalism, by stressing the incoherence of contemporary capitalism, is a rather poor instrument for the analysis of the changes in the paradigm of production, because it defines the new system in a negative way. However, this idea is useful here to hint at the transformation occurred at the end of “high” modernism: the internationalisation of capital; the decline of collective bargaining and of class politics; the spatial division of labour; the geographical dispersal of production; the decline of industrial cities. As several authors have pointed out, in the latter decades more flexible methods of production and the burgeoning of new financial instruments and markets have transformed, even in the presence of aspects of Fordism that have proved resilient, the organization of capital in the core regions. These changes indicate that we might well traverse a “second industrial divide”, as social scientists Piore and Sabel have suggested in their book.\textsuperscript{27}

Detroit and Turin offer two privileged terrains for the analysis of the organization, the symbols, and the shortcomings, of “high” modernism. They provide also a magnifying glass for the causes that ultimately brought its decline. In the large industrial metropolises of the ‘core’ regions Fordism enjoyed its supremacy and tested its limits. Corporations experimented with sophisticated management techniques that rationalized the movements (also in the sense of motion) of huge quantities of men and materials. In particular, in the postwar period, automobile manufacturers introduced automation and computer-based technologies aimed at a reduction of the social power of the workforce, to a greater extent than they had done in the first half of the century. Paradoxically, the rigidity introduced by large per-capita investments amplified the disruptive potential of spontaneous rank-and-file actions.\textsuperscript{28} Acting often outside the


\textsuperscript{27} Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, The Second Industrial Divide: Possibility for Prosperity (New York: Basic Books, 1984); David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 173-197; Paul Hirst and Jonathan Zeitlin, “Flexible Specialization versus Post-Fordism: Theory Evidence and Policy Implications” Economy and Society 20:1 (1991), 1-56; It is worthwhile here to take into consideration Giovanni Arrighi’s suggestion to see the drift towards “flexibility” as one of the recurrent crises that the capitalist systems faced throughout his history in Giovanni Arrighi, The Long Twentieth Century. Money, Power, and the Origins of our Times. (London, Verso, 1994). Arrighi, however, does not take into account the role of working class struggle in the restructuring of capital.

\textsuperscript{28} For instance, when a few hundreds wildcatters struck at Detroit’s Chrysler Eldon Avenue Plant in 1970 they completely halted the production of gears and axles for the whole company. Likewise, at Mirafiori, in Turin, the most effective strike of spring 1969 were those in the body shop and in the paint room (see chapter four).
framework of normal industrial relations, the automobile workers of these two cities, with their struggles, impelled capital to shift to another paradigm of production towards new forms of labour organization.

Even at its apogée, internal tensions challenged the Fordist-Keynesian order. There was always considerable resistance against its bureaucratic rationality, its exclusion of minorities, and its constant drive to increase productivity. These tensions were exacerbated by the exclusion of sizable groups of workers in “competitive” high-risk sectors who did not share the standard of living and political clout of the employees in the “monopoly” sector of the big corporations. In the late 1960s, in the last leap of expansion, the incorporation of masses of marginal workers into the “monopoly” sector introduced the Fordist factory elements foreign to the system. For Meridionali in Turin, African-Americans in Detroit, Turkish workers in Stuttgart, or Portuguese migrants in France, the system had not so far functioned in providing them the social recognition that it granted to the established working class. This contradiction exploded in an open dissent of the Fordist form of regimentation of the workforce. At the same time other groups of society - students, racial minorities – found in anti-authoritarian practices a means to initiate change in society. Movements outside and inside the factory often merged in a wave of opposition that both anticipated and escalated in a postmodern age of capitalism.

I argue that it is imperative to compare Detroit and Turin within this wider framework of transformation. However, this exercise can be fruitful only if we are fully aware of the opportunities and constraints of this kind of methodology. Therefore before turning to the empirical research we need to clarify certain methodological issues.

**Comparative History as Methodology.**

The comparative method has long proved a rewarding tool for historians and social scientists who seek to gain insights into phenomena occurring in two or more social systems. A comparative logic has always been intrinsic in every historical enquiry, however, only in the twentieth century it has explicitly developed as a method for historical research.

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One of its early practitioners, Marc Bloch, has convincingly demonstrated that the comparative method could be used to test the validity of hypotheses in more than one historical setting, to discover the peculiarities of societies that would otherwise remain hidden in a single historical study, and to enrich the agenda for historical research by stimulating new questions. The limits and insights of Bloch’s analysis of the comparative method have been widely discussed. Suffice here to say that Bloch’s legacy has exerted an enduring influence on subsequent generations of comparative historians. The three goals listed above are still the basic principles justifying the use of the comparative method in the study of some specific historical problems – and this dissertation makes no exception.

In the postwar period, the comparative method rose in popularity due also to the debate on the theory of modernization, which prompted scholars to examine the trajectory of individual societies against a given set of parameters. Comparative sociohistorical analysis gained importance especially in the US and, in part, in Germany where it served to investigate the German Sonderweg – a ‘unique path’ to modernity. While in the rest of Europe comparative research was given scant attention, in the US this method found an outlet in a professional journal. In 1958, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* set out to follow Bloch’s example and encouraged the diffusion of this method among historians and social scientists by providing “a forum for comparable work on recurrent types of problems of general interest”. In the course of the following decades, though with some resistance, American historians, more than specialists in other fields, found that the comparative approach could be usefully applied to open new fields of enquiry in their own past. Since then, they have become prominent in establishing comparative history as a historiographic genre.

Carl Degler remarked that “of all the fields of history, American history has the strongest reasons to be comparative”. Degler referred to the persistent claim about the uniqueness of the development of American society due to features such as the

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frontier, the lack of a feudal tradition, the relative isolation from potential enemies. Although this thesis, labelled American exceptionalism, has not remained unchallenged, it has demonstrated a remarkable resilience in the course of the twentieth century in front of several attacks and has persistently influenced subsequent branches of American historiography.  

The idea of American exceptionalism has also strongly affected the field of labour history. Ever since Werner Sombart wondered “Why there is no socialism in the United States?” labour historians have sought to trace the origins of an allegedly peculiar development of the American working-class that, in contrast to the European one, made it less radical and prone to organize politically. According to this theory the greater opportunities for social mobility and the early enfranchisement made the American worker eschew class struggle and the establishment of a labour party with the result of a relative weakness of trade unions and insurmountable two-party system that stifled progressive change.  

Whether to prove or to refute exceptionalism, comparative history grew in popularity in the US, as confirmed by the fact that it provided the theme for the 1978 convention of the American Historical Association. However, while more professional historians (long after sociologists) were now interested in this methodology, there existed marked differences in approach among scholars who claimed to adopt a comparative framework. The practice of comparative history, in itself a quite vague concept, has therefore carried with itself a constant redefinition of the boundaries of its methodology.

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In the 1980s, a small, but influential group of historians, including George Fredrickson, Peter Kolchin, Raymond Grew, defined the salient features of comparative history in a number of key articles. The initial question was to delimit the outer limits of this genre: what could be defined as comparative history? Most historical judgements are implicitly comparative. For instance, the argument that France or Germany had a later industrial development carries an implicit comparison with England. However, for history to be truly comparative, established Fredrickson and Kolchin, it has to be explicitly and systematically so. A brief analogy with another case cannot be called comparative history. To deserve this appellation the study must contain an analytical study of two or more social systems and it must not merely juxtapose them leaving comparative conclusions to the reader.37

Explicit and systematic comparison is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for comparative history. The scale of the project also differentiates history from other kind of enquiries more suitable to sociologists, economists, or political scientists. For instance, the celebrated work by Barrington Moore Jr., *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, in which the author identifies three main paths to modernization through the comparison of six major countries, contains too broad generalizations and too little attention to detail (it is based only on secondary sources) to qualify as history. As much as this is landmark scholarship, it remains a grand social theory of societal development, rather than an historical study of how this actually happened.38 On the contrary, comparative history must retain its attention for detailed narratives and be based on the analysis of primary evidence. Because it requires research on primary sources and a deep knowledge of each instance, it works better with two, maximum three, cases. Therefore, it should also preferably concern the comparison of institutions, ideologies, or social phenomena, rather than large historical processes. Fredrickson’s *White Supremacy* and Kolchin’s *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*, both fulfilled these specifications, as one would expect from the theorists of the genre. Both are also more concerned with differences rather than similarities. For Fredrickson demography, the political setting, and the economic development were powerful variables that shaped race relations in America differently.

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38 Barrington Moore Jr., *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, UK edition (London, Penguin, 1967); of course it was not in Moore’s intention to carry an empirical historical study in the first place.
than in South Africa. For Kolchin relations between masters and serfs were altogether different as compared to planters and slaves because of the different working and relevance of paternalism, of ethnic and racial division, of different modes to seek redress or to resist, and eventually for the way the two systems ended. "After common ground is established it is the differences that will compel most of the historian's attention because of the way that they can suggest new problems of interpretation and point to discrete patterns of causation".  

In 1980, social scientists Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, provided a much needed theoretical assessment of the ways the comparative method was used in history and sociology. They distinguished three "logics-in-use" of comparative history. The "parallel demonstration of theory" compares several cases to demonstrate the validity of a given theory that is presented in detail. The "macro-causal analysis" uses comparative history to test hypothesis and, eventually, make a generalization, about the process under examination. The "contrast of contexts" logic uses comparison to highlight differences and similarities between two cases. In this instance, rather than making generalization, the scholar uses the contrast to highlight aspects of each case that were previously neglected. In practice, Skocpol and Somers' model expanded and rendered more sophisticated Marc Bloch's intuitions. They effectively pointed out the dilemma for the comparative historian between respecting the historical integrity of each case under observation and forgiving some details in order to test some general explanations.

The theoretical framework that Skocpol, Somers and (without proposing a model) Fredrickson, Kolchin, and Grew put forward coexisted along with less rigorous ways to apply the comparative method, as to confirm that no consensus existed on the practice of this discipline. The investigation of the problem of exceptionalism still continued to provide a major stimulus behind this kind of intellectual endeavour. In 1986, Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg published their now classic collection Working Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States, which discussed class formation in the US, France, and Germany. Katznelson and Zolberg aimed at debunking the idea of exceptionalism by


40 Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry" Comparative Studies in Society and History 22 (1980), 174-97.
demonstrating how class evolved in different ways in different countries, without one being the “norm”. The contributors of the volume endorsed the view that the working class did not follow a typical development from which single cases deviated. Instead variations depended on how workers responded to a number of variables: the capitalist structure, “ways of life”, disposition, and collective action. The book made a great contribution towards the abandonment of the practice of taking a normative case and to contrast it with others, but failed to adopt a “truly” comparative method as most essays analysed class formation only in a parallel fashion, without being internally comparative.41

By the 1990s, comparative history had gained a legitimate place, in reality a niche, in American historiography. The comparative study of slavery, race relations, immigration, ideology, class formation had provided new and interesting contributions to these fields. However, some decades of practice also prompted comparative historians to look inward and examine the limits of this methodology as it had so far been applied. The discussion focused in particular the lamentable tendency of comparative historians to make the nation-state the ultimate unit of comparison. On the one hand, this corresponded to the broader influence of national histories upon university curricula in every country. On the other hand, as Ian Tyrell remarked, the “preoccupation with the exceptionalism debate” constituted the foremost inhibition for comparative history. Tyrell therefore called for a transnational history that could take a regional scale of the type used by Braudel for the Mediterranean, or even a world scale, as in Wallerstein.42 Fredrickson, a long time advocate of national in-depth comparisons on a particular theme, remained unconvinced by Tyrell’s arguments. For the dean of comparative history nation-states are potent forces that historians “comparative or otherwise, can scarcely afford to ignore”. He deemed preferable to blend the international and the national dimensions to show how they “interact and modify each other”.

41 Ira Katznelson, Aristide Zolberg eds., Working Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States (Princeton: University Press, 1986); see also John Breuilly, Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Manchester: University Press, 1992) at page 1 he cautioned: “the comparison which begins by regarding one particular case as the norm against which comparisons are made with other cases is flawed from the outset”. 42 Ian Tyrell “American Exceptionalism in the Age of International History”, quote from p. 1033, he indicated in the colonial period, the environment, and ideology three fields were a transnational perspective could be usefully applied. 43 George Fredrickson, “From Exceptionalism to Variability: Developments in Cross-National Comparative History”, Journal of American History, 82:2 (1995), 590-591; Fredrickson remained convinced that cross-national comparison does not necessarily ends up in reinforcing exceptionalism, but in this way he missed the larger point of the implicit distortion of the national lens in historical enquiry.
While it is obvious that nation-states have exerted in the past a crucial influence over social and economic transformations (as they continue to do today even in face of increasing globalisation), the debate over the more appropriate unit of analysis for comparative history concerns pivotal methodological issues. Firstly, comparisons that try to account for national differences or similarities between two countries tend to overlook local, and regional variations in order to achieve the sufficient degree of generalisation necessary to frame the comparison. How to deal with variegations and contrasts within our own unit of analysis? The failure to come to terms with this problem can impair an otherwise effective comparison. Many social phenomena occur on a geographical scale either ‘below’ or ‘above’ that of a nation state.

A second issue at stake is that cross-national comparative historians, while dutifully contrasting the contexts, tend to neglect the connections that might exist between the two cases under observation. Ideologies, institutions, technology, movements, and cultures stretch across national boundaries together with capital and the labour force. Robert Gregg has rightly pointed out that “comparisons have to be undertaken in the knowledge that the nations may have histories that are intertwined”.

The lack of attention toward this aspect, however, is deeply rooted in the logic of comparative history. For instance, Bloch’s analogy of the comparative method as an “experimental method” - by which he intended the possibility of testing a case’s variables against the negative of another case – has formed the habit, among comparative historians, to work in a framework that ignored the fact that a national phenomenon could be part of a multinational and transnational historical process. This in spite of the fact that Bloch himself had studied feudalism as a pan-European phenomenon. If comparative history is an “experimental method”, it is one in which laboratory tests are not independent but can influence each other.

Sociologist Philip McMichael has argued for the need of an “incorporating comparison” that takes into account the world-historical perspective proposed by Wallerstein. The incorporating comparison should analyse an historical process through comparing parts of a whole without, however, falling into the functionalist trap of the “whole” determining the behaviour of the “parts”. For McMichael his approach can represent an alternative perspective because “it views comparable social phenomena as differentiated outcomes or moments of an historically integrated process”, whereas

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comparative history usually treats them as parallel cases. This model represents indeed a useful contribution to the Skocpol-Somers' taxonomy of comparative logics. The world-historical perspective can be apt to study international processes while respecting the historical specificity of the single cases. For the American practitioner, this frame of reference carries the benefits to obliterate the question of exceptionalism: firstly by fragmenting the nation-state (and seeing, for instance, the American North-East and the American South as different parts of the world system), and secondly by characterizing any development as part of a transnational process.

A transnational approach then can correct an ambiguity central to comparative history: that the result of the enquiry varies according to which cases we chose for our comparison. For instance, we would assess differently race relations in the United States if we contrast them with Britain or with South Africa. However, we can correct this distortion when we look at the interconnections among these cases under the imperial system and study why Britain could remain for long time immune from racial strife. Similarly, the outcome of the research would be influenced by the scale of the unit chosen as when we compare – we remain in the same field– New Orleans and Cape Town, rather than the American South and South Africa – according to which level of comparison we choose, we could construe a very different picture of race relations in the two countries.

During the 1990s, finally, the awareness that transnational history could deliver the scholar – in the words of Donna Gabaccia - from “the tyranny of the national in the writing of history” grew in popularity in the academia culminating in a special issue of the *Journal of American History* “The Nation and Beyond. Transnational Perspectives on United States History” in December 1999. The issue summarizes the advances in transnational history in the fields where it is best applied: immigration studies, black history, environmental history, and Atlantic history. Although one of the contributors, Richard White, cautioned that national history “will not disappear” and that the global

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48 Of course it is our research hypothesis that will inspire the choice of the unit of analysis. Historian Chris Lorenz has pointed out that “next to the method of historical comparison is the politics of comparison, which is hidden in the choice of parameters” in “Comparing Historigraphies: Problems and Perspectives” *History and Theory* 38:1 (1999), 25; For this reason intellectual honesty requires the scholar to discuss openly his/her choice of parameters for the comparison.

is not always the appropriate scale of research, the whole tone of the issue is one of unabashedly praise of the transnational perspective. This enthusiasm prefigures the possible popularity of this approach in the profession. However, one cannot help to notice that in the process the ‘transnational’ tends to discount the importance of the ‘comparative’. The general feeling of the contemporary practitioners seem to be that comparative history, in particular in its contrast of contexts version, by privileging the contrast of differences and similarities among nation-states runs the risk of reintroducing exceptionalism from the window after it has been chased by the door. Most of the contributors do not even engage in examining the options offered by the two approaches, assuming comparative history irremediably compromised with the supremacy of the nation-state as category.50

Contrary to this attitude, the transnational and the comparative perspectives can be put at work together to overcome the latter bias towards the nation-state and the former tendency to wipe out the national peculiar into the global. It is essential to understand that global processes of accumulation informed patterns of workers’ struggle at the local and national level, but not in a homogeneous way. The “global labour history” that Marcel van der Linden supports must therefore be blended with the contrast of differences that stands at the core of the comparative method.51

Detroit and Turin Between Comparison and Transnationalism.

These historiographic considerations were necessary to introduce some methodological aspects of comparing shop floor politics in Detroit and Turin auto factories. Because of the smaller geographical size, this approach allows me to depart from the contested national focus, and to take into account two homogenous units and analyse with greater accuracy the phenomenon under observation, namely the crisis of a system of industrial relations – but more in depth of a system of accumulation – under the pressure of social forces previously marginal. Had one compared this process on a

national scale, the diversity of situations among industries and subunits would have diluted the significance of whatever explanation had been advanced.\textsuperscript{52}

Furthermore, researching as an historian, the focus on two cities allows one to move more coherently among the mass of primary sources - company and union archives, newsletters and leaflets, interviews and written biographies. A selection of primary sources would have been incomparably harder had I chosen a larger unit and would have left me with the doubt to have had hand-picked the cases that better fitted my argument.

However, the election of two cities entailed some problems as well. Detroit and Turin were the exception rather than the rule in their respective national settings. Being the centre of the automotive industry, they were both looked at as a magnifying glass for the state of the national economy; both were a ‘laboratory’ for corporate and union strategies; and, in the course of two decade, they were both traversed by sweeping social transformations. Therefore, if Detroit and Turin are comparable at all it is because they emerge as peculiar within the US and Italy. An international comparison between two subunits implies an internal comparison among the subunits. For instance, the discussion of FIAT’s brand of Fordism and industrial relations (chapter two) implies an internal comparison with the more reluctant approach to technology adopted at Lancia (\textit{always} in Turin) and Alfa Romeo (in Milan) or with the non-adversarial approach to industrial relations proposed by Olivetti, the other international Italian corporation.\textsuperscript{53} In the Detroit case, useful internal comparisons could be done with the River Rouge plant, in Dearborn, where, contrary to the Chrysler plants I examine, Communists continued to play a role on shop floor relations; or the Detroit wildcats in the late 1960s could be compared with the Lordstown strike in a situation where the racial issue was not an factor influencing shop floor politics.\textsuperscript{54}

In brief, the number of internal comparisons to juxtapose to the international ones would be too great to be mentioned. To sacrifice this internal aspect is a loss that


undermines the depth of the analysis. It is unfortunately a necessary sacrifice to keep the research within manageable boundaries and to follow a coherent narrative structure.

More crucially, two metropolises such as Detroit and Turin, home of some of the most powerful corporations in the world, existed interconnected in a web of national, international, and transnational trends, constraints, and opportunities. It is necessary then to disentangle several layers of variables. For instance, Detroit and Turin were alike in belonging to the élites of the most productive regions of the industrial world-economy. These geographical areas functioned in a financial, informative, and technological network that included the largest operators in world capitalism. FIAT’s founder Agnelli more resembled Henry Ford than the average Italian entrepreneur. The Italian automobile firm collected more loans on the foreign market, especially the American, than in Italy. Detroit’s Big Three, on the other hand, greatly experimented on the possibility of internationalising their operations during the post war period, by buying or entering in co-partnership with European firms. The success or the failure of these enterprises reflected heavily on Detroit itself.55

However, auto manufacturers, union leaders, radical groups, and autoworkers lived also embedded in a set of laws, customs, cultural practices and ideological legacies that belonged to their own national labour movements and class cultures. Italy and the US have a very different history and as much as Italy entered the American sphere of influence after the Second World War, the two countries maintained a different set of institutions regulating industrial relations, a different managerial attitude toward organized labour, a different degree of economic development, and a different political culture and political systems – just to mention a few variables that had a major impact on shop floor struggles in the auto industry. I will touch upon these variables later in this chapter.

The comparative method of contrast of contexts helps here to highlight differences and – in the words of Skocpol and Somers – “to show how these unique features affect the working-out of putatively general social processes”, in our case the Fordist-Keynesian system.56 For instance, in Italy the intervention of the Ministero del Lavoro (the Department of Labour) during the radicalisation of the shop floor struggle

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56 Skocpol and Somers, “Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry”, 178; for Jeffrey Haydu, “The result of comparative analysis will be a better understanding of how common dilemmas were resolved or how a similar range of possibilities was narrowed, in specific ways, and in historically distinct settings” in *Between Craft and Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 22.
in 1969-70 contributed to institutionalise the conflict and to channel working class militancy towards social reform rather than structural change. The Statuto dei Lavoratori, proposed by the Minister of Labour incorporated many of the demands of the rank-and-file, although it substantially consolidated the position of the trade unions both in front of the manufacturers and of the radical groups. In the American case, the absence of this mediation meant that the incorporation of the rank-and-file movement was much more limited, as it occurred through co-optation of individuals into the union’s and company’s hierarchies rather than through concessions to shop floor bargaining (see below and chapter four).

The challenge of comparing two cities is therefore to dissect three distinct levels of interpretation: the local, the national, and the international/transnational. The transnational aspect, of course, appears closely related to the American dominance during the “high” modernism of the post-war period in Western Europe. A section of the Italian economic and political elite – among whom, and probably more than others, FIAT’s managers – looked at the US as a prototype, a model to imitate within the parameters of their own managerial identity. The Americans, either at corporate or institutional level, encouraged this attitude because it fitted the aims of Cold War policy. In sum, the transnational aspect is here inalienable from the comparison, because Detroit and Turin developed their major similarities in this economic and political framework.

In conclusion, the value of drawing closer the transnational and the comparative perspective is to illuminate each case with the developments that occurred in the other one, without neglecting that the two cases are parts of a whole – a world system that shapes a number of structural features and assigns them a role in the perpetuation, or transformation, of this system.

**Two Stories, Two Historiographies.**

There is a further methodological question related to the groundwork for comparative history: comparing history means comparing historiographies as well. As in any historical research, the preliminaries for comparative history consist in a thorough analysis of the historiography – only there are two of them! Apart from the obvious consideration that the number of volumes (and possibly, libraries) that the scholar has to go through is doubled, this fact raises the thorny question of which historiographic issues to address. Often, and this is the case of the many works concerned with American exceptionalism that we have mentioned so far, comparative
studies address the concern of only one historiography, usually the one of the nation the scholar belongs to, or of his/her field of expertise.\textsuperscript{57}

This is a legitimate way of doing history. As we have seen, comparative research usually leads to new interpretations of national history, although these interpretations are bound to differ according to what case we are contrasting to. If done in a systematic way, meaning with equal attention to primary sources and literature for both cases, it can increase the understanding of the process under examination on both sides. Since most books are originally meant for national audiences, this approach has the advantage of addressing precisely the interests and the expectations of the prefigured academic audience.

However, this type of comparative research has also the basic flaw of not taking into account the research agenda of the historians of the other case. This means closing the door to a useful contrast that can reveal the limits of the national historiography and suggest new departures. Rather than comparative history, this exercise is better called history with a comparative perspective, because it does not treat equally both instances under consideration, does not exploit all the potential benefits of comparative approach, and, eventually does not necessarily interest the academic audiences of both cases.

Comparative history that considers comparing historiographies involves the preoccupation with issues that have been central to the academic (and sometimes political) debate in one case, but possibly ignored in the other. It entails also discerning questions that have interested both historiographies and to understand how do they interrogate each other. For instance, comparative work on the American South and the Italian \textit{Mezzogiorno} has drawn attention not only to the comparable ideologies of the landed \textit{élites} during a tormentous process of nation-building, but also to the fact that the American and Italian historiographies have similarly regarded their respective “Souths” as afflicted with backward institutions and a lack of rational economic mentality until, in both cases, a wave of revisionism attacked this interpretation.\textsuperscript{58} In these cases,


comparing historiographies means also investigating the processes that have shaped similar interpretative paradigms.

I approached the study of Detroit and Turin with the intention of doing comparative history in the full sense and therefore not ignoring the question of the double historiographical agenda. In the tradition of the contrast of contexts, I do not mean to test one single hypothesis or a general theory, but rather to contrast the two cases on a number of historiographical issues that have been on the agenda on both sides of the Atlantic and by this means put forward new interpretations. As I said above, this method is strengthened by an attention to the transnational connections which persuaded me to regard a number of phenomena not as similar but separate, but as similar and interrelated.

I – Labour and Management after the Second World War.

The first issue that I consider is the transformation of industrial relations in the postwar period in a sense of an increased managerial control on the shop floor. In both cases, managers who rolled back workers’ inroads into shop floor control did so in a general context of right-wing reaction against the leftist influence in the society. The Cold War doctrine – itself an eminent case of transnational set of ideas and policies – gave employers and right-wing politicians a common political reference with which to couch their rhetoric. But from a comparative perspective one cannot help but notice that also managerial motivations were strikingly similar, given the different industrial contexts and the different experience of the two countries during the war. Managers who had assisted to an erosion of their prerogatives in the concluding period of the war, and who confronted workers’ expectations of social change, wanted to reassert control on the shop floor. They did so by attacking the prerogatives of the leftists groups and, in particular, the Communists, both at local and national level.59

The purge of the left was a crucial moment for the establishment of what the American historiography calls ‘the liberal consensus’ – the belief that the postwar order ended the necessity for radical change. According to this interpretation, at the end of the 1940s, the American labour movement, including its industrial arm the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), abandoned the more ambitious goals of social reform in order to co-manage a capitalistic economy based on the assumption of a constant growth of the auto industry and a national prosperity underpinned by the Cold War ‘military-industrial complex’. This ‘social accord’ – the interpretation goes - was cemented by

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59 I discuss this in chapter two.
the co-operation of union and management at shop floor level, where once militant union officials now traded-off high wages for the higher pace of work necessary to increase productivity.\textsuperscript{60}

All in all, the components of the ‘consensus’ seems contingent and peculiar to the American situation: the conservative reaction after the strike wave of 1946; the ascendancy of a Republican majority who passed the anti-labour Taft-Hartley Act; the pragmatic choice of the union leaders, whose organization had become institutionalised during the war, to compromise to bread and butter gains; the repression of a Marxist left that could challenge this choice; the supremacy on the internal and international market that American corporations had prepared to take over during the war.\textsuperscript{61} Yet, in a comparative perspective with Turin, one of the most dynamic centres of the economic life in post war Italy, productivity growth, workers’ acquiescence, and a general climate of social peace (at least after 1953), were achieved in markedly different conditions: in the presence of a strong Communist movement, in the post war economic disarray of reconstruction, and notwithstanding the union movement divided on ideological lines, in short with neither a ‘consensus’ nor a ‘social accord’.

In a comparative perspective then – and I suspect that other countries such as Japan, or France could strengthen the argument – the main element of the ‘consensus’ interpretation, the agency of the labour leaders who drifted towards business unionism, appears much weakened, while the determination of the employers, \textit{in primis} the automobile manufacturers, in a global political context that favoured their aims of centralization of power and expansion, \textit{resulted} more consequential in shaping the post


\textsuperscript{61} For a wider discussion of these elements see chapter two.
war Fordism-Keynesianism. That corporate capitalism faced challenges from the labour movement at about the same time and in comparable circumstance in different countries, reflects then the integrated character of the post war industrial political economies.

In Italy the historiography concerning the first decade after the war in the auto industry addresses a different problem. We enter here the field of FIAT's historiography. Being the largest Italian automobile manufacturer - actually the largest Italian manufacturer *tut court* – FIAT’s labour relations (as well as other aspects of its business) have been meticulously scrutinized. And it is not a matter of dimensions only: for the Italian labour movement FIAT represented the symbolic locus of the working class consciousness. FIOM (*Federazione Impiegati ed Operai Metallurgici*), one of the founding unions of the Italian labour movement, developed in Turin as FIAT's nemesis, matching the corporation in growth and regimentation of the working class throughout the twentieth century. Thus, it is not surprising that a sizeable portion of the literature on labour relations at FIAT originated from intellectuals 'organically' linked to organized labour.

From these origins comes the interpretation that I refer to as the *Anni Duri*, the hard years, in reference to how FIOM militants described the period between 1955 and 1962 at FIAT. The supporters of this point of view look at Fiat's industrial relations through the lens of FIOM history, which is unquestionably considered the natural representative of the working class. Commencing in 1949 – argue the champions of this historiographic trend - FIAT's management initiated a speed up in the production departments and the assembly lines. In doing so they encountered the formidable resistance of FIOM, which, even after the departure, in that same year, of its Catholic and Social Democratic components, remained the most popular union in the plants. Management accompanied the intensification of the pace of work with an all-out war to the Communist union. The company enlisted in this battle, on ideological ground, the two minority unions, the Catholic FIM -CISL and the Social Democrat UILM. The repression of left-wing militancy and the discrimination of FIOM members and activists (which I describe in more details in chapter two) gradually eroded its strength, until the major debacle of 1955, the year FIOM collected only a minority of votes among the workers, who were few years earlier their staunch supporters. From 1955 to 1962 (in this year a major strike occurred) FIOM militants at FIAT lived through the *Anni Duri*. They were arbitrarily downgraded to menial jobs, discharged for solely political

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62 Quite recently literature on FIAT has been organized in a 200-page book that, has admitted its author, is not exhaustive. M.Moccia, *Bibliografia* (Torino: Scriptorium, 1998).
reasons, blacklisted in every factory in the Turinese metropolitan area. To a similar fate were condemned workers who discussed politics on the shop floor, introduced leftist literature in the plant, promoted wildcats against the unbearable working conditions. FIM-CISL, UILM, and, later the 'company union’ SIDA, grew in popularity thanks to this politics of discrimination until 1962, when a wind of change started blowing at FIAT. Since then the several components of the labour movement progressively reapproached.63  

Elaborated in the 1970s, (but extraordinarily resilient throughout the rest of the century) when the FIOM had regained its ascendancy over FIAT’s workforce – and in general on Italian working class – the Anni Duri interpretation has the merit of bringing to light the problems of the harsh confrontation between the company and the leftist union in the 1950s and beyond. As several studies have shown, the methods of FIAT management were not only humiliating for its victims, but also, sometimes, downright illegal.64 However, the problem with this body of work describing the leftist repression during the 1950s is that it provides also a distorted view of industrial relations in that period. Paradoxically, it leaves out of the analysis the unions that became predominant in that period, assuming it was the company that channelled, at will, workers’ votes towards them. In comparative perspective with Detroit, where the UAW flourished by adopting the strategy of purging its radical elements and negotiating with the companies the allocation of the productivity gains, I wondered whether this was an option open to the FIM-CISL, UILM, and SIDA in Turin. In other words, I wondered whether their increasing popularity was due to an active agency on their part and, if so, in what ways their politics was similar to the American “business unionism”.65  

This research hypothesis helped me to bring to light a major feature of industrial relations at FIAT neglected by the Anni Duri historiography, namely the attempt to create the conditions to institute that type of firm-centred collective bargaining that in the States had transformed the worker into the ‘affluent worker’.  


65 Here I have to pay a tribute to the work of Giuseppe Berta, who first recognized the limits of the Anni Duri paradigm. In several works, in particular Conflitto industriale e struttura d’impresa alla FIAT (Bologna: Il mulino, 1998), he pointed out that these unions actively created consent and were not only manipulated by FIAT. Kim Moody, An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism (London: Verso, 1988).
Protagonist of this endeavour was Edoardo Arrighi, the FIM union officer who established the SIDA, supported by a number of more obscure officers who looked at, and studied, the “American style” of labour relations. This attempt failed mainly because of the shortsightedness of management in realizing the advantages of this partnership, but also for the resistance inside the Catholic union movement to take the road of “bread and butter” unionism. However, as long as this process was in a state of flux, workers were increasingly drawn towards the non-leftist unions for the material benefits that these promised to provide. In this light, the timid renewal of the struggle in 1962, that FIOM interpreted as discovery of the working class consciousness (chapter two), can be plausibly interpreted as workers’ disillusionment with the, never realized, promise of ‘business unionism’. By the 1960s, in fact, the growth in productivity that previously belonged only to FIAT, and a cluster of other Italian corporations, now spread widely. It was the ‘economic miracle’, as it is usually called. Without an established pattern of sharing the productivity gains, FIAT began to lose that competitive advantage in higher wages that in the 1950s had made it a sought-after employer. Increasingly, even former pupils of the prestigious “Scuola Allievi” – FIAT’s own highly specialized training course – looked for jobs in other firms, where similar pay was accompanied by better working conditions. By not encouraging Arrighi’s “American style” of industrial relations FIAT began to undermine its hard-won control over the workforce.

The transformation of labour relations in the auto industry of Detroit and Turin is closely related to the process of transfer of technology that was meanwhile taking place in the US and Europe. The European Recovery Program (ERP), or Marshall Plan, constituted an important step in the diffusion of American productive models and techniques in Europe, as it was crucial as a vehicle to support Keynesianism. However, there is no agreement on the actual significance that this carried for the reorganization of production in the individual firms. For a number of authors the ERP was decisive in igniting the economic growth of Europe (and Japan) and its assimilation of the American management model. This school emphasizes American agency in transferring managerial expertise, know-how, and technology. The Marshall Plan is viewed as the primary impetus behind the growth in productivity in Europe and the diffusion of ‘scientific’ management techniques. However, Michael J. Hogan has pointed out that

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‘Americanization’ only partially succeeded because of the many social, cultural and political resistances of the Europeans.67

According to an opposite view, the importance of the Marshall Plan was rather marginal in putting European economy on its feet and in changing its managerial practices. More important were the national policies of the Europeans (and Japanese) themselves and the attitude of the entrepreneurs who actively sought to introduce new techniques of mass production, including those borrowed from the US.68 Recent historiography of the Marshall Plan has taken a middle course by pointing out the importance of both the policy of the exporter and the attitude of the importer. For Djelic, the project of transforming the European business implied in the Marshall Plan was most successful where US authorities found local institutions and élites actively collaborating. Likewise Bjarnar and Kipping69 “any successful Americanization depended on the strength of the US efforts and on the institutional circumstances in recipient countries open to American ideas […]. Efforts at both ends will influence the applicability and the actual implementation of these models”.

By looking at this process from the vantage point of one of the receiving end – the automobile industry in Turin - one can observe the actual significance of transnational forces at local level. Focusing on the two poles of the process, one can also explore the transfer channels through which innovation was diffused. For FIAT, which skillfully secured a large percentage of the ERP funds intended for the Italian metalworking industry, the Marshall Plan was certainly essential to attain the productivity level necessary to move from craft production to mass production. I examine in more detail this aspect in chapter two. FIAT’s own kind of ‘Americanization’ was for sure only a hybrid between American techniques and traditional Italian savvy. Valletta and its team of managers were shrewd enough to understand that the Detroit blueprint did not necessarily provide the best solution for the


Italian productive conditions. But contrary to Hogan’s view, FIAT’s resistance to the transfer process of American technique did not constitute a negative expression of ingrained cultural attitudes: it was rather a positive source of innovation.\textsuperscript{70} Notwithstanding this kind of selective adaptation, as one concludes from the reports of the engineers sent to explore the Midwestern plants and from Valletta’s own enthusiastic declarations, the prototype of the ‘American Model’ strongly affected FIAT strategic business choices, with the Marshall Plan constituting a crucial phase of this modeling.\textsuperscript{71}

At the same time, and here we are closer to Hogan, the FIAT case disproves those authors who argue that the ‘American Model’ represented a homogenous package of elements mutually complementary to each other, including mass production techniques, scientific management methods, mass consumption, a non-confrontational model of industrial relations.\textsuperscript{72} At least for this last point, as we have seen, FIAT management’s cultural outlook made them resist the pressures to adopt a transatlantic model of labour relations. It is therefore more plausible to conclude that the Americans were not transferring all these elements in a kind of imperialistic fashion. Rather, Europeans, and in this case FIAT, were able to pick up like in a sort of “department store” the elements that would not pose a challenge to their status of business leaders.\textsuperscript{73}

II – Comparing Apples and Oranges: Meridionali and African-Americans.

Comparing Detroit and Turin in the postwar period means coming to terms with one basic difference that profoundly shaped the history of these two cities. In Detroit, racial strife between the black and white residents was a central fact of everyday life. Racial discrimination constituted a barrier that kept blacks segregated in increasing/deteriorating neighbourhoods, employed (or often unemployed) at the lower

\textsuperscript{70} In this line is the interpretation of Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel in their (eds) Americanization and Its Limits. Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 1-53.

\textsuperscript{71} It has to be noted that FIAT was instrumental in “translating” in European terms the American model for other companies within Italy. In other words, in a wider context, it was itself an important agent of the transfer process. For the concept of “translating” see P. Frideson, “Fordism and Quality: The French Case” in H. Shiomi and K. Wada, eds. Fordism Transformed (Oxford: University Press, 1996);


\textsuperscript{73} I take the phrase “department store” from Luciano Segreto, “Americanizzare o modernizzare l’economia? Progetti americani e risposte italiane negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta,” Passato e Presente XIV.37 (1996), 57.
end of the labour market, abused in the daily interaction with the white authorities. In Detroit, as in the rest of the US, race relations were informed by stereotypes and inequalities deeply rooted in both black and white self-representations. In Turin none of this existed. Although Piedmontesises identified Meridionali as having different characteristics in height, skin colour, and facial features, they considered them as “other” not because of race, but because of culture (see chapter three). Contrary to the US, in Italy the rhetoric of racism had become, to say the least, politically incorrect after the defeat of Fascism and its infamous racial laws. Furthermore, being a land of emigration, rather than immigration, and (in the past) of little internal mobility, Italy had conservsed a rather homogenous population.\footnote{For the “orientalist” premises of the discourse on the South see Jane Schneider ed. Italy’s “Southern Question”. Orientalism in One Country (Oxford: Berg: 1998).}

By comparing African-Americans in Detroit and Meridionali in Turin I do not mean to neglect the crucial factor of race, but I want to emphasize another circumstance: that they were both migratory southerners.\footnote{In adopting this perspective I took much encouragement from the reading of Donna Gabaccia’s short paper: “Two great migrations: American and Italian Southerners in Comparative Perspective” in Enrico Dal Lago, Rick Halpern, eds. The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno… where she compares these two groups in the US.} The literature on Detroit and other cities that were privileged destination of black migration has rightly focused on how race informed African-Americans’ urban experience.\footnote{Concerning the postwar period: Arnold R. Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Henry Louis Jr. Taylor, ed., Race and the City. Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Dorothy Newman et al., Protest, Politics, and Prosperity: Black Americans, White Institutions, 1940-1975 (New York: Pantheon, 1978); for a longer view Joe William Trotter Jr., “Blacks in the Urban North: The ‘Underclass Question’ in Historical Perspective in Michael B. Katz, The ‘Underclass’ Debate. Views From History (Princeton: University Press, 1993) 28-55.} In turn, as Thomas Sugrue suggested, the confrontational character of race relations spatially and economically structured the cities themselves. He argued that the combination of three factors, race, economics, and politics, prepared the urban crisis that had befallen cities such as Detroit in the 1980s. Heather Thompson’s privileged focus is instead on the politics of race in postwar Detroit. She emphasizes how, from the 1950s throughout the 1980s, Detroit became a ‘contested terrain’ in a complex interlacing of racial and political alliances in war for urban control.\footnote{Thomas Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (Princeton: University Press, 1996); Heather Ann Thompson, Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).}

It is not my aim to challenge the findings of these key studies. It is an undeniable fact that race shaped the development of Detroit in a myriad of ways. Rather, in comparative perspective with Turin, I am more concerned with the analysis
of another aspect: that *Meridionali*'s migratory experience in the northern industrial cities presented important similarities, as well as significant differences, with that of southern blacks – even in the absence of ‘race’. The analysis of this aspect opens the way for a global understanding of the forces that uprooted millions of ‘southerners’, in Europe as well as in the US, and brought them to their respective ‘Norths’. At the same time, the comparison helps to isolate important variables that explain the different condition of the southern blacks in Detroit.

Even as migrants, the two groups differed in at least one important aspect: while southern blacks had a strong sense of a common identity both as blacks and as southerners, Italian southern migrants became *Meridionali* only through the contact with the natives (who, similarly, did not think of themselves as *Settentrionali* – northerners). As Gabaccia and other historians of southern Italians in the US have remarked, *Meridionali* carried local identities to the new setting. The same happened when they moved to northern Europe and the Italian northwest. Southern Italy has a very diverse history. Sicilians and Apulians, who could not understand each other’s dialect, could be recognized as similar only in the mind of a northerner.

However, blacks and *Meridionali*, as migrants, shared two fundamental characteristics. First, the magnitude of their impact on the cities set off similar urban problems. The intense pace of new arrivals heightened competition for insufficient housing providing migrants with expensive and shabby accommodation. Because newcomers arrived often through a migratory chain, overcrowding of single-family units further dilapidated the city housing stock. Likewise, in the job market, migrants entered in competition, primarily among themselves, for hazardous and intermittent occupations as in both cities the established residents had secured the steady and remunerative jobs. In both cases, even without the aggravating circumstance of racial discrimination, mass immigration from the ‘Two Souths’ crippled the system: it overloaded hospitals, schools, the cities’ welfare system, and the number of recipients of municipal services. Inevitably, in both cases, it was the migrants who bore the brunt of the urban crisis. The second similarity is implied in what we have said so far. Both groups occupied a marginal place in the cities’ social spectrum. In Turin, the migration of another group, the peasants from Veneto, in the northeast of Italy, had preceded and overlapped with those of *Meridionali*. Venetians fared in general much better than southerners. They found fewer barriers to integration because linguistically and

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78 The American literature on the postwar experience of African-Americans to Detroit and other Midwestern cities is scarce compared to the first wave of interwar “Great” migration. In the Detroit case, the work of Thomas Sugrue and Heather Thompson has filled in part this gap. In the Italian case, there is a paucity of historical work on postwar internal migration.

culturally they were closer to the Piedmonteses, and because they were more likely to move in large family groups. On the other hand, Meridionali typically were individual males who, before being able to call up their wives and mothers from the south, had to settle without the reciprocal help of other family members. In Turin, Meridionali compared unfavourably with the rest of the population in terms of education, income, housing conditions, visibility in politics — in other words, in status. It was therefore under circumstances that signalled their social inferiority that Meridionali forged a new collective identity and transformed the workplace.

In Detroit, blacks were in a comparable situation, only it was worse. Southern whites, in particular ‘hillbillies’ from Appalachia, had also migrated to Detroit. As I show in chapter three, they also were victims of prejudice and discrimination, and were as culturally distant from native Detroiter's as southern blacks were. However, they were white. The dynamic of race relations opened to them more opportunities to integrate in the mainstream American life. In the fierce struggle for resources, jobs in the first place, natives were preferred to ‘hillbillies’, but the latter always outstripped African-Americans. In a few years after the end of the largest migration from the south, which occurred during the Second World War, southern whites in Detroit, except from few small enclaves such as the Briggs area, statistically ‘disappear’ among the native population. On the other hand, their fellow southerners of a different race needed more than a generation to overcome the obstacles to integration. In the late 1960s, the children of the wave of black migrants of the 1940s were still as marginal in status, income, education, and political representation, as their parents. Although this generation is more likely to be born and reared in Detroit than in the South, it still makes sense to compare them with the Meridionali, not as migrants, because technically they are not, but as a marginal group.

In both cases, the late 1960s are the crucial period in which these marginal groups come forward and claim to be recognized as citizens on an equal foot with the rest of the population. It is more a matter of dignity than simple materialistic calculation. In chapter three, I propose to employ Axel Honneth’s theory of the “struggle for recognition” as a useful way to look, comparatively, at what these two

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80 I take this information from my interview with Pasquale De Stefani, a Venetian Fiat worker. De Stefani moved to Turin together with 8 other family members — and his case was far from unique. They were probably more likely to move as a whole family because the distance to travel was considerably shorter than the one Meridionali had to travel. It might also be linked to the political economy of their place of origin: poor Venetians were sharecroppers or tenants who cultivated the land as a family and therefore moved all together; poor Meridionali were braccianti, daily labourers, who find more convenient to move individually. This hypothesis needs further research.

groups, as diverse as apples and oranges (but both fruits), shared in terms of their migratory experience to the north.

III – Antisystemic struggles in Turin and Detroit.

"There have only been two world revolutions. One took place in 1848. The second took place in 1968. Both were historic failures. Both transformed the world", remarked Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein in their short essay *Antisystemic Movements.* The student revolt of 1968 is generally acknowledged as a transnational phenomenon, although it took a peculiar form in each national context. There is a vast literature that, correctly, analyses 1968 from a global viewpoint. The student revolt of 1968 has shown the world as an integrated system, a homogenous whole in which each part is interconnected in real time, the McLuhanian "global village", where the perceptive field of individuals stretched to a world scale.

However, when we scan through the literature on the workers’ movements in the late 1960s we find only studies of single cases, firmly rooted in their national setting. Yet, the workers’ uprising that simultaneously struck Turin, Detroit, Stuttgart, and Billancourt has more than one link with the ‘global’ New Left. With the New Left the workers’ movement shared the critique of organized labour, the anti-authoritarian mood, and the militant revolutionary rhetoric. More importantly, the workers’ movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as much as the New Left, was the outcome of a global process that had similarly restructured the system of Fordist accumulation in several countries. The increased technical and financial interconnection among national productive systems related also workers whose activity resulted integrated in a single worldwide economic market. For this reason I suggest that it is more useful to study

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these movements in the perspective, proposed by Wallerstein and his co-authors in their booklet, of a world-system that created the conditions in which antisystemic movements such as the revolutionary black workers in Detroit and the radical Meridionali in Turin could develop.85

In their respective national historiographies these two movements are explained within larger trends of social change in the national context. In the Italian case, a large agreement exists on the role of the centre-left coalitions that had governed Italy since 1963. The shift from a centre coalition to one that included the socialist left had taken place in Italy after many resistances from conservative circles and from a part of American diplomacy. Corporate managers like Valletta strongly endorsed this change in the government because they believed it could finally put Italy completely in line with the kind of Fordism-Keynesianism that informed other Western countries. Italy was in fact still tarred by the Fascist legacy: the lack of social and institutional reforms in the realm of education, urbanisation, industrial relations and the administration of justice – fields in which it lagged behind its western economic partners and that strongly contrasted with the dynamism of the economy during the ‘miracle’. The centre-left coalition never actually delivered these reforms or it did so only in an ineffective way. It is worth quoting here the synthesis of Paul Ginsborg about this period: “Between 1962 and 1968 the governments of the centre-left had failed to respond to the multiple needs of a rapidly changing Italy. They had done both too little and too much, in the sense that they had talked endlessly of reform but had then left expectations unfulfilled. From 1968 onwards paralysis from above gave way to movement from below”.86 From this assessment of the failure of the centre-left derives the idea that the social movements of the late 1960s, the students and then the workers’ movement, rose from a deluded expectation of reform and eventually put forward demands that were far more progressive.87

With similar tones, in the American case, a number of historians have interpreted the outburst of black militancy in the urban north in the late 1960s as a case of ‘rising expectations’, meaning that the Civil Rights and Great Society legislation

85 Arrighi, Hopkins, Wallerstein, Antisystemic Movements...cit., 1
passed under Lyndon B. Johnson had suddenly accelerated the anticipation for improvements in the economic conditions of blacks. However, Johnson’s reforms never attacked the key institutions that perpetuated the unequal distribution of power and wealth in American society. The fact that the reality of the living conditions in the northern ‘ghetto’ differed so much from the intent of the legislation sparked a number of civil disturbances and the radicalisation of the protest movements.88

While it is persuasive to interpret the protest movements of the 1960s as stemming from dissatisfaction and impatience with belated reforms of the system, this framework is also a reductive way to understand rank-and-file struggles in Detroit and Turin. There is no automatic connection between the lack of reforms and the uprisings in the factories of the two motor cities. These struggles were primarily shaped in the context of life in the plants and in the city. They were prepared, in the first place, by the transformations that occurred in the production technology, in the changes in urban settings, in the dynamics of shop floor politics. Furthermore, the interpretation of rising expectations, not only disregards the importance of local factors, but also, by implicitly focusing on national politics, minimizes the attention on how Fordism evolved worldwide in the core regions and how its expansion augmented its internal contradictions.

There exists also a rich literature concerning more specifically the rank-and-file struggles in the two cities. In the Italian case, the Autunno Caldo has interested historians and social scientists because it opened the path to progressive reforms not only in labour legislation, but also in many other aspects of social life. Labour historians have interpreted this cycle of struggles within a framework that has enjoyed an enduring success for an entire generation of scholars. Following the institutionalisation of the workers’ movement into union growth, scholars, many of them reared in the ranks of the organized labour, have put the Autunno Caldo in a perspective that emphasizes the agency of the unions. This view is closely related to the Anni Duri interpretation that we discussed earlier for the 1950s, and, in fact, is advanced by the same historiography.89 According to this paradigm, it was the


89 Archivio Storico della FIOM Provinciale di Torino ed., Torino 1945-1983, Memoria FIOM (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1985); Bruno Trentin, Autunno Caldo. II Secondo Biennio Rosso 1968-1969 (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999); this view is also accepted by foreign scholars see Dominique Grisoni and Hughes Portelli, Le Lottte Operaie in Italia dal 1960 al 1976 (Milano:
resistance of a group of left-wing militants during Valletta’s repression that prepared the ground for an awakening of the labour movement at FIAT in the following decade. For Pugno and Garavini: “A vanguard has resisted and has represented a reference point for the renewal of workers’ struggle that developed between ’62 and ’68”. The episode of the strike of 1962, the first to break a series of failures at FIAT, is seen as a harbinger of what happened seven years later. Although the mid-sixties were a period of absolute calm on the shop floor at FIAT, the leftist union, FIOM, it is argued, regained ground, while ideological divisions with the other components of Labour became softer. According to this literature, unions worked to regain influence among workers, tensions were accumulating on the shop floor and finally exploded in 1969. Southern migrants – it is acknowledged – played an important role in the Autunno Caldo with their spontaneous rebellion, but they could grow into a strong mass organization only thanks to the guidance of the unions. This line of interpretation emphasizes migrants’ role in the production process as ‘mass’ or unskilled force, rather than their distinctive migratory experience, as the main source of its spontaneous rebellion.

In other words, this historiography (still alive and kicking if one considers that the last book in this line, Gianotti’s, has been published in 1999) regards the events of Turin as the culmination of a coherent, though discontinued, growth of the union movement from the early 1960s onwards. This view is unacceptable. The Autunno Caldo represented a watershed not only in the sense that it opened a progressive decade in which the union movement became an important political actor, as these authors imply, but also in the sense that the social force that initiated this change – southern migrants – burst into the workers’ movement without any previous link to the organized labour.

Social scientists have long been fascinated with the FIAT case because it provided a case study for the dynamics of a social movement from its formative stage to its institutionalisation. They have recognized the disruptive agency of Meridionali for the system of industrial relations and have used the Autunno Caldo to elaborate general

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Rizzoli, 1977); and also Sabel who talks about a partnership between skilled workers and unskilled Meridionali. As a matter of fact, southern workers imposed their agenda in 1969 and Pidmontese skilled workers, the more likely to be union members, either card carring or not, got grudgingly carried away. See Charles Sabel, Work and Politics: The Division of Labour in Industry (Cambridge: University Press, 1982).

90 “Un’avanguardia ha retto e ha costuito il riferimento della riscossa operaia, che si incomincio’ a sviluppare fra il ’62 e il ’68.” Pugno, Garavini, , Gli anni duri alla FIAT....5; also, among several other examples: “la resistenza e la lotta di quegli anni e’ stata la condizione per poi poter rielaborare una linea politica sindacale vincente” Giulio Sapelli, Emilio Pugno, Romolo Gobbi, and Bruno Trentin, Fiat e Stato (Torino: Istituto Gramsci, 1978), 33.
theories on social movements or strike patterns. However, their analysis is not historically grounded. They have not investigated the changes in the urban setting and in the production process over a time period and therefore failed to explain how this group of workers acquired significance.

An historian who has worked in this direction is Giuseppe Berta. He has pointed out the change of FIAT’s recruitment policy in the late 1960s (see chapter three) as a crucial factor in detonating the struggle. At the eve of the Autunno Caldo, remarked Berta, “FIAT did not know its workers anymore. They had become an abnormal mass”. Historian Marco Scavino, in a similar tone, has maintained that it was a mistake to interpret the resurgence of rank-and-file action only within the terms of the history of organized labour. Commenting on Berta, Scavino remarked that “if FIAT in those years did not know its workers anymore, unions had an analogous problem”.

This thesis concurs with this latter scholarship. The comparative perspective further encourages me to follow this line of enquiry. Knowing, for instance, that African-Americans’ militancy in Detroit’s plants was moulded not only by their relation to the means of production, but also by their own identity as racial ‘others’, one can wonder whether at FIAT too the recomposition of the working class brought about a more profound rupture with past industrial relations than is commonly acknowledged. In this case, the Autunno Caldo is unlikely to represent a stage, however important, in a process of advancement of the union movement, but rather a starting point for a whole different system of industrial relations.

While in Turin rank-and-file struggles took momentum in 1969, in Detroit a wave of wildcat strikes had already begun in 1968, simultaneously to the French May. Black revolutionary groups triggered strikes that, similar to Turin, destabilized the plants’ hierarchies and halted production. The Detroit case has also been the subject of an abundant literature, but it has not been conferred the same status as the Autunno

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92 Giuseppe Berta, *Conflitto industriale e struttura d'impresa...cit., 153

Caldo in the Italian case. In the United States, these events are not deemed to have been particularly influential in transforming the society. Yet, also in the American case, rank-and-file rebellion was a national phenomenon, not a local one. Between 1968 and 1974 workplace militancy spread across the nation and in a number of industries: from autoworkers to postal workers, from telephone operators to the Teamsters. The main reason for this difference is that the outcome of these episodes was different. American wildcatters, rather than having been institutionalised, were suppressed, until the movement faded out. In chapter four, I provide some explanation of why this was the case, at least in Detroit.

Contrary to the Italian historiography, the Americans interpreted the outburst of militancy at Chrysler firmly in the context of Detroit’s urban problems. From the first authors who dealt with the subject in the 1970s in a militant vein, Geschwender, and Georgakas and Marvin, to the last compelling study of Detroit by Thompson, there is a consensus that what happened within the plants was inextricably linked to the riot of 1967 and the rise of militants left-wing activism in every realm of the civic life. Why was it so much easier for the Americans to recognise this relation? This is due to the fact that the experience of Detroit paralleled, and actually surpassed, that of other major northern urban centres in being characterized by intense racial conflict over housing, education, and law and order. The militancy of black revolutionaries on the shop floors cannot be dissociated from this context. For Geschwender, Georgakas and Surkin, and Fujita, the experience of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers tells us a great deal about the relationship between class and race.

I have no contention with this point of view, and, indeed, I borrow this interpretative key to highlight the weight of the urban dynamics in setting off the struggles in the Turin case. Yet, the observation that in the Italian case, in the absence of a racial divide, of black nationalism, and of a politics of race at local and national level, southern migrants similarly, and with equal vehemence, attacked the basic institutions that regulated industrial relations led me to investigate other aspects of the Detroit case. It intrigued me, for instance, that, even more directly than in the Italian

black revolutionaries in Detroit stemmed from a radical environment rooted in Marxism, in particular Trotskyism, which comprised mainly white political activists (see chapter four). These links are briefly mentioned in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Georgakas himself was part of this milieu) but are not further investigated in later studies.

I was even more captivated to realize that, even in the highly polarized context of Detroit in the 1960s that these authors describe, African-Americans who joined the ranks of black radical groups that mobilized in the plants, might have done so as a strategy to achieve social recognition, that means as an expedient to evade the social invisibility to which members of marginal groups are confined, rather than as a political choice dictated by ‘race’. Some of these activists joined, after the experience of the League, interracial caucuses either in the UAW or in opposition to it (see chapter three). This was also strikingly similar to the experience of southern migrants in Turin. In other words, the limit of these previous studies consisted in neglecting the fact that the direct experience or the heritage of migration had shaped the construction of a collective identity of southern blacks and their offspring in ways that interacted with race and class. In this sense, the situation of African-Americans in Detroit and in other American urban centres was not unique, but comparable to other groups in the capitalist world-system that had been uprooted by the forces of industrialization and then left marginal in the new setting.

These changes relate to the emergence of a non-class ‘subject of history’: ethnic minorities, blacks, women, a sort of “wretched of the earth” inside the First World. This was, from Marcuse to Fanon to Sartre, a key theme of the 1960s, and spurred that crisis of the “grand meta-narratives” that is now considered an important stage in the passage from modernity to postmodernity. The story of Detroit and Turin,

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96 This might seem paradoxical since, comparatively, it was Italy that hosted the largest Marxist party in the western world.
97 Interviews with former League activists Eula Powell (in Detroit, June 2001) and Raymond Williams (in Detroit, May, 2002) have confirmed this point.
98 As a concluding note to this section I want to call attention to the fact that the literature on Detroit is not a monolithic bloc. While studies in the Georgakas and Marvin, Gerschwender, and Fujita wrote on the topic from a New Left perspective. They emphasize the bankruptcy of the UAW and the collusion with Chrysler. They interpreted the experience of the League of Revolutionary Workers in terms of rebellion and repression. Jefferys, who dedicated a chapter of his history of Chrysler industrial relations, analyses the rise and fall of this group within the dynamics of the industrial relations and focus on the group’s failure to put forward an alternative institutional framework. Heather Thompson’s is the work to which I feel closer (it is also the most recent among them) because it integrates these aspects with the investigation of the League’s internal divisions and weakness and also, more than the others, recognized the deep economic distress that Detroit traversed in that period as a crucial factor in shaping that struggle (for all this work see footnote 94).
however, reminds us that this development was itself a by-product of the maturity of Fordism as a system of accumulation in the postwar period, and of the bankruptcy of the institutions of class politics that accompanied it.

**Industrial relations in the US and Italy:**

**Opportunities and Constraints of the National Framework.**

We have maintained above that the comparative study of two cases demands dissecting several layers of comparisons. We have touched upon the local and the transnational aspects and argued that a national focus sometimes hinders the analysis of some illuminating aspects of the comparison. However, ignoring this dimension would equally mislead us towards wrong conclusions. Certainly, in the case of Detroit and Turin, shop floor politics is to be understood in a context of a changing relationship between state, employers, and organized labour. It is therefore necessary to take into account the institutions regulating industrial relations in order to understand in each case the options open to the protagonists and how the national setting affected the evolution of workers’ struggles.

In the United States the 1935 Wagner Act for the first time explicitly protected workers’ right to organize without employers’ interference. It established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that certified the unions that would win a secret-ballot election at plant level as the legal workers’ representative and bargaining could also extend at the level of a single employer but not beyond. Management had the legal obligation to negotiate exclusively with that union and not to intimidate its members.

In contrast to the Italian situation then, the Wagner Act shaped industrial relations in the sense of being firm-centred and of eliminating competition among unions, which was seen as detrimental to the interests of the workers.

If the Wagner Act provided a stimulus that favoured union growth it was then the Second World War that profoundly shaped industrial relations in a way instrumental

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to Fordism-Keynesianism. As new defence plants were built, hundreds of thousands of workers joined unions for the first time under the wings of the National War Labor Board (NWLB) (the wartime incarnation of the NLRB), an agency created by the government to reconcile management and organized labour and contain industrial conflict. It was in the 1940s, that the main mechanisms of postwar collective bargaining were inaugurated. The necessities of the historical moment in which they took shape account for their propensity to establish orderly and bureaucratised industrial relations and cut the initiative at grassroots level.

Many of the features of the post-war industrial relations were set through the bargaining relationship between UAW and General Motors, respectively the biggest union and biggest corporation in the country. In fact, the model set in the most productive sector of the economy guided thousands of companies in the country, whether or not unionised. The 1940 UAW-GM contract established one of the key institutions of the new system: a permanent umpire who would rule on those disputes unresolved in the four steps of the grievance procedure. In the aim of both union officers and managers this provision served to introduce the rule of the law in place of conflict. From the point of view of the company it served to facilitate disciplinary procedures against wildcat strikes and other spontaneous industrial actions. From the union’s point of view it restrained foremen’s arbitrary decisions on the shop floor.

"Management has no divine right," Walter Reuther wrote in 1948 “management has only functions, which it performs well or poorly. The only prerogatives which management has lost turned out to be usurpations of power and privilege to which no group of men have exclusive right in a democratic nation".

Throughout the postwar era, however, the relationship between UAW and GM set also the limits that the union movement had to confront nationwide. Their 1946 contract confirmed that questions deemed central to management efficiency - for instance, the speed of operations or the adjustment of piece rates - would not be subject to umpire rule. The control of the production process on the shop floor level was the sphere most important from the managerial point of view as it invested its prerogative

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104 “Management’s Future in Labor Relations” folder “Walter Reuther – unused articles, 1948”, box 23, UAW Research Department Collection, ALUA; In an earlier document the UAW reported: “Before organization came into the plant foremen were little tin gods in their own departments. They were accustomed to having orders accepted with no question asked. They expected workers to enter into servile competition for their favours.” UAW, How to win for the union (Detroit: UAW Educational Department), 3.
to determine the production output and its cost. The cornerstone of postwar industrial relations was therefore that management retained control of the instruments of productivity.\(^{105}\)

The existence of collective bargaining rested on the shared assumption between unions and manufacturers that it would have to be enacted at the expense of shop floor bargaining. In fact, unions and manufacturers, by specifying workers' rights on the shop floor through a contract, also severely limited them. At every step of the grievance procedure, union and management representatives negotiated to solve the problem according to the contract. Often the way the grievance would be solved depended on a *quid pro quo* between the two sides, and not to conformity to the abstract rule of the contract. For instance, management could revoke a disciplinary action toward a worker if the union, in exchange, excused a number of safety grievances. If the grievance could not be solved at the lower level of the hierarchy it would go higher up, until, eventually, be submitted to arbitration by a neutral third party with binding decision.\(^{106}\)

David Brody, who has called this system "workplace contractualism", has argued that the umpire system and collective bargaining were the product of workers struggling for a system of just and equal rules. However, there is little discussion that the grievance procedure, as it was implemented, aimed at neutralizing potential disruptive conflict on the shop floor.\(^{107}\) It buttressed management control of the workforce and production process because it left unions with only one legitimate

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\(^{107}\) David Brody, "Workplace Contractualism in Comparative Perspective" in *Industrial Democracy in America...* 176-205. It is telling the following extract from Reuther's "Brief to the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare" in which he argues the case for extending the grievance procedure applied at GM to the whole industry, as it will subsequently happen: "Some unauthorized 'quickie' strikes have occurred during seven years, but the man days lost have been lower at GM than at almost any other industrial company... In the few 'wildcat' stoppages, which have occurred because of momentary outbursts of anger or impatience, our Union was able in a matter of a few hours or at most a day or two, to persuade employers to return to work. The primary reason we were able to do this is because the umpire machinery was in existence and we could convince employees that they did not have to strike in order to obtain a fair disposition of their grievances... the Union has recognized that it is its duty to persuade the employees to return to work and submit their dispute to the grievance machinery and the umpire". In ALU&A UAW Research Department Collection, box 23, folder "Race Relations 1946-47"; of course, that unions acted to minimise shop floor contact is one of the tenets of the New Left historians and the "liberal consensus" interpretation quoted above.
instrument to counter an adverse managerial decision: to file a grievance. This system was also in itself ineffectual in attacking inequalities in the workplace as union officials and managers could, in practice, simply ignore a grievance. The sheer volume of grievances granted that only a small proportion would be submitted to the procedure. Finally, as Katherine Stone has argued, the very premise that unions and corporations could bargain on an equal foot did not correspond to reality of economic world.\textsuperscript{108}

Collective bargaining pursued economic efficiency and orderly industrial relations by rendering most types of job actions illegal during the life of the contract. It transformed union officials into guardians of the rank-and-file insofar as they had to restrain actions that violated the contract. Collective bargaining also affected the internal organization of unions, as only full-time officials could administrate the complex body of contract rules. Officials at local level were responsible for the application of the contract in front of the central organisms. During the war industrial unions had grown into centralized organizations that yielded disciplinary powers towards its local affiliates. Contracts stipulated at industry level severely limited workers' initiative at shop floor level. Local union branches that did not conform to the interpretation of the contract established by the central board could see their democratically elected officers substituted by central administrators. In the UAW a by-law required three conditions for a strike: that the conflict could not be solved through the grievance procedure; that the strike be voted by a majority of the Local members; that the strike be approved by the International Executive Board. Collective (IEB) bargaining therefore reinforced the decisional power of the hierarchies at the expense of the rank-and-file, although always within a system formally committed to internal democracy.\textsuperscript{109}

After the war, the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, a conservative amendment to the Wagner Act, further restricted the union's space for manoeuvring both at shop floor and at national level. It did so in several ways. The Taft-Hartley act redefined the term "employee" in a way that excluded foremen thereby impeding the efforts of this category to build up a union in the form of the Foremen Association of America. As Lichtenstein has demonstrated, the foremen efforts to build a union drove them increasingly into collaboration with the CIO, threatening of depriving management of a fundamental instrument to govern the shop floor. Manufacturers' victory in keeping

\textsuperscript{108} Stone, "Post-War Paradigm"...\textit{cit.}, 1577.

foremen strictly on the management’s side represented an insurmountable limit for the expansion of union’s rights to other categories.\textsuperscript{110}

Title II of the act allowed the US President to seek an injunction to suspend for sixty days strikes that “imperil[ed] the national health”. This clause, although never seriously implemented, was intended to lower public support for unions by portraying them as selfish economic actors who were harmful to the interest of the nation. With a similar intent title III facilitated the suability of unions for breaches of the contract, like in the case of wildcat strikes. It also emphasized the employee’s right to refrain from collective activity, a provision that illustrated the anti-union stance of the law.\textsuperscript{111}

Notwithstanding these charges, the Taft-Hartley Act did not in itself modify the Wagner Act in a radical way. However, the cumulative effect of the new labour legislation and of the collective bargaining pattern, established during the war, was to prevent workers’ from engaging in shop floor bargaining and to discourage unions for pursuing a strategy of structural reform of the American political economy. The Act was important for the development of organized labour and its subsequent decline in several ways: it curtailed workers’ possibility to resolve disputes outside arbitration and grievance procedure, thereby fixing the character of American industrial relations for the following twenty years; it cabined unionisation within a core of industries and left them vulnerable to changes in employers’ strategy; it limited the collaboration among unions and encouraged the pursuit of highly particularistic bargaining strategies in their dealing with the employers.\textsuperscript{112} As a result, since the Taft-Hartley Act the legal standing of US organized labour has declined.

Since 1947 the most significant piece of labour legislation has been the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act that was concerned with the practices of corruption inside some AFL unions. Although the act was useful in protecting the rights of individual members in front of abuses, it represented a further defeat for organized labour since it


\textsuperscript{112} James B. Atleson, “Wartime Labor Regulation, the Industrial Pluralists, and the Law of Collective Bargaining” in \textit{Industrial Democracy in America: The Ambiguous Promise}, Nelson Lichtenstein and Howell J. Harris eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142-175; Howell Harris, \textit{The Right to Manage} (Madison, Win: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); see Tomlins, \textit{The State and the Unions}... “The absence of a ban on industry-wide bargaining from the Taft-Hartley bill reinforces the conclusion that the fundamental intent of the amendments was less to disrupt the collective bargaining structures which had developed over the previous decade than to ensure that unions were confined ever more strictly within those structures”.

During the 1960s and 1970s, also progressive forces took the path of protecting individual, rather than collective, rights. Federal legislation regulated fair employment practices, occupation health and safety, and pension reform, but when the AFL-CIO sought a reform of the Taft-Hartley Act in the 1970s it was defeated. At the same time the regulatory structure of the NLRB developed in an increasingly hostile and restrictive sense for unions. For instance, the clause of the exclusive representation of the unions that collects the majority of vote in a bargaining unit has evolved in the sense of giving the possibility to the employer to operate on non-union basis if the union fails to establish this support thereby denying union representation to those minority workers who wished to have it and providing an incentive to managerial non-union tactics.\footnote{Ibid., 102-103.}

In contrast to the American case, postwar Italy initially lacked any legislative regulation of industrial relations. Up to the 1970’s \textit{Statuto del Lavoratori}, the only norm concerning labour relations were the provisions included in the new republican constitution in 1948: freedom to organize a union (article 39) and freedom to strike (article 40).\footnote{Mario Napoli “Il quadro giuridico-istituzionale” in Gian Primo Cella and Tiziano Treu, eds., \textit{Relazioni Industriali. Manuale per l’analisi della esperienza italiana} (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), 45-47; on the \textit{Statuto dei lavoratori} see C. Assanti e G. Pera, \textit{Commento allo Statuto dei Lavoratori} (Padova: Cedam, 1972); M. Prosperetti, \textit{Commentario allo Statuto dei Lavoratori} (Milano: Giuffrè, 1976).}

During the Fascist period labour and management had been drawn into a corporatist relationship under a special Fascist labour magistracy. Fascist codes offered a minimum of protection towards employers’ speed up, but, unsurprisingly, did not protect their freedom in the workplace. The regime imposed collective agreements from above, as it abolished unions, strikes, lockouts and thus the very possibility of negotiations between workers and employers. After the fall of Fascism, the CGIL, whose leaders continued to be active either in exile or underground, was re-established as the legitimate bargaining agent for the Italian working class. However, its organization destroyed in the factories, the CGIL did not have any presence at shop floor level. All bargaining could have occurred only at national level between the CGIL...
and its counterpart among the employers, the Confindustria, with the state intermediating between the two, sanctioning, and enforcing their agreements. In the precarious social climate of the reconstruction, the government found it advantageous to achieve consistent wage levels across the industrial sector and so did the union and the employers.\(^{116}\)

At plant level workers elected the Commissioni Interne - representative bodies that had been abolished by Fascism and re-established in 1943. These institutions were not allowed to engage in any kind of bargaining, they were only meant to supervise the correct application of the national agreement and, informally, workers expected them to protect their new legal rights in the factory.\(^{117}\) Both the organization of employers and organized labour favoured, at that moment, this kind of centralized bargaining. The first did so because employers resented the presence of unions as bargaining agents in the plant. Also, a centralized negotiation tended to lower wages at the less productive level of the industry.\(^{118}\) The second because, being dominated by the Communists, it favoured a strategy of working class uniformity at national level. A centralized bargaining also favoured a centralised coordination of class politics. It is to be noted that, contrary to the US model, agreements affected all the employees of the Confindustria associates, whether or not they were union members. Confindustria therefore functioned in an altogether different manner than its counterpart in the US. In fact, on the other side of the Atlantic, the National Association of Manufactures played the role of a political pressure group rather than of a bargaining agent.\(^{119}\)

In the 1950s, a number of factors contributed to undermine the efficacy of this type of national contracts that regulated an entire sector (for instance, the national metalworkers’ contract regulated both the automobile and the steel industry). For a start, this type of negotiations assumed a unity of interests among the parts, but, in the 1950s, the union movement had split into the Communist, Catholic, and Social democrat components, all in competition for membership, and ideologically on opposite sides of the Cold War divide. In the Confindustria too, the interest of medium and large corporations did not converge, and, among the latter, there was a further division between those that believed in a Fordist-Keynesian tenets of mass consumption and


\(^{117}\) More precisely the Commissioni Interne are deprived of their bargaining function in 1947.

\(^{118}\) Tiziano Treu, “La contrattazione collettiva” in Gian Primo Cella and Tiziano Treu, eds., _Relazioni Industriali..._ , 165.

mass production and those who did not. Secondly, Italian steady economic development, becoming “the miracle”, in the late 1950s, had created a diversity of situations at firm level, according to the different degree of technological development and productivity, and therefore the necessity to determine a wage policy more suited to the diversity of situations in the firms.

Increasingly, during the 1950s, the Commissioni Interne and management negotiated at plant level on the collective agreements they were only supposed to apply and oversee. This occurred for two reasons. On one hand it was difficult to draw a line between the interpretation of a contract and the negotiation over it. The national collective agreement contained general clauses that had to be adapted to the peculiar circumstances of each plant. On the other hand, a number of unionists, in particular from the ranks of CISL, who had been formed through the example of the American bargaining system, pushed for a firm-centred bargaining procedure, although only in a few cases they meant it to be completely independent from the bargaining at national level. At least in three large corporations - FIAT, Olivetti, and RIV – in different circumstances, groups of unionists that explicitly emulated Reuther’s strategy of industrial relations endeavoured to establish a bargaining pattern at plant level (chapter two). These efforts met with different results but the scarcity of these attempts testifies of the distance between the American and Italian situation.

In the 1960s, with the Cold War climate beginning to loosen and the prospects of a centre-left government initiating some reforms, higher courts, like the Constitutional Court, enacted measures more favourable to workers. For instance, in 1961 the Court ruled unconstitutional a Fascist law that prohibited the change of residence without a special permission – a prerequisite that greatly weakened migrant workers by rendering their status quasi-illegal. More importantly for the industrial relations, in 1959, the Italian Parliament passed the so-called erga omnes law that broadened the coverage of collective agreements, concerning the minimal wage for

123 See Berta “Imprese e Sindacati…”, 1024-1028; for Fiat see the case of the SIDA (chapter two).
each sector, even to firms and employers who were not part of Confindustria and therefore were not part of the agreement.\textsuperscript{124}

When we contrast the Italian situation to the American one, the \textit{erga omnes} law account for a crucial difference. American managers were able to play up different states of the union against each other by choosing to re-locate in the ones more ‘business-friendly’. The possibility of relocating and getting rid of the union represented – in the long term - a too powerful instrument on management’s side in industrial relations. Furthermore, the fact that a competitor in the same industry could pay non-union wages and therefore enjoy a competitive advantage constituted a too great incentive to bust organized labour altogether. None of this could apply to Italy; in this country employers had fewer motives to resist unions, as they had to offer the minimal contract conditions anyway. They would want to do so when, as in the case of FIAT, they could offer a surplus to reward workers’ productivity and did not wish to negotiate the allocation of this bonus with the unions. For instance, for FIAT the possibility of paying above the national metalworking contract represented a key element of its politics of productivity. Otherwise, as in the case of many smaller firms, managers could be anti-union champions if they did not wish anyone to check upon the actual application of collective agreements. In this case they also often declined to join Confindustria. In conclusion, in the 1950s and 1960s, even in the absence of a systematic labour code, a legal framework heavily influenced Italian industrial relations.

A comprehensive labour law, the \textit{Statuto dei lavoratori}, was enacted only in 1970, after the strike wave of the \textit{Autunno Caldo} urged the regulation of the sector. The \textit{Statuto} contained clauses that protected union rights in the workplace and several provisions that extended the rights of workers and limited the employers’ arbitrary power to remove and discipline workers. Therefore, while it established prerogatives that American unionism had long enjoyed, such as the right of union stewards to paid leave, the \textit{Statuto} also introduced measures that related directly to the condition of work on the shop floor - a sphere that in the States had instead been subject to the periodical negotiation, and balance of power, between unions and manufacturers. The act also contained a general amnesty for all the offences connected with the industrial actions of the past two years. Both measures, as the radical leftist groups soon recognised, aimed at institutionalising the type of spontaneous militancy that the \textit{Autunno Caldo} had generated. One other important feature of the law was the prohibition for the employer to dismiss a worker without a “just cause”. This clause was meant to protect union

\textsuperscript{124} Giugni, \textit{Diritto Sindacale...cit.}, 125-133.
activists from the political repression they encountered in the 1950s. However, since it made reprisal more difficult, it resulted also in giving much more confidence and protection to negotiators at shop floor level.\textsuperscript{125}

The Statuto definitely transformed collective bargaining by empowering unions both at national and at firm level. In the plants, unions substituted delegati, delegates, and consigli di fabbrica, factory councils, which functioned as bargaining institutions, to the obsolete Commissione. During the 1970s, national agreements were more likely to reflect the contents of contracts at firm level rather than the other way around. For instance, the inquadramento unico - equal benefits for blue and white collar staff - written in 1971 into FIAT contract was then inscribed in the 1973 national metalworkers’ contract.\textsuperscript{126} In the decade to follow organized labour shifted from the highly centralized and partisan unionism that had characterised the previous twenty years to more autonomous factory-level organizations in a legal framework that encouraged workplace bargaining.

These few comments demonstrate that, although labour laws and government regulation often reflect the balance of power relations in the productive system (as a “superstructure”), they, in turn, are powerful forces in determining options open to workers, unions, and employers even at shop floor level. In the long term, the contrast between the American closed shop and the Italian system of pluralistic representation in the plant explains many of the structural characteristics of organized labour as well as the industrial geography of these two countries. Likewise the system of the erga omnes law and the protections offered by the Statuto allowed Italian unions to concentrate on bargaining shop floor issues even when, in the 1970s, the industrial productive system began to decline. In contrast, American organized labour needed to carry out effective organizing drives to compensate for membership losses. But this, in the legal framework provided by the Taft-Hartley act, could have been done only through a tremendous effort to mobilize the working class. As we shall see in the case of the UAW, American unions did just the opposite.

This chapter has covered the methodological problems related to the comparison between Detroit and Turin as well as a number of interconnected variables


\textsuperscript{126} Giugni, Diritto Sindacale...cit., 166.
at world-system, national, and local level that concern this project. One would miss the larger significance of the empirical research in the following chapters without this larger frame of reference. This chapter has also touched on several historiographic issues that will be dealt with in the rest of the thesis. The transformation of industrial relations and the production technology during the Cold War decades, the experience of marginalisation of the labour force attracted in the motor cities, the origins and the development of radical groups with revolutionary aims, all relate to the central aim of this thesis, that is, to investigate the last cycle of workers’ struggles during Fordism. The following chapters look into the preconditions, the protagonists, and the outcomes of this struggle in two cities that were to a great extent transformed by it.
Chapter Two:
Under the Imperative of Production:
Industrial Relations in Detroit and Turin
1947-1966

After the Second World War, the automobile became the “supreme creation of an era”, the manufactured product leading economic growth in the western world. The automotive industry employed cutting-edge technologies, continuously increased its productivity, yielded one of the highest rates of profit in manufacturing, and delivered high wages to its workers. Because the automobile necessitated a complex network of services and infrastructures as well as a number of raw materials, it transformed the economy of nation states that produced it. Car manufacturing, directly or indirectly, affected the lives of millions of working people. In the second half of the twentieth century, the automobile led consumer demand in capitalist economies and represented the most important symbol of renewed prosperity in the West.

In the US, the reconversion to civilian activities after the Second World War raised the spectre of the Depression as workers were temporarily laid off, and some analysts forecast a drop in consumer demand. However, these fears soon evaporated. During the Cold War, the expanding US economy offered new possibilities for Americans to raise their standard of living, and Detroit, the hub of the automobile industry, was at the centre of this affluence. The city’s economy boasted wages for industrial workers far higher than the national average, thereby attracting legions of migrants, especially from the South. However, the 1940s represented the last decade of

I take this definition from Roland Barthes, “The New Citroen” in Mythologies (first ed Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1957; English trans. London: Vintage, 1993), 88 where he discusses the semiotics of the automobile: “I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as purely magical objects”.

unfettered growth for the motor city. Already in the mid-1950s, there was a trend among auto manufacturers to build new plants outside city boundaries. This tendency ran in parallel with the growth of suburbs — sanctuaries of race and class homogeneity, where returning GIs took advantage of favourable federal legislation to buy single-family houses. Together, the two phenomena caused a gradual economic and population decline in the central area. By the 1980s, the once prosperous metropolis had become one of the most troubled areas in the country, and the symbol of America’s urban crisis.  

In Turin, the main automobile plants survived the destruction of war. FIAT retained most of its production facilities thanks to co-operation between workers and managers in hiding machinery from the retreating German troops. In comparison to the one in America, the automobile industry in Italy was still backward, as it produced large and medium-sized cars mainly for the élite of society. In the late 1940s, FIAT manager Vittorio Valletta proceeded to reorganise the production process to cater for the mass market. The political clout that FIAT enjoyed at a national level and its financial connections abroad allowed the company to secure a large share of the European Recovery Program funds, with which it bought up-to-date machinery from the US. The 1950s in Turin saw a big expansion of FIAT, as the automobile became a product manufactured for the masses.

But Detroit and Turin were also at the heart of a strong union movement. The reorganization of automobile production raised a question of what was to be the relation between labour and capital in the most strategically important sector of the economy. In the years after the end of the conflict prospects for the labour movement looked good. In Detroit, the UAW counted on the solid support of its membership and was determined to play an important role in shaping social policy at local and national levels. In Turin, the Communists who led the resistance took control of FIAT's operations through the appointment of a CEO from the partisan ranks. They soon allowed Valletta to return to the plants, but in co-management with so-called work councils representing the working class. At a national level, they participated in the first anti-Fascist government.

In both cases, the Truman Doctrine and the escalation of the Cold War in 1947 coincided with a backlash against labour. In Detroit, the enactment of the Taft-Hartley

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Act put the labour movement and the UAW on the defensive. Much of the social program of the union looked unattainable in the conservative climate that had befallen the country. After a landmark contract with General Motors, industrial relations in the automobile industry consolidated into a pattern of collective bargaining devoid of social reformism, but which promised wage rise in proportion with the companies’ growth in productivity. In Turin, FIAT used Cold War rhetoric to red-bait, the Communist union, FIOM-CGIL, which was the main obstacle in Valletta’s plan to raise productivity. Valletta hoped to achieve this goal through intensely paced work practices and a re-organization of production that was totally committed to Fordism. On the other hand, FIAT encouraged other unions at FIAT, FIM-CISL, UILM, and, later, SIDA, to accommodate these changes by entering into agreements that offered workers high wages, bonuses linked to productivity, and limited welfare benefits.

This chapter looks at how, in two different contexts, employers and unions refashioned industrial relations in the auto industry in a way that (temporarily) defused challenges from the shop floor. The comparative perspective casts a fresh look on fixed historiographic assumptions. In the US, (see chapter one) the UAW was at the centre of an interpretation of industrial relations that implicitly considered the “accord”, however flimsy, between corporations and industrial unions to be the result of uniquely American circumstances: the resurgence of corporate power during the Second World War; the centralization of union bureaucracy; the purge of leftists in an increasingly conservative climate; a business unionism based on economic expansion and growth in productivity. These features seemed also to shape industrial relations in Turin, at least in that particular historical moment, and therefore are not unique to the American case. It is notable that, when one looks at the micro scale of plants such as Dodge Main in Detroit and Mirafiori in Turin, one can observe that this process actually took place despite sustained resistance from workers. For several years during the first decade after the war, workers challenged managers’ “politics of productivity” in defence of shop floor bargaining, without the two sides being able to foretell the outcome of this struggle.

One could understand little of the similarities and differences between such diverse countries as Italy and the US without combining a transnational perspective.

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130 Dubofsky, _The State and Labor..._ cit.
with the comparative one. On both sides of the Atlantic, decisions about the production technology and firms’ development strategies affected industrial relations and the very balance of power on the shop floor. The Turinese automotive company and, on the opposite side, a number of non-Communist union leaders, both looked at the ‘American model’ as a source of inspiration to achieve the prosperity and social stability that the Cold War choice of the western side had promised. The Marshall Plan constituted first of all a powerful ideological tool that legitimised the efforts of the Italian managers who sought to introduce sweeping technological modernization and of the laborites who wanted to share the fruits of the advancement in productivity. ‘Automation’ — as it was called — was as much part of the politics of productivity as non-antagonistic labour relations. However, automated machines, systematic management methods, and the American model of industrial relations were not necessarily mutually complementary. Attempts by the SIDA union to transfer a firm-centred bargaining approach to FIAT, while depoliticising industrial relations, at first looked promising, but eventually ended up in failure. Yet, the story of this attempt enriches our understanding of events at FIAT in the 1950s, a period long identified with paternalistic repression and a lack of union dynamism.

Walter Reuther, the UAW, and the “liberal consensus”.

In the US, the end of the Second World War meant the lift of the no-strike pledge that unions had underwritten to sustain the wartime production effort. The early post-war years witnessed a wave of strikes second only to that of 1919-20. Thousands of strikes occurred, not only in the automobile, steel, electrical, and coal sectors, but also in shipbuilding, telephone, railways, timber, and other industries. Industrial workers comprised over two-thirds of the strikers. The longest confrontation, and a crucial one for the fate of American labour was the General Motors (GM) strike led by Walter Reuther of the UAW in Detroit. This strike must be interpreted in the framework of the reconstruction of American political economy that occurred after the period from the mid-1930s until the end of the war, when the government had regulated the economy through the War Labor Board and the Office and Price Administration. On the one hand, auto manufacturers wanted to return to the predominant position of leadership in the economy that they had enjoyed before the Great Depression. On the other hand, the more ambitious liberals in the labour movement, like Reuther, favoured a prolongation of government intervention to create a social democracy in America. The UAW and the CIO envisaged that they would be the legitimate representatives of
industrial workers in a tripartite regulation of the economy - government, manufacturers, and unions.

The GM strike lasted 113 days and shut all the company’s plants. Most were concentrated in Detroit, Flint, Toledo, and Cleveland. The UAW demanded a 30 per cent wage increase without a rise in the price of cars. Reuther claimed that, thanks to the rise in productivity during the war, GM had the ability to pay, and provocatively asked the company to open its books to a panel of government experts to show otherwise. Reuther argued that only a redistribution of income could forestall another depression by sustaining consumers’ spending. If wage hikes were passed on to consumers they would undermine sustained growth. He called on the government to maintain price controls and living standards for the working-class. Truman, however, was not going to assume such a role. By not giving full support to the UAW, Truman encouraged GM to resist the kind of social ambitions that Reuther had nurtured during the war. GM manager Wilson, on behalf of the entire business community, upheld the principle that unions should not intrude in management matters such as prices, profits, or organization of work. Therefore, the GM strike was essentially about what sphere organised labour would occupy in the post war period. Eventually, the UAW’s position was undermined by the settlements agreed by the United Steel Workers and United Electrical Workers – (the latter held a strike against the same employer, which was settled with a pay rise of 18.5 cents an hour). With little space for manoeuvring, Reuther had no alternative but to accept these conditions.

Although the settlement between UAW and GM did not deliver the expected wage increase to autoworkers, it did have an effect on internal UAW politics. Reuther’s dynamic leadership during the struggle enhanced his popularity with the rank-and-file. "Reuther was a big hero," admitted an old opponent several years later. "Everybody was a Reutherite in 1946." Formerly responsible for the GM department of the Union, Reuther defeated incumbent President R.J. Thomas by a small margin just two weeks after the end of the GM strike in March 1946. In the next year and a half, Reuther completely altered the balance of power in the union and transformed a thin


135 Jack Palmer as quoted in Lichtenstein, The Most Dangerous...cit., 233.
victory margin into a tight control of the union machine. Like other successful unions throughout the post-war period, Reuther centralised UAW management and heightened international staff powers at the expense of the Locals autonomy.  

The election of Walter Reuther marked the passage of the initiative to anti-Communists, not only inside the UAW, but also in the labour movement as a whole. However, Communists still played a major role in the UAW coalition opposing Reuther. After his election to the presidency, Communists scored a point when R.J Thomas, Richard Leonard, and George Addes, who supported the Communists' program, were elected to the executive board. The Thomas-Leonard-Addes coalition counted on a number of regional directors, but the presidency gave Reuther a secure base from which to neutralize his opponents. He strategically obtained posts for members of his faction in the departments of publicity, education, and fair practices, which were influential on the political attitudes of UAW members. Furthermore, in the climate of increasing hostility with the Soviet Union, the Communist backing of the Thomas-Leonard-Addes coalition served to alienate many of their allies. Many Local leaders swung to Reuther's side because he appeared a winner in the new political climate. At the 1947 UAW convention the oppositional caucus disintegrated, and a new staunchly Reutherite executive board was installed.  

The onset of the Cold War and the strike wave after VJ-day contributed to an anti-labour conservatism that gave the Republicans victory in the elections of 1946. For the Republicans, repeated strikes exposed the inadequacies of the existing labour legislation, which gave "monopolistic" power to unions. Employers too waited for a chance to reform the Wagner Act. Such sentiments resulted in the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act. The first major political attack to the New Deal political order, the Act marked a new era in labour law. The Act sought to restrict unions' influence at a political level and to thwart inter-union solidarity by banning sympathy strikes, supportive boycotts, and campaign contributions. It complicated the procedure for the union shop and, most importantly, for the future of organized labour, allowed states to bypass Federal Law and ban the union shop. This provision in particular nullified "Operation Dixie", the CIO campaign to unionise the South. Drafted under strong pressures from manufacturers, the Act also banned the short-lived but successful foreman union. Finally, the new law required all union office-holders to sign affidavits affirming they were not members of the Communist Party. Any union whose officers

137 Ibid., 248-270; Renshaw, American Labour...cit., 100-114.
refused to sign affidavits would lose the protection provided by the Wagner Act and access to the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) mechanism.\textsuperscript{138}

The anti-Communist clause played into Reuther’s hands during the 1947 convention, but the UAW President vigorously opposed the law, as did other labour leaders. He called Taft-Hartley “a vicious piece of Fascist legislation”.\textsuperscript{139} On 24 April, 1947, the CIO mounted a massive demonstration in Detroit against the law, and called on workers in the whole Detroit-area for support. Reuther sent telegrams to the UAW Locals instructing them to convene in Cadillac Square. By this time, however, as historian Nelson Lichtenstein has argued, collective bargaining had already restricted the UAW President’s vision of industrial relations. General Motors retaliated by disciplining four hundred workers and firing the Fleetwood Local 15 president for having walked off the job on the day of the demonstration—an action that GM claimed was in violation of the contract that prohibited wildcats or stoppages. Reuther however, would not give in to pressures to strike against the retaliation. He managed to reduce some layoffs through negotiations, but GM set an influential precedent when it prompted Reuther’s pledge that the UAW would never again engage in a political strike.\textsuperscript{140}

By 1950, unions such as the UAW had completed their trajectory from catalysts of mass movements to pillars of the social order based on the ‘liberal consensus’. The UAW had definitely abandoned more radical aims in order to co-manage a capitalistic economy based on the assumption of constant growth in the auto industry and a national prosperity underpinned by the Cold War ‘military-industrial complex’. The 1950 UAW-GM contract has traditionally been regarded as the most significant example of this trend. The contract included a 125 dollar-a-month pension and a Cost Of Living Allowance (COLA) linked to inflation. Most remarkably, the contract ran for an unprecedented length of five years. The press hailed the agreement as the “Treaty of Detroit” and its significance was compared to that of Ford’s five-dollar day. Reuther boasted that the contract was “the most significant development in labour relations

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{139} As quoted in Lichtenstein, \textit{The Most Dangerous...} cit., 266;
  \item \textsuperscript{140} ibid., 268; John Anderson, “How the Left was defeated by Walter Reuther and His Allies in Local 15”, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs (ALUA) Vertical Files, John Anderson folder.
\end{itemize}
since the mass production industries were organised. The UAW proved that organized labour was able to provide a high standard of living for the working class, without impeding manufacturers' growth. Indeed, as with previous UAW-GM contracts, the "Treaty of Detroit", was a trendsetter not only in the auto industry, but also in the whole manufacturing sector. However, the contract also marked the end of the union's effort to intervene in the management of the industry—the four-year-old request to "open the books" seemed four decades away from being met— and, by accepting company-based health insurance, testified the end of the liberal hope for expansion of the welfare state.

In the 1950s, collective bargaining in the auto industry settled into a pattern. The UAW enjoyed a great capacity to mobilize its members and Reuther sat with confidence at the bargaining table with the largest corporations of the world. The lack of a strong oppositional current inside the union also meant that Reuther was a reliable partner for manufacturers in the negotiations. Shop floor activists could not exert the leverage they had had when two factions were competing for their allegiance. Militant stewards could therefore be more easily isolated or co-opted. At each round of negotiations, Reuther and his collaborators "sold" the contract proposal to the rank-and-file, gathered solicitations from below, but then retained or discarded issues according to the agenda set by the International Executive Board. Contracts were finally submitted again to the membership before ratification. With Reuther in control of the key communications department, rank-and-file approval was easily obtained. Routinised collective bargaining, however, also stemmed from the necessity to confront a powerful antagonist in a conservative political climate. As Kevin Boyle has argued, although it is tempting to blame Reuther, if the UAW chose to work within the constraints of liberal politics it was because a progressive political agenda would have been difficult to advance. Eventually, only the failure of this attempt makes us wonder whether it would have been more just to chose the difficult path of confrontation.

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141 Reuther's remark quoted in Lichtenstein, The Most Dangerous Man...cit., 280;
142 The definition of "Treaty of Detroit" is of Daniel Bell see "The Treaty of Detroit" Fortune (July, 1950) there he comments: "GM may have paid a billion for peace but it got a bargain. GM has regained control over one of the crucial management functions [...] long range scheduling of production, model changes, and tool and plant investment"; on labour and the lost campaign for universal health insurance legislation see Alan Derickson, "Health Security for All? Social Unionism and Universal Health Insurance, 1935-1958" Journal of American History 80:4 (1994), 1333-1356.
143 For the factional struggle inside the UAW see Martin Halpern, The UAW and the Cold War (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).
144 See Kevin Boyle, The UAW and the Heyday of Liberalism 1945-1968...cit.
A Contested Terrain: Shop Floor Politics at Chrysler in the 1950s.

The contrast between General Motors and Chrysler is instructive. Already before and during the war, shop stewards at Chrysler exercised, comparatively, much more power in shop floor bargaining than did their counterparts at GM. This power was due, not to a minor managerial aversion to unions at Chrysler, but to its inferior share of the market and its structure of production, which gave workers in one particular plant, Hamtramck Dodge Main, a disproportionate amount of power to disrupt the flow of production. In May 1943, for instance, UAW Chrysler stewards called a strike for a managers' violation of a seniority rule at Dodge Main and shut down the plant for four days until the War Labor Board intervened to solve the dispute. Several factors, but in primis workers' militancy, made Chrysler more vulnerable to prolonged strike actions and therefore prone to confront a costly modernization of its labour relations, in the way that GM did in 1946 when it endured a four-month strike.145

At Chrysler, several other factors worked to delay the implementation of the type of collective bargaining described until the end of the 1950s. During this decade, productivity at Chrysler lagged behind that of its two main competitors: Ford and GM. Chrysler employed 30 per cent more workers than Ford to produce the same number of cars. On the other hand, Chrysler employed less salaried staff, with the consequence that, comparatively, its planning and sales department was understaffed.146 Furthermore, at Dodge Main a crucial strata of union activists helped to foster shop floor bargaining long after this type of activity had ceased at Ford and GM. These were the ‘blue button’ stewards. Their original role was to collect dues, but they also functioned as communicators of strike instructions and interpreters of the rank-and-file mood for years after the UAW-Chrysler contract introduced the check-off system in 1950. A worker remembered: “The blue buttons were bargaining all the time. If there was a grievance they would get the chief steward or, since you could never find the chief steward, in the interim they’d act as steward”. In the course of the 1950s, however, the insistence of the blue button stewards to bargain with foremen threatened

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146 Data on the composition of Chrysler, Ford, and GM is held in Box 79, UAW Research Department Collection, ALUA; note that Chrysler probably had already in 1955 a higher percentage of workers concentrated in Detroit – 81 per cent according to the source above – which shows that it lagged behind Ford and GM in decentralization.
to erode the popularity of the chief stewards who, in the elections often found themselves standing against former blue buttons. Gradually, as the check-off system was introduced, chief stewards stopped appointing new blue button stewards so as to avoid creating potential rivals.\(^{147}\)

One remarkable aspect of labour relations at Chrysler was that, although the 1950 contract made wildcat strikes illegal, as at Ford and GM, they continued to occur regularly. 1,434 unauthorised strikes took place between 1946 and 1956. How can we explain this peculiarity? Why did the UAW-company relationship not work at Chrysler in this period as it did at Ford and GM? It is worth here providing some examples of workers’ militancy on the shop floor in those years. Pace of production was the main issue. Workers would regulate their production output and gain extra relief through the practice of “doubling-up” with another worker or through concerted slowdowns under the hidden direction of the steward. Edie Fox remembered: “the standards were pretty much decided by the workers on the job. We would decide how much we could do. [...] We didn’t have any relief – and we wanted it that way. We made our own relief. Without jeopardizing my job I could make fifteen minutes for myself every hour. The foremen knew what was going on. But there was time to do good quality work.”\(^{148}\)

The determination of workers to strike in opposition to management attempts to speed up production was the necessary premise to secure an amount of control on the shop floor. When, in December 1949, management disciplined three workers for production below the set rate established by the time study, in Department 107, the Dodge Main transmission unit, the whole unit walked out in support. In a contest of strength between management and the unit that lasted for two months, it was management who finally backed down by setting lower production rates.\(^{149}\)

Chrysler’s employment policies surely contributed to this situation by providing departments with enough manpower to meet production goals ahead of schedule. In addition to this, General Foremen and Superintendents enjoyed relative autonomy from higher management. Compared to Ford and GM Chrysler had not infringed much on the prerogative of general managers to run departments as they saw fit, as long as

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\(^{147}\) See the Dodge Main News – the newsletter of UAW Local 3 at Dodge Main – 20 and 21 June 1956 The quote is from an interview with Edie Fox, steward at Dodge Main in Jefferys, Management and Managed... cit., 110-111; for the rivalry with chief stewards see Steve Babson, Working Detroit: the making of a union town (Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 1986), 202


\(^{149}\) For this episodes see Detroit Times, 21 December 1949; Dodge Main News, 28 January 1950.
production was not interrupted. In short, Chrysler was still characterised by production
procedures that did not discourage shop floor activity.\textsuperscript{150}

Another difference of Chrysler management was its suspicion of even a
minimal UAW intervention in the sphere managerial decisions. Chief executive K.T.
Keller had inherited his position in 1935 from Walter Chrysler himself, and he still ran
the company like a family business. As I have mentioned, he did not provide the
company with a rational management structure. Important departments such as
engineering, production, and finance, ran almost independently, and Keller would not
allow anyone but himself to intervene. In the same way, Keller had not been capable of
adapting the company’s approach to labour relations to the post-war situation as GM
had done.\textsuperscript{151} The 1950 UAW strike on pensions represented one case in point. Reuther
demanded that Chrysler paid ten cents an hour per worker into a properly administered
pension fund. The pension should have increased at the same rate as federal social
security benefits. He did not ask for a union-administered fund as United Mine
Workers’ president John Lewis had done for the coal miners, but instead insisted that
the fund be administered in accordance with sound actuarial criteria, and that the
company provided actuarial data to the union. Although Keller was not opposed to the
pension plan, he resented union intervention in what he considered to be a strictly
managerial prerogative. Of course, from a financial point of view, the union demand
also meant that millions of dollars would be committed to low-risk and low-return
investments. Chrysler workers went on a 104-day strike over this issue. The company
lost 500 000 cars and a substantial share of the market to Ford before reaching a
compromise with the equally exhausted UAW: the pension scheme was to be set in
accordance with actuarial criteria as the union had asked, but without the automatic
increases demanded. When, in the following month, GM with the “Treaty of Detroit”,
and then Ford conceded to the UAW on actuarial matters with little discussion, the
extent of Chrysler management’s misjudgement on that issue became clear. Years later,
Bob Condor, a member of the company’s executive board, claimed that Keller and other
top officials thought in that occasion that Reuther planned “to use that fund to
somehow take over the corporation.” \textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{150} There is no comprehensive study about Chrysler managerial practices in the 1950s. I take
these information from: Doron P. Levin, \textit{Behind the Wheel at Chrysler: The Iacocca Legacy}
\textsuperscript{151} On Keller see \textit{ibid.}, 12.
\textsuperscript{152} On the strike Jefferys, 105 and 115-116; “The Auto Industry’s Road ahead” \textit{Fortune}, June,
1950; \textit{Dodge Main News} 18 February 1950; also Walter Ruch “100 days Chrysler strike ends in
a bitter mood of futility” \textit{New York Times}, 1 May 1950; quote from ALUA, UAW Oral History
Collection, Douglas Fraser Oral History, p.46.
This debacle at Chrysler prompted a committed, but slow, revision of its management style. Keller resigned his place to a new president, L.L. Colbert, who fearing further confrontation with the UAW, rushed to put Chrysler’s labour relations in line with those of its two competitors. From then on, the company could enlist the assistance of the International UAW in rationalizing managerial control on labour productivity. Colbert realised that he needed the International union to oppose unauthorised strikes in order to overcome the tradition of shop floor bargaining that was so prevalent at the plants, especially at Dodge Main. He also had to overcome the fierce hostility to the union of some members of the executive board, such as Keller and his supporters.\footnote{The New Man at Chrysler" Business Week, n.1098, 10 Oct (1950); for the reorganization after the strike see also Jefferys, Management and the Managed… cit., 117

The aim of management are reported in Dodge Main News 2 June 1951; note the reports coming from the Local to the International: “Supervision in some departments are asking people for production increases s high as 150 per cent with the threat that if they do not produce, other action will be taken.” ALUA, Reuther Collection, box 229, folder 3, Local 3 to Walter Reuther (14 June 1951); Detroit News, 19 July 1951; in the same folder the view from management side in a letter from Chrysler M.C. Patterson to Local 3 officer Frank Lipp: “To the best of our knowledge there are no speed-ups in our trim department. It has been our belief for a long time that there is an organized slowdown on many of our operations, and, furthermore, that our present trouble is attributable to our employees’ failure to follow our contract, which calls for an orderly and peaceful method for resolving rates and production problems.”

UAW central officers were called international because membership included also Canadian workers.}

The managerial offensive against shop floor militancy started in earnest in 1951, after an announcement that management would take "drastic" action against wildcat strikes. An episode from July of this year showed how both Chrysler and the International union could have an interest in curbing unauthorised strike actions: the dispute was, as usual, over production standards, this time in the trim department. Chrysler had set a higher output rate for workers on the seat cushion line, and when two workers did not reach the new output, the company disciplined them.\footnote{The New Man at Chrysler” Business Week, n.1098, 10 Oct (1950); for the reorganization after the strike see also Jefferys, Management and the Managed… cit., 117

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Following tradition, the entire trim department walked out, formed a picket line, and shut down the whole plant the following day. In a mass meeting, Local 3 president Art Grudzen, and International representatives Art Hughes and Harold Julian, convinced workers to end the strike and leave the issue to the grievance procedure.\footnote{The N ew Man at Chrysler” Business Week, n.1098, 10 Oct (1950); for the reorganization after the strike see also Jefferys, Management and the Managed… cit., 117

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UAW central officers were called international because membership included also Canadian workers.} A few days later, Chrysler fired the two workers for not working to the new standard. Clearly, management was not after the two workers, but was taking advantage of International UAW co-operation to alter the balance of power on the shop floor. At this point, Jimmy Solomon, the plant committee chairman and a key militant figure in the union at Dodge Main, called a mass meeting to decide how to respond to the company. This was not the procedure designed by the contract, which aimed to resolve problem through the grievance
system. Knowing that Solomon was not going to be supported by the International union, Chrysler fired Solomon too. When Local 3 requested a strike action, Reuther replied by spelling out the doctrine that regulated post-war industrial relations: "[strike] authorization by the International Union is possible only if the provisions of both the contract and the constitution are complied with [...] the most serious handicap in attempting to obtain the reinstatement of Brother Solomon was the fact that no written grievance had been filled." By firing Solomon, Chrysler management had scored an important point, and it sent the message that even well known figures could be dispensed of easily because unauthorised strike action was discouraged by the international.156

Of course, Chrysler's drive to tight production standards was not confined to Dodge Main. The speed up also affected smaller plants in Detroit and the Midwest, giving the impression of an overall well-planned strategy. In July 1951, representatives of Chrysler Locals convened to discuss their common problem: that "some higher-up in the union must have given the corporation the go ahead sign on the speed-up". In fact, just a few months before this meeting, the UAW regional office had prompted Local 3 executive board to rescind any action in protest to the speed-ups, by threatening that an administrator be placed over the local.157

Meanwhile, Chrysler's share of the market continued to fall. The problem with the company was not only labour relations, but also low investments and a conservative product policy. Keller had, in fact, always refused to adapt design to the modern style for smaller cars. In 1954, Chrysler's sales reached an all-time low of 14 per cent of the market - a situation that forced Colbert to make some changes. Management consultants reported that Chrysler needed reform in almost every aspect, from design, to production, to distribution. In every sector, however, Colbert encountered entrenched resistance to change. He chose to concentrate on the only issue that could unite management: increasing managerial control on the shop floor. He ordered an exhaustive

156 On the strike see Detroit News 19 July 1951; Quote from ALUA, Reuther Collection, box 229, folder 3, Reuther to Local 3, 17 April 1952; Dodge Main News, 11 August 1951; Quite interestingly Solomon himself was later “co-opted” into the International bureaucracy.
157 Local 3, Executive Board Meeting, 12 July 1951, ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 40, folder 2; Local 3, Executive Board Meeting, 28 May 1951, ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 40, folder 1; Zetka, Market Dynamics, and Workplace Authority...cit., 162 argues that “The UAW International was especially hostile to militant shop floor demands from workers in firms hardest hit by intensifying competition. The International accepted managements’ utilitarian rationale for their speed-ups. In its view, working with tighter production standards in line with the most efficient producers in the industry was preferable to no jobs at all...The UAW International was reluctant to authorize the strike requests it received from its locals disadvantaged firms, although it began doing so in the late 1950s in response to intense pressure. Thus, the autoworkers most affected by the 1950s speedups could not turn to the UAW international for support in their struggles... They were forces to fight the International as well as management in pursuing militant courses of action".
time study in every department at Dodge Main, which was still the flagship of the company. This survey allowed a comprehensive view of possibilities to modify staff levels and pace of work in every department.\textsuperscript{158}

A major confrontation was ahead. Even more so as Pat Quinn, a non-Reutherite committed to the tradition of shop floor bargaining, succeeded as Local 3 president in 1956 to serve for the next two years. In September, Colbert circulated a letter among the workforce that amounted to a declaration of war: "We have developed new work standards. These standards are comparable to those of the same jobs at Ford and GM, and they are fair in themselves. Meeting these new work standards means only that each one of us will do, on his own job, as much work as the employees doing the same work at Ford or GM. It takes that much effort to give us the job security and the progress we are all shooting for".\textsuperscript{159} The fact that management expressed these intentions at the onset of the new model year 1957 and after an extensive time study testified of the seriousness of its intentions. The Local executive board intended to carry on in restricting output, but it did so without the endorsement of the International.

In 1957, 512 unauthorized stoppages took place in Chrysler plants. At Dodge Main, shop steward Edie Fox organized a rank-and-file caucus to fight on production issues. She worked in the trim department, which was experiencing one of the worst speed-ups. The caucus gained easy popularity among the Dodge Main workforce, and was assigned 22 of the 35 places for the local at the 1957 UAW Atlantic City convention. Reuther, as usual, dominated the convention, but the rank-and-file caucus stirred some trouble by attacking the proposal to increase union dues. They also protested a resolution that commended the International Executive Board for "unwavering adherence to the policy of authorising strikes where collective bargaining has proved futile". This was not the experience of Dodge Main workers. Edie Fox took the stage and stated that "we, the rank-and-file members of our Union, have demonstrated a willingness to fight back but we are being discouraged in our effort by our international leadership". Another worker added in reference to the union dues, "we have had representation that does not amount to 50 cents". The challenge by this group was quickly defused, and Reuther concluded the debate by accusing the dissenters of wasting the Convention's time, adding: "they are not going to get away

\textsuperscript{158} Doron P. Levin, \textit{Behind the wheel at Chrysler}, 10; "Chrysler’s private depression" \textit{Fortune} June 1958;
\textsuperscript{159} Quote from “To the Men and Women of Chrysler Corporation”, 5 September, 1956; ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 40, folder 3; Jefferys, \textit{Management and the Managed}..., 130; \textit{Dodge Main News}, 27 October, 1956.
with untruths, because we are going to answer them." However, allegations made by the dissenters were confirmed by UAW's own figures; in February 1957, for instance, of twelve strike requests only one had been authorized by the International.

In 1958, Chrysler's car sales dropped to the lowest ever in the post-war period. The company laid off masses of workers and used the recession to undertake the final attack on the residual shop floor militancy. As a result, 1958 saw a record number of strikes, despite the workforce being 40 per cent smaller than the previous year. Management consciously escalated the confrontation on the issue of production standards at a moment when the market slump put them in a favourable position vis-à-vis the militants. Another propitious circumstance for Colbert was the expiration of the three-year contract with the UAW. Reuther did not intend to start negotiations for the new contract until an upturn in the market would give him more bargaining leverage. He also thought that if members temporarily worked without a contract they would better appreciate the meaning of union protection. He remarked "It'll make members aware of a lot of things that used to be automatic." However, in this case, Reuther's tactic played into the hands of Chrysler managers who, without a contract, had no restrictions in attacking established practices in the workplace. To Reuther's protests, managers reiterated the argument that had become a policy at Chrysler, "we are entitled to comparable work effort without bickering, strikes, stoppages, and slowdowns with which your members, often with the support of union officials in the plants, constantly plague Chrysler."

In January, Dodge Main closed for two weeks for retooling. At the re-opening, Colbert presented the "Man Assignments Programs", a new method to determine production rates that pushed the work ratio up to sixty seconds for every work minute. These new standards were prepared by an external team in the Industrial Engineers Department and therefore completely disregarded workers' customs on the shop floor.

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160 For the wildcat strikes see "Chronology of work stoppages 1937 - 1964", ALUA, Simon Alpert Collection, box 5, folder 1; ALUA, UAW, 16th Convention Proceedings April 7-12, 1957 pp.120-205; Quotes in ibid., 311 and 328.
161 Figures on strike requests are in the newsletter UAW-Spotlight March 1957, 134-135.
163 "Chrysler's private depression" Fortune, June 1958; For the escalation of speed up see Reuther to Colbert "Chrysler workers believe that the company is changing established and negotiated production standards that have been in effect in 1957 and in more than four months of the 1958 models in order to provoke Chrysler workers to close down the plants and precipitate the strike actions... [this serves] to make the workers scapegoats for Chrysler high inventories and low sales by sending them home early each day for allegedly not meeting proper production standards" In ALUA, Reuther Collection, box 50, folder 6; quote from John D. Leary to Walter Reuther, 13 May 1958, ALUA, Reuther Collection, box 6, folder 50.
A UAW document shows the extent of the re-organization, which increased the pace of work by up to 43 per cent.\textsuperscript{164}

In June, when the contract expired, Chrysler prohibited the collection of dues during working hours and suspended a twenty-year-old relief agreement that recognized the need for the body-in-white department workers to get seventy minutes relief a day. Chrysler also asked Chief Stewards to go back to work for six hours a day. These were provocative restrictions. Workers initially refused to comply with any of these changes, but this resistance was risky, especially with regard to the last change: it could provide the company with an excuse for mass dismissal of the stewards. Local 3 President Pat Quinn and the International representatives suggested that workers wait until the new contract to return to the old prerogatives, but management knew that by interrupting their practices, these customs became delegitimised.\textsuperscript{165}

Pat Quinn meanwhile, came to increasingly rely on Reuther to resolve the matter in national contract negotiations. But in the market conditions of that year, the agreement signed at Chrysler in September mirrored those signed with Ford and GM and did not tackle the problem of working conditions. Although Dodge Main workers approved the contract, they also voted to strike over production standards. Although the UAW International Executive Board ratified the strike, Chrysler management’s position was strengthened by the fact that the Board delayed or denied approval for other Chrysler plants that had requested authorization, and because, according to new union by-laws, a two-month delay was required between a vote and a strike. In December 1958, the two-week strike ended in failure, and in 1959, a new plant-wide agreement ratified the Man Assignment Program and the principle of union non-interference in decisions based on time studies.\textsuperscript{166}

In the following decade, strike level at Chrysler fell below that at GM, and shop floor activity conformed to that of the two other major auto corporations. Management had won a long struggle thanks to the indirect collusion of the International UAW.

\textsuperscript{164} For the Man assignments program see Dodge Main News, 18 January 1958; The table below measure the increased production output in units after the introduction of the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>1957 Production</th>
<th>Manpower</th>
<th>1958 Production</th>
<th>Manpower</th>
<th>Increase in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body in white</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>2384</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trim (day shift)</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>1650</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>1201</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Assembly:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept 122</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept 123</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Assembly</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ALUA, UAW Research Department Collection, box 79, 24 February 1958.

\textsuperscript{165} Dodge Main News 14 June 1958; ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 2, folder 5, Local 3 Executive Board minutes, 14 August 1958.

\textsuperscript{166} For the events leading to the strike vote see the Local 3 Executive Board minutes October and November 1958 in ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 2.
Thus, even before events in the 1960s showed the limits of collective bargaining, the flaws of Reuther’s strategy were immediately visible, especially at Chrysler, where workers’ control on the shop floor deteriorated. This story, however, also shows how the international union’s options were limited by the fact that similar changes had already been permitted at GM and Ford. One should not underestimate Management’s resolve to restore conditions of maximum productivity in a political and legislative setting that favoured their endeavour.  

Communists, Anti-Communists, Workers and Managers: Reconstruction and Development at FIAT.

After the period of Fascist corporatism between labour, capital, and the state, industrial relations at FIAT formally resumed in September 1943 with an agreement between the leader of FIOM, Bruno Buozzi, and one of the members of the FIAT board of directors, Giuseppe Mazzini, who was also the president of the Confindustria, the Italian association of manufacturers. The agreement instituted the body that was to be at the centre of Italian industrial relations until the upheaval of 1969: the commissione interna (internal commission). Elected by the workers, the commissione had informal bargaining powers at plant level and oversaw the application of national collective bargaining agreements. However, during most of the 1940s external events, such as the German military occupation, the problems of reconstruction, and the precarious political situation before the Cold War, profoundly conditioned labour-management relations in the largest Italian automotive firm.  

By contrast with events in the US, reconversion to civil production in Italy had both economic and political aspects. In 1945, the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN), the body overseeing the nation’s transition to a new form of state, prompted a purge of Fascist elements in bureaucratic hierarchies as well as those who, although not officially party members, had overtly collaborated with the regime. In Turin, the regional CLN accused the top FIAT leadership - including its founder Giovanni Agnelli and its CEO Vittorio Valletta of collusion with the regime. This accusation resulted in the temporary seizure of their personal and industrial properties. In their place, the CLN

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167 See Zetka, Market Dynamics...cit.
nominated a director from partisan ranks, Antonio Cavinato, who had formerly collaborated with FIAT management.169

There were two serious obstacles to the resumption of automobile production after the war. One was the general situation of the Italian economy. Like in other war-torn countries, the supply of basic elements such as steel and coal in Italy had been interrupted or was insufficient. The state of roads and railways remained poor and, more fundamentally, the government lacked the immediate financial resources to mend these problems. The second obstacle was the political expectations of partisans, returning soldiers, and prisoner of war.170 These groups believed that they held claim to a job in the free society they helped to build. In the plants, they aimed to undermine the discipline that had regimented workers during Fascist rule. For instance, historian Liliana Lanzardo noted that the purge at FIAT concentrated mostly on those in low and middle management who had been more overtly associated with the disciplinary practices of the regime. From the reversal of political forces, workers derived the power to get rid of the most authoritarian foremen. Lanzardo has argued that the purge at FIAT was a failure because it did not have an impact on the firm’s repressive apparatus. Quite the contrary, it took management almost ten years to reverse the advances made by workers in controlling the workplace during the immediate post war years.171

Manufacturers found themselves under pressure to cushion the social threat of mass unemployment, but the political necessity to provide an occupation for a multitude that expected security and democracy after the conflict ran against the rationality of the productive process. Plants were more likely to function as centres of assistance or of political recruitment for leftist groups than as units of production. Workers took advantage of the political shift in FIAT plants to choose their own pace of work, to use time for leisure, and even to ignore hours of work start and finish. "When I returned to Mirafiori in 1946", commented one worker, "I was struck by the loose discipline and by the carelessness of the foremen who were supposed to have it respected"172. In the last years of war, FIAT had hired a number of extra workers in order to shield them from deportation to German labour camps (because defence industries workers were exempt

169 Lorenzo Gianotti, Gli operai della Fiat hanno cento anni, (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 36-37; note that the choice of Cavinato was determined by the opposition of allied officials against a more leftist solution; see Piero Bairati, Valletta (Torino: UTET, 1983), 147; Valletta defined Cavinato as "competent".


171 Giulio Sapelli, Organizzazione, lavoro e innovazione industriale nell’Italia fra le due guerre (Torino: Rosenberg & Seller, 1978); Adriano Ballone, Uomini, fabbrica e potere (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1987), 170-175; Lanzardo, Classe operaia...cit., 120.

172 Quote from Interview to Bruno Sarto in Fondo Associazione Perseguitati Politici, n.22, Istituto Gramsci, Torino.
from deportation). However, at the end of the war, the CLN ordered a freeze on layoffs. With production hampered by several factors, FIAT became overstaffed. "For every employee working", lamented Valletta during his exile from management, to the then Governor of the Central Bank, Luigi Einaudi, "there are other two who are idle. It is impossible to lay superfluous workers off". Every month, the firm lost significant amounts of money because of its inoperative workforce, a situation that even Communist leader Santhià acknowledged when he remarked at a party assembly that, at FIAT "there [were] too many people doing nothing".  

In fact, Communists had as much interest in resuming production as FIAT shareholders did. Until mid-1947, at a national level the PCI was part of the governing anti-fascist coalition and it adopted the policy of reconstructing the nation while waiting for the crucial elections that would decide the character of the Italian state. At local level, this stance translated to a persistent call to production. One Turinese Communist leader remarked, "The foremost problem, the most urgent is the struggle to increase production. We have a sense of responsibility and we, who are used to seeing problems in realistic terms, maintain that production has to become the main issue". The consigli di gestione, that had 50 per cent of worker representation, were supposed to oversee and organize the collaboration between labour and capital to improve productivity. However, in practice, in every factory they were organized to implement the political and economic aims of the Communist Party. When prospects for nationalization of the car industry faded at government level, the PCI made it the duty of consigli at all Italian factories to promote an alternative production management style to that of the capitalists. The PCI hoped to use the consigli to achieve a "democratisation" of the economy.

In the 1970s, New Left historians interpreted the PCI's emphasis on production as an instance of 'collaboration' with capitalistic forces to buttress social and economic order. Liliana Lanzardo argued that the period from 1945-48 represented a missed opportunity for the labour movement to channel working class militancy towards the transformation of the relations of production. Instead, she asserts that Communists in the party and in the union lent a hand in restoring the political and economic structures of the capitalist state, in turn creating conditions that allowed repression of the leftist labour movement in the 1950s. Historians Giuseppe Bonazzi and Lucio Cafagna have

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also interpreted the Communist strategy in the postwar period - in particular during the Togliatti period - as one, which aimed to contain the potential disruption of industrial conflict on the workplace. However, the Communist ‘collaboration’ with FIAT in postwar productive efforts has to be seen within the context of an effective interruption of managerial authority in the workplace. Communists saw the plants as an arena to exercise their power and their ability to control the production process. Once Valletta returned to management, production ceased to be a priority for the party.  

After the purge of top management, Communist officers acquired great influence at FIAT. They directed the consigli di gestione as well as FIAT welfare institutions. They freely moved around the plants to collect dues, distribute leaflets, and give political talks. Communists also dominated the commissioni interne. Within these bodies, Social Democrats and Catholics were the minority. By the time political pressures from the national government and the allies had reinstated Valletta to the position of director in February 1946, the PCI counted 7,000 of the 16,000 workers as members at Mirafiori plant. Communists also formed the majority of the commissari di Reparto, informal shop stewards similar to the blue button stewards at Chrysler. Although not recognized by management, the commissari di Reparto were elected by the shop floor, collected union dues, and informally bargained with foremen, who were themselves highly skilled Communist workers.  

When Valletta returned to the head of operations, he found that Communist organizations in the plants were a strong obstacle to managerial control. He could not attack this opponent head on until the collaboration between capital and labour was endorsed at a national level. However, between 1946 and the summer of 1948, while showing the mask of a moderate, he established the basis to reassert full control over the firm’s operation. During this period, Valletta pursued full utilization of all manpower. Consider for instance, that in 1947, FIAT produced 28,490 cars with 58,000 workers, but the next year this figure grew to 46,795 cars with 52,000 workers. He slowly eroded the powers of the consigli di gestione and commissari di Reparto, who he considered to be obstructing the full use of productive capacities. In particular, he relegated the consigli to a mere consultative role, which eventually began to blur the line between counselling the management and representing the interest of workers. Valletta thought that representation of workers’ interests was best left to the

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176 Gianotti, Gli operai della Fiat...cit., 44-52.
commissione interna, without any intervention either from the consigli, or from the commissari dei reparto. As a result of productive reorganization, FIAT increased its production by 100 per cent in these two years, and reached pre-war levels of output. These achievements were made without any significant structural reorganization or technological change, as the models produced were the same as before the war.\textsuperscript{177}

During 1948, two events tipped the balance of power in favour of management at FIAT. In April, in the first elections for the Italian parliament, the Christian Democrats (DC) defeated the PCI. The growing international division in two blocs, the Marshall Plan, and the more or less overt American intervention heavily influenced the elections. The Christian Democrats won with an unexpected margin and became by far the nation’s most preferred party. The Communists actually increased the number of deputies in the parliament (from 106 in 1946 to 140 in 1948). However, the political meaning of the defeat was inescapable, and within an industrial relations context, it meant the end of the truce between capital and organized labour.\textsuperscript{178}

At national level, left wing parties were confined to the opposition (where they stayed for the duration of the Cold War), but at FIAT, Communists still dominated the union and held tremendous sway in the workforce. A demonstration of this strength occurred after the attempt on Togliatti’s life on 14 July, 1948. When the radio spread the news that two shots had wounded the charismatic leader of the PCI, partisan groups across the peninsula prepared for a new resistance against the government’s repression. The stoppage of workers in the main industrial complexes became a general strike, and Italy seemed on the verge of a civil war. In Turin, where the PCI enjoyed high popularity, neighbourhood groups disarmed the police and organized road blocks. At FIAT, workers occupied Mirafiori and denied management, Valletta included, permission to leave the premises—therefore \textit{de facto} kidnapping them. These effect of these events, however, owed much to the spontaneity of the workers’ reaction. The PCI leadership had in fact decided that there would be no “revolution”. The example of Greece demonstrated to Communist officers that a new partisan uprising could be self-defeating and could jeopardize the existence of the newly born democracy. Amidst the disappointed of the militant rank-and-file, Communist leadership ensured that the situation in the cities and in the factories quickly returned to one of normality.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{177} Figures of production in Archivio Storico Fiat, \textit{Fiat: le fasi della crescita. Tempi e cifre dello sviluppo aziendale} (Torino: Paravia, 1996); Lanzardo, \textit{Classe operaia...cit.} 202–207.
\textsuperscript{178} Mario Del Pero, “The United States and ‘Psychological Warfare’ in Italy, 1948-1955” \textit{Journal of American History} 87:1 (2001); see Paul Ginzborg, \textit{History...cit.}, 118-119.
\textsuperscript{179} On the attempt on Togliatti’s life: Walter Tobagi, \textit{La Rivoluzione Impossibile} (Milano, 1978); see Bairati, \textit{Valletta...cit.}, 234.
The general strike triggered the separation of the minority components from the CGIL. The Catholic component founded the *libera* CGIL - the 'free' CGIL - which one year later became the CISL (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*). Some Social Democrats and liberals founded what would later become the UIL (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*) - which, being a compound of different political positions, had a more ambiguous ideological standing, but vaguely, was centre-left. The Communists' electoral defeat and the division of the union movement along ideological lines set the context at FIAT for a massive reaction against the leftist militants, the full reassertion of managerial control over the shop floor, the development of a new system of industrial relations, and the reorganization of production — all parts of Valletta's envisaged plan of expansion for the company.  

Between 1948 and 1949, FIAT management's quest for control clashed with the resistance that workers, guided by the most skilled and "class conscious" among them, retained at the point of production. In this period, workers pursued higher wages through collective mobilization, and resisted any small sign of managerial authority over militants. Labour historians have traditionally referred to this period as *le grandi lotte*, the great struggles. During these months, a core of FIOM officers organized stoppages based on information provided by the consigli di gestione – who had now moved completely to the side of the union. The 'free' unions opposed these struggles, but at this time their leverage among workers in the plants was almost non-existent. FIOM displayed a wide range of strike tactics: 'non-collaboration', a kind of output self-restraint where workers would rigidly follow contract rules, thereby reeking havoc in the flow of production; and the 'checkerboard strike', in which departments stopped for a limited time in different moments, thus causing interruption longer than their actual strike. The organization of stoppages was so sophisticated that FIAT suspected the possible intervention of Soviet engineers in organising the strikes. But these tactics were rooted in the skilled workers' deep knowledge of the production process at FIAT, in a period when, because of the legacy of the Fascist 'autarky', Tayloristic procedure had been only partly introduced.  

After the failed attempt on Togliatti's life, the following general strike, and the intensification of the Cold War, a current of virulent anticommunism pervaded political discourse. The government, through the authoritarian Minister of the Interior Scelba, reinforced anti-riot police squads and reintroduced secret surveillance of left-wing

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groups and individuals. Ideological divisions within Italy were further intensified by the Korean War, the establishment of NATO, and the Americans tightening grip on security after the "loss" of China to Communism.\textsuperscript{182}

A number of historians have maintained that the clash of ideologies during the Cold War backfired in the factories, where it sparked repression of Communist unions. In fact, the American administrations of Truman and Eisenhower closely followed the development of anti-Communist unions in Italy. Through its Free Trade Union Committee, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) lavished funds on the Italian ‘free’ unions, and was a prominent force behind the 1949 split within the Italian labour movement. The CIO too joined the Cold War with its own CIA-funded program.\textsuperscript{183}

A document of the National Security Council (NSC 68) confirmed America’s worries about the Italian situation. Through diplomatic channels, the Americans reproached the Italian government for not sinking the PCI, despite years of financial help to do so. During the Korean War, the CIA and the Italian secret service built up counter-insurrectional organizations, such as the ‘Stay Behind’, which would operate in the case of Communist electoral victory. However, in 1955, Allen Dulles maintained that: "Large sums have been wasted in Italy without achieving any noticeable improvement on the weight of the Communists".\textsuperscript{184}

Historian Gian Giacomo Migone has argued that in the Turinese company, the balance of power at the point of production was "conditioned, sometimes determined" by the national and international Cold War context.\textsuperscript{185} He referred in particular to the pressure that the American Ambassador in Italy, Clara Booth Luce, exerted on Valletta to tear down the Communist presence within its plants during the Eisenhower administration, lest some military ‘offshore’ orders from the American government be

\begin{itemize}
\item For American intervention in Italian labour relations see Ted Morgan, \textit{A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster} (New York, 1999); Maria Eleonora Guasconi, \textit{L’altra faccia della medaglia. Guerra psicologica e diplomazia sindacale nelle relazioni Italia- Stati Uniti durante la prima fase della Guerra Fredda (1944-1955)} (Catanzaro: 1999); Anthony Carew, “The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA” \textit{Labor History} 39:1 (1998), 25-42; note that the AFL’s Free Trade Union Committee was disbanded in 1955; the CIO program was less important because of the beliefs that industrial unions might still be infiltrated by Communists after all.
\end{itemize}
cancelled. These pressures had long been believed to be only a propagandist tool of Valletta to lure workers to vote for the ‘democratic’ unions, and thus allegedly salvage FIAT clients. However, the publication in the 1970s of correspondence between Valletta and Luce showed that the American threats were real, and the American administration did indeed withdraw some military orders from other firms with a Communist workforce.\footnote{Del Pero, “The United States and the ‘Psychological Warfare’ in Italy...”, 1320-1321; on the NSC 68 see John L. Gaddis, \textit{Strategies of Containment: A critical appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy} (New York, 1982), 89-126.}

There is no doubt that Cold War politics played a role in shaping industrial relations at FIAT, as it did in the American case, but in both instances it is important to analyse how manufacturers made use of this rhetoric to pursue their fundamental project to control the production process. In America, in commanding the Communist purge from the labour movement through the Taft-Hartley Act, conservative forces were really after militant unionists rather than mere Communists. In both cases, motives for the repression of left-wing militancy were all within the world of production. In Turin, Valletta exemplified these motives in his famous distinction between "constructive" and "destructive" workers: the former being those who were willing to abide by the company’s plan of increasing productivity within a context of rigid hierarchical discipline; the latter being those who planned to continue resistance to this project through disruptive industrial conflict, as in the period of the \textit{grandi lotte}. In practice, this definition amounted to charging FIOM members and activists with being saboteurs of production.\footnote{For the distinction between \textit{costruttori} and \textit{distruttori} see Sergio Garavini, Emilio Pugno, \textit{Gli anni duri alla Fiat} (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), 3-12; This politics had therefore nothing to do with the fact that FIOM members of partisan experience might have hidden weapons within FIAT plants or with the fact that the Communist had taken up a political role during the political strikes of the 1950s - this is the opinion of Bairati in \textit{Valletta...cit.}, 239.}

Management’s backlash against FIOM started in 1949, after three months of a "checkerboard" strike that had frequently halted production (this period is called \textit{la lotta dei tre mesi} in the union literature). These actions demonstrated not only, as said above, a deep knowledge of the production process, but also showed evidence of workers' strict "discipline" and allegiance to the union’s instructions. Valletta's harsh response to these initiatives was to secure for the company, that discipline that the leftist organization commanded for itself.\footnote{Gianotti, \textit{Gli Operai della FIAT...}, 54-58.}

From 1949 onwards, management saw that national political conditions were appropriate to attack the privileges that militant shop stewards enjoyed in the plants. As a first step, it issued an order that prohibited, under threat of dismissal, stewards’
movements within the departments. The same penalty was to be applied in case of instigation to strike. At the same time the company instituted a production bonus (superpremio) that lured workers away from strikes. In the next six years, this offensive saw over 2,000 FIOM militants fired, with many others transferred to "confined" departments where they would be downgraded to low paid janitorial jobs. This latter form of reprisal was, possibly, even more humiliating to skilled FIOM members than a simple discharge, because it attacked the dignity of the "productive" workers—the very identity of the Communist militant. From management's point of view, it made sense to move troublemakers away from production departments.

As a corollary to these strict provisions about union activities in the plants, FIAT reorganized its supervisory and warden ranks. Management substituted wardens who had a partisan background with former policemen and carabinieri, and filled the top ranks with former army officials who had served during the Fascist regime. On taking office, they had to pledge, "not to belong now, nor in the future, to associations or parties whose activity is in disaccord with the nature of my duties." More important in breaking the pattern of shop floor bargaining, was the reorganization of the foremen ranks. As in the case of Ford after the war and of Chrysler in the 1950s, FIAT management realized that the gaining the allegiance of the "middle men" was the necessary prerequisite to proceed to a technological reorganization and increased productivity.

For this purpose, FIAT established the scuola allievi—a three year course that prepared foremen, engineers, and designers for the managerial stratum. Management treated the allievi, (the apprentices), with special attention because they were meant to become the cornerstone of the hierarchical structure and were supposed to be fully committed to the company. Giuseppe Gambino, an apprentice who later "betrayed" by

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189 In an executive board meeting Valletta remarked that “we have an opposition to the superpremio that tries to prevent workers to get interested in augmenting the production output. This comes from political disturbers (elementi perturbatori) and not, as it is normal, from the majority of workers who agrees to all kind of premio and therefore also to the superpremio” in Archivio Storico Fiat, Verbali del Consiglio di Amministrazione, 31 July, 1950.


joining a union, remembers the soldierly discipline that characterised life at the scuola. For instance, cadets were not allowed to put their hands in their pockets, unbutton their jackets, or raise their voice. These excesses prepared students for life in the plants, where they were asked to both exert and respect the principle of obedience to a superior. At the same time, FIAT offered the Allievi chances of career advancement and remuneration that were exceptionally good considering the economic climate of the 1950s. By ensuring that this social stratum acted as a terminal of managerial power, FIAT sent the Communist union an irrefutable sign of its renewed authority on the shop floor.  

From the minutes of management meetings with the Commissione Interna, it appears that the distance between FIAT and FIOM allowed no room for compromise. Valletta could no longer legitimise the presence of FIOM and its capacity to veto managerial decision at shop floor level, as happened during the grandi lotte. FIOM, on the other hand, could not endorse the restoration of a hierarchy that was exclusively loyal to the company. “Now that workers have achieved their own freedom”, maintained a FIOM commissario in a roundtable with top management, “they cannot tolerate a policy that […] intends to transform foremen in pawns of management […] foremen have to do their duty but must not be transformed in jailer. They must not become like foremen at Ford”. Valletta commented in the same meeting “You too must be loyal to the company. Everyone has to do his own duty and it’s not up to you to decide what’s the supervisors’ one”.  

Management had to mobilize important organizational resources to erode workers’ loyalty to the union with which they had an historical attachment. The aim of the management was to impede any contact between workers and FIOM activists. In order to achieve this, it attacked the established power of the shop stewards, commissari di reparto, and collettori (the same person could hold all three posts at the same time). Together with the implementation of internal rules restraining the activity of these individuals, FIAT aimed to create a climate of suspicion around these men. Famous instances of this strategy were the constant intimidation of FIOM sympathizers, and the searches at the plant gates to destroy militant literature or even the Communist paper L’Unità. At each election of the commissione interna, management employed several 

193 Interview with Giovanni Gambino, April 2001. He remembers also that this control continued outside the walls of the school. Students caught up behaving “inappropriately” outside school hours were promptly dismissed.
means to undermine the leftist union. Foremen usually stifled political discussion on the shop floor, and on the eve of the elections, workers in many departments were summoned up and reminded by the chief foremen that they “were there to work, and to build cars, not to do politics or to express an ideology”. Workers were therefore invited not to vote for “ideological” unions.

During the elections, workers’ families were sometimes flooded with leaflets and letters, often anonymous, which contained veiled threats. This literature appealed to the basic fears of male Piedmontese workers. In one instance, a southern unemployed farmhand with the allusive name of Gennariello Aspettante (literally: “waiting” Gennariello – a typical southern forename) invites his “comrades” to vote for FIOM, so that he and his friends, can replace them after FIAT dismisses them. Another letter was addressed to the workers’ female family members. “The outcome of next elections for the Commissione Interna” - wrote the anonymous hand - “will state the number of votes collected by FIOM, and show how many workers have not cared about their family before casting their ballot. Wives, mothers, daughters do all that you can to avoid your husband, son, or father being in that number!”

Under a cloaked identity, FIAT overtly exploited the anxiety of newly arrived migrants in the Turinese labour market. These letters all made reference to the privileged position enjoyed by autoworkers in the Italian economy, which in the early 1950s was precarious. By presenting FIOM as a choice against the family, impairing the capacity of the breadwinner, FIAT tickled that same masculine pride that, conversely, the Communist rhetoric of conflict and class struggle intentionally had also aroused in the male working class.

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196 This episode is related by Giovanni Gambino, whom I interviewed on April 2001, he added that he thought that this kind of biased lectures could actually push some workers to vote for FIOM.
197 This leaflet from an allegedly southern worker is worth quoting at length: “Dear comrade, we are a clique of farmhands from Venosa, Partinico, Comiso, and Barletta. The Party propaganda has particularly cared for us in the dramatic weeks of last winter. We know that you too, over there, are complaining because you are overexploited. We believe that the demand launched by comrade Bitossi at the 4th CGIL Congress “a thousand liras of daily wage” is still a far, though wonderful goal. So, we ask you: “You, comrade at FIAT who are tired of being overexploited, why don’t you leave your place to us and rest for a while?” Think twice comrade. Don’t say no – to us too the thankless duty of being overexploited at FIAT. Therefore vote for FIOM and leave us your job. On behalf of everybody I thank you. Gennariello Aspettante”. This and the other leaflets dated 1955 quoted are kept in Istituto Gramsci Torino, Fondo FIOM, busta 12/4.
198 “You, wife of a FIAT worker: ask you neighbour, your friend whose husband toils in another factory or company, how much does he bring home on payday. You’ll see that FIAT wages are above the others. Did you know that FIAT health insurance is the best of all? Did you know that
As a result of the combination of all these tactics, FIOM lost its pre-eminence within the commissione interna in the election of 1955. Two years earlier, the Communist union still commanded enough support to successfully mobilize 99 per cent of FIAT workers against the "swindle law", which could have allowed the Catholic government to acquire sweeping powers, even with a tiny electoral majority. In 1953, FIOM also received 63.9 per cent of votes for the Commissione interna. But in the 1955 elections, only one third of FIAT workers cast their ballot for FIOM, therefore giving the majority to the 'free' unions. As a consequence of this debacle, FIOM was to be excluded from every negotiation within the company for the next seven years. FIAT management was quite adamant that it interpreted the outcome of the ballot as a turning point in its industrial relations. “Today”, declared manager Giorgio Garino at the first round-table with the 'free' unions, “management is ever more persuaded that it doesn’t want anything to do with the friends of FIOM, [...] the possibility of improving the condition of workers and making the most of your work as commissari depends on continuing to isolate FIOM”. 199

The defeat of FIOM at FIAT had historical significance because FIOM and Communist leaders regarded the Turinese firm as the stronghold of the most advanced working class. Within the union, this event opened a period of reflection on the causes of the failure. While opponents charged FIOM with having alienated its supporters by staging too many political strikes, and neglecting the bread and butter issues; PCI leaders charged that FIOM cadres did not have enough political preparation to resist managerial repression. 200

FIOM’s analysis centred in particular on its own inability to fully comprehend the changing organization of production at FIAT and what that meant for the workers. The company’s great leaps in productivity between 1949 and 1955 translated into an increasing gap between wages of autoworkers and those of workers in most backwards Italian industrial sectors that were regulated by the national metalworking contract. As a result, the proportion of wages linked to FIAT ‘magnanimity’ grew considerably in this period, giving management a powerful means to accomplish its productivity goals. Faced with this situation, FIOM had continued with a broad union strategy, using FIAT

other companies do not offer summer camps or assistance to the sick?” ibid. These were rhetorical questions, because everybody knew the economical advantages of being employed at FIAT (see chapter three).

199 For election data of the Commissione Interna see Appendix A; I take Garino’s quote from the minutes of the Commissione- Management round table 16 May 1956 in 1944-1956 Le Relazioni Industriali alla Fiat nei verbali delle Commissioni Interni, 1637.
200 PCI analysis of the FIOM defeat is contained in Istruzioni e direttive di lavoro della Direzione del PCI a tutte le Federazioni (Roma, 1955) quoted by Gianotti, Gli operai della Fiat... 104; on the “swindle law”: G. Scarpari, La Democrazia Cristiana e le leggi eccezionali (1950-1953)(Milano, 1977); Carlo Rodotà, Storia della "Legge Traffia" (Roma, 1992).
workers as a vanguard force to lift the condition of the whole working class at national level. Following this analysis, the motto for FIOM's plan to recover its fortune at FIAT was "return to the factory", meaning that every union action should originate from a detailed knowledge of the workers' conditions at the point of production rather than from a priori goals of class politics. In a sense, therefore, FIOM's own analysis resembled that of its antagonists in pointing out the political mistakes of union actions.201

FIOM "self-criticism", as its leaders dubbed it, had two limits. First, although it acknowledged the lack of understanding of the real basis of FIAT expansion—due, not only to workers' exploitation, but also to a complex reorganization and innovation of production—it never overcame its model of unionism. FIOM continued to ascribe, to the detriment of a firm-centred approach, primary importance to the collective mobilization, organized from the centre, of all the workers in their category for the achievement of a wide social agenda and the expansion of workers' rights. FIOM saw local struggles for goals that would not advance the whole working class as inconsequential. Second, FIOM analysis failed to explain the fact that, although the electoral turnout for the union at FIAT remained high until 1953, its membership and the number of its activists had been in decline since 1949, which was well before both managerial repression and productive reorganization had begun in earnest. FIAT historian Giuseppe Berta pointed out that electoral collapse followed and not preceded its organisational collapse.202

In a comparative perspective with the US, we notice how in both cases the unions' aspiration to put a check on the profits of auto manufacturers (see Reuther's request to "open the books" and FIOM's attempt to co-manage through the consigli di gestione) and to pursue a social welfare agenda failed in the face of structural and political conditions that were operating throughout the western world. The pre-eminent position of the auto industry in the national economies gave the manufacturers leverage to provide higher wages for its workers, and therefore detach them from the collective destiny of the national working class. In both cases, manufacturers took advantage of two circumstances to curb workers' control at the point of production and union's influence at the company and national level. One was the politics of the Cold war, which legitimated the suppression of leftist militants, in many cases Communists, by charging them with being ideologically irreconcilable to democracy and the market economy. The other was the leap in technological innovation achieved in the US during

202 Berta, "Un sindacato industriale all'epoca…", 80.
the war and then transferred in Europe, which allowed manufacturers to undermine the
strength of their adversary in a seemingly ‘objective’ way. In both Detroit and Turin,
the imperative of production – necessary in the first case to avoid a new depression, in
the second to reconstruct the country - was espoused by both manufacturers and unions,
but eventually benefited the former because it provided a basis for their anti-union
activities.

Collective bargaining at FIAT: unfulfilled expectations.

FIOM’s defeat in the election for the commissione interna occurred, as we have
seen, precisely at the moment that FIAT entered a stage of maximum productive
expansion. The opportunity to manipulate the production bonus and expand company
welfare was to FIAT’s advantage in the following years, as the company tried to
strengthen its position against the Communists. The timing of the FIOM defeat meant
also that the masses of workers hired during this phase were to be managed according
to a system of industrial relations that differed markedly from that of the preceding
years, when the Communist union frequently used the weapon of industrial conflict.

Having lost the majority of representatives in the commissione interna meant
that FIOM’s signature was no longer necessary to implement the contract, if the other
components agreed to its terms. FIAT management extended the consequences of
FIOM’s diminished representation, even denying it the right to participate in
negotiations. FIAT repression went even further when it mobilised its internal security
service to prevent FIOM from collecting a sufficient number of signatures from
workers to present their candidates for future elections. These tactics did, of course,
undermine the democratic legitimacy of the Commessone Interna itself. As we pointed
out earlier, the consequence of these measures was total isolation of the remaining
leftist militants from the rest of the workers. Oral histories confirm that even simply
talking to FIOM militants could result in a disciplinary measure.203

This discrimination occurred with the consent of the two other unions: FIM-
CISL, which in 1955 gained the relative majority with 39.5 per cent, and UILM, which
received 22.4 per cent. This has led to charges from the left that the success of these

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203 An extensive literature exists on the Anni Duri, though unfortunately most of it is written
with epic tones: Sergio Garavini, Emilio Pugno, Gli anni duri alla Fiat...cit.; Ballone, Uomini,
fabbrica e potere...cit; Torino 1945-1983. Memoria FIOM...cit.; Frasca, Sapelli, Le relazioni
radio all FIAT...cit.; Aris Accornero, Gli anni ’50 in fabbrica...cit.; A voi cari compagni, Sesa
Tatò ed. (Bari: De Donato, 1981); Gianotti, Gli operai della FIAT...cit; Vittorio Rieser e Aris
two unions could be attributed exclusively to the support they received from the company—in so far as they participated in its plan to isolate the left—rather than to their capacity to represent workers or to initiate a bargaining strategy. More recent studies, in particular from historian Giuseppe Berta, have questioned this assumption. He argues that the non-leftist unions, namely the FIM current led by Edoardo Arrighi, claimed an independent role in FIAT industrial relations, which surpassed that of a "mere negation" of the Communist union. This latter interpretation seems to allow a greater chance to map the influences of the American model of industrial relations to those at FIAT; to understand FIAT’s departure from that model and, eventually, the consequences of this choice in determining the balance of power once the conflict, both in Detroit and Turin, again burst into the system.204

When, in 1949, FIAT introduced the superpremio (production bonus), the "free" unions found the opportunity to have a voice in negotiations that regularly involved the commissione interna and management. The superpremio represented a novelty in Italian industrial relations because for the first time, it linked workers’ wages to the productivity of the firm. However, this principle was already applied in the US where it constituted the cornerstone of the post-war "liberal consensus". FIAT subsequently introduced another production bonus, the premio di collaborazione, which was distributed only to workers who eschewed industrial action—a measure that ended up targeting the resisting core of FIOM militants, while undermining their support base. Between 1949 and 1955, the proportion of pay linked to productivity – that part of the wage that was in excess of the national metalworking agreement - grew from 25 per cent to 50 per cent.205

In 1951, Edoardo Arrighi, then a CISL officer and member of the Commissione, launched the slogan "let’s collaborate in production and divide it equally".206 This message was in line with Valletta’s plan to increase productivity, but it subtly introduced an element that came to be explicitly formulated only later: the request for an automatic link between wages and productivity. Arrighi put forward this request during the negotiation of summer 1953. In this round of meetings between the commissione interna and the management, Arrighi demonstrated for the first time its bargaining skills and its vision of an alternative style of unionism based neither on class struggle politics like for FIOM, nor on the petty patronage that had so far characterised

204 For the leftist literature see footnote above; Berta, Conflitto industriale e struttura d’impresa alla FIAT (Bologna: Il mulino, 1998), 125.
206 Ibid., 234-239.
the activity of the ‘free’ unions. In asking for an automatic increase in wages, Arrighi
did not use the argument that workers needed to be compensated for the further
exploitation, but instead cleverly presented it as a consequence of the firm’s expansion
to which workers had contributed, thereby employing the same logic that underpinned
Valletta’s argument. 207

In the same year, 1953, Arrighi found an opportunity to refine his conception of
industrial relations during a trip to the States, which was financed by a grant from the
American Congress reserved for ‘democratic’ unionists. This was part of an AFL-
financed program to familiarise European unionists with the technical aspects of labour
relations. In the US he met several representatives of the major unions. His attention,
however, was attracted in particular by the UAW, which in that period had bargained
landmark contracts, such as the “Treaty of Detroit”, centred precisely on the principle
of workers sharing the postwar gains in productivity. Arrighi wanted to pursue the same
path at FIAT. In a conference on his return he reported that:

In the US, productivity delivers the promises that are implicit in its
definition: workers’ standard of living increases [...] manufacturers enjoy
greater possibilities [...] and workers collaboration is not only based on the spur
of profit, but on the appreciation that, being the contract bargained on firm’s
basis, their wages are inextricably linked to the performance of the company
[…] finally, the fact that American unionism is apolitical is extremely beneficial
to workers, because it favours their unity. 208

Arrighi was firmly in control of the FIM-CISL group in the Commessione
Interna when, in 1955, the balance of power turned in his favour after the FIOM defeat.
For several years, his group became management’s favourite partner on the labour’s
side. FIM took the credit with workers for increasing the production bonus during those
years, now that the factory was free of conflict. However, Arrighi never quite managed
to achieve the bargaining influence to which he aspired. As we shall see, management,
after all, was determined not to relinquish control of this instrument of consensus

This shift in the balance of power at FIAT in 1955 had an impact on other
factories in the city; by the end of 1956, FIM had tripled its membership. In turn, this
success produced a feedback at FIAT when, in 1957, in the following elections of the
commessione interna, FIM collected 45.9 per cent of votes. At the same time, however,
because of his insistence on firm-centred bargaining, independent from the union
central board, Arrighi had become undesirable to the higher ranks of the Catholic

207 See for a comment on this Ibid., 240-245.
208 Comitato nazionale per la produttività, I Convegno sindacalisti democratici reduci da
missioni negli USA, 9-10 gennaio 1953 (Roma: Apollon 1953) 29-31; an excellent overview on
Arrighi at FIAT is Gianpaolo Fissore, Dentro la FIAT. Il SIDA-FISMIC. Un sindacato
federation who did not want to lose control of workers in Italy’s largest corporation. The American model that Arrighi looked at was not entirely popular with Catholic lower ranks either. They saw what they considered as bread-and-butter unionism to be a corruption of the moral responsibility of the union. One FIM official went as far as declaring that Arrighi’s control of the *commissione* at FIAT reminded them of the union portrayed in the film *On the Waterfront.*

The separation of Arrighi and his supporter group from FIM was prompted by the question of who was going to preside over the *commissione.* Arrighi thought that decisions regarding this body needed to be left to FIAT representatives themselves – the group that, in practice, he controlled. Instead, the federation claimed the right to nominate the candidates list for the following elections of the *Commissione,* and thereby included candidates immune from Arrighi’s charisma. Over this issue, the Arrighi group at FIAT departed from the central organization and formed a brand new union, the *Liberi Lavoratori Democratici,* soon to be transformed in *Sindacato Italiano dell’Automobile* (SIDA). The group retained the relative majority in the *Commissione,* thereby initiating quite a unique experience of independent unionism in such a large firm.

In 1959, his split from FIM gave Arrighi the chance to put forward his plan for a firm-centred contract, in opposition to the national metalworking contract that was to be negotiated between the confederate unions and the *Confindustria* in that same year. The success or the failure of this attempt represented the ultimate test for the kind of business unionism that Arrighi wanted to import to FIAT. The *contratto sindacale FIAT* – as Arrighi called it – when compared with the national contract, presented additional features in the areas of wages, benefits, and in the grievance procedure. Many of these provisions were reminiscent of those negotiated by the UAW in the US: an automatic wage increase of six per cent per year; a forty per cent increase in overtime pay; an expansion of the pension fund; and a multi-step grievance procedure with final binding arbitration. This contract would have put industrial relations at FIAT effectively in line with its most advanced American counterparts and could have opened the way to a similar social ‘compact’.

However, Arrighi had misjudged the likelihood of this contract being accepted by Valletta. FIAT benefited from the chance to integrate the national contract with its own ‘magnanimity’, and considered SIDA instrumental in presiding over workers’ collaboration. However, it did not want to draw itself away from the *Confindustria* and

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209 G.P. Cella, B. Manghi, P. Piva, *La FIM-CISL dall’associazione alla classe* (Bari: De Donato, 1992), 315; Fissore, *Dentro la Fiat…cit.*, 80;
210 See the SIDA paper “Il lavoratore FIAT”, 30 Dec 1959 and 7 Apr 1960.
the national contract in order to pursue its own style of industrial relations. Furthermore, being the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana), FIAT’s political referent in the government, the split caused some embarrassment in the executive rooms, although according to SIDA historian Fissore it was explicitly approved by Valletta.²¹¹

Management’s choice reflected its belief that the workforce was ultimately best controlled through a paternalistic discipline rather than through the achievement of a social consensus. In this sense, any kind of genuine unionism, either militant like FIOM’s, or ‘bread and butter’ like Arrighi’s, represented a hindrance to production. If repression was the best way to outmanoeuvre a militant leftist style of unionism, Arrighi’s style was better neutralized through a policy of token assistance to “constructive” workers, supported by limited company welfare. In this context, the Commissioni Interne, though legitimated by the workers’ vote, were in reality devoid of any real role by the company, apart from that of providing token democratic representation. After the late 1940s and early 1950s, when FIOM still held the majority of union cards, and past the brief period between 1955 and 1959, when Arrighi sought an alternative model, unions at FIAT developed into bureaucratic institutions that, unlike those in the United States, were not called to manage any ‘crisis’, nor to restrain workers’ militancy, because in the ten years after the war the company had developed the necessary hegemony to do so for itself. In doing so, FIAT also weakened a potential ally when the social transformation brought a kind of conflict into the plants that did not originate from the union’s class politics.

In the period between the late 1950s and the late 1960s, FIAT itself impeded smooth labour-management relationship through its paternalistic concept of industrial relations. As a consequence, unions lacked a real capacity or opportunity to mobilize workers on the shop floor. FIOM militants in the plants had almost disappeared as a result of dismissal or repression. In this period, Communist activists faced the difficult problem of penetrating a factory that, because of the many technological

²¹¹ Fissore, Dentro la Fiat...86; FIAT minutes from the Executive Board provide a more nuanced explanation. In the meeting on the 29 January 1959 he declared: “Fiat management is against company unions and prefer that democratic unions do not divide but, if possible, coalesce. Therefore, FIAT has tried to act as a broker to mend the division between CISL and the new branch Liberi Lavoratori hoping that they both would overcome their differences and found a new unity. Verbali del Consiglio di Amministrazione (1958) Archivio Storico FIAT; for Franco Gheddo, on the contrary, the split was explicitly endorsed by FIAT. He reported threats to the FIM candidates in the elections of 1959, see “Il 1958 alla Fiat” in Benenati Marconi, Elisabetta et al. CISL 1948-1968. Ispirazione cattolica, scelta di classe, nuovo sindacato (Messina, Reggio Emilia: Hobelix Editrice, 1981), 197-199.
transformations and the recomposition of the labour force, they did not know anymore.212

FIAT continued to have a bias towards SIDA and UILM. Despite this, in 1961, Arrighi, disappointed by the lack of managerial support for his plan, and discouraged by attacks on him from the Catholic world, decided to leave FIAT for a medium-sized firm. After his departure, SIDA accepted the task of administering the limited welfare of the company, thereby losing any ambition of reforming industrial relations or pressing on groundbreaking contracts. Likewise, UILM exercised only the petty patronage that FIAT allowed it. However, while SIDA had no political influence, UILM had the advantage of being politically close to the ascendant centre-left coalition in the national government, which Valletta endorsed as the best way to isolate the Communists and reform the country. Therefore, by 1960, Valletta saw UILM as his privileged intermediary among unions.

Management delegated the administration of key posts in its welfare institutions to UILM and SIDA; the company health system (Mutua Aziendale Lavoratori Fiat), company housing, and the several recreational activities like football, bowls, and so on. Faced with the difficulties of integration, Meridionali were unlikely to fall prey to the ideological approach of FIOM, which insisted on a notion of working class consciousness that was unfamiliar and unimportant to southerners. They were instead more attracted to those union officers who could deliver actual improvements to their daily life, either in the plant, through the transfer to a lighter task, or outside through an ‘aid’ to the application for the much sought after FIAT-leased apartment. However, the fact that southern migrants bought into this kind of patronage system did not necessarily mean that they agreed with the union bargaining approach. More fundamentally, the problems of mass urbanization, and the tediousness of their jobs could not be resolved on a one-to-one basis—resolution of these problems needed a restructuring of the relationship between FIAT and its workers.213

1960s: Catholics meet Communists.

FIM-CISL traversed a different trajectory from its rivals. At FIAT, the split of the Arrighi group had proved costly for the Catholic group, and in the election for the commissione of 1958, FIM collected only 12.9 per cent of votes. But FIM was backed outside the plants by the well-organized ACLI, an association of militant Catholics

212 Gianotti, Gli Operai alla Fiat...cit., 40-53.
213 See Fissore, Un Sindacato Aziendale...cit., 65-72.
interested in labour problems and by the ascendancy within the *Democrazia Cristiana* of two politicians of CISL background: Giulio Pastore and Carlo Donat Cattin. These circumstances offered FIM greater opportunities of expansion in the medium term (see Appendix A).

In a way, FIM’s class politics were no less ‘ideological’ than FIOM’s, though in a different sense. Thus, after the split in 1959, this union took a new course at FIAT, with men willing to bring the principles of the Catholic social doctrine into the realm of industrial relations. Interestingly, in many instances, this evolution brought the Catholics closer to the Communist’s position rather than that of the moderates'. In fact, during the strikes of 1959, which succeeded in many Turinese factories but not at FIAT, Valletta reported at an executive board meeting that: “sometimes the Catholics are embroiled by the Communists”.[214]

The Catholic social doctrine diminished the importance of conflict and held an organic view of society, one in which all of its components must live in harmony. However, it also postulated a distributive justice in social relations, and it was this aspect that was most influencing FIM’s officials after 1959. The withdrawal of officials who were more prone to business unionism effectively left the union in the hands of a more militant group that wanted to act in coherence with its Christian ideals—even in the face of a growing ecclesiastical disapproval of militant attitudes in the plants. To this minority group in the *commissione interna*, the *a priori* exclusion of the FIOM representatives from the meeting, the overt discrimination against the few promoters of strikes, and the authoritarian climate on the shop floor ran against their moral imperative. FIAT management did not fail to take notice of FIM’s different approach and it gradually spread the tactics of ‘containment’ used against the ‘reds’ to the Catholics, although in a more veiled manner. FIM officer Mario Gheddo remarked in a letter to a priest friend, “my exasperation is at its height since the last events. The continuous relocation of union officers, the reprisals and menaces against workers prone to strike, and now the arbitrary firing of two (Communists) members of the *Commissione* […] are driving me to rebellion”.[215]

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[215] Rocco Cerrato “Sindacalismo cristiano e mondo cattolico” Elisabetta Benenati Marconi et al., *CISL 1948-1968. Ispirazione cattolica, scelta di classe, nuovo sindacato* (Messina, Reggio Emilia: Hobelix Editrica, 1981), 55-57; on th Catholic social doctrine see M.D. Chenu, *La dottrina sociale della chiesa origine e sviluppo* (Brescia: Queriniano, 1977); note this letter written by a group of FIM officers at FIAT on the eve of the Autunno Caldo: “It doesn’t seem morally just to eschew in a systematic way to participate in the struggles of the labour movement when it aims to improve not only the material conditions of thousands of men, but also to build a
We have to interpret this convergence between Catholics and Communists within the context of the onset of the 1960s—a period full of promises of reform and social change. The altered international situation with the new Kennedy administration, and rift between China and USSR opened the prospect in Italy for a centre-left government that was open to moderate Socialists, and that could conform the political institutions to the transformations of the ‘economic miracle’. The centre-left promised, but did not achieve the economic planning and the coherent industrial politics that the now industrialized Italian north needed. The modernization of industrial relations was part of this plan. These policies ran parallel to the contemporary mood in the workers’ movement. In 1962, for the first time in a decade, a massive wave of strikes hit the main manufacturing centres. These disruptions were in response to the renewal of the metalworking contract, which did not tackle the gap between the great leap in productivity that workers had achieved and the wage increases. Large firms such as Lancia, Michelin, and Pirelli were shut down by the industrial action, but a strike called in February at FIAT by FIOM ended in complete failure. While in other cities the agitation continued, on and off, for several months during the long negotiations, at FIAT the election of the commissione interna in March saw an advancement of the moderate forces: UILM and SIDA. The outcome of the election put the situation at FIAT in stark contrast with the one at national level, where UIL was getting closer to CGIL and CISL, and where the working class showed a greater cohesion.

Even amidst signs of social change, FIAT management maintained its grip on the labour force. During a round table discussion between management and unions, manager Giorgio Garino commended the ‘free’ unions:

The pose of calm activity that FIAT workers have recently shown in contrast to the agitation inflicted on labour, widely demonstrates the soundness of the pattern of collaboration that you endorse as well as the strength of the

more just society. That would mean to give up the Christian commitment to build here and now God’s Kingdom. We believe that to passively accept the gap between blue and white collar staff is very far to the Christian vision of equal relationship among men, “in order for the poor not to blush in front of the rich” (1 Cor 11:22)” letter to Padre Pellegrino, 22 October, 1969, FVN, box A, folder 1; quote in ibid., Mario Gheddo to Don Carlo; note also the episode told by Gheddo about his first Commissione Interna meeting with Fiat in 1962 personnel manager Vittorio Vittonato. To the remark of Gheddo that the meeting was void because of the absence of the FIOM component, Vittonato replied: “Listen Gheddo, I say this in front of your colleagues: if you don’t agree you are free to leave. We don’t need people like you. It’s your choice whether to stay or go.” Gheddo regretted to have remained in the room and ascribed his shy behaviour to his lack of experience in the Commissione. Related in Torino 1945-1983, Memoria FIOM...cit., 76-77.

216 F. Barca, Storia del capitalismo italiano dal dopoguerra ad oggi (Roma, 1997), 4-117.
217 ibid., 25-43.

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bargaining system and the compromise among the different factors of production.  

However, as we have seen, the apparent acquiescence of FIAT workers was not the result of a well-balanced system of industrial relations. While during the 1950s, industrial relations at FIAT were still in a state of flux, with several options open regarding their development, by 1960 they were crystallized in a pattern that blended paternalism, repression of militant activists, and calculated wage and benefit concessions.

Within this context, the one episode that was interpreted by many historians as the labour movement at FIAT regaining its positions from 1962, actually demonstrated that management continued to enjoy control in the plants. In late June 1962, at the peak of the national demonstrations for the metalworking contract, the three union federations CGIL, CISL, and UIL announced a series of strikes. So, on June 23, FIAT workers, after some failed attempts, finally joined the rest of national working class on the last of the strikes. About 60,000 workers did not enter the workplace, thus shutting down the Mirafiori complex and all the major FIAT plants. Prominent in the organization of the strike was the generation of FIOM militants who had been ousted from FIAT, together with some of the FIM officers. They interpreted the strike as a personal victory and a sign of reawakening at FIAT. However, this successful strike, as it turned out, was less significant than it originally appeared. In fact, it was due to a number of circumstances, such as short-lived unity between all the national federations outside the FIAT plants. Furthermore, the number of participants was heavily distorted by the hard picketing by the core of original strikers, some of them already dismissed from FIAT.

The confirmation that FIAT industrial relations remained independent from the situation at national level came a few days later when the UILM officers at FIAT, in disaccord with the national federation, signed, together with SIDA (which never approved of the strikes anyway) an “advance” on the national agreement and invited

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218 Verbale rapporto delle Commissioni Interne FIAT, 10 Marzo 1961, Istituto Gramsci Torino, Fondo FIOM, Coordinamento C.I. FIAT.

219 Pugno, Gli Anni Duri... cit, Gianotti, Trent'anni di Lotte alla FIAT...cit.; the violence in the picket lines was, of course, promptly denounced (and exaggerated) by FIAT and its press, but was it was later acknowledged by the union officers too. See Gheddo “For instance, I remember a fellow worker of mine. A type really calm and peaceful. That kind of person who talks slowly. I stopped him in the act of throwing stones against a bus with strikebreakers. They were going to work, although eventually many would end up not being able to cross the gates” in Torino 1945-1983, Memoria FIOM ...cit., 78; see also Gianotti a PCI officer at the time in Gianotti, Gli Operai della Fiat...145-147; declared Valletta in that occasion: “This is pre-ordained and systematic violence both against people and the production assets” (Ci si trova davanti ad un tentativo sistematico e preordinato di violenza diretta oltre che contro le persone anche contro le possibilità produttive), La Stampa 26 June, 1962.
FIAT workers to desist from further action. At this point, FIM and FIOM denounced the “betrayal” of UILM and invited workers to strike again on 6 July. Again the call to strike succeeded, but the massive demonstration had a disastrous aftermath. At the end of the march, a group of workers moved to Piazza Statuto to protest in front of the seat of the local UILM. When the police arrived to restore “order”, the protest developed into a full riot. In the chaos that ensued for the next forty-eight hours, the original group of protesters was joined by young hoodlums who continued the disturbance using “urban guerrilla” style tactics. The riot of Piazza Statuto gave FIAT the opportunity to argue that industrial conflict would automatically bring social chaos, and for the conservative press to accuse the PCI of organising the uprising. For the leftists it represented evidence of a combative mood in the working class, generated because of the provocation from the police and other interlopers. The PCI claimed that violence had been spurred by neo-Fascist groups and by unemployed migrants bought off by agent provocateurs with “1500 liras and a packet of cigarettes”. However, historian Dario Lanzardo has demonstrated that the majority of the rioters were actually metal workers, leftist militants, and southern migrants who had responded to the assault of the police, or simply vented their rage at the “sold out” union. Although the court judging the 38 rioters held that “the events of Piazza Statuto [represented] an ugly episode in the history of such an industrious and quiet city”, the riot demonstrated that Turin, similarly to its counterpart in the US, had been transfigured by the social recomposition of its working class, the cultural cleavage between natives and migrants, the urban malaise of rapid growth. All in all, the events of Piazza Statuto did not say anything about the subversive potential of the Communists (as the right argued) or about an impending radicalisation of industrial relations at FIAT (as the left argued), but instead pointed to the unpredictable effects of urban transformation.

The Persistence of Fordism: Technological Change Between Detroit and Turin.

220 See La Stampa 27 to 30 June, 1962.
222 Quote ibid., 68; nor did it say anything about an alleged newly-found unity between “southern youth with northern labour and Resistance traditions” as Ginzborg argues in History...cit., 252.
As we have seen, manufacturers and their political allies had scored an important victory with the passing of the Taft-Hartley Act. However, this law alone could not possibly solve the "labour problem" inside their plants. After all the Taft-Hartley Act continued to legitimise collective bargaining, and the high costs it entailed for business. Manufacturers found a better response in the ‘automation’ of their operations, a new word for the old method of replacing workers with machines. Automation meant in many cases ‘decentralization’, a term that indicated the construction of new updated plants outside traditional industrial hubs like Detroit, and, once the South became a desirable location for business, outside the Northeast and the Midwest altogether. In fact, during the postwar decades, an increasing number of operators turned to southern states to find cheap, non-union labour, low taxes, and state support for industries. The Taft-Hartley act actually contributed to this possibility by giving these states the opportunity to outlaw the closed shop. Thus, decentralization meant de-industrialization for cities such as Detroit – a process that carried enormous social consequences for the future of white and black Detroiter.

Detroit’s ‘automation’ found enthusiastic champions at Turin’s FIAT. Contrary to what a certain historiography argues, the fact that in the 1950s labour costs were lower in Italy did not diminish FIAT’s interest in technological transformation. The Agnellis and their manager, even before the war, endeavoured to inform FIAT’s production technology along Fordist-Taylorist lines, but only in the postwar period, within the cadre of American financial and technical help of the Marshall Plan, they found the optimal conditions to do so. However, as we shall see, what happened in Turin remained a selective adaptation rather than mere replication.

"Few words of recent years", warned Harvard Business School Professor James Bright in the introduction of his study of automation, "have been so twisted to suit a multitude of purposes and phobias as this new word ‘automation’. It has been used as a technological rallying cry, a manufacturing goal, an engineering challenge, an advertising slogan, a labor campaign banner, and as the symbol of ominous technological progress." In fact, by 1958, the year Bright published his study, the word was hardly new. In 1946, a Ford manager had introduced it to describe automatic work feeding and material handling devices. When, in 1947, Ford launched a short-

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223 On the industrialization of the postwar south see James Cobb, The Selling of the South. The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993)
224 For this opinion see Michel Burnier, FIAT: Conseils Ouvriers et Syndicat (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1980), 100.
lived automation department, the term became a catchword for the type of industrial technology scholars imagined for the future.

After having lost a substantial share of the automobile market in the 1930s and 1940s to its main competitors Chrysler and General Motors, Ford used the neologism to communicate its come back in the market as an innovator. The opening of the first "automatic factory" in 1947, the new engine plant in Cleveland, served many purposes, not least as an expedient marketing tool that demonstrated that the company was again using cutting-edge technology. The *American Machinist* defined the word as "the art of applying mechanical devices to manipulate work pieces into and out of equipment, turn parts between operations, remove scrap, and to perform these tasks in timed sequence with the production equipment so that the line can be put wholly or partially under push-button control at strategic stations". In reality, automation was, in 1947, circumscribed, even in the advanced Cleveland plant, to mechanical linkages between different transfer machines. It was hardly a system that functioned through a "push-button", as the technical press described it. It needed the intensive labour of many workers. However, the press rightly pointed out that automation represented Ford’s "philosophy" of production. Indeed, the same philosophy had characterized industrial development from its inception. Marx described this process in the first volume of *Capital*. In the post war period, this managerial approach benefited from the extraordinary development of research on mechanization and, later, on computer processing.

Until the early 1950s, the Ford Cleveland engine factory remained the most advanced example of automation: "One will find here an almost unbroken chain of sequential operations, with work moving continuously from receiving to the individual machines, and to the assembly line, while constantly guided automatically", boasted *Automotive Industries*. Although few firms in the US had the resources or expected volume of sales necessary to afford the expensive mechanization of production, the "automation" fever gripped the nation. Two books by MIT mathematician Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics* (1948) and *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950), depicted the introduction of automatic machinery as both inevitable and catastrophic. He compared the automatic machine to slave labour and maintained that "any labor which competes with slave labor must accept the economic conditions of slave labor. It is perfectly clear..."
that this will produce an unemployment situation, in comparison with which the precedent recession and even the depression of the thirties will seem a pleasant joke.\textsuperscript{229}

Wiener also suggested that "computation machinery" would be used in the near future for decision-making in war, business, and social problems.

Because of his authority as a MIT professor, Wiener's books proved widely influential with the popular press, so that, in the 1950s, the use of "automation" spread from technical journals to reach a broader audience. Wiener himself took his role as a prophet of automation quite seriously. He became concerned about the consequences of automation for the labour movement. He restricted his collaboration with the corporations and, in 1949, wrote to Walter Reuther asking him to "show a sufficient interest in the very pressing menace of the large-scale replacement of labor by machine" (and, as we shall see, Reuther engaged extensively in the problems of automation).\textsuperscript{230}

John Diebold's \textit{Automation - The Advent of the Automatic Factory} (1952) first carried the new word in a book's title and it therefore indicated its acceptance by the general public. Diebold registered the first shift in the meaning of the term, which now denoted "both the automatic operation and the process of making things automatic. In the latter sense, it includes several areas of industrial activity, such as product and process redesign, the theory of communication and control, and the design of machinery."\textsuperscript{231} By the early 1950s therefore, although the scope of its practical applications was limited, automation became much discussed as the new trend in technology that would shape the future of manufacturing.

As we have seen, the automotive industry was at the forefront of this technological change. The war had created unprecedented opportunities for the metalworking industry by subsidizing mechanized mass production and introducing innovations such as hydraulic and electronic controls. In the first half of the 1950s, Ford also introduced automation in the company's flagship at Dearborn, and the other manufacturers followed. One of the industry's trade journals, the \textit{American Machinist}, announced that manufacturers had spent more than $1.1 billion in retooling and machinery, making 1955 "the biggest year in automotive industry in terms of over-all expenditures for new machines, tools, fixtures, handling equipment and preparation for

\textsuperscript{229} Norbert Wiener, \textit{Cybernetics, or control and communication in the animal and the machine} (New York: 1948); \textit{The Human Use of Human Beings} (Boston: 1950) 189; Wiener had actually invented the servomechanisms crucial to the development of this technology.
\textsuperscript{230} Wiener to Reuther, 13 August, 1949, appendix to David F. Noble, \textit{Progress Without People} (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1995), 161; see also David F. Noble, \textit{Forces of Production} (New York: Knopf, 1984), 71-76.
production”, adding that: "automation, just a new word six years ago, is today the outstanding trend in the automobile plants. Degree varies with available capital, expected production, frequency of design change, and planner’s preference, but automatic equipment and automatic handling are the order of the day". 232

Despite the high costs involved, automation became "the order of the day" in the mid-1950s. What made automation so popular among auto manufacturers? The impulse behind automatic control was not at all new. As historian Silvio Bedini has shown, human enchantment with automation was as old as western civilization. For Marx, the drive to mechanization was embedded in the same logic of capitalism. He understood the transformation of the labour process as a series of stages in capitalists’ appropriation of knowledge and skill from the direct labourers. First, Marx argued, workers would lose control over the product itself, then over the labour process as a whole, and finally over the specific tasks on which they are engaged.233 Harry Braverman has updated this model by including the era of scientific management and automation. He has analysed how advanced forms of mechanization removed the last remainders of skill and autonomy and reduced the worker to a passive attendant of the machine. 234

In the light of these considerations, we should see automation as a creative managerial response, in particular within the auto industry, to deplete the leverage held by organised labour. Automation was also one part of a multi-pronged attack on the control that workers had gained on the shop floor since the Wagner Act: the other aspects being a legislation hostile to labour, the practice of time-studies and speed ups; trade off of increased workers' effort with high wages.

Automobile manufacturers were initially quite candid about the main motivation behind automation. One anonymous Big Three manager frankly defined it as "any operation that removes a man from production".235 The American Machinist commented: "with labor costs generally rising steadily, industry is forced to seek economies in other areas. That accounts largely for the accelerated search for more and
better automatic devices." Indeed, the trade journal did not miss any occasion to touch the nerve of the captains of the industry on this crucial point, "what the sociological effect of automation will be is a matter of point of view. It is undeniable that automatic lines do not require direct labor for loading, unloading, and inspection operations as is still common on many highly developed, but semi-automatic, production set ups." In the widely respected study by James Bright, the author pointed out the advantages of automation. Most items in the list regarded the possibilities for improvement of the productive relation between man and machine. Automated machines worked faster, had a bigger capacity, compounded many functions "requiring only one or few operators", and mechanized control since "a greater percentage of the cycle of the machine is controlled automatically".

These words reminded them that the warning of Norbert Wiener was not exaggerated. But the facts spoke louder than words. By mid-1950s, automation had already changed the automobile industry. The introduction of the new "philosophy", in fact, suited only manufacturers with a high-volume production as it required substantial initial investment, frequent maintenance, the cost of a "debugging" period when machines required frequent adjustment, and an overall increase in fixed costs. "Since automation generally implies a continuous use of equipment", wrote business analyst Reuben E. Slesinger, "delays become unusually expensive. A slight delay at one stage of operations may generate a considerable long jam in the productive process". As a result, automation increased the trend in the industry towards greater concentration because only large corporations could afford the rigidity of operation it entailed. The Big Three's share of automobile production increased from 80.4 per cent in 1948 to 90.1 per cent in 1959. Furthermore, auto manufacturers increasingly mass produced accessories that they had formerly bought from supplier firms. The first effect of automation was therefore to shrink the number of autoworkers in the whole sector, despite the fact that the Big Three actually increased their workforce.

Of course, the direct effect of automation was to displace workers through reorganization of the production with fewer operators, but higher productivity. In the long run this development represented the most threatening aspect of the technological evolution. "A passenger car plant, which formerly employed 36 men to feed fenders

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236 Ibid.
238 Bright, Automation...cit., 172.
into a conveyor for spray painting, now has modernized equipment which automatically feeds six sets of fenders to a fast moving 'merry-go-round' where coloured finishes are applied simultaneously. One worker guides the entire operation", reported a UAW informative booklet in 1954.\textsuperscript{241} For Walter Reuther, the displacement of workers through automation created social and economic problems, in particular, he argued, it cut the purchasing power of the working masses and therefore slowed the entire economy. During Congressional hearings on the problem of "technological unemployment", Reuther called for a Guaranteed Annual Wage in the auto industry, which would make management more cautious about introducing new equipment that would result in layoffs. In essence, he argued that corporations should be held responsible for the dislocation they caused - a principle that, if accepted, would have changed the whole American industrial landscape.\textsuperscript{242}

Two congressional committees on the effects of automation, one in 1955 and the other in 1960, testify that unions had agitated the spectre of unemployment enough to arouse the concern of the general public. Manufacturers argued that, like past technological innovations, automation would deliver benefits for the whole of society. Management consultant Peter F. Drucker maintained, in 1955, that automation, by increasing the fixed costs, actually brought even greater stability to employment, as production could not adjust easily to short-term economic fluctuations. "Labor under automation must be considered a capital resource, with wage costs being treated virtually as fixed costs". In this argument Drucker graciously twisted the fact that it was precisely because union wages could be considered almost as fixed costs that manufacturers had so enthusiastically adopted automation.\textsuperscript{243}

Another, more persuasive, argument was that automation actually created jobs, but of a different kind. "Many people seem to fear that automation will downgrade the worker by making him a slave to a mechanical monster... Mass production upgraded the unskilled laborer of yesterday into the semiskilled machine operator of today - and in the process multiplied both his productivity and his income. In just the same way, automation will upgrade the semiskilled machine operator of today into a highly skilled and knowledgeable technician - multiplying his income again."\textsuperscript{244} According to this line of thought, automation would eliminate the drudgery of the most tedious works and "upgrade" workers to new technological jobs. The UAW bought into this, by asking for

\textsuperscript{241} "Automation- A report to the UAW-CIO economic and collective bargaining conference" November 12-13, 1954; in ALUA, UAW President Collection, box 577, folder 2.

\textsuperscript{242} Walter Reuther Congressional Testimony to the Committee on Automation, 1955 in Automation. Implications for the Future...cit., 284.


\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Ibid.} 222-223.
federal programs to train more operators and maintenance men who would be needed for the new machines. However, exactly as the first mass production had not upgraded unskilled workers, but instead had diluted the skills of craftsmen, automation too aimed at freeing management from the need for skilled workers.

By 1958, James R. Bright, himself a business consultant, had to admit that automation seldom upgraded workers. Even when men were assigned to the new machines, they were so easy to operate that workers hardly needed lengthy training. In most of cases, being "upgraded" by automation meant a loss of pay, and, when automation eliminated entire departments, even a loss of seniority. As one union writer cautioned in a pamphlet: "automation will not upgrade people; it will only upgrade jobs". Prediction that more maintenance employees would be needed in automated plants also failed to materialize. Quite on the contrary, after the initial period of 'debugging', automated machines required little maintenance. Furthermore, the manufacturing of these machines was in turn automated. After all, any detailed inquiry indicated that automation really was "any operation that removed a man from production".

Automation and de-industrialization in Detroit.

The drive of auto manufacturers towards automated plants restructured the industrial economy in another fundamental way. The optimum efficiency of automatic transfer lines connected with other automatic devices could better be reached with an *ad hoc* layout of the plant. Automated plants functioned better when built on a single level, therefore requiring more surface area than multi-storey plants. Ford's Cleveland plant, for instance, occupied 425,000 square feet. As a result, automation quickly rendered Detroit's plants obsolete. Starting in the late 1940s and 1950s, GM and Ford (and Chrysler to a lesser extent) were building their more productive plants outside Detroit, and often outside the state of Michigan, where they could find cheaper land.

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245 Bright, Automation...cit., 203; "in some instances automation involves a methods change that substitutes a lower paid skill for the present one; or it forces a worker of a position requiring his skill and leaves him the choice of accepting another job at lesser skill or resigning... in union situations they (workers) sometimes create jurisdictional grievances in an effort to protect their pay status. This is the principal labour headache arising out of automation, according to one leading industrial relations official."; quote from: James Stern, "Fact, Fallacy, and Fantasy of Automation" (1957) in ALUA, UAW President Collection, box 577, folder 2.


247 Automotive Industries, 1 August, 1951, 42; Reuther, Congressional Testimony, ibid., 308;
Industrial decentralization, however, was less the consequence of a neutral technological process than a concoction of social, political, and economic factors. The federal government actively stimulated decentralization by generously subsidizing the construction of defence plants outside large urban centres – a precaution for the unlikely event of air attacks on American cities. During the Cold War, the increasing leverage of Sunbelt Congressmen contributed to a diminishing share of the defence budget being given to Detroit and other industrial centres in the Midwest. For instance, in the 1950s, California by far surpassed Michigan in its share of contracts. Even more influential in directing investments outside Michigan were the lower business taxes offered first by Ohio and Indiana, and then by the Southern states. Last but not least, the anti-labour outlook of the Sunbelt, greatly appealed to manufacturers, such as the automakers, who had suffered most the rise of the ‘big unions’.

UAW contracts established a common recall pool in the Detroit area for workers laid off by ‘runaway shops’, but job opportunities for Detroit autoworkers decreased steadily during the 1950s. One also has to consider that, according to the process described above, many supplier companies closed or moved along with the big manufacturers. Companies usually offered workers the opportunity to follow their job to the new plant, but not all the workers were prepared to abandon their communities. Furthermore, in some cases the change meant a lower wage. In the case of African-American workers, the difficulty in securing accommodation in white suburbs excluded them from this possibility. Sociologists talked about job “spatial mismatch” to describe this situation. The more firms moved from the metropolitan area, the greater the gap became between African-Americans and available jobs.

248 Bruce Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt...cit., 135-173; Lewis Mandell, Industrial Location Decisions: Detroit Compared with Atlanta and Chicago (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975); Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis...cit., 140-141.

249 Some data for these changes can be taken from Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission (DMARPC), “Location of Automotive Plants”, 1955-56, 18, ALUA, South-eastern Michigan Council of Government Collection; Robert Sinclair, The Face of Detroit: A Spatial Synthesis (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 36-41; for the metal parts industries see DMARPC, Recent Growth and Trends in Manufacturing in the Detroit Region (1956), 3; between 1947 and 1958 the Big Three did not build any new plant in Detroit, but they built twenty-five in its suburbs. Between 1950 and 1956, fifty-five metal parts firms moved out of Detroit to join the other sixty-nine brand new auto parts firms opened in that period. Furthermore, in the 1950s, the Big Three began manufacturing their own body parts through their automated facilities, which led to the closing of many independent car body and parts manufacturers. In 1953, Briggs Auto Body, a landmark of industrial Detroit, was absorbed by Chrysler and in 1954 Murray Auto Body, another major supplier, went out of business. In this process of re-organization of production Detroit lost thousands of jobs. See Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis...cit., 135-138; Harold L. Sheppard and James L. Stern, “Impact of Automation on Workers in Supplier Plants: A Case Study” (circa 1956), ALUA, Vertical Files, box 4, folder: Employment-Unemployment 1950s; a sociological article on job mismatch is John F. Kain “Housing Segregation, Negro Employment and Metropolitan Decentralization” Quarterly Journal of Economics 82 (1968), 175-197; see also Kevin Boyle, “There are no Sorrows that
Another undesirable effect of decentralization was that manufacturers put their plants in different sections of the country in competition for production jobs. In their drive to increase productivity, Chrysler managers at Dodge Main made much use of the threat to move departments to more modern plants. These threats were not empty: since 1953, Chrysler had moved operations away from Dodge Main to new plants in St. Louis, Twinsburg, Ohio, Newark, and Delaware. In 1937, Dodge Main employed 33,000 workers but by 1961 the number had dwindled to 7,500. Throughout the 1960s, management regularly spread rumours about the plant being shut down so as to keep the pressure on workers and local union officers.\(^{250}\)

"Automation is not a mere word anymore", lamented Local 3 union officer Pete Telinsky, "it's a reality in all phases of our industrial life. There are no workers who haven't felt the impact of unemployment due to automation at one time or another."\(^{251}\) From the end of the Korean War to the mid-1960s, unemployment in Detroit reached unprecedented levels. In 1956, approximately 130,000 Detroitors were out of work, and the figure continued to rise in the following years. The Federal Government declared the city a depressed area. Workers with as many as eighteen years of seniority were being laid off by Chrysler, which was by that time the largest employer in Detroit. The UAW staged demonstrations in the city's business district and lobbied for a federal works program and further unemployment compensation. Yet, these measures could not stop changes in the auto industry and the effects of these changes on the city.\(^{252}\)

In 1958, Dodge Main laid 9,000 worker off "with a stroke of a pen", but those who remained on the payrolls were not faring well either.\(^ {253}\) They toiled as never before. We have already described how management sped up the lines during the 1950s. However, workers were not only working more intensively, but also longer hours. Chrysler reduced its workforce, but it also forced those still employed to work overtime. While workers sometimes welcomed overtime, in particular during the recession, when it could be used to save up some money, it put UAW officers in a

\(^{250}\) Quote from *Dodge Main News*, 11 March, 1961.

\(^ {251}\) *Labor History*, 35 (1995), 5-23; see the 1959 NAACP Labor Department Annual Report by Herbert Hill: "Because there is a disproportionate concentration of Negroes in the ranks of the unskilled and the semiskilled there is now occurring a severe displacement of Negroes as a result of automation and other technological changes in the industry. This process will undoubtedly continue at an accelerated pace in the future and will have a devastating effect upon the economic well-being of the entire Negro Community, unless there is a rapid development of industrial, technical, and scientific skills among colored workers." in Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, NAACP papers group III, box A309, folder Herbert Hill reports.


\(^{253}\) *Dodge Main News*, 22 October, 1960.

\(^{254}\) *ibid.* April 7, 1956 a great anti-unemployment demonstration occurred in Jan 1962, see *ibid.*, Jan 6, 1962; the conditions of unemployment at Chrysler are described in the letter of Local 3 to Reuther, 14 July 1958, ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 229, folder 4.

difficult position with regards to those union members who had been laid off. UAW Local 3 officers repeatedly defined overtime as “morally wrong” in light of the more than 2,500 fellow workers who were unemployed. However, it was difficult to rally enough support for a strike vote on this issue, and Chrysler management remained adamant that it preferred overtime with fewer workers to recall because it involved no ‘fringe’ benefits.254

The early 1960s were difficult times both for the company and its workers. The lengthy managerial reorganization had left Chrysler the less competitive of the Big Three. Although, the company opened new plants in this period, notably in Windsor, Ontario, the bulk of its operations remained in Detroit in old-fashioned complexes like Dodge Main. On the other hand, in the same period, Ford and General Motors had dismantled most of their Detroit operations. The fact that different stages of work organization co-existed within the same industry, and within the same firm, put workers in traditional departments in competition with automated ones for production output. Thus, although no major confrontation with the company occurred during the 1960s the pressure on Dodge Main workers during this time did not ease. “The crew cuts”, reported shop steward Edie Fox, “are roaming the trim shop selecting operations that they think can be eliminated by breaking them up and dividing them among other workers... A job here and a job there and before we know it some 21 workers are laid off because of speed-up. We have been told that there is a new management in Chrysler and that we are on the road to improved relations between the management and the union. We have yet to see evidence of this.”255

“Improved relations” was, rather, a euphemism for the normalization of union-management relations to the standard set by GM - the firm that dominated the industry and therefore did not need to cut costs to the same extent than Chrysler did. At Chrysler the unrelenting increase of production under reduced manpower undermined workers’ confidence in the capacity of the union to keep management’s pressure in check. Once workers’ capacity to hold wildcat strikes had been restrained, promises from the Local leadership to improve working conditions sounded hollow. Every year Local 3 presented to management a list of grievances to be corrected. A look at the items on the list shows the extent of management’s inroads into shop floor control:

254 Local 3 special executive board meeting 4 April, 1963 ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 40, folder 17.
255 Local 3 regular executive meeting 9 January, 1964, ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 40, folder 18; Dodge Main News; “Workers getting sick and tired of being hounded by crew cuts”, 12 January, 1963.
Production standards must be established within the first thirty days...[of the change]
No worker must be disciplined in any way for failure to meet a disputed production standard while a dispute is pending.
Our contracts should provide a minimum of six minutes per hour rest period
Our contract should provide a minimum of five minutes wash-up before lunch and five minutes wash-up time before quitting time...
Lines are not to be speeded up to make up loss of production due to breakdowns...
No production standards shall be changed unless there is a change in methods or product.\textsuperscript{256}

Although many of these prerogatives were protected by the contract, management frustrated any attempt of discussion on production issues. In this situation it was understandable that the membership grew weary of the union’s ineffectiveness. "Almost everyday", reported vice-president Pete Telinsky, “someone will come to my office and demand to know what he is paying the five dollars a month dues for? The Company is demanding more work out of him and he or she demands to know, what is the union going to do about it?”\textsuperscript{257} Something that the literature on the DRUM failed to notice is that even before the protests of militant black workers in the late 1960s, the fracture between the rank-and-file and union leadership had already been consumed. "Workers are in a rebellious mood", remarked an editorial of \textit{Dodge Main News} commenting on the reaction to a speed up in 1966. Indeed, even before the radicalisation of important segments of the black workforce, an upswing in the fortunes of the company created the favourable conditions for Dodge Main workers to resist management’s control at the point of production.\textsuperscript{258}

In 1961, former accountant Lynn Townsend became Chrysler’s president and initiated a severe revision of costs that hit hard at both its white and blue-collar staff. But he also revived Chrysler’s image by hiring a consulting firm that created an effective marketing campaign based on a new ‘Pentastar’ logo. More importantly, he improved the design and engineering of the 1963 models, which were hailed as “the most successful since World War II”.\textsuperscript{259} Therefore, after seven years of poor quality production and disastrous finance, the business community celebrated the come back of Chrysler in 1962. \textit{Time} dedicated a cover to Townsend as the architect of this miracle. Chrysler’s surging sales were also carried by a general growth in total automotive sales and in the economy, although by 1968, Chrysler had also increased its total share of the market by 4.7 per cent. In 1968, the \textit{New York Times} wrote: "Almost every move made

\textsuperscript{256} Collective Bargaining Report of the National Negotiating Committee (June 15 1961) ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 9 folder 52.
\textsuperscript{257} \textit{Dodge Main News}, 18 January, 1964.
\textsuperscript{258} \textit{Dodge Main News}, 15 October, 1966.
\textsuperscript{259} “How Chrysler Hopes to rebound” \textit{Business Week} Oct 6, 1962;
by Lynn Townsend and his management since 1961 seems to have been the correct one". 260

At Dodge Main, the company's brighter outlook meant a momentary interruption of management threats to close or downsize the plant. The company recalled laid off workers and hired again. By 1965, the workforce had accrued almost 5,000 new workers, bringing the total to 12,000. Management re-established a second shift in 1963, and a third in 1967. Workers with seniority who had been laid off during the reorganization of the company in the 1950s and who still remembered the Local 3 militant tradition experienced the new tight production standards, but their place in the more exacting low seniority jobs was soon taken by young African-Americans, first or second generation Southerners in their first job in an auto factory. The economic upswing at Chrysler indirectly created conditions that allowed the resumption of shop floor militancy. Now the remnant militant workers who remembered tradition of resistance before the managerial re-organization were potentially sympathetic with the newly hired African Americans who toiled on the worst jobs. At the same time, the boom also established conditions of best cooperation between Chrysler and the UAW. In 1964, the union and the company negotiated a contract that, while giving only token attention to the working condition in the production and assembly departments, provided an improved pension scheme and benefits to the high seniority workers. In this way, although all workers perceived that Chrysler expansion was based on increased managerial shop floor authority and speed up, only a section of the workforce actually received fair economic treatment for this effort. The failure of the UAW to address this injustice soon upset the recently achieved stability of industrial relations. 261

FIAT and the "American way".

With the end of the Second World War and in particular with Valletta's return to the top of FIAT in 1946, the Turinese firm re-established its connections with the Detroit manufacturers that had been interrupted during the late part of the Fascist period. In the following years, FIAT selectively adopted American technology and work organization


261 Regular executive meeting 10 January, 1963, ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 40, folder 17; Dodge Main News, 16 January, 1965; for a synthesis of these years see M. Moritz and B. Seaman, Going for Broke: The Chrysler Story (New York: Doubleday, 1981); for the expansion of Chrysler see Chrysler Corporation, Financial and General Fact Book (Detroit: Chrysler, 1973).
practices, and subscribed to a model of development founded on increasing productivity. The experience of FIAT, which was similar to that of other European car manufacturers, confirms that the transnational dominance of the Fordist paradigm of production was more pervasive in the second half of the twentieth century rather that during its ‘golden age’ in the 1920s.

From the turn of the century (his first trip to Detroit is dated 1906), FIAT founder Giovanni Agnelli explicitly set out to follow Henry Ford’s example. In a photo dated 1934, the two men, who were at that time, the two largest auto manufacturers in their respective countries, posed together outside a Detroit plant. Most often it was FIAT engineers who travelled to Michigan to report on the American way of mass production. In 1919, engineer Maraini wrote:

What first strikes the observer in the well organized shops and during a regular period of production is the intensity of the individual tasks. Observing the many departments in the height of their activity, one believes that these workers are obsessively trying to increase their piece-work. However, in most cases piece-work has been abolished. This is instead the direct result of an organization that regulates a continuous and automatic production. The worker is part of it, and an intelligent part [...] Workers who are unsuitable, unable, slow, or lazy cannot resist. They are automatically selected and removed from production.

FIAT engineers saw in the continuous flow of the Fordist assembly line an organizational means that could standardize the production process, which in their own company was still much hampered by the workers’ skills. But what most captivated FIAT men was the impression that this system convinced the workforce that it “automatically selected” the more efficient workers. In fact, Agnelli was highly interested in importing the philosophy of scientific management, and its variants, to Italy. A discussion on this theme is outside the scope of this work, but it will suffice to say that Agnelli was the president of the Italian Bedaux society and that he employed this system within his plants.

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262 Valerio Castronovo, Giovanni Agnelli (Torino: UTET, 1971), 529.
263 Archivio Storico FIAT, FIAT “Relazione Tecnica” (April 1919), 4
264 Valerio Castronovo, Giovanni Agnelli …cit., 220; Duccio Bigazzi has written a great deal about FIAT’s organization of work in the interwar period and about the application of scientific management at FIAT see for instance his “Management strategies in the Italian car industry 1906-1945: Fiat and Alfa Romeo” in The Automobile Industry and its Workers. Between Fordism and Flexibility, Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin eds. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 76-95; in 1911, Charles Bedaux set forth to develop a system that would improve the efficiency of workers: the results were a human efficiency system rooted in the infamous ‘B unit’ of productivity measure - the number of ‘man minutes’ required to perform a specified job or operation based on a predetermined measured standard.
Although FIAT plants Lingotto, built in 1923, and Mirafiori, built in 1939, copied much of the layout of Ford’s Highland Park and River Rouge plants, respectively, the Turinese manufacturer could not immediately transpose Fordist methods to Italy. FIAT, in fact, manufactured a wide range of car models and Italy at that time lacked the mass market for small cars. Moreover, Italian manpower was cheap and available thereby making less convenient to pursue the coupling of rationalisation and high wages that constituted the premise of Fordist productivity.265

During Fascism, any application of the Fordist philosophy to the Italian situation became forcibly more difficult. In place of the mass consumption that represented the basis of the American industrial development, the regime advocated moderation in private consumption and implemented a program of infrastructures and rearmament. The trips of Italian engineers to the temples of industrial American continued during the 1930s, but in a political climate that blamed American materialism, while exalting the Fascist value of tradition.266 Finally, as the war approached, the regime intervened more frequently in FIAT production strategies emphasizing attention to the recycling of precious metal scrap rather than to the rationalization of the organization of work. In sum, although FIAT adopted certain features of Fordism before the Second World War, such as the conveyor belt, the Bedaux system, and the vertical integration of production, these transformations did not undermine the importance of the skilled workforce. Increased production was more likely to be achieved through intensification of work rates and within a labour law that denied workers the right to strike.267

It was only after the war that FIAT saw conditions that would allow them to move towards mass production with the collaboration of American manufacturers and banks. At a time when other corporate managers, such as Alfa Romeo’s Pasquale Gallo, thought that “Italy [was] meant to be a country of craftsmanship”268 not of large

268 Quote from Pasquale Gallo in Bairati, Valletta...cit., 163.
industries, Valletta, interrogated in 1946 by a Ministerial Economic Commission, maintained that all the requirements need for rapid industrialization existed in Italy. The automobile industry, argued Valletta, had the chance to introduce new technology quickly, and even find a niche in a segment of the world market that the Americans could not tap.  

In 1947, Valletta travelled to the US to secure important loans with the Bank of America and the Export Import Bank. However, only the European Recovery Program (ERP) would provide the firm with the necessary capital to invest in the modernization of its equipment. From 1949 to 1951, FIAT received $30.9 million from ERP, 12.1 per cent of the total funding allocated to Italy. The aid of the ERP funds allowed FIAT to start using specialized machinery for the construction of standardized pieces on a larger scale than during the inter-war period. Grinding, boring, and lapping machines bought with the ERP funds permitted substitution of unskilled workers for the craftsmen who used to perform these operations. The single most important investment concerned the purchase of mechanic and hydraulic presses from Budd -an American leading manufacturer in this sector. These presses allowed a more rapid cycle of production and could be employed for working both at hot and cold temperature.

The number of ERP-financed machines purchased from the US certainly was evidence of Valletta's design to augment FIAT's production capacity while reducing costs. Workers were bewildered, and "astounded" to see cutting edge machinery after the long Fascist interruption. However, although the ERP grants facilitated the update of many key departments, these innovations were not yet integrated into an interconnected system. The reorganization of production was, by all means, a lengthy process at FIAT and it continued until the late 1950s. The importance of ERP funding was that it allowed FIAT to catch up with American technology in a relatively short period, an achievement that could not being taken for granted at the end of the war. The reconstruction of FIAT, therefore, seems to represent a case in which the ERP and the American financial and technical assistance programs provided the essential pre-

\footnotesize{269} For the remarks to the Economic Commission \textit{ibid.}, 158-163; see also Bigazzi, "Modelli e pratiche...", 973.  
\footnotesize{270} Confront this amount with the $ 2.1 million provided to Alfa Romeo and to the $6 million provided to Renault. See Archivio Storico Fiat, Verbali Consiglio D'Amministrazione 29 July and 23 November 1949; Duccio Bigazzi "Mirafiori e il modello Americano, 1936-1960" in \textit{Mirafiori} 269-271 and 273 for the presses.  
\footnotesize{271} Bairati, \textit{Valletta...cit}, 214-218; Archivio Storico FIAT, Fondo DAI, busta 108/2, Ing. Bruschi "Relazione" (1949); for details of ERP funds on the automotive industry see Comitato Interministeriale per la Ricostruzione (CIR), “Lo sviluppo dell’economia Italiana nel quadro della ricostruzione e della cooperazione europea” (Roma, 1952).
condition for the reorganization of production and the introduction of new techniques—an contention that has been lately under the scrutiny of the historiography.\footnote{It was FIAT worker Paolo Bonello who was “astounded” at the sight of the new machinery, see Archivio Storico FIAT, interview no.2.03. Concerning the Marshall Plan historiography that minimizes the importance of the American post war programs see: Charles Maier and Gunther Bischof eds., The Marshall Plan and Germany (Oxford: Berg, 1991) here see in particular Werner Abelshauser, “American Aid and West German Economic Recovery: A Macroeconomic Perspective”; at pan European level see Alan Mildward, The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-1951 (London: Methuen, 1984) and The European Rescue of the Nation State (London: Routledge, 1992); A different position is taken by Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel, eds., Americanization and its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Postwar Europe and Japan (Oxford: University Press, 1999).}

The ERP was also crucial in facilitating trust-based relationships among automotive firms. Valletta established a good working relationship with Chrysler managers, in particular Philip K. Hills. Chrysler offered its know-how to FIAT in exchange for the future possibility of outsourcing assembly of American parts to the Turinese factories. Soon, however, GM, Ford, and Packard were also ready to open their plants to the FIAT men. The openness of the Americans is to be explained by the fact that a general climate that encouraged information exchange among car manufactures was preferable to remaining excluded from key developments, especially at a time when European manufacturers were not in the position to compete in the US market.\footnote{White, The Automobile Industry since 1945 ...cit., 213-215; A. Fiorelli “Relazione di viaggio in America ottobre-novembre 1947” Archivio Storico FIAT, fondo DAI, busta 107/2. Because this machinery required a complex installation FIAT initiated a long lasting collaboration with American consulting firms, such as the Giffels&Vallet of Detroit which co-ordinated the reorganization of the casting and painting departments.}

The DAI (Direzione Affari Internazionali) collection of the FIAT archives provides us with some insights on how the technological transfer between Detroit and Turin occurred. This collection preserves all the reports of FIAT engineers who travelled to the Midwest plants. Italian engineers, despite significant technological gap between the American and Italian industry, were always able to analyse the conditions in the American plants, without being blinded by the scale of production. In doing so they fulfilled the goal of their mission, which was to select machinery and work-organization methods that were suitable for FIAT, rather than choosing those which, theoretically were more efficient. For instance, FIAT engineers expressed some reservation about the convenience of applying the procedure witnessed at Dodge Main, and in a GM Cadillac plant of piling up large stock reserves on the line; instead, the engineers suggested that only the daily needs be kept on the line at FIAT.\footnote{Archivio Storico Fiat, fondo DAI, busta 49; Bigazzi, “Mirafiori e il Modello Americano...”, 259-262.}

The reports of the DAI collection also provide a comment on the transformations that were occurring in the American automobile industry at that time, and which FIAT
looked to for reflections of its own future. In 1947, in one of its first trip to Detroit, the FIAT delegation remarked that, in many plants "discipline, both among blue and white collar workers, is much less complied with than in 1936. In some plants we have seen workers queuing to punch out even 15 minutes before the end of the shift, and then run to leave the factory [...] conversely, at the beginning of the shift, they talk among each other and set out to do the job half an hour later"\textsuperscript{275}. Here the delegation was, unconsciously, describing workers' empowerment at the point of production, in particular in the large Detroit plants, in a period when industrial relations in the automobile industry were still in flux. Compare this previous comment with another from a visit made only three years later, in 1950: "the pace of work is very intense on the assembly line and it is pushed to incredible limits at Oldsmobile and, above all, at the Fisher Body, in Hamilton. Over all, the pace of work is always superior to the European one; it is reassuring for a manager to see how workers here perform conscientiously even modest tasks".\textsuperscript{276}

One theme, however, was common to many reports: that of production. "Production", noticed Eng. Bruschi, "is in America the base of everything. When there is an obstacle that hinders it, everybody, from the top manager down to the worker, struggles to solve the problem". This theme, of course, and this rhetoric, was dear to Valletta, who, commenting on the American industry in an executive board meeting, remarked in turn that, "for us too, as for the Americans, production must be the base of everything".\textsuperscript{277}

In the late 1940s, FIAT, now better equipped thanks to the ERP purchases, augmented its automobile production many times. It not only quickly reached pre-war levels, but it soon surpassed them, tapping the vast possibilities of foreign and afterwards, the internal market. In 1947 FIAT produced 40,144 cars and trucks, two years later 79,800; in 1951 this figure rose to 132,153, and after a slow down in 1952, it reached 153,365 in 1953. The increase in production was the result of both technological reorganization and the additional exploitation of workers, which the CGIL unsuccessfully resisted in the season of le Grandi Lotte. From the point of view of output, it must be remarked that FIAT expansion in this period was still driven by

\textsuperscript{275} Archivio Storico Fiat, fondo DAI, busta 107/2, Ing. Genero, "Impressioni". He added "Tutti questi disordini si notano maggiormente a Detroit [...] in quasi tutte le fabbriche visitate nei piccoli centri industriali abbiamo riscontrato regolarità e ritmi di lavoro migliori delle fabbriche di Detroit".

\textsuperscript{276} See Lichtenstein, The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit...cit.; last quote from Archivio Storico Fiat, fondo DAI, busta 107/4, P. Ragazzi "Relazione sui sistemi di lavorazione macchinario ed attrezzature impiegate negli stabilimenti USA"13 March, 1950.

\textsuperscript{277} Archivio Storico FIAT, fondo DAI, busta 107/3, “Relazione Bruschi” 12 April, 1947; Valletta’s quote from Archivio Storico Fiat, Verbali consiglio d'amministrazione, 7 May 1947.
medium-sized cars like the 1900, 1400, and 1100. However, in 1953, FIAT released the *nuova 1100*, a more affordable version of the first model, which paved the way in 1955 for the inexpensive 600—an event that signalled a real turning point in the history of Italian motorization.278

In 1955, the year of the FIOM’s defeat and of the release of the 600, car production jumped to 250,072. Clearly, for Valletta, product differentiation, repression of militants, and technological reorganization, all worked together to accomplish the plan of mass motorization. But the cornerstone of this strategy, and the key for FIAT development in the postwar period, remained the constant drive to increase productivity in the plants. In both Italy and the US, ‘productivity’ is the basis for understanding all the changes that occurred in the factory and in industrial relations.279

In Europe, at the end of the war, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) launched ‘productivity’ as a shorthand for the American style of management. Many countries, Italy included, established National Productivity Committees in order to propagate and train managers in American methods. These efforts achieved only limited results in a knot of medium sized firms. For most employers ‘productivity’ amounted merely to a speed up, while, in the poverty-stricken postwar Italy they preferred to pay low wages rather than invest resources in a better productive process or bargain with unions for increased effort from workers. However, as we have seen, FIAT and a few other corporations had a completely different outlook. They foresaw quick expansion of the internal market, and pursued greater efficiency through their own channels of communication with the United States.280

Valletta, in fact, had a clear idea of what productivity meant and what it was for. He observed that,

The term productivity refers to a technical idea that measures the relationship between the use of production means (workers, machinery, and time) and the quality of the production; more than that, this term summarizes the practical aim of industrial progress, which is to provide to increasing masses of consumers, increasing quantities of useful goods at low prices, in order to

achieve economic prosperity and a better standard of living for the people, both in a material and moral sense.\textsuperscript{281}

These words encapsulated the Fordist origins of Valletta's vision of mass production, mass consumerism, and high wages for the Italians. Valletta now proposed the American model, which during the war had remained unattainable for political and economic reason, as the means to uplift a country ravaged by the conflict. In fact, in the 1950s, Italian manufacturing grew tremendously, thus generating the 'economic miracle' that allegedly closed the gap between the standard of living in Italy and that in other European countries. Durable consumer goods like automobiles, washing machines, and refrigerators became the norm in Italian households. However, it must be noted that among Italian manufacturers few enterprises adopted a Fordist production process to the same extent that FIAT did (and it was always, as we have said, a selective adaptation). For instance, a survey done in 1953 revealed that 80 per cent of firms in this sector did not systematically time work operations. At Fiat, instead, in the same period up-to-date systems of scientific organization, such the MTM (Methods-Time Measurement) found application in the shops. The MTM, first applied on the 600 line, consisted of a precise measurement of the workers movements, in order to eliminate all superfluous motion. Replacing the outdated Bedaux system with the MTM, FIAT presented the new system with an aura of scientific objectivity. The MTM considered even eye movements as a component of the task, and paid accordingly.\textsuperscript{282}

In the late 1950s, FIAT completed the modernization of both its "power technology" and "processing technology" by picking up the most appropriate American machinery. At the same time, FIAT began experimenting with the "material handling technology" or automation, although only during the 1960s did it fully integrate automatic devices into the production process. In the 1950s, FIAT applied automated technology less extensively than did other growing European manufacturers, like Renault. The slowness of this process reflected FIAT managers' underestimation of market demand and their caution in adopting this kind of innovation before they were completely certain that it would guarantee a high return in productivity. Furthermore, the cost of purchasing and debugging transfer machines made them convenient only in the presence of a considerable volume of production. The Turinese firm probably

\textsuperscript{281} Extract from Archivio Storico Fiat, \textit{Relazioni del Consiglio d'amministrazione e dei sindaci}, 10 Aprile 1952.
\textsuperscript{282} G. Morello "Indagine sul grado di organizzazione delle aziende italiane" in \textit{Rivista di organizzazione aziendale}, 1:1 (1957); on the MTM see H. B. Maynard, G. J. Stegermerten, J.L. Schwab, \textit{Methods-Time Measurement} (New York, 1948); on its application at FIAT see Bigazzi "Mirafiori e il modello americano...", 290-291; Pasquale De Stefani, interviewed on April 2001 has provided me with several information about the application of MTM at FIAT.
reached the necessary output only in the late 1950s, when it flanked the best seller 600 with the 500. With the two models, FIAT sold 623,178 cars in 1961.283

In particular, automation was implemented in the engine departments, where in the late 1950s it completed 30 per cent of the operations for the 600. In situations where it was applied, automation cut both time and costs per unit, but it also created certain cost rigidities in the production flow that required an ever increasing production flow to make it economically advantageous. On the other hand, because of the tighter control on the workforce, and the marked rise in productivity in non-automated departments, such as the body shops during this period, the exact contribution of automation is difficult to estimate.284

The technological transfer brought to Italy the attached debate on the social consequences of automation, and in particular the problem of "technological" unemployment, which I will not discuss because, drawing from the American texts, it follows the lines of the American debate. In Italy, however, the presence of a strong Communist labour movement complicated the matter by raising interpretations of whether automation was a new phenomenon, or one that could be inscribed in the framework elaborated by Marx in his chapter: "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry."285 Another, more important, Italian characteristic was the deep divide between the few technologically advanced corporations, like FIAT or Olivetti, and the vast majority of backward, although highly productive, manufacturers. CGIL and CISL (which, in the 1960s, as we have seen, was undergoing a political transformation) saw that, because only a few firms could afford to automate, that this gap would only become wider, thereby making it more difficult for trade union confederations to represent the totality of industrial workers. Although these unions were not against automation per se, they called for co-operation between workers’ representatives and managers on strategic technological choices—a call that was to remain unanswered.

283 I use here the classification that William A. Faunce suggested in "Automation and the Division of Labor" in Automation, Alienation, and Anomie, Simon Marcson ed. (New York: Harper, 1970). He argued there that the production process can be divided into four basic components: power technology, processing technology, materials handling technology, regulation of output quality. For a comparison with the French manufacturers see Alain Touraine, L’evolution du travail ouvrier aux Usines Renault (Paris: CNRS, 1955); Jean-Louis Loubert, Citroen, Peugeot, Renault et les autres. Soixante ans de strategies (Paris: Le Monde Editions, 1995); Archivio Storico Fiat, Fiat: le fasi della crescita...cit.; all in all this system of innovation was not different from the one of FIAT’s American counterparts in whose plants automated and “traditional” departments often co-existed.

284 Olinto Sassi, Considerazioni sul progresso tecnologico alla FIAT nella produzione automobilistica, in Il progresso tecnologico e la società italiana. Effetti economici del progresso tecnologico sull’economia industriale italiana 1938-1958 Vol. 2, (Milano: 1961), 181-197 [He reports there the increased productivity of production workers in hours/kilos of end product note: 1948,100; 1953,47.5; 1958,27].

285 Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, ...cit.
until the *autunno caldo*. Other unions like the UIL confederation and, at FIAT, the SIDA offered instead a more conciliatory position, buying into the argument that automation would lower commodities prices, augment consumption and, in turn, increase production and employment.\(^{286}\)

With the progressive adoption of automatic transfer lines, the Turinese automobile industry completed the phase of catching up' with American technology. In the 1960s, a period of continuous expansion of production, FIAT abandoned its traditional circumspection about the suitability of American technology. FIAT was growing: in 1958 it inaugurated the first part of Mirafiori Sud, an attachment to the existing Mirafiori plant that expanded during the 1960s until eventually it had doubled the size of the original plant. It was not by chance that American technical consultants had been involved in the planning of Mirafiori Sud. In 1967, Mirafiori was a complex that employed 54,000 workers and covered 1.2 million square meters. The huge size of this plant, its extensive use of automation, with the associated problems of synchronizing production, and the social consequence of gathering several thousands of workers, made Mirafiori a rigid idol with feet of clay. However, before the *autunno caldo* brought the need for flexibility and decentralization to the agenda, Mirafiori, the core of FIAT, had shown how well the firm responded to the challenges of rapid expansion. Mirafiori represented a successful example of transnational technological transfer. In 1968, observing that FIAT’s hourly production of engines surpassed American standards, one FIAT engineer on a visit to the US commented "we always found inspiration in American machinery, but now FIAT transfer lines are not to be considered inferior". This comment anticipated the American discovery that they had lost their pre-eminence in manufacturing, which opened the way for the ensuing restructuring of the Fordist factory in the postmodern age.\(^{287}\)


\(^{287}\) Note that the Mirafiori complex eventually covered 3,756,290 mq, equal to 6.2 per cent of Turin; see Daniela Ferrero, “Mirafiori: Una predisposizione alla quantità” in Olmo, *Mirafiori...cit.* , 85; quote from Archivio Storico Fiat, fondo DAI, busta 51, “Visita in USA a costruttori di macchine a trasferta” 28 September - 18 October 1968, 10; Archivio Storico Fiat, *Fiat: le fasi della crescita...cit.* ; Giuseppe Volpato, *Il caso FIAT. Una strategia di riororganizzazione e di rilancio* (Torino, 1966), 58-62; Stefano Musso “Production Methods and Industrial Relations at FIAT (1930-90) in *Fordism transformed...cit.* ; to put Fiat’s growth in an international perspective consider that, according to an internal document in 1966. Italian automotive production increased of 16.1 per cent while world production increased of only 1.1 per cent in Fondazione Vera Nocentini, *fondo Rieser, busta 19, “Scelte produttive e tendenze di sviluppo alla FIAT”*. 

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In both Turin and Detroit, the twenty years after the end of the Second World War represented a crucial period of transformation of the production process and of industrial relations. At the onset of the Cold War, as the American hegemony on the Western bloc promised an expanding market for consumer goods, organized labour stood as the only obstacle to the manufacturers' vision of an industrial regime of high productivity and high profits. The war had, in fact, created expectations of a pluralistic society, in which labour participated in the regulation of the economy. On the shop floor, rank-and-file militancy backed these aspirations by claiming a measure of control at the point of production.

The rigid ideological fissures of the period gave the upper hand inside the union movement to those who endorsed the managerial quest for productivity. In the US, Reuther dismantled leftist-UAW locals linked to the Communist party or the militant left. In Italy, the Catholic and Social Democratic components of the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro established their own federations, creating conditions that allowed repression and exclusion of the Communist component. On the shop floor, this choice inevitably led unionists to become unwitting partners in the politics of wrestling control back to management.

In the US, unions such as the UAW gave the impression that industrial relations had entered an era of 'liberal consensus', in which management agreed to give workers a fair share of profits in exchange for the industrial calm necessary to fulfil market demand. In Turin, SIDA's attempts to fully conform industrial relations to the same 'American Model' that FIAT enthusiastically followed in the organization of work eventually met with resistance from the company. FIAT managers were unwilling to pay the economic costs of the full legitimisation of unions as business partners, and assigned them a much more limited role by giving patronage leverage to their officers. In this way, the largest Italian car manufacturer showed an anti-union prejudice much more entrenched than that of its American counterparts. However, in the United States too, technological and strategic choices, such as those hastily dubbed 'automation' and 'decentralization' revealed manufacturers' intention to undermine the foundation of a strong, although accommodating, organized labour.

In both cases, managerial practices contained the pitfall of an excessive rigidity both in the production process and in labour relations. The liabilities of the American Model and its Italian variation became evident once new social groups, such as African-Americans in Detroit, and Meridionali in Turin, questioned the trade off between wages and productivity. In the late 1960s, their insurgence opened a period in which both unions and manufacturers had to take into account a larger social world outside the
factory. However, these groups could exert such leverage only because of the technological transformations that were occurring at the factory.

A transnational process moulded FIAT’s production technology along the lines of advanced Fordism that the Detroit manufacturers had explored in the postwar years. Automation moved quite rapidly through the highly competitive automobile industry, once again enabling managers to set the pace of production after a period in the wake of the war when this right had been contested. Spreading from Detroit to Turin, automation allowed Fordism—as historian Stephen Meyer has remarked—to continue to dominate the automobile industry during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Meyer has fittingly characterized this endurance as the “persistence of Fordism.” However, the effects of such transformation rebounded differently on the two motor cities. In Detroit, automation accelerated the decentralization of auto plants and progressively shrank employment opportunities for the migrants who were pouring into the city at that time. In Turin, just the opposite occurred—the expansion of productivity provided by the new technological reorganization stimulated the unfettered growth of the auto industry and its suppliers. In both cases, automated production systems had reintroduced to the industry relatively inflexible investments that were vulnerable to industrial action. Without this technological evolution, the action of a minority (although it was a sizeable minority) of radicals could not have been so effective in challenging the “politics of productivity” at the point of production.

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Chapter Three
Years of Transformation:
*Meridionali* and African-Americans in Detroit and Turin.
1947-1967

During and after the Second World War, in Italy and the United States, migration from the south to the north of the countries caused great social transformations. In Italy, three million workers left the *Mezzogiorno* during the 1950s and the 1960s. This mass exodus reached a peak during 1958-1963, due to the high rate of economic growth in northern Italy during this time. In the United States, between 1940 and 1960, more than five million people left the American South, three million of which were African-Americans. The latter added to the millions who had left the South during the first Great Migration a generation earlier. By 1966 only 55 per cent of blacks lived below the Mason-Dixon line.  

In both Italy and the US there were many economic and social factors that made workers leave their homeland and settle in the industrial centres of the north. In the United States, in rural areas across the South and in the Appalachian region, machines replaced farmlands as the region shifted from subsistence to commercial agriculture. The coal industry underwent a similar transformation when it introduced new machinery during a period of slackening demand for coal. These transformations created an employment crisis that induced Southerners to look to northern manufacturing industry for salvation. The opportunities of the national labour market during the 1940s released millions of unskilled workers who had been bottled up in the

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Southern economy. African-Americans paid the toll of the economic change disproportionately, as an entrenched pattern of discrimination denied them the meagre opportunities that the region provided to whites. Black Americans were therefore eager to escape the pervasive system of racial segregation that mocked their rights as citizens and hurt their dignity as human beings. Also, the successful development in mechanical cotton harvesting meant that they had outlived their usefulness as sharecroppers and tenants. This trend continued during the 1950s and in the early 1960s. In fact, although the South was slowly and unequally changing, the social and political situation, in the light of the ‘massive resistance’ against civil rights, continued to be a significant push factor for African Americans.²⁹⁰

In Italy the *questione meridionale*, the question of the South, surfaced immediately after the Italian unification in 1861. For decades afterwards the problem remained unsolved, and it worsened as the North (in particular the Northwest) developed a strong base of manufacturing and the South stalled in a backward rural economy.²⁹¹ Agrarian reforms in the 1950s failed to efficiently allocate the land. The pieces of land redistributed from broken *latifundia* were small and not fertile, barely sufficient for subsistence agriculture, let alone making the South competitive with the North. Even the subsequent government policy, always tainted with patronage, to subsidize industrial investments in the region, achieved little in terms of employment, as only capital-intensive industries accepted the move South. These industrial complexes came to be known as ‘cathedrals in the desert’ as they were surrounded by desolate rural villages and did not contribute to the development of the region. A Parliamentary commission established in 1951 to investigate poverty ascertained that a quarter of Italian households fell in the “poor” category, but a majority of these, 50.2 per cent lived in the South. The bottom of misery was to be found in Calabria were the average income was only 30 per cent of Piedmont.²⁹²

The *Mezzogiorno* had traditionally been a pool of migrants. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth, they migrated to the Americas.

After the Second World War, they migrated towards Northern European countries and, increasingly, to Italy’s Northwest. Both in Italy and the United States, Southerners saw migration as the only alternative to a life of material poverty. The North, which they knew through the ‘grapevine’ and through the media, offered opportunities for quick economic advancement as wages in manufacturing more than tripled those in agriculture. Young Southerners were also attracted by the lure of the city life, which markedly contrasted the oppressive social order and the dull life of rural villages.293

Migration from Appalachia and the American South occurred later and was exclusively internal to the States, but it was equally informed by migrants’ desire to move from rural to urban areas. For both white Appalachians and Southern blacks, migratory chains followed extended family ties. In both the US and Italy therefore an extensive southern region provided the necessary flow of labour to the industrialised north. In the United States these depressed regions became part of the “Other America”294. In Italy the situation was characterised as the “Two Italies”295. Recognition that Mezzogiorno and Appalachia lagged behind the standard of their wealthy countries led to the establishment of two equally ineffective institutions. This is not the place to analyse the Casa per il Mezzogiorno and the Appalachian Regional Commission. It will suffice to say that their infrastructural improvements, and, in Italy, massive credit facilitation, did not result in any increase of the industrial base, nor in the alleviation of the causes of migration.296

Moving north, southerners altered the urban configuration of the cities they settled in, which in many cases where unprepared to host such a number of newcomers. Class, cultural, and, in the United States, racial, differences set off migrants from the established population creating conflicts that sometimes escalated in violence. Southerners transformed the workplace by resisting integration to the Fordist production process, or by embracing it and interpret it within their own cultural parameters. They also affected union politics by bringing their own agenda to the labour relations and by demanding inclusion as protagonists in the system of industrial

295 For a re-evaluation of this expression see Mariella Pandolfi, “Two Italies: Rhetorical Figures of Failed Nationhood” in Italy’s Southern Question, Jane Schneider eds. (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 285-289
relations. In some cases, migrants espoused radical tactics and ideologies to advance their demands. Eventually, in confronting economic and social forces which excluded them, and - in the words of writer Salman Rushdie - "[having] been obliged to define themselves -because they are so defined by others - by their otherness", they also shaped their own identity.\textsuperscript{297}

In this chapter I consider the problems the migrants encountered in the north and point out similarities and differences between the American and the Italian case. In the first section I look at the encounter between Meridionali and African Americans and their Northerner counterparts. In Detroit, where discrimination operated through institutions and was fuelled by white supremacist voluntary organizations, blacks also reacted by forming their own organization to claim their rights. In Turin, where discriminatory attitudes existed but were politically censored, Meridionali adopted individual rather than collective responses. In the second section of the chapter I look at migrants as workers. Although the spheres of the city and the factory were strictly intertwined, the experiences of migrants and African Americans in the workplace often differed markedly from their experience as residents. In this realm their destiny was informed, not only by social practices, but also by the working of economic forces, which rapidly drove Detroit toward de-industrialization, while bringing about an ephemeral expansion in Turin. Finally, in the third section I look at the experience of those migrants and African-Americans who took part in the radical movement that stirred the automobile plants in the late 1960s. I suggest that for many of them this choice was not dictated by clarity of political goals but by the need to construct the basis of their new identity in an environment where they formerly occupied a marginal place. My overall aim is to provide an all-round picture of these workers that include both their class and non-class identities, and to link the development of their collective identity to the evolution of Fordism itself, which created the conditions of its own demise by provoking the urban crisis that than reverberated into the factory.

\textbf{Migrants become residents: Detroit in the 1940s and Turin in the 1950s.}

Although Southern black and white migrants moved to Detroit as early as the 1920s, their impact on the city became especially noticeable in the 1940s. With the onset of the war, Detroit witnessed a dramatic expansion of its manufacturing base and

a quick recovery from the Great Depression. Employment opportunities skyrocketed in auto plants that had quickly converted their lines to become the "arsenal of democracy". For Southern farmers and returning soldiers Detroit offered the possibility to fulfil the American Dream. Black Americans, in particular, eagerly took advantage of the new opportunities that the war offered to them, either on the front or at home. Blacks, more than whites, were willing to travel long distances to take up manufacturing jobs. In part, the histories of black and white Southerners ran together, as similar were the economic and social forces that uprooted them. On the other hand, the paths they followed in their destination set them apart, as a result of overwhelming racial and social constraints.

Southern migrants of either race did not receive a warm reception on their arrival in Detroit. "The feeling towards the white Appalachians was about the same as the black and white feeling was" commented one old Detroit resident to anthropologist John Hartigan. Both groups were considered a stain on the city's image. They provided cheap labour, but they were stereotyped as lazy, unreliable, and violent. Their rural ways stunned native Detroiters who labelled them as unfit to live the city life. After the racial incident in the shore of Belle Isle that led to the race riot of 1943, native Detroiters considered "hillbillies", Southern whites from the Appalachian region, and "Negroes" to be the cause for the escalation of violence. In doing so they reaffirmed the traditional assumption that only "lower-class" whites are responsible for acts of racial violence. During the riot white mobs roamed through the city assaulting black passers-by and stoning African-Americans' cars. Eventually 33 persons lay dead. Mayor Jeffries and the press blamed it on the Southerners inability to adapt to urban living. They believed that Southerners were "clinging to Jim Crow notions" of social order. However, other incidents, in particular over the allocation of public housing involved mainly native white communities.

A sociological survey conducted in 1952 by Arthur Kornhauser, ten years after the race riot, seems to confirm the narrative of Hartigan’s interviewee (see above). White Detroiters saw Southerners, whatever their race, as a cultural other. To the question "What people in Detroit are undesirable?" Detroiteres in the early 1950s responded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminals, gangsters, etc.</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Southern whites; hillbillies, etc.</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-self supporting, transients, drifters, etc.</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negroes</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who had come lately</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>12%(^{302})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this survey, the category "Negroes" collected fewer responses than "hillbillies", but what is more interesting is that Detroiters seemed negative toward all kinds of newcomers, as demonstrated by the fact that the categories "transients", "People who had come lately" "foreigners", and "others" amassed 40 per cent of the answers.

White and black Southerners shared a great deal in terms of language, food habits, lifestyle, and attitudes towards the industrial city and white Detroiters despised both groups. The presence of white people displaying many attributes usually ascribed to the Black race confused the racial perceptions of white Detroiters. White Appalachians were a kind of 'in-between' people, possessing the physical traits of the white Anglo-Saxon heritage, while at the same time contradicting the mainstream representation of Americanness.\(^{303}\)

By reading Kornhauser one is left with the impression that Detroiters alternatively directed their contempt at Blacks or Hillbillies depending upon the sort of unpleasant encounter they had in their neighbourhoods or workplace. This would confirm that a class element was paramount in the representation of the Southern black migrant as other. Northerners would accuse white Appalachians of being "nigger-rich", meaning they were prone to spend money on alcohol and games. By transposing the degrading connotation of this racial label, this appellation attests, again, to an interplay between class and race.\(^{304}\)

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\(^{304}\) See also Hartigan, *Racial Situations*, 46. I take the expression "nigger-rich" from Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed*..., 239 she quotes from Eldwin S. Harwood, "Work and Community
While socio-economic conditions determined the neighbourhood where Southern migrants would first settle and the type of occupation they would seek, it would then be racial factors that would mostly shape their path towards integration or exclusion. In fact, Southern migrants found in Detroit and other Midwestern cities, patterns of racial discrimination that reminded them of the South. Arthur Johnson, head of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), Detroit branch, recalled: "when I first came to Detroit I thought of it as most Southern blacks did: it had to be better than what we were living in". To his disappointment Johnson discovered that blacks in the North were denied the opportunities of social (and spatial) mobility that even white Appalachians enjoyed.\textsuperscript{305}

African-Americans represented only 9.2 per cent of the population in 1940, but their numbers increased to 16.2 per cent ten years later. By 1960, Detroit was 28.9 per cent black (see table 1). It is difficult to understand the exact weight of white southern migrants. Since the census specifies race but not geographical origin, and since, contrary to ethnic groups, southern whites did not carry distinct surnames, they disappear in the statistics. When the 1940s turn into the 1950s, it is already impossible to collect evidence about the "hillbillies" path to integration.

Given the large influx of newcomers in this period, a shortage housing became "the most urgent single problem" of the city.\textsuperscript{306} However, in the rush for decent accommodation African-American migrants had a special disadvantage. An article in the \textit{Detroit Free Press} commented on the housing situation: "We have regressed in race relations. Evidence of tension grows. Competition for living space, rumours spread by both white and Negroes have heightened hostility. Negative attitudes are played up." The article referred, in ambiguous terms, to the confrontation taking place in the city on the issue of \textit{de facto} segregated neighbourhoods between an open housing movement, supported by civil rights and religious groups together with the Mayor's Interracial Committee, and a conservative group of homeowners and civic associations. The latter

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Image description}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{306} Kornhauser, \textit{Detroit as People...}, 75.
constituted a grass roots movement that profoundly shaped Detroit’s urban space, which "became a metaphor for perceived racial differences." 307

Nothing exemplified the effects of institutionalised racism in narrowing the range of choices for African-Americans than the modus operandi of urban segregation. Historian Thomas Sugrue has shown that the practices and the interests of real estate brokers, bankers, and city planners all conspired to preserve the racial homogeneity of the neighbourhoods and to heighten racial animosity. Although the Supreme Court prohibited racial covenants in 1948, the housing market continued to be segregated well into the 1960s. Realtors who offended white customers by selling to people considered to be "detrimental to the property values" of the neighbourhood could face expulsion from the National Association of Real Estate Boards. 308 They could also be intimidated by the residents. Banks considered it a risky investment to finance black homebuyers, particularly in poor or racially transitional neighbourhoods. As a result only well-off families could afford the high initial payment and the rates that were necessary to buy a house with non-conventional financing such as land contracts. 309

Projects of urban redevelopment during the 1940s and 1950s often exacerbated the problem. Slum clearances devastated densely populated black areas where residents had little power to influence the city’s administration. On the occasion of the displacement of hundreds of families for the construction of a freeway, Mayor Albert Cobo commented: "That’s the price of progress". Every redevelopment effort, including the allocation of public housing, was severely undermined by the city administration’s resolve to contain blacks in selected areas. Every redevelopment plan was pre-empted by social and economic forces that gave preference to commercial and industrial developments, and to beautiful civic symbols rather than to housing the poor. 310

These discriminatory practices also excluded blacks from new suburbs that were open to white homebuyers. Whites fleeing the city strove to create suburban municipalities secure from racial change. Federal legislation reinforced and legitimised local inclinations. Mostly whites benefited from the mortgage insurance programs of the Federal Housing Administration and the Veteran Administration as, in practice, the

308 Ibid., 228
land where construction of black housing was allowed remained minimal. Furthermore, the same freeways that displaced hundreds of African-American families permitted middle and working class whites to escape to the suburbs. Figures of racial dissimilarity showed that suburban lines proved more difficult to cross than urban ones (see table 2). Residential segregation was not only a humiliating experience for its victims: as David Harvey has pointed out, the spatial ecology of the city provides different groups with different access to resources and public goods. In fact, as auto jobs and other economic opportunities moved to non-metropolitan areas, black Americans found themselves increasingly entrapped in a decaying post-industrial city surrounded by prosperous suburbs. By the mid-1970s even an energetic black administration in Detroit could not undo the damage of decades of racial discrimination.  

By defending the racial boundaries of their neighborhood, white homeowners not only resisted racial and social change in their community, but also protected their investment. Racial change diminished white people's confidence in the future of their neighborhood. In the context of potential flight, owners would not be motivated to invest in improving their homes. In turn, neighborhood decay reinforced the perception that the presence of black families would depreciate properties.  

The numerous episodes of violence - the ultimate buttress of this system - in racially changing areas must be read in the context of a web of prejudiced practices that resulted in a depreciation of property values in black areas. Homeowners "improvement" associations protested in a number of ways against black homebuyers. Signs reading "If you're black go back to Africa were you belong" or "Negroes moving here will be burned. Signed Neighbors" were posted to houses sold to black families. Often these associations tried to pre-empt the threat of a racial change by discouraging African-Americans visiting the neighborhood. When the Dodge Community Center started being used by some black families, more than forty residents wrote to the centre complaining "this gives the impression that this is a Negro neighborhood" and more...  

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311 See Kenneth Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier...cit.*; David Harvey, *Social Justice and the city* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973); in 1967 the NAACP Labor Department commented in its annual report "The most recent reliable data on the economic status of the Negro wage earners [clearly] indicates that the Negro workers and his family have been forced outside the “opportunity structure” of American life and that Negro communities are now experiencing rates of unemployment and underemployment that exceed the general poverty rates for the entire nation during the Great Depression of the 1930s" in Library of Congress, NAACP papers, group IV, box A75, folder: Herbert Hill reports.  
312 June Thomas, *Redevelopment...cit.*, 87-89.
explicitly: "The value of our property is affected by so many colored people in the center".  

Verbal or written protests could be followed by actual violence either against blacks newcomers in the block, or against white families selling to blacks. Vandalism and bombing were the most common incidents, but the homeowners associations could employ several tactics. When the Woodsons, an African-American family, moved into their new house they received an anonymous letter stating: "Get off this street or we will blow you off". A few days later, a neighbour shot at their front door. Finally, a spokesman for the "citizen committee" approached the family and convinced to accept a thousand dollars more that they had invested to move out. The Woodsons accepted. The spokesman commented: "Practically every family in the neighborhood contributed money to help settle this problem, and we hope to foster this community spirit by working together on other projects".  

Remarked black Reverend Horace White with sarcasm: "The funny thing about this mob... is that it is led by so-called Christian men and women. These people are members of churches, on trustee boards of churches, members of unions... All of these organisations teach the brotherhood of man... Another ironic thing about the mob... is that it uses a church for its meeting place."  

Violence was a powerful deterrent in the short term and black homebuyers who resisted violence were an exception. However, in the long term all the "threatened" neighbourhoods changed their racial composition, but change would come through block-by-block expansion of the ghetto rather than through integration.

Violence afflicted not only those few homebuyers who challenged the colour line, but also the majority of African-Americans who did not have the means to flee the ghetto. While black homeowners in changing neighbourhoods complained that the police reluctantly dispersed the white crowds menacing their home and family, black ghetto residents were actively harassed by the police. Police brutality ranked high in the agenda of problems of the NAACP during the 1950s, but it would come to national attention only a decade later when clashes between police and more defiant black youth ignited civil disturbances, most notably the 1967 riot. In 1968, in a survey of the Detroit

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313 Sugrue, The Origins...cit., 247; ALUA, Detroit Commission on Community Relations Collection (DCCR), box 9, folder 53- 8; ALUA, DCCR, box 9, folder 53-30, 15 October, 1953

314 These quotes and the whole Woodson episode is related in ALUA, DCCR, box 9, folder 53-40, entry 15 October 1953.

315 Quote from Horace White in Race and Uneven Development, Joe T. Darden et al...cit., 128. See Sugrue, The Origins...cit., 231-258; for a more complete analysis of this problem.
Free Press, black Detroiters rated police brutality first among the causes of the riot; poor housing, poverty, and lack of jobs followed.\(^{316}\)

According to a NAACP document, complaints against the police went from the use of racial slurs to the practice of stopping black women on the streets to accuse them of prostitution, and from the search and destruction of property without a warrant to unmotivated physical assault.\(^{317}\) Not the entire African-American community was affected by police brutality in the same way. Detroit’s East Side, the Black Bottom, and Paradise Valley, traditional black areas that housed the poorest underclass, were a favourite target. But, for instance, General Baker, born in Detroit from a Georgian family, did not recall any encounter with the "Big Four" before he moved from Highland Park to downtown. The Big Four - four police officers in a patrol car - is one of the most recurrent representations of the discriminatory attitude of the police department in the black Detroiters narratives. "They would generally harass young African-Americans - tells another black migrant - they'd see us assembled in a group, and there it looked like the old assembly law in the south where we couldn't cluster together […] They would hit upside the head, you dare not say anything back 'cause they were four of them all the time. So they were prepared to gun you down".\(^{318}\)

One major cause of the police-community relation was the system of recruitment of the police department that kept the force overwhelmingly white. Many were recruited among Appalachian "rednecks" from Kentucky or Tennessee. Furthermore, the black community complained that only most "bigoted" officers were assigned to the ghetto "were the opportunity to act out the prejudice is always available".\(^{319}\) In the aftermath of the riot, and of the Algiers Motel episode where white policemen shot three unarmed blacks, the Detroit Police Department was under increasing pressure to both reform its practices and get tougher on black crime. In the early 1970s, while paying lip service to the desegregation of its ranks, the department instituted a covert program called STRESS (Stop The Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets).

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\(^{317}\) “NAACP Commission on Community Relations”, ALUA, DNAACP collection, part II, box 10, folder 12.

\(^{318}\) Interview with General Baker, June 2002; Interview with Herb Boyd, May 2002: “They would hit upside the head there say anything back 'cause they were four of them all the time. So they were prepared to gun you down”.

\(^{319}\) “The problem is not of a few 'bad eggs' in a police department of 1,000 or 10,000 men, but rather of a police system that recruits a significant number of bigots, reinforces the bigotry through the department's value system and socialization with older officers, and then takes the worst of the officers and puts them on duty in the ghetto were the opportunity to act out the prejudice is always available" in Burton Levy "The cop and the ghetto: a problem of police system" 11 November 1967, typescript in ALUA, Horace Gilmore Collection, box 13 (Negro-Police Relation), folder 3; John Hersey, Algiers Motel Incident (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968).
STRESS used plain cloth officers who, while claiming to curb street crime, brought terror to the ghettos of Detroit when its hot-head officers engaged in number of shoot-outs. STRESS was responsible for a high number of deaths, in particular among black teenagers. According to a source it made the Detroit Police Department "the department with the highest number of civilian deaths per capita in the country". The unit generated much criticism from liberal whites and civil rights organisations. Detroit radicals led an anti-STRESS campaign in the streets and achieved acquittal for the defendants in two cases of self-defence against STRESS officers. After being at the centre, in one way or another, of the local political platforms during the early 1970s, the department underwent serious reform only after the election of black Mayor Coleman Young in 1973 and not without tensions.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, blacks in Detroit resisted the oppression of discrimination and prejudice through actively organizing themselves, first in the community then in the workplace. The Detroit branch of the NAACP, formed in 1911, was one of the oldest in the country. Throughout the 1950s, the NAACP opposed discrimination in public housing, police brutality, and segregation in public facilities. It pressured city leaders and employers to open opportunities for the black community. Most notably, it collected millions of dollars in order to win the key legal battles that changed the life of millions of black Americans. Black Detroiters joined other organizations like the Urban League or the Cotillion Club, and formed their own Masonic lodges. To even a greater extent they organised through the churches. These groups pursued the improvement of the African-American community according to different philosophies. The Urban League followed the tradition of Booker T. Washington of self-improvement and negotiation with "enlightened" businessmen. In Detroit the Urban League ran courses and seminars to prepare young blacks for job interviews. Throughout the 1940s, the Urban League had functioned as an employment agency for recent migrants who needed advice on how to approach the segregated labour market. Following the modest growth of the black middle class, the League shifted its focus to finding white-collar jobs for black graduates. The results were not

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520 Wilma Hood Henrickson, Detroit Perspectives (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 452;
521 On STRESS see Georgakas, Surkin, Detroit...cit., 151-173; for the political battle and the courtroom cases around STRESS see Thompson, Whose Detroit...cit., 81-102.
encouraging. Remarked an Urban League officer: "I have 600 young Negroes, men and women with degrees [...] and there isn't any place where to send them." 323

While the inspiring principles of these groups were different, they often formed coalitions to promote or fight a particular piece of legislation or an institutional initiative. For example the “open housing” movement was comprised of the main civil rights groups in the city together with progressive white religious groups of different confessions. The movement exposed the discriminatory practices of real estate agencies and allied with the Democrats at state level to draft a bill that penalized real estate brokers who continued these practices. Although the bill did not pass, in the late 1950s and the early 1960s the open housing movement made neighbourhood integration a central political issue. 324

None of this existed in the case of Meridionali, in Turin or elsewhere. Meridionali did help each other through the networks of friends and family that are typical of migratory chains. However, they never organised as a pressure group in the community until they organised in the factories in the late 1960s. The explanation to this difference does not lie in a supposedly more comfortable situation of the southern Italians. Although they were not victim of the brutal racial hate of the American case, they nevertheless confronted the similar material and psychological problems of integration. Instead, the reason has to be found in an initial lack of group identity and in a lack of class stratification inside their community. In fact, Meridionale – and its pejoratives like terrone – was an appellation that did not carried any particular meaning for the southern migrants. Their identity was rooted in their village or, in some instances, their region (Sicily, Calabria, and so on). They lacked a communal notion of being part of a Meridione until they encountered northerners who were not acquainted with differences in the South. Habits and dialects of Meridionali were diverse and only the shared experience of migration made communication among them easier than with natives. On the contrary African Americans had developed a unique culture throughout centuries of sharing the collective experience first of slavery and then of segregation. Although some Meridionali – those with education and urban background – managed to move to white collar positions, they did not provide the kind of leadership to the

community that we see in the case of African American communities, where
association like the NAACP and the Urban League were all headed by middle class
blacks. *Meridionali* resembled in this instance more to the Appalachian migrants who
‘disappeared’ among the native population. In the interview done by journalist
Goffredo Fofi in the 1960s, migrant workers claimed not to know any of their kind who
had become a white-collar or a manager. For the interviewer this demonstrated that
*Meridionali* moving upwards quickly absorbed the prejudices typical of Piedmonteses.
His enquiry demonstrated that the southern community remained much more class
homogenous during all this period than the African Americans in the American case.\(^{325}\)

In the inter-war period a Fascist law against urbanization had restricted
migration along the peninsula.\(^{326}\) At the end of the war, Turin, like other industrialised
cities, did not resemble a metropolis, but, with its half million residents, a large town. A
substantial immigration movement started only in the late 1940s, after the
reconstruction of the city’s industries. The immigrants came from rural Piedmont and
Veneto, and southern migrants did not outnumber migrants from Northern regions until
1955. Immigration concerned also the suburbs of Turin, and as a whole the Turinese
metropolitan area increased from 1,281,000 to 1,662,500 in the period 1951 - 1961.\(^{327}\)
Turin became, after Naples and Palermo, the third largest ‘southern’ city. (see table 6
and 7)\(^{328}\) In fact, in contrast to Detroit, migrants settled not only in the dilapidated
inner-city buildings, but also in the growing suburbs. However, these were not the
Italian version of the American “crabgrass frontier”, enclaves of single-family houses
with their own lawn. Rather, southern migrants in Turin lived in impoverished areas
with crowded public housing or in hastily built housing projects. Paradigmatic was the
case of Vallette, a huge housing project built in 1958 in the far periphery of the city.
Vallette lodged 20,000 tenants, but the area was poorly connected to the city, thereby
creating a *de facto* segregation of its immigrant residents. The same applied to other

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\(^{325}\) Interview with Beppe Rorro, 6 January 2002; Goffredo Fofi, *L’ immigrazione meridionale a

\(^{326}\) See Francesco Compagna, *I terroni in città* (Bari: Laterza, 1959), 128-130: “This becami
an absurd vicious circle. One could not change his official residence in another city without
evidence of a ‘steady remunarate occupation’. However, one could not apply to the job centre
without evidence of the new residence”.

\(^{327}\) Guido Galeotti, *I movimenti migratori interni in Italia* (Bari, Cacucci editore, 1971), 22;
Annuario statistico della città di Torino, 1955; Carlo Tombola, “Per un atalante delle aree
metropolitane: la crescita urbana nell’italia settentrionale” in Roberto Mainardi and Carlo
Tombola, (eds) *Grandi città e aree metropolitane*, Vol. I *Città e spazi regionali d’Italia* (Milano:
Franco Angeli , 1982), 124.

\(^{328}\) Italo Vignoli, “Torino: La città FIAT”, in *ibid.*, 143.
peripheral areas, such as Nichelino and Falchera, which came under media attention for their decay.\textsuperscript{329}

As in Detroit, in postwar Turin the apportionment of the urban space conveyed the class and ethnic divisions of its population. Piedmonteses regarded Southerners as distinctly backwards, impolite, unclean, male chauvinist, and prone to violence. \textit{Meridionali} were usually denied quality housing through the ubiquitous sign ‘We don't rent to Southerners’ and were instead forced in attics and cellars of old tenements in the city centre or otherwise confined to villages at the outskirts of that city that lacked basic infrastructures\textsuperscript{330} and were disconnected from the workplace.\textsuperscript{331} In both cases, the severe housing shortage was the main cause of tension and a discernible sign of the impact of immigration to the city. In a study on migrants’ integration in the urban fabric sociologist Magda Talamo set out to methodically enquire into the housing conditions of the Meridionali. In 1962 she described the search for accommodation as “the most tormenting and immediate problem the migrant has to face on the arrival”\textsuperscript{332}

For most of the Meridionali, coming with the night train from the south, Turin Central Station \textit{Porta Nuova} provided the first impression of life in the north. Migrants received an immediate appreciation for the geographical and social remoteness of their origin. “I arrived at Porta Nuova one morning in November 1961 - tells a Sicilian migrant - straight from Messina with two suitcases and no address. When I stepped outside I couldn’t see anything, only a grey and humid wall, I could hear the city and imagine it, but I couldn’t look at it. At home, I didn’t even know what the fog looks like.”\textsuperscript{333} Meridionali arrived at Porta Nuova with the ”sunshine train”, as it was called, a railway line that started from both Palermo and Siracusa, in Sicily, to join at the southern end of the Booth and then ravel upwards through many of the poor regions of the Mezzogiorno. Some arrived from Sardinia with a boat to Genoa and then with a


\textsuperscript{330} For instance in 1971 66 per cent of one or two bedroom house lacked an internal toilet. In Vignal, “Torino: Città Fiat”..., 169.


\textsuperscript{332} Magda Talamo, “L’inserimento socio-urbanistico degli immigrati meridionali a Torino” \textit{ibid.}, 185-219.

\textsuperscript{333} Interview with Pino B. in Marco Revelli, \textit{Lavorare in Fiat} (Milano: Garzanti, 1989), 28.
two-hour train ride to Turin. Others arrived by train from the north of Europe – Belgium, Germany, and France – where they had worked as miners, construction workers, and timber workers. As it can be seen in interviews from contemporary researches, many migrants travelled back and forth between their southern villages and northern European destination, finally stopping half way in Turin. Still an alien environment for many, but it was a place where "at least they talk Italian". 334

Porta Nuova was also a temporary shelter for those who did not have contacts in the metropolis. Often such temporary arrangement would last for weeks, as accommodation was scarce. Another arrangement was the ‘bed-sharing’: two or three Meridionali working on different work shift would share the same bed in a rented room. If single, migrants often lived in boarding-houses where they would sleep “in bunches, one over the other in bunk beds... with 7 toilets for 120 persons” and where the food was poor quality. When a TV crew went to visit one of these slums they interviewed Southern tenants who, in a flawed Italian, stated: “only animals could live here”. 335

Postwar Turin saw several waves of migration. It started in 1948 after reconstruction with mainly Venetians and farmers from Piedmont. It continued with Meridionali, peaking in the early 1960s. Then it slowed down considerably during 1964 – 66 because of a mini recession. Another wave of Meridionali arrived between 1967 and 1969 due to the growth of the automobile industry and migration continued during the 1970s slowly decreasing until 1980. 336

In 1967, FIAT opened a new plant at Rivalta, in the outskirts of Turin. At the time a tiny municipality of 5,000 people, Rivalta suddenly found itself with 11,613 new workers, mainly migrants, many of whom brought along their family. Rents in Rivalta increased dramatically due to the complete lack of accommodation near the factory and the situation of overcrowd determined a collapse of public and welfare services in the community. At the same time FIAT enlarged the existing Turinese plants, most notably Mirafiori. As a result, within two years 60,000 more migrants moved in the Turinese metropolitan area. At a time when American plants were moving out of industrial cities, FIAT had pledged to a productive model that involved the maximum concentration of activities into a single metropolitan area. Fiat managers were unmoved by requests from the city administration and the state to spread operations along the peninsula. Until the Autumn Caldo, that is, until urban problems risked jeopardising its planned production

335 Centro Piero Gobetti, Fondo Marcello Vitale, Carte Bobbio, box E2, folder VI, leaflet di Lotta Continua: they continued: “we would throw the rest of what we were given to eat on the floor lest they would serve it again the following day”; Second quote from the documentary “Sapere: pregiudizio” by Giuseppe Ferrara, RAI teche, 1970.
336 See Fofi, L’immigrazione...cit.; Ascoli, Movimenti migratory...cit.; Massimo Paci, Mercato del lavoro e classi sociali in Italia (Bologna: Il mulino, 1973).
output, FIAT refused to take any responsibility for the congestion of the city. Executive Giorgio Garino’s assertion that “we make cars, let the GESCAL (council house agency) make the buildings” was typical of this attitude.\[337\]

During the peaks of migration waves, in the late 1950s and the late 1960s, the local press ran campaigns that reaffirmed Piedmontese stereotyping of Southerners. La Stampa’s choice of letters from the readership for its section Lo Specchio dei Tempi (The mirror of times) is telling of this attitude. In 1962, a reader warned against mixed marriage:

Maybe not everyone knows what life in a Sicilian family really is. While it is, without doubt, attractive for men, either fathers or sons, it is humiliating and enslaving for women, either wives or daughters. Piedmontese women, marry Sicilians if you prefer it and you will, if allowed, come back to your home black-and-blue... Sicilians are warm-hearted, but it has to be proven that women prefer a jealousy entailing constant confinement, corporal punishment for trivial reasons, and many, many children.

Although the writer did not go as far as cautioning against miscegenation, he or she expressed the widely shared sense of a threatened cultural identity. The differences between natives and Southerners congealed in a representation that depicted the latter as irrational, violent, lazy, vulgar, and the former as active, strong-willed, polite, and civilised\[338\]. Many stories circulated on their unsuitability to city life, such as the one told in a TV talk show by a college teacher, that Meridionali utilised the bathtub as a big vessel to grow basil. In Turin as in Detroit, the propagation of such anecdotes, whether true or false, served to reinforce the social distance between older residents and the newcomers.\[339\] Another reader of La Stampa wished “that this was the smallest city in Italy, but with only Piedmonteses”.\[340\]

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\[337\] Valerio Castronovo, Torino...cit., 423, 389; Fofi, L’Im migrazione...cit., 306; Giuseppe Berta, Conflitto industriale e strutture d’impresa alla FIAT, 1919-1979, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 151-52.

\[338\] In 1961, following the disruption of a live TV stand-up comedy show set in a Turinese theatre (“Comicissimo”) by some young Meridionali, native Turinese inundated the city papers La Stampa and La Gazzetta del Popolo of letter of complaint. I quote from one of them “I am in the first row - wrote a Turinese - to welcome those workers who moved in search of a better life, but I can’t stand this bragging riff-raff. Immigrants’ poor civic sense is always evident in their public behaviour” (from La Gazzetta del Popolo, 29 July 1961); La Stampa summed up: “All the letters we have received agree on one single fact: the main responsibility of those facts belong to the immigrants […]. This is something the police should take into account.” In “120mila persone” La Stampa, 29 July 1961.

\[339\] A.Bagnasco, Torino, Un Profilo Sociologico (Torino: Einaudi, 1986); See Mario Giovana, Torino: la città e i ‘Signori della Fiat’ (Milano: Tei Editore, 1977), 138; for Piedmontese perception of the southerners. He relates the story of the bath tub.

\[340\] This is an excerpt from a letter to Specchio dei Tempi never actually published for its racist content. It has been later printed in Marco Tomatis and Cinzia Ghigliano, Io c’ero. Cento anni di Fiat e dintorni (CGIL Edizioni: Torino, 1999), 65.
In a survey made in Piedmont in 1969 53.3 per cent of the respondents declared of not wishing to have any kind of contact with Meridionali (the survey was about Calabrians in that instance). Although, as another contemporary survey shown, Meridionali were perceived as having different racial features (especially in height, and skin and hair colour), the majority thought that in Northern urban environment they had been given the chance to relinquish their habits and adopt the work ethic and sober temperament of the Piedmontese. Environment, not biology was the cause of the newcomers' difference – a point stressed by presumably "objective" highbrow literature. "It is well known - wrote sociologist Cataldo Di Napoli - that his environment bequeathed to the Méridionale (in particular, the Sicilian)... an excessive moral severity towards his wife, of whom he continually controls the faithfulness, and his daughters, whom he keeps locked up. Totally different is the behaviour of the Northerners who usually concede a rather wide freedom to the female members of the family. Of course, I am merely stating a fact and have no intention of judging which attitude is superior".

The stereotype of the warm-hearted and jealous Meridionale was rooted in an important characteristic of the migration process: its actors were primarily males. The encounter between the Piedmontese and the Southerner was framed by the gendered dynamics of the process. In the collision the two groups redefined the specific traits of their own masculinity, and the one of the other. This was either, for the latter, as hard working males inheritors of their ancestors' work ethic or, for the former, as respected heads of a patriarchal family. In fact, both these kinds of representations were only broad generalizations as it was the brand of Fordism adopted by FIAT and its contractors that kept most migrant women out of the job market. This made them invisible to the Piedmonteses. In both Turin and Detroit, during the 1950s and 1960s, the metalworking industry demanded the maximum productivity from its workers and the necessary robustness to sustain increasing workloads and overtime hours - a stamina that women allegedly lacked. The gendered division of labour in the persistently Fordist factory consigned women to the few departments, like the trim shop, that managers associated to feminine labour. More often women's role concerned those duties in the

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341 Survey in Stefano Passigli, *Emigrazione e comportamento politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1969), 165. Another indication of separation between native and southern groups is given by intermarriage. A survey made in 1965 established that only 6.1 per cent of southerners had a Piedmontese partner. This increased to 13.4 for Venetian migrants, suggesting for the latter a higher index of integration. In Unione regionale delle province piemontesi, *Immigrazione di massa e struttura sociale in Piemonte* (Torino: IRES, 1965).


domestic sphere that were indispensable to maintain the labour capacity of the male workforce. Behind a successful managerial productivity drive there was a domestic organization that liberated male workers from the daily tasks necessary to "reproduce" their labour capacity.  

In the Italy of the economic miracle, female occupation in the blue-collar sector touched its lowest percentage of the century. Statistical data recorded the diminution of female employment at a time when unemployment rates were also diminished. This indicated that unemployed women were leaving the workforce and becoming housewives. At FIAT, women at the Mirafiori plant comprised about 10 per cent of the work force in 1947, but their number subsequently diminished both in absolute and relative terms, touching 2.8 per cent in 1965 (see table 3).  

The fact that Southern women were less likely to negotiate their identity in a workplace augmented their distance from the residents. The survey of sociologist Magda Talamo showed that, on average, women assessed more negatively the attitudes of Turinese towards Southerners than men did. The interviews collected by Talamo, Anna Anfossi, in the 1960s, and Laura De Rossi in the 1990s suggested that women were more likely to have a repertoire of anecdotes of discrimination, while men were likely to balance those with a set of stories of unexpected comradeship with fellow Turinese workers.  

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344 For the "Persistence of Fordism" see Daniel Nelson in On the line... cit.; Francesca Bettio, The Sexual Division of Labour. The Italian Case (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988). At the same time FIAT’s high wages were supposed to guarantee that male workers maintained their role of breadwinner of the family. This constituted one central expectation of migrants who moved in search of a job that allowed them to assert their manhood in this way. Male migrants’ struggle could be read in terms of securing the privileges of manhood in a moment when their society (for inferiority of housing, school, services, status) denied them. However, this interpretation needs further evidence.  


346 Magda Talamo, "L’inserimento socio-urbanistico... 213; for Stefano Musso “The slow improvements in the question of equal wage for men and women (finally achieved in 1962, but already under way in 1954) no doubt contributed to the corporation’s choice to employ mainly men. In fact, they came to lose the advantage of saving on womens wages. Women found employment in small firms, where it was easier to practice wage discrimination”, Stefano Musso, “Il lungo miracolo economico. Industria, economia e società (1950-1970)”, in Storia di Torino, IX - Gli anni della Repubblica (Torino: Einaudi, 1999), 91.  

347 Anna Anfossi, "Differenze socio-culturali tra gruppi piemontesi e meridionali a Torino"…cit.; Laura Derossi, “Il treno del sole: Storie di immigrati”, Torino fra ieri ed Oggi, (Milano: Elio Sollino Editore, 1994); Emory S. Bogardus "Race Reactions by Sexes" and Judson R. Landis, Darryl Datwyeler, and Dean S. Dorn's "Race and Social Class as Determinants of Social Distance" in Sociology and Social Research, 43 (July-Aug, 1959) argued that women of all social groups express a stronger wish to avoid social contact with members of the other group than do men. According to these two scholars this is due to the fact that women’s contacts are more likely to be personal while men’s are professional.
I came here back in 1961 - tells a Southern woman - following my husband. We lived in a room in a boarding house and found this apartment only later. When our child was born we didn’t even have a chair in the house! The first years were hard. We experienced racism and, you know, it continues today. (...) My first son had several problems at primary school with a Piedmontese teacher who disliked Meridionali...I would like to go back to my village. Here we don’t have any recreation, only sacrifices to pay off the mortgage. Our only friend is the TV set. Back at the village you could go out and stroll around, without any fear.348

The encounter with discrimination is recounted here through the experience of the most fragile member of the family, the child. It concerns an institution, the school, and a task, education, included in the sphere of "feminine" responsibilities. It was the woman who was presumably more alienated by life in the Northern city and more missed the communal life of the village. She characterises treatment by the native as nothing short of “racism” - a word that might seems inappropriate in a context of comparison with the US, but that is frequent in the Meridionali narratives.

In the 1950s, ‘racial’ prejudice towards Meridionali found a political outlet in the activity of the Movimento per l’Autonomia Regionale Piemontese (MARP or Movement for Regional Piedmont Autonomy). This was a movement initiated by a handful of local politicians and it achieved substantial electoral success in administrative elections at local and regional level. MARP appealed to the sense of true ‘Piedmontesism’ threatened by the barbaric invasion from the South. It evoked a Piedmontese heritage of superior civic virtue and untainted work ethic and demanded the immediate expulsion of the immigrants. The latter was, at least theoretically, possible since the Fascist law against urbanization was abolished only in 1961. MARP collected 31,000 votes in Piedmont in 1951, but its popularity waned through the 1950s, and the movement disappeared in the 1960s. The demise of MARP, in a period of increasing immigration and congestion in the city, can largely be explained by its weak political platform. Moreover, even if La Stampa frequently reiterated stereotypes about Meridionali, the paper would not, in the long term, support a political movement that eventually might have undermined the policy of expansion of its owner, FIAT.349

By American terms, Meridionali in Turin did not undergo the process of racialization that expected Italian migrants to the United States at the turn of the century. Nor did discrimination against Southerners closely resemble the entrenched prejudice against African-Americans in Detroit. Piedmonteses commanded higher wages but did not enjoy “wages of whiteness”. However, oral history sources show that Southerners did perceive prejudice as racism. In an urban environment that had

348 De Rossi, “Il treno del sole...”, 2132.
349 I draw this assessment of MARP from Giovana, Torino e i signori della città..., 137. See also Valerio Castronovo, Il Piemonte, (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), 656.
conserved its homogeneity up to 1950s, natives perceived a population that looked differently, talked strangely, and behaved backwardly, as the other.350

Only the timing of mass migration had put Southerners on the path of a difficult integration rather than of exclusion. At the end of the nineteenth century, in fact, Italian Darwinian theorists, notably Cesare Lombroso and Alfredo Niceforo, associated the complexion of Southerners with those of an inferior race that had a strong tendency towards wrongdoing and mischief. They characterised Southern Italian population as lagging at an inferior stage of social evolution.351 However, after the Second World War and the Holocaust, these theories had become inadmissible in public discourse. Furthermore, in contrast to Detroit, prejudice against the newcomers in Turin never fuelled a grass-roots movement parallel to the American homeowners’ one. One difference was that homeownership was not as widespread in Italy as in the United States. Landlords were less concerned about depreciation of property than their American counterparts, as they did not suffer competition from suburbs as they did in Detroit. Italian middle classes remained urban throughout the postwar period. In Turin, it was the suburbs that instead saw the greater influx of migrants and that bore the consequence of chaotic growth.

Another difference was the lack of a tradition of conflict between established residents and newcomers in Turin. In Detroit and other Northern American cities, the rhetoric of discrimination had deep and profound historical roots in the fabric of society, which further discrimination could exploit. By contrast, up to the Second World War, Turin had been a culturally homogeneous city that had gradually absorbed the immigration from its hinterland without significant conflict. The way in which the cultural cleavage between Piedmonteses and Meridionali was recomposed and exacerbated depended therefore exclusively upon the future negotiation of resources and status between the different groups in the metropolitan arena.

Migrants become workers: Chrysler and Fiat auto plants in the 1960s.

For southern migrants in the motor cities, the achievement of material gratifications came only after a journey through a number of dirty, dangerous, demeaning, and poorly paid occupations. In both cases, the auto manufacturers’ ability to offer relatively steady jobs paid at higher wages meant that they could enjoy a large ‘reserve army’ always available to join the ranks of their workforce. This situation created a dual labour market in both Turin and Detroit: one offered union jobs in big companies, competitive pay and benefits, and the credit advantages of a steady occupation; the other offered menial work, long hours, safety hazards, arbitrary layoffs. The great influx of migrants somehow added fuel to this system. Prejudice, racism, lack of skills, and rural ways all contributed, in different measure in the two cities, to push migrants towards the lower scale of the labour market. Only a favourable economic upturn would open to them the sought-after jobs in the auto plants. Prejudices and discrimination that migrants encountered as new residents continued to shape also their identity as autoworkers, but the way cultural and racial cleavages functioned within the world of production was markedly different from the outside.

In Detroit the dual labour market meant that blacks were confined in the less desirable jobs, while whites enjoyed an upward mobility in the more desirable occupations. However, while acknowledging this situation it is also necessary to make some qualifications. In the case of migrants, not only race, but also ethnicity, education, and gender determined the type of occupation they could find. Sociologists Philliber and Obermiller argued that white Appalachians found themselves in an advantageous position compared to African-Americans as they were twice as likely to find steady occupation. However, Appalachians were themselves victims of discrimination as, in turn, employers preferred non-Appalachian or native whites. Philliber and Obermiller argue that there existed a segmented job market with three layers: the best jobs went to the dominant group, next came the white migrants. Whatever was left went to blacks. For a white Appalachian, however, possession of a college degree delivered the entrance into mainstream northern society. This was not the case for African-Americans. Educated blacks were often offered work as janitors, although also in their case education could give more chances to get a decent job. Black women were barred from most clerical work, an opportunity available to whites, but were sometimes hired as sales clerks, a job that was less exhausting than the ones of their male counterparts in manufacturing. However, the domestic sector long remained the most likely occupation
for a black woman after a brief period of limited opportunities in defence industries during the war.\textsuperscript{352}

In Turin, migrants' lack of industrial skills confined them to the most humble and unsteady jobs, in particular construction work, a sector that in Italy was totally non-unionised.\textsuperscript{353} Northern industrialists called for the establishment of training courses in their region of origins. However, with a production technology fully committed to a Tayloristic division of labour, the obstacle to the recruitment of migrants was more cultural than professional.\textsuperscript{354} This hypothesis finds an echo in less pragmatic requests by the Turinese social élite: that the mayors and pastors of southern villages should teach Meridionali good manners as well as the Piedmontese dialect, and convince them not to carry or use weapons.\textsuperscript{355} In the Italian case, it is useful to distinguish between rural and urban migrants. The latter were a minority and, if educated, could find clerical jobs. They enjoyed an upward mobility and "disappeared".

In Detroit, during the Second World War, the impact of black competition in the job market caused a number of "hate strikes" directed against the hiring or the upgrading of blacks in the workplace. Historian Nelson Lichtenstein argued that these strikes always failed because they were thwarted by UAW leaders and because blacks were determined not to be intimidated. However, these actions, although limited in time and number, contributed to the institutionalisation of the dual labour market. The concern for the morale of the white employees added, in the minds of the employers, to prejudices concerning the reliability and the ability of a black workforce. In 1953, Walter Reuther noted that roughly 82 per cent of the job orders in manufacturing, clerical, sales, and professional jobs explicitly discriminated against blacks, and those that did not so in written form discriminated at the gates. This situation matched the one


\textsuperscript{353} Fofi, \textit{Immigrazione...cit.}, 83.

\textsuperscript{354} Massimo Paci, \textit{Mercato del lavoro e classi sociali in Italia... cit.}, 60; on the problems of integration of Meridionali in northern Italy and northern Europe see Amalia Signorelli, "Movimenti di popolazioni e trasformazioni culturali" in \textit{Storia dell'Italia repubblicana. La trasformazione dell'Italia: sviluppo e squilibri}. Vol.II (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 589-643.

\textsuperscript{355} From an address of Count Metello Rossi di Montedera at the Rotary Club Day on Immigration, 5 May 1962. At the Rotary Club di Torino, \textit{Influenza e problemi della immigrazione in Piemonte}. (Torino, 1962), 114; for Metello Rossi "it is only logic that the people of this city do not want to change their habits, those customs of the city that are elegance and courtesy, and that they require from those who join the growing population of this city the intention to adopt our habits, in order not to degenerate the city itself". It is remarkable that this kind of opinions belonged to Turinese of all classes. It is also to be noted that Valletta himself was a member of the Rotary Club.
described by the Mayor's Interracial Committee in 1951. The Committee reported that blacks were almost non-existent in certain sectors, such as building trades (in Detroit a reserve of ethnic white workers) and were to be found employed only as elevator operators, doorkeepers, janitors, and stock handlers in retail stores. No African-American man was employed as sales clerk at that date.Ç

While the 1950s are normally considered a period of economic boom in the US, blacks in Detroit faced high rates of unemployment due to their position at the lower end of the labour market. It was paradoxical that the city press boasted Detroit as "the city of promise to Negro". The Detroit Free Press remarked that: "in following his aspirations, the Negro has crossed over his Jordan in multitudes to a land of Canaan in America - a city called Detroit".Ç Certainly, the situation in the Midwest compared favourably to the Deep South, but this type of account produced the impression of an abundance of jobs for African-Americans and further stimulated migration to the city, thereby contributing in worsening the situation for those already there.

In fact, by the end of the 1950s, Detroit had gone a long way toward losing the manufacturing base that had made it one of the principal industrial centres of the world - a trend that increased during the 1960s and 1970s. Sociologist Marylyn Morehead, by analysing the data of the US Census of Manufacturers over the period 1947-1977, has identified the main trends of disinvestment from Detroit. From 1958 to 1963 Detroit's share of investment within its metropolitan area fell from 44 per cent to 30 per cent. Manufacturing employment in the Detroit Metropolitan Area (including Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties) grew from 295,800 to 329,700, while manufacturing jobs in Detroit fell from 145,200 to 141,400.Ç In 1962 union leaders were calling for help in Washington for a "massive federal public works program and immediate extension of unemployment compensation now". Between 1963 and 1967 manufacturing employment actually increased in the central city, but this concealed a growing gap between the rate of growth in Detroit and in the suburbs. Finally between 1967 and 1977 a major flight of capital investment and jobs completed the process of deindustrialization. This dynamic coincided with the residential mobility of thousands of whites that we discussed above.Ç

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357 “This is a city of Promise to Negro” Detroit Free Press, 7 March, 1957,
359 See Marilyn Morehead, Industrial Disinvestment, Dare City Life Task Force report (Detroit, 1981); Detroit: Race and Uneven Development, Joe Darden et al...cit., 22-23; Sugrue, The
While in Turin employment grew steadily in the 1950s and 1960s, Detroit had increasingly less to offer to the "multitudes" of Southern blacks. Furthermore, the latter had to wage an incessant battle to claim their right to work. In the 1950s, the NAACP and the UAW were at the forefront on the battle to increase job opportunities for African-Americans. The Detroit branch of NAACP adopted a mainly legalistic approach by fighting discrimination in courts and by lobbying state legislature and Congress, while eschewing more confrontational, militant tactics. This reflected the conservative shift of the organisation at the national level. The UAW also supported civil rights legislation and established a close alliance with the NAACP. The union established a Fair Practices Department (FPD) chiefly with an educational task towards white workers and as a sign of commitment towards its black membership. However, the UAW gave only a token effort to convince employers to change their hiring practices. "Mr Mays applied for work at the Dodge Truck plant - wrote FPD vice-director William Oliver - although there were a number of applicants filling out forms, the man at the employment desk refused to give Mr. Mays a form, saying that there was no job for him...and began to confer with the next man in line." Another less explicit discriminatory practice was to mark African-American's applications with a red dot. In any case the FPD was powerless to start real change.

In 1951 the UAW Fair Practices Department together with the main civil rights organizations lobbied unsuccessfully for an equal opportunities ordinance, which would have required employing minorities according to their population ratio, to be passed in Detroit. Afterwards the efforts of the anti-discrimination coalition centred on a statewide campaign for a Fair Employment Practices (FEP) law. Between 1952 and 1953, they organised rallies in favour of the bill. However, opposition from the Republican majority blocked it until 1955, when Democrats had the numbers to transform into law.

For all the efforts of the civil rights groups, the FEP act remained a product of its time. It prohibited discrimination on the basis of creed, race, and colour, but its significance was largely symbolic. The commission established to enforce the law was too small, only six members for the whole Michigan, and the rule governing its investigation too restricting. However, although it had little direct authority, the

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Origins...cit., 125-152; ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 4, folder 12, press release Local 3, 23 April 1962.
360 Goffredo Fofi, L'immigrazione Meridionale a Torino...cit., 47;
361 ALUA, UAW Fair Practices Department Collection, box 14, folder 5, Willian Oliver to Mike Novac.
362 See ALUA, Fair Practices Department Collection, box 5, folder Race Relation Correspondence; Sugrue, Origins...cit., 173.
commission served to redress individual cases, expose racist conditions, and spur on new activism.\textsuperscript{363}

In 1957, a group of black unionists inside the UAW began to question the gradualist strategy towards civil rights of the Reutherites. This group was led by activists Horace Sheffield, Robert Battle III, and Sheldon Tappes and took the name of Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC). TULC accused Reuther of not living up to his frequent promise: "Every American is a first class citizen, regardless of race, or creed or color".\textsuperscript{364} TULC maintained that the UAW leadership failed first at advancing black participation in the skilled trades apprenticeship system, and, second at allowing a black member on its executive board (a post that Sheffield coveted for himself). To the latter Reuther responded that a member of the International Executive Board should not be elected solely on the basis of his race. Between 1957 and 1965 TULC became a considerable political force in Detroit increasing its membership from 500 to 13,000, and with an even larger area of influence. Its leverage became clear to UAW leaders when, in 1961 it became instrumental in the election of Jerome Cavanagh as Mayor of Detroit against Louis Miriani, a candidate supported by both the UAW and the business community. TULC's success warned the UAW about the large amount of dissent that existed among African-American workers. In 1962, this pressure finally achieved the goal of the election of a black candidate, Nelson Jack Edward, to the UAW's IEB. However, after these achievements, the UAW co-opted many of TULC leaders into executive posts, and the organization gradually began to work inside the union rather than independently. At the same time, the UAW established a working alliance at city level with Cavanagh. By 1965 TULC returned into mainstream UAW politics, as testified by awarding their annual "freedom award" to Walter Reuther and to Frank Sinatra.\textsuperscript{365}

One of the aims of TULC had been to increase African American presence in politics at every level. From 1957 to 1968, Detroit had only one black councilman (over nine) - first William Patrick, then Nicholas Hood - in a city one third black. In the postwar period mayors Edward Jeffries, Albert Cobo, and Louis Miriani had been not supportive of civil rights.\textsuperscript{366} The latter's mayoralty was marked by an increase of police

\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., 174-175.
\textsuperscript{364} Lichtenstein, Korstad, "Opportunities Found and Lost", 809.
\textsuperscript{366} TULC's Horace Sheffield commented on Miriani: "The mayor had been an obstinate person – you go down to try to see him on any problem pertaining to the Negro community […] you found that he was one of these guys who never had the time and was never around. He'd give
harassment in the ghetto, in name of the campaign against "Negro crime". Only with the election of 33-year-old Jerry Cavanagh, were African-Americans on the winning side. Cavanagh had been elected thanks to a coalition of blacks, harnessed by TULC and civil rights group, and white liberals. He brought a breeze of optimism for the civil rights groups. He immediately issued an executive order guaranteeing equal opportunities and ordered the monitoring of the city's suppliers about their compliance with Michigan's Fair Employment Practices Law.367

As a result of these initiatives, as well as the general spirit of the decade, the protesters against discrimination in employment became more vocal in the 1960s. Picketing and boycotting became common tactics. These proved especially successful for downtown department stores that refused to hire coloured sales assistants, but a sit-in was also used in 1963 to protest the unfair hiring practices at First Federal Savings and Loan Association and in 1964 against General Motors. However, notwithstanding Cavanagh's good intentions, municipal employment too reflected the pattern dominant in the private sector. The city government opened jobs as janitors, heavy labourers, sanitation men, and bus conductors. Or otherwise it offered more clerical level positions in departments such as Welfare and Housing that interacted with blacks. But the police department employed only 337 blacks out of 5,017 employees in 1963, a mere seven per cent. The fire department (another sacred temple of white masculinity) had an even worse record with only three per cent of nonwhites. Integrating these departments proved more difficult as it met with the active resistance of their staff.368

The auto industry too had a mixed record on black employment. On the one hand it was the largest employer of both whites and non-whites. For example, in 1945 blacks comprised fifteen per cent of its workforce. It also offered some of the highest wages in manufacturing as well as good retirement plans and fringe benefits. On the other hand it conserved overwhelming racial barriers at its internal and lacked uniform anti-discriminatory practices. Sugrue has pointed out that, as result of decentralised hiring practices, the distribution of blacks in the Detroit area auto plants was highly uneven and arbitrary.369

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you these stock answers, or else he'd appoint people and them refer you to them. You could never get any basic answer from him whatsoever" in “Trade Union Leadership Council: Experiment in Community Action” cit.


369 Sugrue, The Origins...cit., 95-105.
By the 1960s auto manufacturers were increasingly relocating their operations outside city or state limits. In the first case they could build newly automated plants on cheap land; in the second, if they moved to the South or the West, they could also take advantage of inexpensive and docile labour markets. Among the Big Three, Chrysler lacked the funds to invest in the sort of new plants that its main competitors, Ford and GM, had built. Chrysler continued to rely on its old inner city plants and in the 1960s became Detroit’s single largest taxpayer and employer.\(^\text{370}\)

Before the 1960s, African-Americans had made major inroads into the car plants during the war time labour shortage, occasionally as strike-breakers, and in those occupations that whites would no longer accept, such as in the forges and the foundry, or working as janitors. The skilled trades, such as the tool and die makers, and the electricians, continued to be the reserve of white labour. Apprenticeship programs, usually negotiated between the company and the UAW, excluded both blacks and women on a \textit{de facto} if not \textit{de jure} basis (see table 5). Seniority rules too greatly disadvantaged minority groups. Departmental and occupational seniority lines trapped blacks in the undesirable occupations in which they had been hired. With little possibility of promotion, they often ended up in dead-end jobs. In general, although the seniority system represented a real guarantee against the caprice of the employer, it also worked against the new employees by putting them in a more vulnerable position in case of recession\(^\text{371}\). Inevitably, in the Detroit context of rapid restructuring of the industry, the majority of these recent hires were African-Americans.\(^\text{372}\)

However, with the boom in car production in the mid-sixties, Detroit’s African-Americans entered the assembly line. As a whole, in the second half of decade, Detroit’s share of auto jobs was shrinking rather than growing, but in absolute terms it was increasing. Blacks were still likely to get the most heavy production jobs, but they now occupied the core of the process. Their contribution became essential for the final output and for the continuing flow of production. Therefore, although African


\(^{371}\) This is how NAACP labour officer Herbert Hill described the situation in the auto industry in 1957: “This seniority provision as it is enforced by the Union and the Company constitutes a separate line of progression for white and Negro workers. Negroes are hired exclusively in certain departments and have seniority rights only within these departments. White workers are hired in production and skilled classifications and hold seniority rights in operations which permit promotions and development of skills in a significant number of job classifications” Library of Congress, Manuscript division, NAACP papers, Group III, box A309, folder: Herbert Hill reports.

Americans were still employed at the lower end of the job market, they now gained more leverage on the actual production process. It was crucial that this occurred in a moment of general awakening and politicisation of African Americans.

The existence of a dual labour market in the auto plants does not necessarily reveal much about the racial attitudes of workers' themselves. To what extent did race relations obstruct to co-operation in industrial action? Was race the employer's most powerful weapon in creating working class dis-unity? In the 1960s black and white autoworkers in Detroit were toiling on the same line, although usually on different types of assignments. Scattered evidence suggests that more fluid race relations existed in the plants compared to the city than is usually acknowledged. This is not to suggest an optimist vision of race relations in Detroit, but to point out that the real arena of confrontation was the neighbourhood, not the shop floor. In the 1950s, an UAW officer about autoworkers' racial attitudes recounted:

We used to do these surveys at our educational camps, where people would come in with a pretty bad attitude towards blacks. You'd say, "Do you object to working with a black?" "No" "are they entitled to the same seniority, same jobs?" "Yes" "What about eating in the same lunch room?" "No Problem" Then "What about a swimming pool in your neighborhood? What about a next door neighbor?" They draw the line.  

Admittedly, the relation between white foreman and black worker could assume racial connotations, but this attained the way race shaped a hierarchical relationship which would be antagonistic anyway.

On the production lines, black and white workers intermingled to a degree unknown in the racially segregated neighbourhoods. Charles Denby, a black autoworker, wrote in his biography that at lunchtime, "negroes never sit just to themselves. On our line we’re all mixed up unless a hot issue involving Negroes comes up. It has to be something very serious if we’re not all eating together. Then we eat with our buddy but we may go in a corner to speak alone."  

On the shop floor, black and white workers constantly re-negotiated race relations. Like his colleagues, Denby was bringing to the workplace both his identity as an African-American and as an industrial worker. It is only in this context of multiple and overlapping identities that we can understand instances of both solidarity and antagonism among black and white workers. Both groups participated and co-operated in practices such as “doubling-up”, an assertion of workers' control and resistance that

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373 ALUA, UAW Oral History collection, interview with Douglas Fraser.
consisted in two or more workers learning each other’s operation. In this way one worker performed two jobs while the other rested or they both doubled the production to save some rest or leisure time for themselves. In order to succeed these operations required a great deal of solidarity among the workers who practised it, together of course with an in-depth knowledge of the productive process. This sort of analysis of shop floor politics on a micro-historical level undermines the monolithic image of American workplace race relations. Historian Steven Jefferys, in his study of Chrysler Dodge Main, has pointed out that, in front of the company’s continuous drive to cut labour costs, unofficial strike actions regularly involved both black and white workers during the 1960s. A Dodge Main worker related how in the late 1960s, even in a climate of increasing agitation in the African American community, it was white and senior African American workers on the first shift (the more comfortable shift were high seniority workers were assigned) who stirred trouble with frequent stoppages and wildcats.

Continuous speed-ups affected all the workers on the line, whatever their race and the nature of their jobs, and provided them with a common opponent in the management, and in particular middle level management. This was all the more true in Chrysler plants, such as Dodge Main, where management avoided modernisation and where production standards were met not by automation but rather by increased human effort, an alternative that black workers dubbed “Niggermation”. Clearly, in Detroit, the more inclusive issue of deteriorating working conditions coexisted with the one of racial discrimination. Denby’s anecdote suggests that workers mobilised for one or the other according to contingent situations and variable factors. Among these factors one has to consider, together with the conscious program of a militant vanguard, the local level policies of both manufacturers and the union. To these we have to add the response of the rank-and-file. How these elements interact will be clearer later when we examine the origins of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement.

In Turin, race was not an issue on the shop floor. However, the labour market was also segmented in much the same way as it was in Detroit. Unskilled migrants

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377 This is a word that repeatedly appears in the radical literature of that period. See ALUA, DRM Collection, box 1, folder 1.

would get at first only the most hazardous jobs in unlicensed construction firms that employed workers without a contract or similar menial positions in non-unionised factories where they would be assigned to the foundries or other unpleasant departments. In 1960 the Work Department of Turin investigated the increasing work related accidents and discovered that more than one third involved Southern migrants. This was a number superior to their percentage of manufacturing jobs. According to a survey done in 1961, 64 per cent of migrants were heavy labourers, 30 per cent pedlars, and 1.15 per cent skilled workers. Like African-Americans, *Meridionali* were stuck in low paying jobs with only "horizontal" mobility between similar occupations in different industries, while their presence allowed a upward mobility to the natives. *Meridionali* were indefatigable in their search for economic improvement. Fofi observed that two thirds of migrants had twice changed their job in one-year time.

In the 1950s, the social and economic forces of a segmented job market pushed Southerners in Turin and African-Americans in Detroit towards the lesser rewarding occupations. However, a crucial difference lay in the economic context in which this process took place. Detroit was steadily de-industrializing with the most productive companies building plants out of the city. On the contrary in Turin manufacturing jobs were constantly growing in the same period under the thrust of Fiat's extraordinary expansion, which led the company in the 1960s to double the size of its flagship plant Mirafiori and to build, as we mentioned, a new plant at Rivalta. This caused a demand for 40,000 more workers in the auto industry alone. Without indulging in counterfactual considerations, one might wonder how different the fate of *Meridionali* would have been in Turin from their Detroit counterparts in a context of distressed economy and of high unemployment rate, even without the aggravating factor of racial discrimination.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, FIAT, under the leadership of the authoritarian Vittorio Valletta, had a policy of employing migrants only after they had acquired substantial experience in smaller industrial workshops and had assimilated the work habits of the Piedmontese. Furthermore, Valletta encouraged the recruitment of friends and relatives of existing workers – the closer the relationship, the higher the chance of being hired. He used to characterise the company as a *grande famiglia*. As Giuseppa Battagli, a Piedmontese worker, recalls: "we are a FIAT dynasty. My father brought my older sister; they subsequently had me hired, and finally we got the last one hired, until we were in four working at FIAT". Because of this type of recruitment,

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381 Bairati, *Valletta*...cit., 203.
although during that period the influx of migrants in the city had been extraordinary, Southerners were still little represented at Fiat. Their inexistente industrial expertise was a factor, but so was their lack of the social networks leading to the hiring gate. 382

At a time when the Italian welfare state was still underdeveloped, and when small nonunionised workshops dominated the industrial landscape, a job at FIAT represented the working class dream. A Meridionale hired in the late 1950s recalled his wife’s reaction to the news of the hiring at FIAT: “She was excited. She thought it was like entering the university. She used to say ‘Madonna, finalmente!’”.383 For worker Domenico Del Pero, hired in 1959, it was like: "reaching one’s Mecca”. Also worker Pierina Rabaglino was overjoyed for having found a posto sicuro, a steady job. Until 1966 FIAT had its own health insurance plan, the MALF (Mutua Autonoma Lavoratori FIAT), allegedly much more efficient than the public one. The company also built a limited number of apartments to allocate to its blue and white-collar staff. Although the Casa FIAT was just a drop in a bucket in front of the housing needs of mass immigration, it served, in the 1950s, to bolster the paternalistic image of the company. Only workers with a clean disciplinary record would be eligible for the Casa FIAT, so this was also a powerful means for Valletta to regiment the workforce. Finally, as Pierina related, a FIAT job meant also extended credit with the local grocer. For all these reasons working for FIAT “really meant something”. 384

In the course of the 1960s, the number of migrants who had experience in industrial jobs increased steadily and so did their percentage among the FIAT workforce. This rise was due, in large measure, to the continued expansion of the market and to the same technological innovations that were occurring in Detroit, which opened up many unskilled positions. The first wave of migrants entering FIAT could compare employment conditions in the auto company, in particular the material benefits they derived from high wages, with the insecure conditions they experienced elsewhere, where the employer would not even pay their social security. As we shall see, this element differentiated them from a second wave of FIAT southern workers hired at the end of the decade.385

As we have seen in the Detroit case, racial discrimination at the hiring gate and in job assignments did not necessarily lead to racial tensions in the workplace. After the

382 Archivio Storico FIAT, Interview n. 1.18 with Giuseppa Battagli.
383 Interview with Peppino Muscara’, by Renata Jodice, Memorie FIOM…cit., 109.
384 Archivio Storico Fiat, Interview with Domenico Del Pero, n. 1-15; Archivio Storico Fiat, Interview with Pierina Rabaglino, n.2-16.
"hate strikes" episode during the war years, I did not find evidence of racial conflict in either primary source or oral histories or in the literature. Conversely, even in absence of the racial divide it would be misleading to conclude that at Fiat the integration of Southern migrants proceeded smoothly and without tensions. Quite on the contrary, the encounter between Piedmontese and Meridionale involved a clash of cultures also in the factory. According to former PCI officer Adalberto Minucci, Piedmonteses skilled workers blamed the Meridionali for fostering the division of the working class at FIAT. He goes as far as to speak of a "subcultura antimeridionalista".  

In the workplace, as in the neighbourhoods, Piedmonteses welcomed migrants with circumspection, and, analogously to the American case, Piedmontese preferred to have Meridionali as co-workers rather than neighbours. For Turinese FIAT worker Pietro Borretto, "many Meridionali had pretensions of several kinds. Some of them asserted they had come, as a matter of fact, to change FIAT. We replied that FIAT had been built, as it was, by our ancestors." For another fellow worker, "When Meridionali come here they expect to change everything, even the weather". A first leit-motif in the accounts of the encounter North/South is the allegation that Meridionali wanted every right but no duty. Meridionali were not accustomed to the pace of work of the Fordist factory and they rejected the organisation of work more vehemently than their Piedmontese workmates. Meridionali also lacked a sense of belonging. For the natives FIAT was inextricably linked to their forefathers as generation after generation in the same family toiled in the auto factories. Natives were aware that the entire city's economy had developed around the car manufacturer. For the Southerner it only symbolised his condition of migrant and the distance he travelled from his roots.

Another recurrent theme, intertwining with the latter, is that of the migrant's "lazyness", or lack of work ethic. Some Meridionali "kept doing nothing". This was more than a simple stereotype as it actually exemplified the cultural distance between the two groups, a gap that widened with the last wave of Meridionali, those hired, in 1969, directly from the South. For the generation of Piedmontese workers whose experience at FIAT antedated Valletta’s re-organisation of production of the 1950s, or

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588 Adalberto Minucci “Il Partito Comunista Torinese” in Bonaventura Alfano, Mirafiori e dintorni (Roma: Ediesse, 1997), 81; however, I could not found further evidence for this claim.
587 Ibid. 81; This is confirmed in the same volume by former Turinese mayor Diego Novelli and former CGIL secretary Bruno Trentin. The latter remembered that, although in the 1950s FIOM opened its meeting to Meridionali, Piedmontes workers would address the audience in dialect (which was incomprehensible to southerners) in ibid., 61.
588 Unione regionale delle province piemontesi, Immigrazione di massa e struttura sociale in Piemonte...cit., 276.
589 Archivio Storico Fiat, interview with Pietro Borretto, n. 2-04.
591 Archivio Storico Fiat, interview with Pietro Borretto, n. 2-04.
for those who had been transmitted the Piedmontese work ethic through their family or
group, there still existed the myth of the ‘demiurge’ worker - the worker who creates a manufactured good out of his own hands and skills; the worker who shapes the
elements of nature. Amongst the native population this myth served as a touchstone, and it was even stronger among the left-wing union militants though it was also present in the Catholic tradition. Indeed for historians Luisa Passerini and Marcella Filippa, “precisely for those who defined themselves as militants, skills and work ethic were conditio sine qua non to be in action, to establish relations of trust with other workers, to be able to negotiate at the various levels of the hierarchy.” The content of this ethic consisted in seeing work as duty, a necessary burden that moulded workers’ personal identities, and eventually led to self-esteem and self-realisation.

FIAT fostered and valorised this illusion through practices such as the accomplishment of a ‘masterpiece’ -the manual completion of a part of the car that was necessary for a promotion to a higher category - clearly an obsolete, and useless, exercise in the era of standardised components. Young southerners’ perception of factory work was different. They confronted the mass production process without any cultural reference to a mythical past of workers’ control. Coming from an agrarian background they considered work as fatica, toil, physical effort, without an uplifting content. On the other hand, because of their lack of cultural reference in the new environment, the factory, they escaped the illusion of the ‘value’ of work and its accompanying rhetorical and ideological baggage.

Turinese unions, especially the FIOM, considered this workers’ ethic to be a precondition for the achievement of class-consciousness and, therefore, a necessary and desirable weapon in the battle against capital. Without such ethic, they argued, workers would become ‘integrated’ into a capitalist system that could guarantee high levels of consumption for better-paid workers such as the autoworkers. It was no coincidence that, traditionally, the leaders of the labour movement in Turin were skilled workers, who, in this line of thought, had the necessary ‘moral authority’ to conduct the struggle. Leftist sociologists like Minucci, Vertone, and Bonazzi, validated this line of thought with enquiries that demonstrated that migrants’ lack of an ‘industrial culture’ caused

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392 For analogies between Communist and Catholic workers see Liliana Lanzardo Personalità operaia e coscienza di classe. Comunisti e cattolici nelle fabbriche torinesi del dopoguerra, (Milano, Franco Angeli, 1987).
393 Luisa Passerini e Marcella Filippa, “Memorie di Mirafiori”, in Mirafiori, Carlo Olmo ed...cit., 341.
394 Istituto Gramsci Torino, Serie perseguitati politici, interview with Emilio Pugno, by A. Ballone.
395 Giuliana Saladino, Terra di Rapina (Torino: Einaudi, 1977) touches upon this subject.
their alienation from class politics. The debate inside the PCI about the incorporation of migrants into the working class and the PCI reflected this standpoint. Communists posited a model of “class integration” that would “situate migrant workers, shoulder by shoulder, with the advanced political vanguard of native working class, in the context of the international proletarianism.”

Through this kind of approach leftists forces distanced themselves from the newcomers and, sceptical of their militancy, assumed that the skilled ‘conscious’ workers should take the lead in a possible resurgence of conflict at FIAT. Indeed there existed a basic contradiction between the unions’ policy of “liberation through work” as opposed to the migrants’ aim of “liberation from work”, a contradiction that exploded with full force in the autumn of 1969.

In both Turin and Detroit, the re-composition of the working class in the auto plants had been far-reaching. It represented the necessary pre-condition towards rank-and-filers’ challenge to the established system of industrial relations in the late 1960s. This re-composition, however, did not occur without considerable friction between newcomers and the established working class. As residents autoworkers were not immune from the anxiety about social and racial change in course in the city, and in the workplace they both reproduced and reshaped their perception of the migrants according to different patterns. By contrasting the two cases, one can argue that if race represented the most visible obstacle to the social integration of African-Americans in Detroit, it was its declining economy and its “run-away” shops which more fundamentally deprived them of the economic opportunities available to a former generation of migrants. In both cases, migrants who initially occupied the lower end of the job market, became the main force of change inside the auto plants. This was for them an alien environment, and their demand and their tactics were also shaped by the way they came to terms with this new environment.

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397 This policy is related in P. Cinnani, *Emigrazione e unità operaia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974), 103-207; this was opposed to the “social integration” model proposed in intellectual circles of the journal *NordSud* that for Cinnani was synonomous of capitalist integration *tout court*. A thorough study of the PCI policy towards southern migration in Turin is Fiammetta Balestracci, *Immigrati e PCI a Torino 1950-1970* in *La città e lo sviluppo*...cit., 120-184 where she argues that the PCI policy towards *Meridionali* failed because the party vision was limited to considering them instrumental to electoral politics.

398 I borrow these terms from Claus Offe, *Disorganised Capitalism*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 156.
Migrants Become Radicals: Challenges to the System at Chrysler and FIAT in the Late 1960s.

By the end of the 1960s the two motor cities and their automobile plants had been transformed by the arrival of migrants. Their expectations, their culture, their quest for a fair share of the northerners' "affluent society", shaped the industrial conflict at FIAT and Chrysler in the most turbulent years, for both countries, after the war. Detroit and Turin were two significant examples among a larger series of rank-and-file upsurges in mass-production factories, not only confined to Western Europe and the States. In many cases migrants or marginal workers were protagonists of these struggles, but the paucity of comparative historical analysis has diminished their visibility.\(^{399}\)

How did a vanguard of workers formerly peripheral to the system of industrial relations came to play a crucial role in challenging that system? Was there a common denominator among the different national and local situations? How did the migrants' background shape the industrial conflict and how did the struggle transform their self-representation? How did migrants become radicals? Americans, both inside and outside academia, have long associated immigration with radicalism, but this argument did not apply to internal migration, only to European immigrants, and in a period of working class formation.\(^{400}\) Similarly, in Italy, after the war few would have imagined, that Southerners would have become a major force of social change.

The pronounced industrial conflict of the late 1960s has mainly engaged the attention of economists and sociologists seeking to prove generalisations about recurrent patterns in class struggles. One hypothesis links the rank-and-file movements to slowdowns in the rise of real wages and living standards in the years preceding the upsurge. In Italy, for instance, the rise in real incomes during the period 1965-68 was

\(^{399}\) Since the bulk of Southern migration in Detroit had occurred in the 1940s, by the late 1960s the most militant workers were likely to be either second-generation migrants in their twenties or southerners who arrived north as children with their parents and spent most of their life in Detroit. (Migration to Detroit continued until mid-1960s, but no statistics exists to quantify this phenomenon). However, even though young African-American did not always fit the traditional definition of migrants, they can well be compared with migrants because of the position they occupied in the labour market.

only half as great than in the period 1962-65, at the height of the ‘economic boom’. This check in the expectations of a rising standard of living, according to this view, explains the resentment that led to the autunno caldo. Workers, in this interpretation, reacted directly to the changing pace of growth in the international market.401

Macroeconomic forces undoubtedly have an influence upon workers and the labour market. However, this explanation does not address the issue of the novelty of actors and the forms of protest that characterised the conflict and mark it out as distinct from the struggles that preceded it. Rather than posit a deterministic correlation between workers’ industrial behaviour and variation in real wages we need to seek a multi-factored and more historically nuanced explanation. Another, more sophisticated, interpretation assumes that younger employees raised in a period of post-war prosperity carried higher material expectations and were less accommodating to social constraints than the former generation, which held potent memories of the hardships of the Second World War and the Great Depression. The events of May 1968 in Paris signalled the start of this generation of industrial workers’ activism. While again ignoring the question of the composition of the insurgent working class, this interpretation at least brings in the generational factor. In both Detroit and Turin, attention to generational dynamics further develops an understanding of workers’ demands and their tactics.402

Sociologists Charles Sabel and Michael J. Piore have put forward an alternative view. They focus on the changes in the composition of the industrial labour force. Industrial countries in the post-war decades had large reserves of workers to call upon. In the United States rural Blacks and white Appalachians and, in Italy, Southerners. As long as these reserves saw themselves as outsiders to industrial society they were not especially interested in gaining job security, acquiring factory skills, or fighting for better working conditions. However, once they were drawn into full participation in the industry their world-view changed. They came to consider their condition as marginal unjust and confining. In other words, something worth fighting against.403

In the pages that follow I elaborate on the insights of Sabel and Piore to suggest that one of the key sources of rank-and-file militancy in the auto plants of Detroit and

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Turin was the unfulfilled recognition of the migrants' identity as subjects of industrial relations. For the purpose of this thesis I define migrants in a large sense, not only as the persons who travel to another region or country to work, but as those who, having settled in a new place, are denied full citizenship in that place. Their combativeness stemmed from their awareness that the increase in their number and in their importance in the production process was not matched by any improvement either on or off the shop floor.

I borrow the concept of ‘struggle for recognition’ from philosopher Axel Honneth. Following the work of E.P. Thompson, Honneth developed the idea that the motivation underlying protest actions is not orientation towards positively formulated moral principles but rather the experience of disrespect towards the subjects' intuitively presupposed conception of justice. He argued that: “violence to individual or collective claims to social recognition will be experienced as moral injustice”.

Because it departs in one important respect from E. P. Thompson’s ‘moral economy’, Honneth's theory can be profitably applied to enquire into rank-and-file actions in Detroit and Turin. In fact, where Thompson suggests that moral outrage emerges in defence of traditional ways of life, Honneth adds that it also surfaces in situations of exclusion and degradation that violate self-respect and self-confidence, even inside a traditional way of life.

I argue also that in both cases the subjects misidentified the core motive of their drive to action, that is the experience of marginalisation as a drive to action, by interpreting their resistance in terms of interest categories such as race, class, or ethnicity. This circumstance can easily be overlooked in single monographic studies (as opposed to comparative) because actors do not have to be aware of the driving moral motivation of their action, although they can be. Migrants' struggle for recognition was embedded in the battle for better working conditions on and off the shop floor, and (in the Detroit case) against the racially discriminatory attitudes of both the company and the union. This approach, however, does not diminish the significance of these factors. For instance in the case of Detroit's African-Americans, it only means that the experience of racial discrimination can be one of the many ways to motivate collective demands for expanded recognition of a group.

In 1969, industrial conflict at FIAT took on a chaotic dimension. Migrants put at the top of their agenda egalitarian demands that drastically diverged from the culture of...
the leftist organisations, like the PCI and the CGIL, which had traditionally represented the metal workers. As we have seen, these groups regarded workers’ skills as the cornerstone of the bargaining process, a standpoint that could not mobilise unskilled Southerners mostly with a rural background. Instead, the insurgent southern rank-and-file were in the process of forging an explosive alliance with the revolutionary student movement that swept the Turinese, and the Italian, universities in 1968.\textsuperscript{407} At the end of virtually every shift students and workers gathered in informal meetings. They discussed the actions to be taken and produced leaflets for distribution at the gates the following day. In June 1969, they started signing their literature \textit{La Lotta Continua} - the struggle goes on. These groups sparked off a bold critique of the established unions. In particular, they accused them of a reluctance to champion a protracted struggle for an across-the-board wage increase. Students and workers also built a loose organisational structure, the Students-Workers Assembly. At its opening meeting, a worker from Mirafiori body shop declared:

\begin{quote}
Today we can make it with our own means. We don’t need any union representation anymore, or nobody else’s. This means that we now decide not only the form of the struggle, but also its goals, the style of its leadership, the way of organising it and spreading it. This is what manufacturers and union bureaucrats alike are more afraid of.\textsuperscript{408}
\end{quote}

On the eve of the \textit{autunno caldo}, the period of the most intense labour unrest in Italian history, these words articulated a state of disaffection without precedent at Fiat. They also testify to the ultimate failure of the hegemonic project of the company to defuse the class struggle within its plants. It was, in fact, the assurance that left-wing militancy had been subdued that led Fiat managers (under the new leadership of Giovanni Agnelli after the death of Valletta) to abandon, the traditional policy of carefully screening job applicants at a moment when consumer demand for automobiles was experiencing a rapid increase. For Turinese autoworker Vincenzo Damiano "when FIAT needed it made no distinctions. The company hired a whole bunch of hoodlums without any previous information. When I was hired they asked everywhere about who I was". In the course of 1969, FIAT hired no less that 15,000 migrants directly from the South, most of them without any previous industrial experience. These workers augmented to the thousands of meridionali already hired during the 1950s and 1960s. However, in contrast to the latter, they could not make a favourable comparison between the steady employment conditions at FIAT and the unstable situations in the

\textsuperscript{407} More on this in chapter four.
\textsuperscript{408} Quoted in D. Giachetti, M.Scavino, \textit{La Fiat in mano agli operai} (Pisa: BFS edizioni, 1999), 38.
‘secondary sector’, the small workshops, many of them contractors for FIAT. Therefore they were primed and ready to respond to the inhumane pace of the assembly line and problematic safety conditions they encountered on the shop floor. It was this group of marginalised workers that fuelled the new type of protest in 1969.409

Worker Armando Bianchi recalls that "these people were quite upset...some used to sleep at the train station... they came to work, but they could not integrate in society".410 However, migrants were rebellious not only against their precarious housing situation, but also toward the plant hierarchy and the condition of exploitation at work. The situation on the shop floor was analogous to their experience as hired farmhand in that bosses' had the same arbitrary disciplinary power. Traditions of southern resistance, such as instances of "standing up to the big man" were imported into the new setting.411

Under the astounded look of fellow Piedmontese workers, young Meridionali adopted a confrontational stance to foremen: "Listen, Mr. Supervisor...I'm not afraid of you – threatened a migrant who had been reproached for slowing down his pace of work – I'm 23, even if I spend the next 20 year in jail, I will still be young when I'm released, but you won't be there when I'm released".412 One worker remarked: "It was Meridionali with their impoliteness (maleducazione) who started to break up the discipline".413

Responding to working conditions inside the plant and to living conditions in the neighbourhoods, these migrants were more likely to transform their identity not through training as industrial workers or as members of ‘thrift’ northern society, but in the course of the struggle and through contact with the tiny radical Marxist groups that canvassed workers outside the factory.414 Fiat managers once remarked to a group of southern strikers: “What do you expect from us? Yesterday you were at the hoe and today you raise your head”.415

410 Archivio Storico FIAT, interview with Armando Bianchi, no.2.01.
411 For Alessandro Portelli, “narrators everywhere relish narratives of “standing up to the big man”, theatrical anecdotes of personal confrontation in which workers stand up to bosses (especially in stories of union negotiations), rank and file to leaders, students to teachers, soldiers to officers, in complex representations of personal courage, professional pride, or political resistance” in The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1997), 7.
412 Archivio Storico Fiat, interview with Pietro Borretto, n. 2.04.
414 “FIAT is our university” read one of their placards in a picket line. In Lotta Continua leaflet 18 June 1969; This last wave of migrant had in fact reopened the still unsolved problem of lack of adequate services and housing; Mario Dalmaviva in Oltre il Sessantotto: prima, durante e dopo il movimento Diego Giachetti ed. (Pisa: BFS, 1998).
415 This an episode cited in La Classe n. 8, 21-28 June, 1969, 8.
Andrea Papaleo, southerner hired in 1969 at Mirafiori, told an interviewer:

So far, I've never had a chance to listen to them (the radicals of Lotta Continua) in person. I agreed with their aims and I liked their language. This was simple, direct, not as the one of the unions, which hardly distributed leaflets and those few times they were incomprehensible. My encounter with politics began in this way. I started to attend meetings regularly with other workers. I attended gladly because I could always learn something new and free of charge.\(^4\)

In the meetings with fellow migrant workers and northern students, southerners like Papaleo became familiar with the revolutionary ideology that inspired the militant organisations. These groups specifically rejected the parliamentary road to power and, with different emphases, advocated the empowerment of workers through direct action. L'Unità, the official paper of the PCI, accused them "of dividing the workers to the advantage of the master – FIAT".\(^4\)\(^1\) The "small groups" were in reality a mass of workers, and these sorts of allegations indicated the legitimate fear of already weakened trade unions of losing their grip on the rising labour movement. In Italy the two groups with the greatest following were Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio (Workers' Power). They repudiated some key tenets of the labour movement including discipline at work, the desirability of skills, and the usefulness of delegation. They scorned prolonged negotiations and regarded the contracts only as basis for new demands. These radical groups inherited from the teaching of operaismo the attention to the 'mass worker' and to the factory as the actor and the locus of a revolutionary change of society.\(^4\)\(^1\)\(^8\)

Consequently, they adopted the direct language and the slogan of the young migrant workers: "vogliamo tutto e subito" - we want everything and we want it now. For FIAT worker Nino Ciarciaiaglino “workers started using the students as their writers. They came out of the factory and said: ‘Today this and that happened write it all up’".\(^4\)\(^1\)\(^9\)

In opposition to the unions, these groups also had a very loose organisational structure: they eschewed formal constitutions and membership, adopting an egalitarian structure in accordance with their emphasis upon participatory democracy. For this reason, different tendencies coexisted inside the groups, and militants could shift from one group to another without formal obstacles. Migrants could join in the assemblies and take the floor without being formal members. For the same reason, it is difficult to assess the actual size of these groups and the percentage of migrants who affiliated. A

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\(^4\)\(^1\)\(^6\) Interview with Andrea Papaleo, in G. Polo, I Tamburi di Mirafiori..., 212.
\(^4\)\(^1\)\(^7\) "La Fiat ricatta minacciando sospensioni", L’unità, 2 June, 1969.
\(^4\)\(^1\)\(^8\) Renato Panzieri, Spontaneità e Organizzazione. Gli anni dei Quaderni Rossi (Pisa: BFS, 1994).
\(^4\)\(^1\)\(^9\) Interview with Nino Ciarciaiaglino, December 2001.
researcher estimated that at the peak of its success *Lotta Continua* had 15,000 followers all over Italy, with a majority of them in Turin. *Potere Operaio* was significantly smaller with about 5,000 supporters. Unfortunately these figures reveal little about the extent of the circulation of their ideas through the many leaflets and newsletters distributed at the factory gates.\footnote{420}

It would be a mistake, however, to formulate any equation between the agency of the radical groups and the extraordinary momentousness or rank-and-file action at FIAT. *Lotta Continua* and the others remained a *minorità agissante* outside the plant and could instigate shop floor activism only by relying upon militants in the various departments. This cannot account for the majority of occasions in which the workers, *motu propriu*, initiated the wildcats. It is more precise and accurate therefore to consider the radical movement outside FIAT and the rank-and-file inside, as two entities sharing some goals, influencing each other and overlapping to a limited extent, but separate nonetheless.\footnote{421}

For the migrant the struggle often represented a stage in his inclusion, as an outsider, in the new society.\footnote{422} He would bring his own ‘baggage’ of experience and ideas, but he also enriched it or transformed it according to which path of inclusion he followed. Participation in a radical group, in a union, or in any other organization was part of an individual strategy to obtain ‘recognition’ and it was also an occasion to develop a new self. That is why it is difficult to establish to what extent, in both Turin and Detroit, migrants were part of the New Left. The story of Domenico Norcia is a case in point. He left Apulia for Stuttgart, Germany where, even without speaking German, he led a wildcat in an auto plant. This experience radicalised him. In the late 1960s, in the last wave of recruitment in the automobile industry, Norcia moved to Turin and entered FIAT Mirafiori where he looked immediately for a union, but no one on his line belonged to one. By chance he ran into a FIM-CISL activist outside the plant and joined. Undaunted by the pressure of the foreman he was on the first line when the situation in the shop heated up. He participated in the meetings of *Lotta Continua* and

\footnote{421}According to G. Berta 9 millions strike hours in a workforce of 65,000 only in the three largest FIAT plants: Mirafiori, Lingotto e Rivalta with a loss of 1/5 of the planned production output. In *Mirafiori* (Bologna: II Mulino, 1998), 63.  
\footnote{422}In this sense it was equally important the social aspect of the interaction between students and migrants. Commented a migrant: “there were a lot of students who used to come outside the gates at Mirafiori. It was full of university students and we, ill-mannered (cafoni) Meridionali, miserable wretched who never went to school, had the opportunity to meet such girls with furs” Quoted in Borio G., Francesca Pozzi, Roggero Gigi, *Futuro Anteriore* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2002): interview with Giovanni Contini p.3; for worker Cesare Cosi: “An old worker who for years had felt almost like an inferior being, all of a sudden had a young woman [student] taking interest in his life, telling him he was the center of everything” quoted in G. Polo, *I Tamburi di Mirafiori*, 152.
Collettivo Lenin (another, minor New Left group), groups that were very critical of unions. “I attempted – he recalls - to introduce in the union the ideas we discussed in those meetings, but I was always 'put on trial' for this kind of behaviour.” Evidently, Norcia’s theoretical inconsistency and aggressive militancy embarrassed Catholic FIM officials, however they did not expel him, as at this time unions competed for activists with the New Left groups. Norcia became one of the leading militants in his department, he organised processions inside the plant to arouse workers to strike, and distressed FIM leadership by enthusiastically beating up strikebreakers. He was eventually elected as a union steward.

Did Norcia belong to the New Left or to a union? Norcia’s case is revealing because it shows that these labels cannot be easily pinned down on workers. Furthermore, in this case, the flexibility that FIM-CISL allowed to its members in Turin contributed to the ambiguity because of its policy on the borderline between Old and New Left. Contrary to FIOM, FIM was in the late 1960s a small union that tried to appeal to young Southerners. In comparison with the strict FIOM’s ‘class struggle’ approach, FIM embarked on campaigns to improve the migrants’ condition in the community and to aid their rapid integration in the society, preferably through Catholic channels. In a period in which the Communists continued to believe that skilled workers were the natural protagonists in the industrial conflict, FIM ended up being much more open to Meridionali and as a result adopted at times more extreme positions. When Pasquale De Stefani, a migrant from Veneto, joined FIM, his foreman told him he made the wrong choice as he regarded FIM unionists as rossi bianchi, red whites, Catholics who behaved like Communists. They actually did not, but this label reflected the perception of the hierarchy towards Catholics’ militance. De Stefani also joined the New Left area for a while by becoming member of the PSIUP. This party was an offspring of the Socialist and Communist parties that was more sympathetic to the new trends. De Stefani also befriended some leaders of Lotta Continua. He remembers that on the picket line outside the Mirafiori gates the relationship between Communists and radicals was tense, sometimes even violent, while with FIM there was a mutual tolerance as it endorsed some of the radical issues.

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423 Interview with Domenico Norcia, December 2001.
424 ibid.
425 In chapter two I talk about the history of industrial relations and about the differences between the four unions at FIAT: FIM-CISL, UILM, FIOM-CGIL, SIDA.
426 Marta Margotti has shown how the Catholic Church looked at migration as a disruptive process for the individual religious practice as consequence in northern cities implemented a through policy of social integration of the migrant aimed at protecting its devotion. See her “La Chiesa Cattolica di Torino di fronte ai processi di modernizzazione: il caso dell’immigrazione (1945-1965)” in La città e lo sviluppo...cit., 71-115.
427 Interview with Pasquale De Stefani, April 2001.
However, more importantly, the ambiguity in the position of many workers derived from their own personal motivation to join a union or a radical group. For migrants, the boundaries between New and Old Left were not rigid as for the northern skilled workers. Migrants looked at political participation primarily as means to gain recognition of their status of citizens and as participants in the industrial relations. Alternatively it can also be part of a strategy of advancement that included siding with what is believed the winning part.

During my interviews with former DRUM members I found out that a similar consideration could apply to black autoworkers in Detroit. While leaders consciously espoused an ideology, the rank-and-file did not find it inconsistent to shift their political allegiance. By reconstructing their personal stories, what can superficially look as a contradiction makes sense if we interpret them not as stories of an abstract class struggle, but of how the migrants came to terms with a hostile environment. Their stories tell us more about their strategy to cope with discrimination or marginalization, rather than about some abstract class consciousness they could have gained. This also applies to second-generation blacks in Detroit who, although not migrants themselves, lived outside the mainstream white society.

Eula Powell entered Chrysler Dodge Main in 1968 as part of the post-riot black recruitment when she was in her early twenties. In fact, in the aftermath of the 1967 riot the liberal leadership of the city urged the Big Three auto manufacturers to hire the ‘hard-core’ unemployed blacks of the city, those considered to be the main actors in the riot. Chrysler, the last to run plants in Detroit itself, hired 4,000 African-American in a two-year period, under a federal-funded training program. When Eula was hired the racial climate in the city and in the plant was tense. The murder of Martin Luther King Jr. resuscitated fears of another riot and Chrysler managers shut the plant for a few days as a precaution. In May 1968 (see next chapter) the DRUM organised the first of a series of successful wildcat strikes. DRUM asserted with validity that black workers on the assembly line, like the slaves on the ante-bellum cotton plantations, occupied the core of the production process, the most vulnerable gear of the capitalist machine.\footnote{B.J. Widick, \textit{Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence} \ldots cit., 193.}

As in the case of the last wave of young unskilled Meridionali at FIAT, these workers were at the forefront of the auto strikes and shop floor activism for the following two years. These workers knew little of the union of which they were nominally members, except from the fact that they had to pay a sizeable initial membership fee and then regular dues. Moreover, the failure or unwillingness of the UAW to bargain contracts that effectively addressed the question of unsafe working
conditions and speed-ups (issues that were so pressing in the ageing inner city Chrysler plants) meant that these African-Americans no longer looked at the union as the solution of their problems. On the contrary, many African-Americans saw the union rules governing seniority and entry into the skilled trades as obstacles to promotion to better jobs that were seemingly monopolised by the older stock Polish and ethnic whites. These practices exposed the inconsistency of the UAW, a union with a progressive image on racial matters, but one reluctant to advance blacks within its own ranks or seriously challenge racist company policies.  

At the local level, UAW Dodge Main Local 3 President Ed Liska represented the old generation of Polish ethnic workers who where hostile to the counterculture, the student movement, and to the aggressive turn that the Civil Rights movement had taken in the North, and in particular in Detroit. As black militancy grew at Dodge Main, so did Liska’s aversion towards the dissident groups. Local 3 and DRUM engaged in a protracted struggle on the future of labour relations in Detroit. It was a struggle for power but their antagonism derived also from a cultural, ideological, and generational divide. In opposition to trade unions, radical groups in Detroit, as in Turin, did not see an ethical or educational value in work and they promised to upset social (and racial, in the case of Detroit) hierarchies. Their language alarmed even progressive union bureaucrats. Unionists accustomed to resolving problems through negotiation could not sanction the spontaneous, rough, types of industrial action practised by the radicals. Many episodes indicate a sheer lack of communication. In February 1969 Local 3 President Liska left in his diary an account of a stormy meeting with DRUM militants:

About 50 persons were in the Executive Board room. Chuck Walters tried to explain what happened at the meeting. They would not listen. Edith Fox tried to explain about the problems. They shouted her down... Joe Gordon attempted to talk. He was shouted down and called names. The group was totally unreachable. Few did not know the rules...Swearing, dirty talk and just plain arrogance prevailed at the meeting...The meeting ended up with shouts, yells, confusions.

Too young to remember the organising days of the 1930s, or even the post-war strikes, radicals at Dodge Main saw the local and International officers as being part of the same machine as company management. They did not believe in the possibility of

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429 Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit...cit.*, 25.
an independent black leadership in the UAW because the Reuther machine could easily 
co-opt blacks desirous to improve their own condition."  

Eula worked in production, masking tape in the painting department. She 
participated in the strikes and joined DRUM, therefore paying a fee to both the radicals 
and the union. For Eula DRUM "had a nice movement… they had a lot of smart people 
with them too". However, when, after the defeat of their own slate in the Local election 
DRUM declined, Eula joined the Ed Liska faction, whom she characterises as a "nice 
guy". She later became a union steward in her department. Was Eula feeling like a 
radical or a union officer?"  

"You know, people they'd call us radicals", recalls former DRUM member 
Clifford Jr. Brookins. However, he did not represent himself as radical. In his story the 
experience of radicalism is rather told as part of his journey to a more comfortable way 
of living. It was an important moment, because it situated him, a marginal, among the 
protagonists of his generation. Clifford was only a second generation Southerner: his 
father came from Alabama and was a coal miner in West Virginia where he met his 
future wife. They moved to Highland Park, a municipality within Detroit, where they 
had ten children. Clifford Senior found a job at Uniroyal, a tyre factory. Like Eula, 
Clifford Jr also entered Dodge Main in 1968. Three events pushed him to join a radical 
group: discrimination at his recruitment, Martin Luther King’s death, and the riot. At 
the hiring gate Clifford observed that although he had a school degree in electronics he 
was assigned to the assembly line in a nocturnal shift. Instead, a white man of his same 
age who did not complete school was given a comfortable job as an inspector. "I had all 
the schooling, had a certificate and a degree and everything. It didn't mean nothing", 
commented Clifford. At Chrysler the dual labour market did not end with the passing of 
the Civil Rights Act.  

On the line Clifford toiled with fellow black workers "under a lot of 
pressure". Many of his co-workers intoxicated themselves with alcohol, marijuana, or 
cocaine. On the night shift, in particular, drugs and alcohol were a common remedy to 
the high pace of work. The augmentation of consumption of drugs and alcohol within 
the plants had been noted by both management and the union, and constituted the topic 
of a frequent exchange of letter between the two - most of them are company warnings

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432 Interview with Eula Powell, June 2001. When I asked her what she meant by “smart” she added, without any hint of blame, that a few of them had become supervisors within the company.  
433 Interview with Clifford Brookins Jr., June 2001; B.J. Widick, Detroit: City of Race...cit., 199.  
434 Interview with Clifford Brookins Jr., June 2001.
to union members. For young workers, intoxication constituted an alternative type of resistance, one that did not involve a political engagement. However, also this kind of resistance eventually had political and economic consequences, as it attacked the productivity of the workers, the cornerstone of the Fordist factory. A "cultural" rejection of work could be as disrupting as a political or economic one.\footnote{See correspondence between Dodge Main Labor Relations supervisor Kowalsky and UAW Local 3 president Pasica in ALUA, UAW local 3 collection, box 11, folder 16-18; a Chrysler executive reported to the the media: one of every five assembly workers is on narcotics and one in three carry guns to work" this is related by Liska in his Diary, entry 24 June, 1971, ALUA, Liska collection.}

Clifford first joined the Black Panthers, and then later DRUM. He said this happened after the riot that occurred in consequence of King's death. Nine months elapsed between these two events, the 1967 riot and the assassination of King, but, interestingly, Clifford remembered them as a continuous event. As Eula, Clifford must have lived through the strong tensions exploded in the black departments on April 4th, 1968, which prompted him to become more militant in the workplace. We know that rumours of a riot in Detroit after King's murder failed to materialize. Mayor Cavanagh declared the curfew and the governor sent 3,000 National Guardsmen to prevent an outbreak, but nothing happened. However, Clifford in his memory shifted the riot from July 1967 to April 1968 thereby combining the two events that radicalised him into a single one. Clifford merged "the myth and the reality", the two moments that have a symbolic significance in the construction of his identity.\footnote{L. Passerini, “Women’s personal narratives: myths, experience and emotions” in Persona, Narratives Group (eds) Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives Indiana University Press, 1989, 191; interview with Clifford Brookins Jr.}

Clifford left Dodge Main two years later after a minor incident on the line. He could have joined the litigation that DRUM lawyers had initiated on behalf of a number of Dodge Main workers injured on the line. Understanding that the political stance of DRUM might have harmed his chances to get compensation, Clifford decided to sue the company on his own with a different lawyer. As one could expect in the hot political climate of Detroit, the court dismissed DRUM’s protégés, but awarded him compensation. DRUM had raised a political case, Clifford only a legal one. With the compensation he opened a small business that now has several branches in the Midwest. He continued to be active in politics, but certainly not as a radical. He ran three times as an independent candidate for mayor of Detroit. He later joined the right-wing Militia.\footnote{Ibid.}

The industrial conflict that saw protagonists Meridionali and African Americans were instances of social groups struggling for ‘recognition’. They can be
framed in Axel Honneth's theories. Social struggle in these cases should be understood in the context of an "everyday web of moral feelings" and starts, as Honneth maintains, "with a practical process in which individual experiences of disrespect are read as typical of an entire group, and in such a way that they can motivate collective demands for expanded relations of recognition". While the action of native groups can be easier accounted for with a logic of material interests, migrants' militancy was more linked to the process of formation of a new individual and collective identity in the new urban setting (which of course passed also through the acquisition of a more comfortable life). The relatively small number of migrants who joined radical groups and the relatively large numbers who participated in strikes or pickets, was an expression of the ‘distance’ between what they wanted to be and what place they were assigned in the receiving communities. Struggles in the automobile plants assailed the gap between the expectations and the reality of life in the northern cities for migrants. African Americans expected the end of the discrimination that determined their low wages, their poor housing, and their inferior social status. Likewise *Meridionali* protested against the burden of inequalities that the quick industrial development had caused in Italy. In the collective struggle, both groups recovered their sense of dignity and self-respect ("a positive relation to the self") that seemed undermined in the north.

Radical unrest in Turin and Detroit shared an important feature in that they both advanced the standing of two social groups - *Meridionali* and Southern Blacks - that occupied a marginal position in the system of industrial relations of those two cities. Although the UAW and Chrysler made no concessions to DRUM, within two years of its appearance Local 3 elected a black president and Chrysler appointed black supervisory staff in the plant. By 1973, during a subsequent wave of wildcats at Chrysler’s Detroit plants, conditions on the shop floor were equally bad for both black and white and rank-and-file protest was markedly inter-racial. In Turin, the appeal of *Lotta Continua* among migrants prompted the unions to espouse the demands of the latter (see next chapter) lest they lost their grip over an insurgent labour movement at FIAT. In both cases the activity of small radical groups gave migrants the chance to fight for their recognition as full-status actors in the system of industrial relations.

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439 *ibid.*
### Tables

**Table 1**

Detroit’s Population, 1910-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>Percentage Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>465,766</td>
<td>5,741</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>993,675</td>
<td>40,838</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1,568,662</td>
<td>120,066</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1,623,452</td>
<td>149,119</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1,849,568</td>
<td>300,506</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1,670,144</td>
<td>482,229</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1,511,482</td>
<td>660,428</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 2**

The pattern of racial segregation between municipalities in the Detroit metropolitan area. The highest the index of dissimilarity, the highest the separation between the two races.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dissimilarity blacks v. total whites</th>
<th>Number of municipalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Total Male and Female workers at FIAT Mirafiori, 1945-1965

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>13,246</td>
<td>85.53</td>
<td>2,241</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>15,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>14,823</td>
<td>84.45</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>13.55</td>
<td>17,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>12,721</td>
<td>89.56</td>
<td>1,483</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>14,204</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>12,473</td>
<td>90.07</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>9.93</td>
<td>13,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>13,911</td>
<td>90.47</td>
<td>1,465</td>
<td>9.53</td>
<td>15,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>16,180</td>
<td>91.04</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td>17,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>16,103</td>
<td>90.92</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>17,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>14,035</td>
<td>90.21</td>
<td>1,524</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>15,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>13,901</td>
<td>90.33</td>
<td>1,488</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>15,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>14,071</td>
<td>90.77</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>15,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>15,184</td>
<td>91.91</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>8.09</td>
<td>16,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>16,339</td>
<td>92.77</td>
<td>1,274</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>17,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>16,999</td>
<td>93.35</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>18,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>17,684</td>
<td>93.90</td>
<td>1,148</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>18,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>19,696</td>
<td>94.62</td>
<td>1,119</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>20,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>21,824</td>
<td>95.21</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>22,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>23,005</td>
<td>95.76</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>24,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>29,900</td>
<td>96.38</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>31,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>32,009</td>
<td>96.69</td>
<td>1,095</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>33,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>34,719</td>
<td>96.94</td>
<td>1,097</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>35,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>35,569</td>
<td>97.25</td>
<td>1,006</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>36,575</td>
</tr>
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Table 4

Decline in Manufacturing Employment in Detroit, 1947-1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing Firms</td>
<td>3,272</td>
<td>3,453</td>
<td>3,363</td>
<td>3,370</td>
<td>2,947</td>
<td>2,398</td>
<td>1,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Manufacturing Employment (in thousands)</td>
<td>338.4</td>
<td>296.5</td>
<td>204.4</td>
<td>200.6</td>
<td>209.7</td>
<td>180.4</td>
<td>153.3</td>
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</table>


Table 5

Black Enrollment in Apprenticeship Programs in Detroit, 1962-1966

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Apprentices</th>
<th>Black Apprentices</th>
<th>Percent Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 1962</td>
<td>1,314</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1963</td>
<td>1,341</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1963</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1964</td>
<td>1,585</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1964</td>
<td>1,902</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1965</td>
<td>2,056</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1965</td>
<td>2,321</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1966</td>
<td>2,363</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

Immigration to Turin, 1952-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>17,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>31,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
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<td>1955</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>46,689</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>51,925</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>43,860</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>46,761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>74,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>84,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>79,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>59,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>35,525</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>42,501</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>54,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>56,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>59,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>52,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>47,791</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Michel Bournier, *Les Conseils Ouvrier et la FIAT*. 103

Table 7


Source: *Annuario Statistico della città di Torino*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>329,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>415,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>499,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>590,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>629,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>719,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1,025,822</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,167,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1,117,154</td>
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Chapter Four:
The Cities of Discontent:
The Breakdown of Industrial Relations in the Automobile Plants of Turin and Detroit
1967-1973

In the late 1960s, the factory and the metropolis, the two laboratories for Fordism as a system of socio-economic organization, burst into a rank-and-file struggle that in turn changed that very system. My aim in this chapter is to examine the dynamics of this last stage. I want to understand the origins of the radical groups that articulated, or sometimes, distorted, the voice of the rank-and-file. I will study the encounters that shaped the rhetoric of Meridionali and southern blacks, and also analyse the response of organized labour to these groups. Did the rank-and-file really belong to the New Left or did dissident leaders find that the New Left rhetoric was optimal to stir them up? Finally, I conclude by outlining the factors that explain the different outcomes of the working class struggle in Detroit and Turin.

One cannot completely understand this wave of working class militancy without weighing up the role of an older generation of dissenters that, in the 1950s and 1960s, in both Detroit and Turin, elaborated an analysis of postwar capitalism in contrast with the mainstream currents of the labour movement. Leaders of New Left groups who were prominent in the struggle in the automobile plants had numerous personal and intellectual links to this older generation of activists. In the first part I examine the radical milieus of Detroit and Turin and show a connection, between different generations of militants. Although, it was the leaders of the movement, rather than the rank-and-file, who draw from an established tradition of leftist opposition. One of the complexities of interpreting these events lies in the distance between the intellectual sophistication of the leadership and the type of militancy expressed by the rank-and-file. As we have seen, workers were likely to shift their allegiances towards the unions or the radicals, according to how these organizations responded to their demands (see chapter three). Unions and radicals are best seen as competing to win over social groups and individuals that were in the process of building their own identity. As the iconography of the 1960s shows us, this was a bolder generation of protesters: they expressed their fervour in loud performances (bongo drums, rhythmic beating of the machinery during processions) by using aggressive slogans in their
placards, and in uncompromising language in their publications. Some of the characteristics of these movements proceeded from the migrants’ cultural background, others from their exposure to local traditions of radical struggle.

In the second part, I explore the relationship between working class struggle in the auto plants and other protest movements in the cities, notably the student movement in Turin and the Black Nationalist movement in Detroit. In both cases there is a strong connection between these events, as it is evident from the personal involvement of certain radical leaders. In the third section of the chapter I analyse the climax of these struggles and their effect on the industrial relations. Here I point out the several factors that have determined a different outcome. I finally conclude by sketching the two different directions that the rank-and-file movements took in the early 1970s.

Counter currents: The Postwar Radical Left in Detroit and Turin.

Some of the themes that characterised the rank-and-file movements found their origins in ideas developed during the 1950s and early 1960s by radical intellectuals and unorthodox Marxists. These intellectuals moved away from the traditional stance of the left during 1930s and 1940s, which consisted in significant practical and ideological support of trade unions and their programme. The disillusionment that unions could never transform society, which grew during the postwar decade with the marginalization or the purge of the radical elements from the union movement, prompted a number of left-wing intellectuals to advocate a route to this transformation different from unionism. When in the sixties workers’ unrest precipitated in the auto plants in Turin and Detroit, the new dissident groups that were taking the lead of the struggle could tap a stock of ideas - a debate about the transformation of capitalism and the working class - antecedent to them. For two decades, intellectuals, in particular within the anti-Stalinist left, had elaborated on questions such as liberation from work, the impact of automation upon industrial workers, the inadequacy of the Leninist revolutionary strategy, the central importance of new industrial actors such as migrants and blacks. By adopting and adapting these insights, radical groups became better equipped than traditional labour organisations to understand the rationale of the high levels of industrial conflict and to respond to the new workers’ movement. From a

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440 See Liliana Lanzardo, "Un percorso di lettura delle fotografie del lavoro, 1840-1977", Tra fabbrica e società, Stefano Musso ed. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999); ALUA, Grace Lee Boggs papers, box 5, folder 4, Edward Lee "Whoever heard of bong drums on the picket line?".
theoretical perspective, radical groups could also use these notions to frame workers’ demands in a more general critique of traditional Marxism.\(^4\)

I am not interested here in reconstructing an intellectual history of New Left groups, rather, I would like to focus on the Marxist milieus in Turin and Detroit where intellectuals close to the working class nurtured these ideas and passed them onto the emerging movements. Thus, an older generation of militants and leftist thinkers played a part in the development of radical groupings in the late 1960s. These were individuals already active during the postwar years and who had been involved in union politics or in leftist organisations but had been confined to marginality by their ideological nonconformism. Radical theories about workers’ control and the rejection of mass production always remained a theoretical tool of a minority of activists, many of them coming from the student movement rather than from the factory. At the end of the decade, with the rise of the autoworkers, their ideas found the favour of radical leaders who sought to turn workers’ discontent into a revolutionary project.

In Italy, in the second half of the 1950s, the rapid industrial development contradicted the official PCI stance that the monopolistic character of the Italian industrial bourgeoisie would have brought to the downfall of Italian capitalism.\(^4\) In Turin, a circle of militant intellectuals writing for the review Quaderni Rossi realized instead that precisely industrial development could provide workers with collective leverage to use against capital. This position established a durable influence on subsequent radical groups.\(^4\) Since its founding in 1961, Quaderni Rossi, aimed to function as a tool to revive working class struggle. Edited in Turin, it shared a particular concern with autoworkers. Following the intentions of its founder, Raniero Panzieri, a dissident cadre of the PSI, the Italian Socialist Party, Quaderni Rossi served to foster an interpretation of Marxist theory more geared to understanding the actual condition of workers caught in an ever-changing production process, as opposed to the interpretation focused on its philosophical and historical meaning endorsed by leftist parties and unions. This standpoint became known as operaismo, “workerism”, an


\(^4\) See pamphlet *I temi del dibattito che la CGIL e la CCDL propongono a tutti i lavoratori al IV Congresso camerale* in Istituto Gramsci Torino, Fondo Camera confederale del lavoro di Torino, serie A1, busta 1, fascicolo 5; veteran union officer Vittorio Foa talked about this frame of mind in his memoir *Il cavallo e la torre. Riflessioni su una vita* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 252; for this line inside the PCI see Federazione Torinese del PCI, *Atti dell’assemblea dei comunisti alla FIAT. Torino, 15-16 aprile 1961*, 3-11

\(^4\) For a full elaboration of this position see Romano Alquati, *Sulla Fiat e altri scritti* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1975).
appellation that did not convey the complexity of the thinking of Panzieri and the contributors of *Quaderni Rossi*.

Since 1960, the group of young intellectuals - Liliana e Dario Lanzardo, Vittorio Rieser, Giovanni Mottura, Emilio Soave, Goffredo Fofi, Romano Alquati, among others - who gathered around in Turin Panzieri formulated a critique of the reformist approach of PCI and CGIL. They argued that this approach could not bear fruits in the age of *neocapitalismo*, a capitalism that enthralled the whole society to the needs of production. This was a development that, at the time applied especially to the monopoly of FIAT in the Italian car industry: "The same type of process that characterises the factory (...) stretches out to assert itself on the whole society, and therefore the features of factory work - in particular the subordination of the workforce to the capital, and so on - penetrate to all levels of society, acquiring specific and peculiar forms". These conceptions anticipated the Foucauldian notion of power, and were directly derived from the study of the *Capital*. The editors of *Quaderni Rossi* also accused the labour organizations of acquiescing with the capitalist notion of the 'objectivity' of technological innovations. In fact, since the massive introduction of automation at FIAT in the 1950s, the Fiom-Cgil took the position that technological development, although used by capitalists to increase the surplus they extracted from workers, was not in itself disadvantageous for the working class, but they argued that it had to be put to a 'good' use. Panzieri, in a famous essay published on the first issue of *Quaderni Rossi*, characterised this position as an illusion, a camouflage of the romantic idea that the machines will liberate men from work. He argued that technological development could serve only the purpose of the productive process that had generated it: the capitalist productive process. Capitalism, while growing, appropriates technological progress and by this means increases its "authority": "Every new 'technical stage' achieved in the production represents for capitalism a new possibility to reinforce its power." Panzieri asserted that, instead of claiming a wage rise, the labour movement should strike at the relation between "objective" requirements of technology, division of labour, and subordination of the working class at the point of production. Panzieri conceded that only in the long term would this

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444 Goffredo Fofi, *Strana Gente*, (Milano, Donzelli, 1986); Raniero Panzieri, "Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico", in *Spontaneità e organizzazione*, Stefano Merli ed. (Pisa: BFS, 1994), 84 these words also aptly reminded how Turin's urban space had been completely reshaped by FIAT - a situation acutely perceived by intellectuals working in Turin;

445 David Gartman has similarly distinguished between "neutral" and "biased" technological innovations. He maintains that only the latter originate in the capitalist drive to control and shrink the workforce. See David Gartman, *Auto Slavery: The Labor Process in the American Automobile Industry, 1897-1950* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

446 Raniero Panzieri, "Sull'uso capitalistico delle macchine nel neocapitalismo", *Quaderni Rossi*, n.1, 1961; Panzieri, *Spontaneità...cit.*, 74.
theory – at first to be endorsed only by a revolutionary vanguard - correspond to the aim of the whole working class.

In 1962, in occasion of the renewal of the metalworkers contract, FIOM-CGIL organised the first successful strike at FIAT in eight years (chapter two). Although only half of the workforce went on strike, it was a triumph for a union that had been victimized throughout the 1950s. While the other two independent unions FIM-CISL and UILM had pledged to follow a unitary course of action with FIOM in the negotiations, UILM eventually signed a separate agreement with the company, thereby undermining the position of the other two. Spontaneous protests in front of the Piazza Statuto headquarters of UILM developed in a full-scale riot. For three days police and protesters clashed in the piazza and in the surrounding area. For FIAT's La Stampa, Communist agitators had masterminded the riot. In particular, the paper accused the Panzieri group of advocating working class violence. However, the Communist party had been taken by surprise by the event, and even though there were several leftist militants in the crowd, the majority were Meridionali with precarious employment or hoodlums from the projects in the suburbs.\(^{447}\) Rather than a Communist plan to attack a "democratic" union, as FIAT manager Valletta characterised UILM union, the riot revealed the tensions that were accumulating in Turin following the mass arrival of migrants, and the harsh competition for housing and jobs. The Panzieri group, too, interpreted the riot in relation to the factory. For them it was the harbinger of the working class will to alter its relation of subordination with the capital - meaning the configuration of the capital inside the factory. That both the right and the left failed to understand the real meaning of the episode testifies to the lack of comprehension of the complex changes occurring in Turin.\(^{448}\)

However, the young intellectuals of Quaderni Rossi were right in regarding the recomposed working class as ready to adopt new forms of struggle even without the leadership of the labour organisations. They argued that the union movement did not coincide with the labour movement, and with this insight they became precursors of the revolutionary groups that appealed to unionised migrants. Quaderni Rossi sought to chart the transformation of the workforce inside the factory through sociological surveys. Sociology had so far been rejected by traditional leftists' organisations as a bourgeois discipline. However, the editors of Quaderni Rossi believed that surveys could be useful: "The sociological inquiry allows us to elude a fictitious image of the working class. It always ensures the scientific observation of the degree of awareness of


the working class, and therefore it constitutes the means to bring this awareness to an higher degree. In other words, Panzieri and Quaderni Rossi established that field research on workers was a prerequisite for political action, a fact neglected by CGIL and PCI that draw their political agenda from the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

One central tenet of these traditional leftist organizations was the central place they assigned to the work ethic of skilled workers in the making of a working class consciousness. After the debacle of 1955, the FIOM-CGIL did set out to investigate what changes in the factory had created the preconditions of its defeat, but it always assumed that a resumption of militancy could occur only among workers with a skill. Given the progressive automation of work - FIOM leader Sergio Garavini argued - skilled work could have taken a new form: the ability and knowledge required to operate a complex machine. In turn, this new sort of skilled workers would have been the natural revolutionary vanguard inside the factory. For historian Marco Scavino this kind of argument demonstrated that: "the belief that unskilled workers could not constitute the core of a political and unionist strategy was so deep-rooted that to expect a resumption of the labour movement one would go as far as anticipating a new stage of the relation worker/machinery. This stage would allow the former to recover certain professional and intellectual contents in the factory work". These premises rendered unfeasible collaboration between Panzieri's group and even the more open-minded segment of the local FIOM officials. The latter had actually collaborated with the first issue of the review, but soon the rift between the two strategies became too wide to allow compromises. On the occasion of the events of 1962, L'Unità accused Panzieri and his disciples of fostering "fragmentation". However, ironically, precisely this unexpected uprising at FIAT corroborated the claim of Quaderni Rossi that the labour movement needed to know its working class.

The events of 1962, marked a turning point in the work of the group of Quaderni Rossi, in the sense that it now became more isolated from even the more progressive wing of CGIL and PCI: a development that Panzieri, the older and more moderate of the group, did not welcome. The unexpected, though ephemeral, workers'
uprising also caused a split inside the editorial staff of the review. In fact, the component of the Roman branch, led by Mario Tronti, now advocated an immediate involvement in the struggle, while the Turinese group, under Panzieri, still believed in the long-term perspective. Furthermore, Tronti believed it was necessary to provide a political leadership to the workers while Panzieri’s group argued for a bottom-up organisation. However, after Panzieri’s death in 1964, it was Tronti’s group that continued to spread operaismo, in particular through the review La Classe Operaia. Later, in 1969, the review changed its name to La Classe and functioned as a means to voice radical doctrines.452

Meanwhile, in 1963, Goffredo Fofi, one of the acolytes of Panzieri, published his sociological study on the Southern migrant workers in Turin, L’immigrazione Meridionale a Torino, the first and still the most important study of the topic. Rejected by the Turinese publishing house Einaudi because too controversial, the study was published by the Milanese publisher Feltrinelli, specialising in texts of the New Left. The author researched the conditions of the new working class in the unfamiliar Northern urban setting. Fofi maintained that labour organisations neglected to organise southerners thereby preventing them from acquiring a full working class conscience. However, he also foresaw that migrants would assume a pivotal role in forthcoming workers’ struggles in Turin and in the nation. In fact, already during the 1962 metalworkers’ strike he had noticed a strong rebelliousness among migrants. He did not explain how this could happen without the ‘class consciousness’ that he deemed necessary, but he argued that on the basis of this potential militancy, Piedmontese and Southern workers "could give birth to a new force".453

The theoretical critique developed by Quaderni Rossi was better elaborated through a practical approach. Vittorio Rieser, for instance, was active in the student movement and then decisive in organising the contacts - from the end of 1968 to Autumn 1969 - between students and FIAT workers. However, the leaders of Quaderni Rossi, a decade older than the student leaders, became later critical of the direction taken by the radical organisations after 1969. They opposed in particular the ideological extremism and ‘spontaneity’ of the new groups.454 Italian historiography has often

452 Mario Tronti, Operai e Capitale (Torino: Einaudi, 1966).
454 For Mario Tronti “As these groups developed they became even more antagonistic to traditional labour movement. This was their internal dialectic: the more they developed, the more they becomes self-enclosed. This was not right” in Futuro Anteriore...cit. p.90 e un’altra forse meglio p.93; Rieser interview p.8 in ibid. “Often there was nihilism in this attitude. Every kind of agreement, no matter the content of it, was the same. There have been some good contracts at FIAT but they were all considered a swindle”.
considered *Quaderni Rossi* as the ‘father’ of the New Left, but it is more accurate to consider it as a transitional group developed in between. *Quaderni Rossi* injected new ideas in the debate on the role of unions, the transformation of capitalism, and the re-composition of the working class, but in opposition to the New Left groups that adopted and re-fashioned some of these ideas, *Quaderni Rossi* did not forsake ideological coherence for practical action and continued to caution against tactics and objectives that were alien to the tradition of the labour movement.\(^5\)

In Detroit, after the purge of Communists from the labour movement, the leftist group that had remained most vigorous were the Trotskyites. Because of the substantial presence of a left-wing tradition in the local UAW, Detroit remained during the 1950s one of the few centres of discussion of radical ideas in the nation. The Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP), a Trotskyite organization, had one important branch in the motor city, which was revitalized in the early 1950s. The SWP organised the Friday Night Forum, an event that attracted an audience of fifty to two hundred people at each time. The Forum functioned as a meeting place for all kinds of radicals rather than strictly for Trotskyites. “It was in that context – says Dan Georgakas who used to attend these meetings - that a lot of the white and the black radical met and began to discuss things”. The Friday Night Forum attracted a lot of young blacks, among whom the future leaders of DRUM, because of the SWP’s openness towards black’s involvement in class struggle. For instance, they first recognized the political importance of Malcolm X and accepted him as a radical.\(^6\) The Forum fostered political and personal friendship. Rather than serve the purpose of recruiting people to the party, it aimed at building a movement. Two years after the Cuban revolution the SWP organized a trip to Cuba. For some of those who later form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the visit to Cuba, where they met Fidel Castro and “Che” Guevara, was a crucial experience. Remarked General Baker: “We came back with some level of responsibility”.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) SWP’s George Breitman was the first editor of Malcolm X’s work in the US. see George Breitman ed. *Malcolm X. Speaks. Selected Speeches and Statements* (London: Seeker & Warburg, 1966).

\(^7\) I take most information about the Friday Night Forum from my interview with Dan Georgakas, April 2002 and General Baker, May 2002. See also Dan Georgakas “Frank Lovell: the Detroit Years” and Michael Steven Smith “The Branch That Frank Built: Detroit in the Fifties and Sixties” in *Revolutionary Labor Socialist: The Life, Ideas, and Comrades of Frank*
Another influential Trotskyite group was Correspondence that was the expression of the Johnson-Forest faction within Trotskyism. Johnson and Forest were pen names for C.L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, the leaders of this group. They had left the SWP over the question of the nature of the Soviet state. C.L.R. James, the more important of the two was a West-Indian Marxist active both in England and the States - James argued for a greater autonomy of the proletariat from labour organizations. In Notes on Dialectics, he wrote: "The task is to abolish organisation. The task is to call for, to teach, to illustrate, to develop spontaneity - the free creativity of the proletariat". Inside Correspondence activists such as Martin and Jessie Glaberman, Johnny Zupan, Grace Lee and James Boggs, Seymour Faber, George Rawick developed a critique of conventional trade unions. In comparison to other Trotskyites they were also more concerned with the "Negro question". Being active in Detroit, but with small branches in other cities, their main target was the UAW. As with the operaisti in Turin, the Correspondence group also rejected the concept of a vanguard party and the imposition of a political line on rank-and-file. Following C.L.R. James, they maintained that workers should organise themselves at the point of production. In the pamphlet "Punching out", Glaberman called for a "new society... in which the workers, every one of them, takes (sic) his part in planning production, in carrying out the plan, in developing himself by helping his fellow men, in helping society by developing himself".

In 1955, the Subversive Activities Board included the group and its newsletter in its list, and Correspondence split on the issue of the necessity of going underground. Rana Dunayevskaya formed her own group. From then on the newsletter came out irregularly until the group changed its name in 1963. Meanwhile, in the 1960s, Detroit was changing. The racial transition in the neighbourhoods and, slowly, in the factories became increasingly evident, and it was accompanied by numerous tensions. Starting from 1963, following a boom in the demand, Dodge Main plant in Hamtramck, a complex that already employed a number of black workers in the foundry department, started hiring African-Americans on the assembly line. At the same time the Civil

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Lovell, Paul le Blanc and Thomas Barret eds. (Union City, NJ: Smyrnia Press, 2000); Lovell was one of the founder of SWP and for a long period the organized of the forum.


460 Correspondence was also the name of the newspaper they edited. Copies can be found in ALUA; Martin Glaberman, Punching Out (Detroit: Bewick editions, 1973, [1952]) 32.
Rights movement was gaining momentum in the nation. In the new situation, other divisions came to light in the group.461

In 1963, James Boggs, then the chairperson of Correspondence, maintained, in a paper that became the book The American Revolution, that blacks would replace workers as the revolutionary social force of the coming years.462 From London, C.L.R. James denounced this position as non-Marxist and the controversy over this matter led to another split, with the Boggs and others leaving. They subsequently continued their engagement mainly in the community. The remaining members took the name of Facing Reality and, under the leadership of Glaberman, persisted with an approach that regarded factory workers, black or white, as the motor for revolutionary change. However, Glaberman thought also that the all-black revolutionary movement that was forming in Detroit’s Chrysler plants, like the student movement or the anti-war movement, had an “independent validity”. A standpoint that C.L.R. James criticised, though they had once agreed that “the traditional view of the American Left ‘black and white: unite and fight’ usually meant the subordination of black struggles to the perceived limitations of white working class.”463 Of the two, it was paradoxically the white Glaberman who was more prepared to come to terms with the multi-racial dimension of the Detroit working class.

Although Facing Reality now counted only a few members, it endeavoured to stay in touch with the working class in automobile plants. Through George Rawick, who had joined in the 1960s, the group was in close touch with the leaders of DRUM. Rawick had written a book on slave rebellions and had written extensively on workers self-activity on the shop floor. In 1968 Glaberman gave classes in Marxist theory to the leadership body of DRUM. In these occasions they would talk about the flaws of bureaucratised unions and the need to support wildcat strikes. This, in a very real sense, contributed to pass some of the ideas that Correspondence elaborated in the 1950s and 1960s to a new generation of activists. However, Facing Reality kept on shrinking. In 1970 only half a dozen members were left. Notwithstanding the contrary advice of C.L.R. James, Glaberman decided that the organization had outlived its usefulness and disbanded it.464 However, informal meetings between different generation of militants

461 Grace Lee Boggs, Living for a Change...cit., 100.
463 M. Glaberman ed., Marxism for Our Times: C.L.R. James on Revolutionary Organization (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), xxi; ibid. xvi.
continued at Jimmy Boggs’s place where the younger “[absorbed a] revolutionary analysis of capitalism and imperialism”\textsuperscript{465}

In both Turin and Detroit, small groups of activists and intellectuals prepared the theoretical ground for the activity of radical groups in the factories. These discussion circles - says one former member of the League - “collectively functioned as ongoing radical institutions which preserved and transmitted historical information and revolutionary values to a fresh generation of Detroit activists”.\textsuperscript{466} The terms in which radicals attacked unions and proposed an alternative course of action to autoworkers reveals this influence. However, this was no direct kinship. Groups such as DRUM and Lotta Continua drew on an array of ideological and rhetorical sources. These groups typically neglected the quest for an ideological coherence, in favour of practical activity. Moreover, this older generation of leftists certainly did not subscribe to the radicals’ strategic approach to struggle and to their theoretical development as organisations. If these radicals were ever students of these masters, they were ‘bad students’. The point here is that successful radical groups, such the ones mentioned above, do not crop up in an intellectual vacuum. In particular, it is important to consider the local aspect. Networks of militants at the margin of the official union movement; distribution of key texts and circulation of oppositional leaflets and newsletters; informal contacts between different generations of activists: these interconnections are difficult to trace but are the necessary background for the rise of protest movements. Manufacturers have learnt that the best way to avoid the risk of disorder at the point of production is to move operations where such traditions and networks do not exist.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the American and the Italian leftist dissident interested each other. During a trip to Italy in 1964, Glaberman and C.L.R. James had established contacts with New Left groups with whom they had ideological affinities.\textsuperscript{467} Italian militants avidly followed the development of Black workers’ struggle in the United States. Ferruccio Gambino, an activist close to Classe Operaia and the Operaisti, later member of Potere Operaio, joined the Facing Reality group for a few months in 1967 during which “[Jessie Glaberman instructed [him] on Marxist Feminism and tested [him] with the huge washing up after the meetings]”.\textsuperscript{468} The following year George Rawick was Gambino’s guest in Padova where he lectured local militants of

\textsuperscript{465} As related by Grace Lee Boggs, \textit{Living for Change}…cit., 125.

\textsuperscript{466} Ernest Mkalimoto Allen, “Review of: Detroit I do Mind Dying”, \textit{Radical America}, Vol. 8, n.4 (1974), 72

\textsuperscript{467} See Glaberman, \textit{Marxism for our Times}…cit., introduction.

\textsuperscript{468} Interview with Ferruccio Gambino as quoted in G. Borio \textit{et al.}, \textit{Futuro Anteriore}…cit.;
Potere Operaio. James Boggs also toured Italian universities during the occupations of 1968. Roberto Giammanco and Dan Georgakas, the former a TV producer and an intellectual who taught philosophy at Wayne State University in Detroit, and the latter a student of his who spent two years in Italy, had started other connections. These links persisted until later in the decade between radical groupings on the two sides of the Atlantic. More than reciprocal influence, these contacts demonstrated that the radicalisation of the workers’ movement, as much as that of the students’ movement, had an international dimension.

Students meet workers.

In both Turin and Detroit, radicalisation of industrial action commenced off the shop floor by groups that, in the community and in the university advocated the overthrow of the political and economic system. Some of these activists began gravitating around the auto plants - materially and symbolically the driving force of the system they aimed to change. The interaction between ‘new’ workers and ‘new’ leaders ignited a wave of strikes whose demands perturbed manufacturers and union official alike. Radicals who entered (sometimes only with their ideas, as not all of them were autoworkers) the auto plants, through their involvement in the student movement or in Black Nationalist groups (or both) had come to the conclusion that migrants and black workers would be the protagonists of the forthcoming revolution, or at least, the real actors of social change.

In Turin, the student movement of Palazzo Campana, the site of the university, was characterised by extremism, resilience, as well as theoretical sophistication, which distinguished it from most of the other universities’ agitations in Italy. In Detroit, the student movement at Wayne State University was less important than the ones in other campuses in Michigan, such as Ann Arbor. In the late 1960s the leaders of DRUM trained in the many groups that espoused a Black Nationalist ideology. The factory was thus at the centre of a dynamic involving several ingredients: social and racial changes in the neighbourhoods, the organizational activity of an older generation of leftist militants, the turbulent agitation of young students and activists, and the receptive mood of young migrant or black rank-and-file in the plants. This was a Molotov cocktail for the cities’ establishment.

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149 Grace Lee Boggs, Living...cit., 149.
187 Interview with Dan Georgakas, April 2002.
From the onset of the decade, several revolutionary groups appeared in Detroit. The motor city became, in the 1960s, a hub for militants advocating, within a wide spectrum of positions, the need for black liberation. Detroit's African-American population had constantly increased in the post-war period and, already in the 1950s the city hosted the biggest NAACP branch and the most successful black-owned music label in the nation, Motown. Detroit was also the headquarters of the Nation of Islam from whose ranks Malcolm X emerged (at one point he was even nicknamed “Detroit Red”).

In the political climate of the 1960s, in the wake of successful Civil Rights campaign in the South, many activists came to express more militant views concerning the African-American situation and that of the disadvantaged class. A number of acronyms began acquiring visibility: WCO (West Central Organization); GOAL (Group on Advanced Leadership); PAR (People against Racism); WRO (Welfare Rights Organization), the Motor City Labor League. This wealth of organizations gave to the city "a reputation as the revolutionary capital of America". They were a breeding ground for the militants later active in the auto plants.

In 1962, the Detroit chapter of SNCC advocated: "direct action in the North as well as in the South" ahead of time and was thus banished from the national organisation. In the same years, Max Stanford, a black nationalist from Philadelphia, moved to Detroit and formed the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). Following the teachings of Malcolm X, RAM upheld armed self-defence and endorsed black rebellion in the North. Another group - UHURU (the Swahili word for freedom) - comprised many elements that later constituted the leadership of DRUM and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

Membership in any of these groups was not exclusive. Militants had multiple associations with several groups or moved from one to the other according to political or personal liaisons. In 1963, Detroit's black nationalists came for the first time to media attention when they publicly contested the candidature of the city as a site for a future Olympiad. In a ceremony staged at City Hall to interest the Olympic committee, John

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472 Interview with Dick Lobenthal in R. Mast, *Detroit Lives...cit.*, 280, where he continues sarcastically: "...and that could have pointed out the sad state of the revolution".

473 Quote from Georgakas, Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying...cit.*.16; Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for a Change...cit.*, 125.
Watson (future DRUM leader) and others hissed the American flag and the national anthem, a felony that brought them to court.\textsuperscript{474} In 1966, during a ‘mini’ riot in Detroit’s east side, activists of RAM and UHURU -General Baker, Glanton Dowell, Rufus Griffin - were arrested on the charge of carrying concealed weapons. That episode started with one incident involving the – ’Big Four’ and could have spread to the whole city. „That rebellion probably would have spread if it hadn’t rained – remembers Baker -You know it started to rain really so hard… they arrested us on the way home and put us to the county jail and it rained so hard we wetted the county jail”.\textsuperscript{475}

The ‘real’ riot occurred on 23 July, 1967 and came unexpected for the city administration and for observers of race relations. Given the participation of a number of white ‘hillbillies’ in the looting and mayhem on 12th street as well as black population, it was soon recognised by more acute journalists, and then reasserted by sociologists and historians, that the disturbances resulted from frustration and anger about unequal distribution of resources and opportunities rather than about racial strife. "Not to say that racial tensions didn't exist, but it wasn't black against white. It was the propertied against the non-propertied".\textsuperscript{476} However, the response of the police and the National Guard, culpable for the killing - often in unjustifiable situations\textsuperscript{477} - of 33 African-Americans, and the reaction of the white public opinion gave to the event an indisputable racial connotation. Authorities used this occasion to flood the only African-American bookstore, to gas the office of radical newspaper \textit{Fifth Estate}, and to devastate independent business in the black community.\textsuperscript{478} In the post-riot years, the white and middle-class flight to the suburbs increased in intensity leaving Detroit with a diminished tax base and rapidly degrading neighbourhoods, schools, and housing stock. In a more recent study, historian Thomas Sugrue, however, characterises the riot as an event that marked rather the final stage of a long-term process. He observed: “The riot of 1943 came at a time of increasing black and white competition for jobs and housing;
by 1967, discrimination and deindustrialization ensured that blacks had lost the competition".479

The event caught Detroit's revolutionary nationalists by surprise: on 23 July many of them were in Newark attending a conference. For them, the riot represented a "unique opportunity to begin the difficult task of transferring meaningful power from the white power structure to the black community".480 From a revolutionary perspective the riot became ‘rebellion’ and marked a great leap forward in the struggle of Detroit's African-Americans. In fact, the post-riot mood swelled the ranks of the various revolutionary groups and encouraged new initiatives.481 Remarkd a Detroit radical: “Once Detroit exploded the Left said: this is the Lenigrad of [America] and all the left groups came to Detroit"482

In October 1967, John Watson, General Baker, Mike Hamlin – mostly born in the South but raised in Detroit- and other UHURU activists began publishing a monthly paper, Inner City Voice, which, significantly, carried the masthead "the voice of revolution". The core group around this publication provided the leadership for the revolutionary movements that soon emerged in the city's factories. Just a month before they had again come to public attention when they sponsored a talk by CORE's Floyd McKissick and SNCC's H. Rap Brown (SNCC had now moved to a more militant position). The latter, in particular, inflamed the audience with his advice "stop looting... start shooting", which encouraged the crowd to smash some cars outside the venue.483 However, UHURU organised the paper not only as a political means to attain revolutionary goals, but also to reveal the situation of the inner city black community. By showing the dilapidated conditions of the black neighbourhoods together with the unrelenting exploitation in the factories the Inner City Voice suggested a link between the struggle in the plants and the community.484

The radicalisation of the workers' struggle in Chrysler's plants therefore cannot be detached by its post-riot urban context. Yet it did not occur in any kind of 'automatic' way. Although retrospectively it seems obvious that the riot was the precondition for the outburst of workers' militancy, of the several 'riot' cities of the

480 Sydney Fine, Violence in the Model City...cit. 365; Cleage, "Transfer of Power" Center Magazine 1 (Mar 1968) quoted in Fine, Violence in the Model City...cit., 375.
481 Ibid. 369-386.
482 Interview with Dan Georgakas, April 2002.
484 Detroit: I Do Mind...cit., 13-22.
1960s only Newark harboured another black labour group, the United Black Brothers. In Detroit, the commitment of some militants, as well as the tradition of leftist militancy, played an essential part: of the many groups in the city that boasted black self-assertion, only the editors of *Inner City Voice* - through General Baker, a Dodge Main production worker - began to organise evening meetings with workers to build a revolutionary structure in the plant. For instance, the Republic of New Africa (RNA), which formed, as DRUM, in the aftermath of the rebellion, advocated the establishment of a black independent nation, and proposed that five southern states be allocated to African-Americans for that purpose. As with the majority of nationalist groups RNA mobilised blacks solely on the issue of race. DRUM, instead, inextricably linked the spheres of race and class in their literature.\(^{485}\)

Between 1967 and 1968, the fermenting political situation in the city interacted with the deteriorating working conditions for rank-and-file at Chrysler Dodge Main. In autumn 1967, in occasion of the negotiations for the renewal of the autoworkers' contract, the trim department, led by Chief Steward Edith Fox staged a wildcat against working conditions. This action demonstrated that managerial practises generated discontent not only among the young black production workers, at this point the majority in the plant, but also among older workers, like the white women of that department, who were heir of the militant tradition of UAW Local 3 in the 1950s.\(^{486}\)

Meanwhile, although UAW's *Chrysler Newsgram* boasted that: "in any event, Chrysler workers will have full protection against increases in the cost of living", the 1967 contract had established a ceiling to cost-of-living adjustments, thereby curtailing, in real money, workers' pay check.\(^{487}\) For the United National Caucus, a rank-and-file caucus opposed to Reuther, this cap cost each worker $1,200.\(^{488}\) Therefore, even before the economic recession of the 1970s, when competition from foreign imports and low productivity growth induced auto makers to shrink their workforce, and unions to accept concessions, the trade off between higher wages, benefits, and increased human effort, inaugurated by Reuther in 1950, had entered a crisis. After all, the regime of collective bargaining accomplished during the apogée of the liberal consensus was meant to remain a historically circumscribed practice.


\(^{486}\) ALUA, UAW local 3 collection, box 23, folder 3, leaflet: Trim Department, 26 September 1967

\(^{487}\) ALUA, Simon Alpert Collection, box 1, folder 3, "What we won at Chrysler", *Chrysler Newsgram*, November 1967, 3.

\(^{488}\) Ibid., Leaflet of United National Caucus; note that the rise of collective bargaining is dealt with in chapter two.
A turning point for the history of the city as whole, the 1967 riot also affected labour relations at Dodge Main and other Chrysler plants in the metropolitan area. Remarked General Baker: “People had such a crude awakening at the naked power of the police that they were just angry. They were not the same people that came out of the riot […] What we are talking about you could never separate from that”. Historian Steven Jefferys rightly observed that the significance of the rebellion for most of the plant’s black workers “was not that they participated but that they sympathized”. In fact, at Dodge Main, the new impulse for political action among African-Americans interacted with the specific conditions of this group of workers in the plant. Since 1963, following a managerial re-organisation of the firm in the late 1950s, Chrysler had augmented its productivity, tightened the room for shop floor bargaining, and hired thousands of new workers. The fact that workers on inconvenient shifts, such as the nocturnal “graveyard” shift, were overwhelmingly black, while white workers could usually get the first shift and easier jobs, could not escape anyone. This was in part due to seniority rules that, although colour blind, exacerbated the effect of a still existing discrimination at the hiring gates. In this situation, management, facing the several wildcats that followed the above mentioned trim department walkout, opted as a course of action to further divide the work force, with the aim of weakening the resistance.

On 2 May, 1968, white women who worked in the fender assembly area, together with a few black workers, formed a picket line protesting the speed up of their understaffed line thereby triggering a plant-wide strike. The fact that this occurred on payday represented a favourable condition. These white women belonged to an older generation hired in the late 1940s that still remember the tradition of shop stewards militancy at Dodge Main. From management’s point of view, it would have been unpopular to make reprisal against these respected senior workers. Eventually, of the several instigators of the action, management retaliated only on two black workers, Bennie Tate and General Baker. The latter was right when, shortly afterwards, in an open letter to Chrysler Corporation, claimed: “In discharging me you have falsely placed the banner of leadership upon my shoulder”. Glaberman, who was at the time close to DRUM leaders, narrated the strike in this way: “The [white] women were pissed off and stood at the gate to keep people out. These black dudes came by and said…

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489 Interview with General Baker, May 2002.
490 Jefferys, Management…cit., 169.
492 Jefferys, Management…cit., 171.
'Yeah, that's cool,' and they joined them and shut down the plant". This episode, at the very least, confirmed management's conjecture that, if not divided, the two segment of its labour force could jeopardize the production output. The unexpected result was that: "by taking the course of disciplining the strikers, [management had opened] the struggle to a new and higher level", as Baker emphatically intimated in his letter.

I shall return to this episode in the section three of this chapter where I shall touch upon the several stages that lead labour relations at Chrysler on the verge of breakdown: here I am interested in exploring the radical networks outside the plant. In autumn 1968, the rebellious mood of the French May also contaminated students at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit. In that year the University had the largest percentage of black students in any state campus in the US. A former WSU student remembers that it was "so incredibly fertile. There were the cultural nationalists, the nationalists who embraced socialism, the Marxist-Leninists, the Communists. It was just an incredible time". In this intellectual climate, and thanks to the sympathy of the local SDS chapter for DRUM, John Watson was appointed editor of the campus newspaper. This choice reflected an increasing radicalisation in the student committee responsible for the appointment. The previous year the committee had already chosen "some hippie" who had changed the paper's name from a classic The Collegian to South End - an appellation that referred to the Cass corridor, the working class area south of the campus where most new arrivals to Detroit settled.

John Watson was the first African-American to become editor and he used the paper's daily circulation of about 20,000 copies to give visibility to workers' struggle in the auto plants and to those groups - like the Black Panthers, the anti-war, the women liberation movement, etc. - whose views were usually distorted by conservative media. Very often only a thousand of copies remained on campus, the rest were distributed at plants, hospitals, and schools. In every respect John Watson and DRUM transformed the paper into an effective organizational tool for the working class. Southend's masthead stated: "One class conscious worker is worth one thousand students". The kind of direction Watson gave to the paper starting from September 1968, caused considerable apprehension in the city's establishment, in particular among manufacturers and union officials. The WSU president, a liberal, found himself under

495 "Open Letter to Chrysler Corporation", Inner City Voice, June 1968.
497 Ron Lockett interview in Robert Mast, Detroit Lives...cit., 92.
498 Glaberman in The New Rank and File...cit., 206.
499 Georgakas, Surkin, Detroit: I Do Mind Dying...cit., 51.
increasing pressure to remove the editor, but that, in the post-riot city and campus, could not easily be done without swelling the ranks of the protesters. The daily organization of the paper, which was carried out by Nick Melvecky, a white student, required a working alliance between black and white radicals on campus. Students also participated in many instances on DRUM picket lines when workers ran the risk of retaliation from the corporation. Internal disagreements in the editorial board and the student committee, due not to the political line of the paper but to the editor’s style of management, eventually terminated Watson’s appointment at the end of the academic year. The way DRUM lost control of the paper epitomized one of its greater weaknesses: the inability to consolidate its victories and build prolonged relationships with white radicals.

In Turin, Mario Allara, the Rector of the city’s university, was a guardian of a status quo orderly structured around the ascendancy of FIAT. At the opening speech of the academic year 1967-68 he declared: "In this university it is necessary to talk less and achieve more". Allara referred to the students’ turmoil of the previous year around the rejected request to participate to the election of the university Rector and in the Senato Accademico, the governing body of the university. Allara’s remark was also a comment on the growing discussion around his controversial proposal, endorsed by FIAT but opposed by the city council and sections of the academic community, to open a new campus in a suburban area – a choice allegedly dictated by speculative real estate interests.

On 27 November, 1967, following the approval of Allara’s proposal, several hundred humanities students resolved to occupy Palazzo Campana, the main campus building in Turin’s city centre. Taken by surprise and internally divided on how to respond to such action, the Senato Accademico waited one month before intervening. Thanks to this hesitation students occupying the university transformed the building into a space for discussion. They organised ‘countercourses’ on subjects such as Vietnam, Education and Society, Youth and Protest, Psychoanalysis and Social Repression. Like their American counterparts, students distilled a critique of the university system and urged the introduction of participatory democracy in academia. Italian students grounded their analysis in the same influential texts used by the

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500 I take this information from my interview with Dan Georgakas, April 2002.
501 I take much of this information on the South End from Georgakas, Surkin, Detroit: I Do Mind Dying...cit., 43-68.
American New Left. C. W. Mills’ *Power Elite* had been translated in 1959, while in 1967 the Turinese publisher Einaudi released Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*.\[^{504}\] In *Contro L’Università* (against the university) an article on the radical journal *Quaderni Piacentini*, Guido Viale, a charismatic leader of the movement, maintained that the sole social function of higher education was to inculcate subordination and argued that students could end this manipulation only through struggle\[^{505}\].

During the occupation therefore students’ protest had shifted from identifiable issues, such as the protest against the location of the new campus and the inefficient representative system, to more generic goals, such as the end of “academic authoritarianism”. On 27 December, 1967, Allara finally asked the police to clear the campus of protesters. As in similar cases, the intervention of the forces of law and order further radicalised students. An escalation of new occupations and new evacuations, led to one hundred students being suspended from courses. Further demonstrations culminated in the arrest of two of them, Luigi Bobbio and Paolo Marinucci. Students reacted by attempting a new occupation. As 22 January, 1968, Allara shut down all the campus activities.\[^{506}\]

*La Stampa* described the occupying students as a minority preventing the majority of diligent students to follow classes. The editors filled the daily section *Lo Specchio dei Tempi* (The mirror of times) - which contained letters from the readership - with stories of worried parents and hard-working students in dire straits.\[^{507}\] Students responded with the publication of the *Bollettino*, a newsletter, with a daily report called the “anti-*Stampa*”, where the main paper was corrected when it distorted the facts and criticised for its approach to the movement. Moreover, the middle class readership of *La Stampa*, often constituted by their own parents, represented, for the militants, the embodiment of those established norms that they rejected.\[^{508}\]

Notwithstanding the allegations of *La Stampa*, the student movement continued to grow. Students assembled at the *Camera del Lavoro*, a local union hall. Lectures and classes resumed among frequent *contestazioni*. The student assembly accepted the proposal of the *Senato Accademico*, to establish commissions to study the renovation of the academic system, with the request, however, that these be publicly held. Students


insisted that the counterpart to the Senato in these negotiations be the general assembly of students and not a small number of delegates. When the Senato rejected this clause a new occupation ensued. This time students barricaded themselves inside the building to better resist the police assault. The 1st of March the court issued a warrant of arrest for thirteen members of the movement, and a few days later a protest march in city centre ended with the smashing of La Stampa office windows.509

In the course of this radicalisation many of the students realized that their opponent was not only the academic hierarchy, but also the social system that upheld it. In Turin this connection was even more evident because all the activities of repression revolved around the hegemony of the local car manufacturer. This conversion caused students to shift the focus of their action from the university to the factory and prompted them to seek to reach workers.510

The French May represented another stimulus for Italian students to spread the protest off campus. "After the French May we were ready for anything", admitted former student activist Peppino Ortoleva in an interview with Luisa Passerini.511 However, the rapid exhaustion of French enthusiasm for revolution constituted also a reminder that prolonged action needed a lengthy work of organisation. From Turin, Guido Viale and Luigi Bobbio warned: "We cannot longer afford to leave the fate of the movement to single episodes of rebellion. We need to couple the radicalisation of our actions with the development of our political consciousness and the consolidation of our organization...it's unthinkable that the movement will last on the simple basis of the refusal and the blockage of education".512

Students in Turin interacted with other movements cropped up in other Italian campuses, such as Trento, Pisa, and Roma. As elsewhere, students in Turin had begun to ponder the purpose of the movement and the possibility of reaching other social strata. The content of these considerations were indeed very similar in all Western Europe and the United States. In Le Tesi della Sapienza, Pisan students (and prominent among these, Adrian Sofri) regarded their condition as subordinate "not only in relation to the future collocation in the labour market, but also in the present academic activity where a capitalistic division of labour assigns [them] the mere execution of pre-

509 See Marco Revelli, “Il 68 a Torino. Gli esordi. La Comunità studentesca di Palazzo Campana” in La Cultura e i Luoghi del ’68...cit., 212-266.
511 Passerini, Autoritratto...cit., 131
512 Luigi Bobbio, Guido Viale, "La strategia del movimento studentesco" in Problemi del Socialismo, n 28-29, March-April 1968, 78.
determined mental operations”. Perhaps a muddled wording (more so in an English translation), but one that conveyed students’ intention to ‘proletarianize’ their condition in order to find a theoretical justification for their participation in the workers’ struggle. However, in contrast to other Italian campus protests, the Turinese movement insisted that the student rebellion also had value on its own. According to Guido Viale everybody should rebel against his own oppression. Since all institutions, the university as well as the factory, were authoritarian, each struggle had its own value as a struggle for liberation.

Meanwhile, in the summer holidays of 1968, the student movement lost its mass appeal in the university. The remaining activists split on the strategy to follow thereafter. Signs of mounting unrest at FIAT opened up new possibilities for the militant groups. In fact, the starting of workers’ agitations in the factories coincided with the internal discussion in the student movement concerning the way to enlarge the social basis of protest. The first strikes at Mirafiori convinced students to take a practical approach and, even without a strategy, start to make contacts with autoworkers. In the winter of 1968-69, a group of activists canvassed workers outside the factory and distributed leaflets. Industrial conflict in these months was very limited because these initial actions were organised by unions and carried on mainly by Piedmontese skilled workers. At the same time students focused on evening courses that were usually attended by southern migrants who worked during daytime and tried to get a secondary school certificate. However, only in the Spring 1969 students moved in large numbers to the plants and shifted their focus of activity markedly on Meridionali.

The majority of the groups of the radical left, called in Italy "extra-parliamentary", were founded in this period, between Autumn 1968 and Autumn 1969. They were given this denomination to indicate that it was a left not represented by member of the parliament (and therefore implied it was on the left of the PCI). These groups usually took their name from the paper they published: Avanguardia Operaia in December 1968 (Milan), Il Manifesto in June 1969, Potere Operaio in September 1969,

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513 Le tesi della sapienza, Pisa In AA.VV, Università: l’ipotesi rivoluzionaria, (Padova, 1968), 176-177.
515 Guido Viale, “Contro L’università…”, 6
516 Marco Revelli, “Movimenti Sociali e Spazio Politico”…cit.
and *Lotta Continua* in November 1969.\(^{517}\) Former militants of the student movement constituted the majority of participants. However, these groups stemmed out of the encounter with the workers and responded to the need to enact an organization to achieve those revolutionary goals that the movement established when it spread outside the university.

Although students represented the main component, radical groups also evolved through the interlacing of different generation of militants. The first generation had commenced its political activity in the 1950s in the Communist or the Socialist parties, and then shifted to the left of these organizations by working in groups like *Il Manifesto* or the PSIUP (*Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria*), which represented the more institutionalised manifestation of the New Left. The second generation began its activity in the sixties. In Turin this involved in particular the group around *Quaderni Rossi*. I shall mention a particular case, as an example: Vittorio Rieser started as a young researcher in *Quaderni Rossi*, then participated in the student movement when he was already an assistant in the university, and finally operated outside the plants in winter 1968-69 and was instrumental in organizing the students-workers assembly in spring 1969. The last generation is precisely that of the students radicalised in the course of the occupations of 1967-68. Their number also comprised some students from vocational schools that encountered politics for the first time in 1969. In their case, the fact that they would have probably found a job in a factory and that they lived in working-class neighbourhoods contributed to their feeling of association with workers.\(^{518}\)

In spring 1969, the presence of students at the gate of Mirafiori plant added a new dimension to the workers’ movement. The students were attracted by rumours of increasing militancy on the shop floor. With the arrival of Adriano Sofri, student leader at University of Pisa and militant of the Tuscan branch of Potere Operaio, in Turin, the entire Turinese movement, headed by Luigi Bobbio, Guido Viale, and others, decided to join those few, like Vittorio Rieser and Mario Dalmaviva, already engaged at FIAT gates since the previous Autumn. Dozen of activists started to circulate a daily leaflet signed "workers and students". From the same group of activists originated the daily *La Classe* that chronicled every forms of struggle in the FIAT plants. In its first number it launched the slogan "*Rifiuto del lavoro*" - refuse to work.\(^{519}\)

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519 *La Classe*, 1 May 1969, n.1.
The activity of the unions and of the PCI, carried out by a few officials and MPs compared poorly with the mobilization of hundreds of students in the radical left. These students succeeded in a daunting task: coordinating the circulation, through leaflets of information about strikes and grievances among 45,000 workers entering the enormous Mirafiori complex from thirty-two different gates. Dalmaviva reported that: "workers striking on a shop would look for the ‘externals’ (the students) to discuss with them, to know what happened in other departments, to understand what they have to do the next day. Through this organisation, specific problems in a department would reverberate in the experience of workers in others." Giovanni Falcone, a southern worker, recalled that: "the leaflets were very important, at least for me. I was a commuter and had no time to stop after work outside the gates to discuss things. I could understand them because they were written in a simple language, perhaps a little strained for those who wrote them, because I don’t think the students spoke like that at home". With students waiting to talk to them at the gate workers felt at the centre of the city’s attention. After a strike a worker remarked: "Now everybody will come here to see some revolution".

In May 1969, at the end of the morning and afternoon shift, students and workers organized a "students-workers assembly" at the department of medicine. Workers who attended were mainly young non-unionised migrants distrustful of party politics. In the assembly, these workers found both a means of expression, a possibility so far denied to them by not having access to institutional representation, and a chance to ponder about their role in industrial society. *Meridionali* were bringing their own agenda to the assemblies. Luigi Bobbio maintained that: "It was not the student movement that instructed workers to the refusal of being represented by unions: it was the workers themselves who claimed that unions were their antagonists". While students’ radicalism derived from a theoretical deliberation, workers’ radicalism stemmed from their involvement in the mass production process, an alienating experience for *Meridionali*.

In June, radicals expanded the assembly on a city-wide level in the central *Palazzo Nuovo*, seat of some departments of the university. Here, workers and students

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521 Quoted in Polo, *I Tamburi di Mirafiori...cit.*, 165.
were able to better define their position in relation to unions, thanks also to the participation in the debate of some FIOM-CGIL officials. According to the reconstruction of one of these assemblies by historian Diego Giachetti, when an old steward, active since 1948, spoke from the floor about the need to address questions of safety and working environment rather than an across-the-board increase, a worker replied:

It's useless to further talk about unions, we completely lost our trust in unions. We workers have no more illusions. Unionists boast the glorious 1948, but we are now in 1969, after 21 years the Italian worker has come of age and has no need for union.\(^{524}\)

Although this standpoint might have been expression of only a vanguard of rank-and-file, it reflected the fact that young Southerners had found better representation through the radical groups animated by students. Rank-and-filers would later take up questions of safety procedures and working conditions specific to every department. However, at this stage, it was more important, in order to mobilise the mass of unskilled workers, to find a broad issue, described by the slogan "more money, less work". This simplistic demand derived from Southern workers' dire material conditions as well as sense of estrangement from both the production process and the system of industrial relations based on unions.

**The Escalation of the Struggle: Detroit**

The 1967 riot came as a surprise to the city administration and to national public opinion that regarded Detroit as a "model" in race relations. National and local media praised Mayor Jerome Cavanagh for having created a climate of racial cooperation in the city. This was exemplified by the "Freedom March" on 23 July, 1963, the twentieth anniversary of the wartime riot, in which Martin Luther King jr. addressed the peaceful crowd with an anticipation of his "I have a dream" speech. Racial truce allegedly was accompanied by economic recovery. The *National Observer* contended that: "Physically, Detroit has acquired freshness and vitality. Acres of slums have been razed, and steel-and-glass apartments [...] have sprung up in their place. Accustomed to years of adversity, to decades of drabness and civic immobility, Detroiter are naturally exhilarated".\(^{525}\) *Fortune* quoted a corporate manager who had worked in Atlanta, New York, Dallas and Denver as saying: "Detroit is more sophisticated in race relations that


\(^{525}\) As quoted in B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence,...cit.*, 157-158.
any other city I know.⁵²⁶ However, by favourably comparing Detroit with more troubled cities, political observers tended to underestimate the combined effects of residential segregation and discrimination had reached an explosive potential across many of the American urban concentrations. In Detroit, the lack of jobs due to early deindustrialization added fuel to this mixture.⁵²⁷

In the same way, as the auto industry still enjoyed a reputation for high wages and good benefits, manufactures and union officials alike overlooked the discontent that was breeding in the Chrysler plants among both newly hired and older workers. The tempo of production on the shop floor was equally tight for both these groups, but seniority rules and discriminatory practices usually confined African-Americans to less desirable jobs. For instance, Chrysler seldom appointed black supervisory staff. Even more significantly, this latter group could draw parallels between the harsh discipline and poor safety of the shop floor, and the low living standard in the inner city neighbourhoods where the constant scrutiny of an almost-entirely white police reminded them of the gaze of the white foreman on the line.⁵²⁸

In Autumn 1967, UAW and Chrysler corporation negotiated a contract that undercut workers’ buying power by putting a cap on the cost-of-living-allowance. The contract, on the other hand, comprised a "30-and-out" clause, much boasted in the union propaganda literature, which allowed workers to retire after thirty years of work no matter their age. The contract reflected the bargaining strategy of the UAW that benefited older workers while frustrating the expectations of the new ones. The fact that the first group consisted mainly of white ethnic workers and the second mainly of African-Americans deepened the division by including a racial dimension. Young black workers particularly resented the $20 initiation fee for a union that would not protect them the first three months of employment and that placed their needs low on the bargaining agenda. “These are the rules”, as Local 3 President explained to a black autoworker laid off after nine days who was “ready to go to jail” to have his money back.⁵²⁹

In this situation the high turnover caused by the appalling safety conditions and the continuous speed up advantaged financially both the company and the union.

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⁵²⁶ "Detroit: Model City" in Fortune, April 1963.
⁵²⁷ For these issues see: Thomas Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis...cit.; June Manning Thomas, Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).
⁵²⁸ DRUM claimed the 99 per cent of supervisors were whites and demand 50 per cent black workers representation both at supervisory level and in the UAW. See DRUM’s Program in Inner City Voice, Vol.2, No.3, (April, 1970).
Unsurprisingly, working conditions never represented a priority on the bargaining table. Moreover, in the context of a rapidly de-industrializing city in the late 1960s, UAW negotiators feared that any demand that would decrease production output would eventually cause the plants’ closure.\(^{530}\)

Against this background, these words of Douglas Fraser sound derisory, but they were tragically serious: “The lessons of the past have not been lost on the new generation of Chrysler workers. They know that every benefit they have today had to be won by struggle and sacrifice... and they also know that the benefits they will win in the future will have to be won in the same way. But they will win, because they are determined to have their fair share of the wealth they produce, and a measure of justice in their workplace”.\(^{531}\) And, ironically, perhaps fittingly, this was exactly what rank-and-file workers opposing the UAW attempted to do in the forthcoming years.

Elliot Rudwick and August Meier in their study of the relationship between UAW and the black workers highlighted how the union leadership in the 1940s allied with the black community. They contend that the UAW managed to bridge the gap between black and white workers and defused racial strife on the shop floor. However, they failed to notice that in the 1960s the fragmentation of the workforce along racial and generational lines, and in a context of severe safety hazards and management’s drive to increase the human effort, created an antagonism not among workers, but against that same liberal leadership that supported Civil Rights. In September 1967, Charlie Brooks, the African-American Vice-President of Local 3 at Dodge Main, reported to UAW President Walter Reuther that:

> There are many youngsters coming into our ranks today… these people have many problems that bother Local officers. We are trying to find out what they want and how to cope with it. Among these youngsters are all kind of extremists… and we think, Black nationalists. They are meeting together on a weekly basis and talking about Chrysler not making their promotions on any basis other than race and they are not going to stand still for it. Now, the thing that disturbs me most is that they don’t care who gets hurt… they are in for trouble within the plants… \(^{532}\)

Working its way through the bureaucracy of Solidarity House, the letter was brought to the attention of Douglas Fraser, the UAW official responsible for Chrysler, with a note attached to it: “Sounds ominous”. International UAW executives knew, in

\(^{530}\) For example of factory life in Detroit in that period see B. J. Widick, “Black City, Black Unions?” in *Dissent* Vol. 19 (Winter 1972), 138-145;

\(^{531}\) ALUA, Simon Alpert collection, box 1, folder 7, “Chrysler History” leaflet signed by Douglas Fraser, January, 1967.

fact, of the bad state of workplace relations at Chrysler and of the poor reputation of the union among some sections of the workforce. The contracts between the company and the union only nominally tackled the question of working conditions and speed-ups that were so pressing at Dodge Main. UAW negotiators took a ‘realistic’ approach about the possibility of Chrysler continuing to remain competitive in a changing market without recourse to these methods. But there was more to it than that. The claims of discrimination by African-Americans among Chrysler workers in Detroit also exposed the union’s weakness on matters of racial equality.

Earlier in the year, the Quayle report, an internal UAW research memorandum on rank-and-file, disclosed that Detroit’s Chrysler workers had the highest degree of disaffection from the union in the nation. Fifty-one per cent of them rated the work done by their Locals unsatisfactory, and forty-four per cent thought the same of the International. The highest single complaint - 11 per cent - was that grievances were handled too slowly. The researchers warned that a “program must be developed and launched to strengthen the International at Chrysler, for support there is currently flagging”.

During 1967, as the company continued speeding up the line and grievances rose, walkouts became frequent. Local 3 officials tried hard to reassure management that they could control these isolated cases. “I am sure - wrote Vice-President Charlie Brooks to Chrysler manager Kowalsky concerning thirty-six workers involved in a wildcat - these employees now [after his counselling] understand the severity of their offence and will not do the same again. Trusting this meet (sic) with your approval...” But in autumn, during contract negotiations, the trim department, backed by Chief Steward Edith Fox, walked out in protest and the strike continued for three days. Since the contract had expired they could do so without legal retaliation from the corporation. For Steven Jefferys: “The interaction of the old tradition of sectional problem solving with the new combativity had brought strike action back into the vocabulary of the Dodge Main shop floor”. However, although management constantly raised production schedules, workers did no resort to this kind of action until the next March.

Only in Spring 1968, Dodge Main workers actually took on "a fighting mood". At every speed up workers would counteract with a wildcat. Women in the trim department were particularly militant. They struck on 2 and 22 March, 27 April, and 2

533 ALUA, UAW President Office, Walter Reuther Collection, box 147, folder 14, Quayle report, vol. 1a, May 1967.
534 ALUA, UAW Local 3 collection, box 32, folder 10, Charlie Brooks to Kowalsky, 7 July 1967.
535 Jefferys, Management...cit., 170
May. This last one involved 4,000 workers. Personnel manager Leonnard Nawrocki, enlisted the cooperation of the Local 3 President Domanski to curb down the "illegal walkouts", but without much success. 536

As previously mentioned, one important feature of these strikes was the cooperation between different groups within the workforce, most notably between white women with seniority and new black workers. It was not an organisational cooperation. Quite simply, the latter were more than happy to honour the picket lines. Chrysler, preoccupied about the growing trend in militancy, aimed at splitting this dangerous alliance when, on 11 May, management resolved to retaliate by firing black participants in disproportionate numbers.

The response of the corporation followed the old strategy of 'divide and rule', but, in the context of the post-riot city, such a blatantly racist measure increased the appeal of Black Nationalist groups. This was a surprising miscalculation on the part of a management that, just a month before, for the assassination of Martin Luther King, had cautiously shut down the plant fearing troubles. They underestimated the organisational strength of the dissenting elements in the plant. 537

General Baker, one of the discharged after the May strike, had in fact started with the group of the Inner City Voice to meet with autoworkers. His firing only reinforced his resolve to organize them. The group chose the name of Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and promptly decide to work as an alternative workers' organisation, rather than as an opposition caucus inside the UAW. In an early draft of its program DRUM aimed "to establish an all black union" and "to give black workers a more active voice in policymaking in the plants". 538

The drafters of this document pledged "to maintain black unity at all cost", however since they advocated aggressive confrontation against both the company and the union they labelled those blacks who had chosen to work inside the union machine as "Uncle Toms" or "House Negroes". There were only a few of them anyway. As we have seen, Nelson Jack Edwards was the only black member of the UAW's International Executive Board, and he had been elected only in 1962 after a lengthy lobbying from the Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC). At local level, the African-American with highest responsibility was Vice-President Charles Brooks. The question of the legitimisation of blacks working "for Reuther" became central in the contest over black workers' allegiance at Dodge Main, with the radicals denying it and UAW officials reaffirming it, and ended up being crucial for the fate of the radical

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536 Ed Liska's, Daily Dispute Diary, May 14 1968, quoted in Jefferys, Management...cit., 173; 
Ibid., 171-173
537 Interview with Eula Powell, July 2001.
538 ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 1.
struggle in the plant.\textsuperscript{539} Otherwise the bureaucracy of the Local, as DRUM repeatedly pointed out in its literature, was predominantly Polish and did not reflect the changes in the Dodge Main workforce. For instance, in a single meeting on 25 September 1965, a year when half of Dodge Main workers were black, the UAW Local 3 Executive Board deliberated over buying $50 worth of tickets for the anniversary of the Polish Daily News, $50 for the Hamtramck (predominantly Polish) Police Field Day, $25 for the Hamtramck Fire Fighters, $10 for a picnic honouring Mayor Joseph J. Grzecki, to donate $50 for the American Relief for Poland, $25 to the Metropolitan Club of Hamtramck, and $25 to the Annual General Casimir Pulaski banquet. However, it only decided to dispatch a black member to the NAACP convention in Denver without financial contribution.\textsuperscript{540}

In June 1968 DRUM staged a successful boycott of two bars serving Dodge Main workers that would not hire black staff. This proved a good way to make black workers familiar with its leaflets and its activity, as it followed the traditional tactics of the Civil Rights movement. A month later DRUM organised three days of agitation at Dodge Main that would put the corporation and the company on the alert. On the first day, DRUM led some three hundred workers from the plant to Local 3 officers, few blocks away, to confront the Local executive board on the issues of discrimination and working conditions. The next day, they formed a picket line that kept 3,000 workers out of the plant and seriously disrupted production. The effectiveness of action depended also on the choreographic use of conga players in colourful African robes, which made passers-by stop and take notice. Even after the police dispersed the crowd, the sounds of the drums reminded people that the protest continued, in an eerie atmosphere, as "twenty bongo players [filled] the air with the curious, alien, and slightly frightening noises", as one witness recalls.\textsuperscript{541}

In three days DRUM had mobilized thousands of workers and caused Chrysler a production loss of 1,900 cars. Chrysler Labor Relations Director Kowalski and Douglas Fraser, the UAW official responsible for Chrysler, had not grasped DRUM'S potential appeal. A day before the agitation Kowalski still maintained that "the majority of participants will be outsiders. Plant employees do not seem to be in support of this movement". The UAW and the auto manufactures had established a relationship that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{540} ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 30, folder 107, “Report and recommendations from the Executive Board”, 25 September 1965.
\item \textsuperscript{541} Georgakas, Surkin \textit{Detroit...cit}; 38; ALUA , DRM collection, box 1, folder 1,DRUM's Program Suzanne E.Smith, \textit{Dancing in the Streets...cit}; 4; Edward Lee "Whoever heard of bong drums on the picket line?" ...cit.
\end{itemize}
would grant the former the monopoly of workers' representation and the latter the control of the condition of production. DRUM's action ignited a rank-and-file movement that threatened both. Therefore, from then on, both the company and the union looked for a response that would leave their prerogatives in their respective spheres unaltered.542

DRUM remained present in the plant through the distribution of a weekly newsletter and tried throughout the summer to mobilize workers for the reinstatement of the May strikers, Bennie Tate and General Baker. The issue was at the centre of a heated confrontation, a "stormy meeting", between membership and leadership and UAW Local 3 on 19 August, 1968. Since Chrysler could not reinstate the strikers without further swelling the ranks of the protesters, only a general plant strike could have achieved a result, but Liska maintained that the justification for a strike was "very weak".543 Edith Fox, who represented a small opposition caucus that was working within the rules, mediated by proposing to put the two workers on the union payroll, but Liska refused to allow a vote on it.544

By this time even unsympathetic accounts acknowledged the potential of the new movement. One report noted, "no one laughs at the drum-beating or the African garb nor do observers inside the union, all of them skilled in race relations - skilled and troubled - mock DRUM's demands at the Hamtramck plant, where there are some 3,500 black workers. Just to list a few of this 'revolution's' 14 demands is enough to turn a sociologist into a pathologist".545 DRUM's fourteen demands were, in fact, explicitly provocative. They demanded a black at the head of Chrysler board of directors, a 50 per cent black representation in the UAW International Executive Board, and a black president for the UAW and urged blacks not to pay union dues. In contrast to the Turinese radicals' effort to find a lowest common denominator to appeal to Southern migrants, DRUM's most advertised claims could mobilize only the most radical workers and overshadowed the more sensible demands of better working conditions and fair treatment which could have found a larger audience.546

Both at International and Local levels the UAW's response aimed at eroding the support of moderate and non-politicised blacks to DRUM. In the Summer of 1968,

542 ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 1, folder 47, clipping Detroit Free Press August 1968; the loss is of 3,000 cars according to the newsletter SPEAK OUT in ALUA, Lampinen collection, box 1, folder 20, January 1969; ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 1, folder 47, Art Hughes to Douglas Fraser, 10 July, 1968.
544 ALUA, Art Hughes Collection, box 47, folder 1, clipping.
546 Drum, Vol. 1 n. 9.
Local 3 acknowledged the importance of the movement by sending a three-page letter to its 9,000 members. It reminded members that: "The UAW has been at the forefront of every fight for equality for all the workers" while the aim of DRUM was "to pit white worker against black workers and even black against black" in an attempt "make the union ineffective and weak". DRUM and its sister publication Inner City Voice were "not so much the voice of the inner city as... the voice of a worldwide [Communist] propaganda network" calling for bloody and violent revolution.\(^547\) This attempt to delegitimise DRUM was vital for the political survival of the Local 3 leadership, both black and white. But the International Executive Board, so far only incidentally challenged by the new movement, responded with a delay, only after a further spreading of the protest. During these conflict-ridden months, Ed Liska often lamented this situation in his personal diary: "It is unfair for such a large organization such as the UAW to sit by idle while one local is combating a dangerous cancer by itself... Phone calls to the Chrysler department are useless. Their attitude seems to be that they are busy with pension problems..."\(^548\)

DRUM language, charged with Black Nationalist tones, obscured the fundamental issue of the organisation of production, and alienated many potentially sympathetic white and moderate workers.\(^549\) But the success at Dodge Main brought to DRUM a large number of black workers who, in turn, forced the organisation to extend the struggle to other Chrysler plants in the Detroit metropolitan area which had a workforce fragmented along the same generational and racial lines. Groupings in other factories, outside Chrysler, wanted to join DRUM. Its largest offspring, ELRUM, was founded in November 1968 at Chrysler Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle factory, a plant with 4,000 black workers. Working conditions at Eldon were, if possible, even more appalling than at Dodge Main. By 1970 the plant had a record of several deaths on the job. Furthermore, even more frequently than in other Chrysler plants, the medical team would often return injured workers to work without granting any leave.\(^550\) In these conditions, ELRUM was an immediate, although short-lived, success. ELRUM attracted even more members than DRUM, and soon, in January 1969, led 300 workers to a confrontation with Local 961 in much the same way as DRUM had done. It subsequently called a strike that kept the majority of the workforce out for two days and met with heavy retaliation from the company. Since the plant was the sole producer of

\(^547\) ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 1, "Common Sense - or Chaos?".
\(^548\) ALUA, "Report", Liska collection, box 1, Ed Liska Diary.
\(^549\) ALUA, DRM collection, box 3, folder 9, "History of DRUM. Its principles and Program" 1969; "Our thing is DRUM", manifesto republished in *Leviathan*, n.6 (1970)
\(^550\) ELRUM Vol.1, n.9, in ALUA, UAW Region I collection, box 45; *South End* 14 May 1969 in ALUA, Arthur Hughes collection, series 9, part 2, box 47, folder 3.
axles for the whole range of Chrysler cars other assembly lines would halt production if they struck for too long.551

The widening appeal of radicals finally caused a crisis in the UAW's headquarters. Detroit's black radicals received nationwide coverage by Wall Street Journal and New York Times. The International responded also with a letter, this time to the entire membership, a total of 350,000 copies. The letter reasserted the union's past record for promoting racial equality and called DRUM and ELRUM "a group of extremists and racial separatists [that] has sought to spread terror in the plants among both black and white workers and to undermine the unity and solidarity among all the workers". It also pointed out that these radicals were practitioners of violence and intimidation against "local union leaders who have been democratically elected to serve all the workers".552

The International also started to seek out those UAW officials who were sympathetic to DRUM's style of militancy. One of them was Sheldon Tappes who worked for the UAW's Fair Practices department, and who publicly declared that: "communication between the union and DRUM might well be the key to an alliance... to recognize a common foe - the company".553 International officers concerned about his conduct soon admonished him and such statements disappeared from the press, but Tappes had a point when, in his reply to the IEB he indicated that "by ignoring the existence of these organisations... we are forfeiting an important segment of our membership".554

Between 1968 and 1969, the radical movement seemed to gain in momentum. Revolutionary movements cropped up in many workplaces – FRUM at Ford's River Rouge, JARUM at Chrysler Jefferson Avenue, CADRUM at Cadillac's Fleetwood factory, and others. DRUM and ELRUM proved able to command enough following to shut down plants. Apart from leaflets and newsletters they also controlled The South End, the campus paper that had a distribution close to a real paper. At this time the leadership put forward the idea of creating an umbrella organization for the several movements, which later became the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. However, on the other hand, they generated too much attention before having consolidated their structure. In particular, at Eldon, after the January strike, Chrysler had disciplined two dozens activists as well as many other participating workers, a blow that had shattered the group's ability to grow. Also, even more than DRUM, ELRUM had vehemently

551 Georgakas, Surkin, Detroit I Do Mind Dying... cit., 85-106.
552 ALUA, UAW Local 3 collection, box 47, folder 17, 10 March, 1969.
553 "International Rep Urges DRUM to join UAW", Michigan Chronicle, 1 March 1969;
554 ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 1, Shelton Tappes to William Oliver, 28 March 1969.
attacked with a vitriolic language blacks prepared to collaborate with UAW Local 961. This resulted in older and moderate blacks being averse to their propaganda. From the onset, the extreme Black Nationalist tone of the ELRUM newsletter, which received critiques also from some DRUM leaders, became an hindrance to appeal to the totality of black workers (let alone white workers). This would have been enough of a strength in a plant where blacks composed the majority of the workforce.555

In June 1969, all the RUMs formally coalesced into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The leadership cadre was still constituted by DRUM people – such as General Baker, John Watson, Ken Cockrel, Mike Hamlin, Chuck Wooten and others. The League committed "to waging a relentless struggle against racism, capitalism, and imperialism" and defined itself as a “black Marxist-Leninist party designed to liberate black people [and] dedicated to leading the workers’ struggle in this country."556 As an organization created in the aftermath of the Detroit riot, Black Nationalism pervaded all the components of the League. However, its general program represented also a compromise between different political orientations in the leadership. Cockrel, Hamlin, and Watson called themselves "proletarian revolutionaries", and saw the League as a means of political education of the black masses towards the revolution.557 Most of the group’s experiments with the media originated from their initiative, such as the papers, the setting up of the Black Star publishing and bookshop, and, most notably, the production of Finally Got the News, a movie about the League. Cockrel, Hamlin, and Watson, the most articulate members of the group, aimed at reaching the widest possible black audience and urged cooperation with white radicals. They also openly encouraged the creation of League branches in other cities.558

The other faction in the leadership was represented by General Baker and Chuck Wooten who espoused an ideology more markedly Black Nationalist than Marxist, but who were also more committed to the in-plant organizing of black workers. They distrusted activities that diverted funds and energy elsewhere. Baker’s resolve after his discharge in May 1968 fuelled most of the actions at Dodge Main. "A

555 The language of these newsletters often depicted whites as “pigs” and “honkies”, while aggressively attacking moderate blacks as “Uncle Toms” and “House Nigger”. According to Wilbur Haddock, former black revolutionary, also the outlook and the attitude of nationalist militants was “scaring the hell out” of older black workers, in particular females. (Telephone interview with Haddock, April 2002). In response to one ELRUM article one black worker replied: “Your expressions make you a discredit to the black man and the black cause... The black men of the Eldon Ave. Axle don’t need nasty talk and cuss words to express ourselves”, ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 16.
557 See the document produced by Cockrel, Watson, and Hamlin after their departure from the LRBW, in ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 19.
558 Georgakas, Surkin, Detroit...cit., 72-74.
huge strong built guy with a very ugly face" - according to Liska - Baker was also "the
king pin of the DRUM movement". While on a city level Ken Cockrel, for his
activity as a radical lawyer, became the most famous representative of the League, in
the factories Baker was the most familiar face, often distributing leaflets and canvassing
workers at the gates.

The League's membership was constituted mainly by young workers, students,
and others with no steady occupation (what one member called the "free-floating"
elements or the "hanger-on"). In numbers, the League's membership was less important
than the people it could actually mobilize. The membership's ideological creed was, to
say the least, variegated. It went "from nationalist distrust of all whites, to Christianity,
astrology, pro-socialist sentiment, and even anti-Marxist sentiment". Viewed from
the rank-and-file, the League did not look like the "Marxist-Leninist party" it
proclaimed to be. Cockrel and his colleagues lamented the lack of self-discipline and
the aversion towards political education as well as the "infantile militarism and
adventurism" of plots like blowing up the statue of liberty that were "secrets to
everyone except the police". But the lack of a clear organizational structure did not
favour the political education and self-discipline of groups that had never been involved
in politics before the "great rebellion". On the other hand, the leadership relied heavily
on these politically immature elements to organize its irreverent actions, like the march
to the UAW headquarters with the placards "UAW means U ain't White" or when it
tried to organise a boycott of Chrysler cars boasting "that [it] will be enforced in the
streets of ghettos all across this racist dog country", implying that it would have been
unsafe for Chrysler auto owners to drive into a black area.

The lack of clearly defined rules for the democratic debate perpetuated the
distance between an intellectually more sophisticated leadership and the more narrow­
minded and capricious rank-and-file. The League's leadership set up a number of goals
and a detailed division of tasks, but did not provide for mechanisms governing internal
discussion between the two. "At no time - said Mike Hamlin in a later interview - do I

559 ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, Ed Liska's diary, entry 18 March 1970.
560 Ernest Allen Mkalimoto in review of Detroit I do mind Dying in Radical America, Vol. 8, n.
4 (1974), 72; according to Clifford Brookin and Eula Powell a safe estimate of the League's
paying members is 200 (interviews quoted), for Ernest Allen the "active" members were sixty
(in Ernie Allen, "Dying From the Inside" in They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee Dick
Cluster ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 81; I personally found a list (undated) of 238 dues­
paying members, but that does not tell us whether they were "active" (in ALUA, DRM
collection, box 1, folder 5)
561 Allen, "Dying From the Inside"...cit., 87
562 Demonstration at the UAW convention held at the Cobo Hall Detroit 8-9 November 1969 see
ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 1, folder 47 "Chrysler boycott called by the League of
Revolutionary Black Workers", South End, 4 March 1969 (clipping).
recall a situation where people wanted to have a battle of ideas in front of the membership and let the membership decide. For Ernie Allen, another League member: “perhaps the best illustration of this particular state of affairs can be found in the fact that the LRBW’s first general meeting did not take place until almost a year and half after its founding. A large number of individuals who had more or less informally participated in League activities until then, were not even aware of their own formal membership until receiving letters from the Executive Board requesting their attendance at that first meeting in July 1970”. The League paradoxically replicated the wrongdoing it reproached the UAW: the lack of participatory democracy and the lack of communication between leadership and rank-and-file.

However, the League overestimated its grip on Chrysler’s rank-and-file, and so did UAW officials who, impressed by sudden outbursts of rebellion, thought that they were only due to the influence of outside radicals. The election for the Local 3 executive office, one of the democratic procedures extolled by the union leaders, became therefore the occasion for a rowdy confrontation between the two groups.

Ed Liska, the incumbent President, did not have, a majority in the plant that guaranteed his re-election. Instead, he hoped that the turn out of Polish retirees, who were allowed to vote by UAW by-laws, and whom he actually organised by transporting them to and from the local, would turn the vote his way. The League’s candidate, Ron March, commanded a substantial following in the plant. Dodge Main’s general foreman reported that even workers outside March’s department would say: "I don’t want my steward to represent me. I want Ronnie March to represent me". In fact, in some union grievances cases involving the discipline of workers, the plant’s management dealt directly with March rather than with the appointed union steward. For example, when money was stolen from a plastic charity box management "immediately got hold of March and the money was returned the next day". Liska complained that "DRUM leaders and labor relations are too close and it is no secret of certain labor relations cuddling them".

Both local and international UAW officials had a lot at stake in this election, as Local 3 was one of the largest in the nation. The League never reached the majority of black workers, but both the union and the company could not take the risk of a defeat. Apart from bringing the retirees at the polls, many of whom allegedly voted twice, the UAW solicited the assistance of the company, which laid off a number of militants, and

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563 Mast, Detroit Lives...cit., 87.
566 Ibid entry: "DRUM representation in the plant".
Hamtramck police, also overwhelmingly Polish, which harassed and intimidated workers outside the polls. To the League's Chuck Wooten this kind of treatment provided "an idea of the kind of repression black workers seeking to make a revolutionary organization would face".\(^{567}\)

In *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence*, B. J. Widick maintained that the League's "failure to win recruits in the auto plants doomed its attempt to win local union offices".\(^{568}\) However, the League's grip on black union members must have been less transient than Widick considered if Ron March got 563 votes and managed to gain a run-off election to be held in March 1970. This occurred eighteen months after the first DRUM-led wildcats. The fact that the first election had not been decisive increased UAW officials' insecurity towards the confrontation. The League claimed that even more abuses occurred during the runoff election than during the first one. However, the chaos surrounding the election at Local 3 in March 1970 far surpassed the actual threat of the League. Overall its weight had been rapidly declining at Dodge Main. The League had, in fact, multiplied its activities in the community and gained more visibility, but, because of the combination of this diversion of energy and of repression, the in-plant organising had almost completely ceased. For two days the building of the UAW Local 3 became a ‘contested terrain’ between young black militants, the UAW ‘flying squadron’ (the union’s security officers), white SDS, Hamtramck Police, conservative white workers, and radical leaders. To complicate things the opposition caucus led by Edith Fox campaigned on its own and was "very active" during the elections.\(^{569}\)

The League was well organised. This is the only point on which Liska’s and the League’s accounts of the elections concur. The League’s "contingent of supporters far outnumbered the other two slates. Flags and banners [raised] the enthusiasm of black workers to the point of frenzy". Liska concluded that "the DRUM organisation is sponsored by somebody other than DRUM workers in the plants... the 3 by 4 feet size posters throughout the plant cost a lot of money...they had large pictures...they had busses...[and] various types of printed campaign forms". The League had clearly thrown all its resources into the campaign and so had UAW Local 3. After the events of the first election the League’s members took a more aggressive stance and on many occasions they clashed with the UAW flying squadron. The controversy concerned in particular broken voting machines, which substantially penalised DRUM voters, and the fact the DRUM challengers were forced to leave on the second day before the

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\(^{567}\) Thompson, "Southern migrants...".,19; Georgakas, Surkin, *Detroit... cit.*,40, 41; Chuck Wooten in the film *Finally Got The News* (1970).

\(^{568}\) B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence...cit.*,196-197.

\(^{569}\) ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, Liska's diary, 18 March 1970.
machines had been sealed. Liska maintained, however, that DRUM challengers could watch the machines being sealed before being escorted away.\textsuperscript{570}

In any case Liska's margin of victory - 2732 to 969 votes - seems too wide to be based only on a cheat. Jefferys rightly argued that: "DRUM's defeat was real".\textsuperscript{571} In fact, although the League advocated change through revolution, losing the opportunity to gain political control of Local 3 represented a major setback for the organisation. The control of the union apparatus would have given the League the resources and the ascendancy to mobilise again a substantial number of workers in the plant, would have interrupted its decline, and would have brought the struggle with the UAW bureaucracy to another level. None of this was possible in the aftermath of the election. Notwithstanding the charges of fraud filed by DRUM workers, the UAW credential committee upheld the elections. Chrysler subsequently fired Ron March and other activists.\textsuperscript{572}

In this situation, the tensions inside the leadership imploded. The most articulate leaders, Ken Cockrel, John Watson, and Mike Hamlin, concentrated on a parallel project, the Black Workers Congress. When James Forman, a black Marxist intellectual, joined the trio, the animosity between the different components increased. General Baker resented the personal ambitions of these people. The others countercharged that they had gathered most of the League resources and that the nationalistic section had "attached itself to the League as so many barnacles to a ship".\textsuperscript{573}

In March 1971, the \textit{Detroit News} disclosed that, according to the senate Internal Security Subcommittee, the Communist party had a working relationship with the League and that this was "devoting [its] time to organizing within the plants".\textsuperscript{574} But the League at this point was only nominally present at Chrysler with a handful of militants meeting clandestinely. Like many New Left groups in the US, Italy, and elsewhere, the League's ability to attract support and carry out action was not matched by an ability to build a solid organization. A combination of factors account for its demise. First: both Chrysler and the UAW increased the number of black supervisors and union officers, defusing an important motive of mobilization. Second: the uproar caused by the 1967 riot had, a few years later, subsided amongst the non-politicised black Detroiters, as


\textsuperscript{571} Jefferys, \textit{Management...cit.}, 180.

\textsuperscript{572} Thompson, "Southern migrants...", 20.


\textsuperscript{574} "State Reds are tied to militant blacks", \textit{The Detroit News}, 25 March, 1971.
repression and surveillance both in the factory and outside had isolated key League
organisers. Finally, and probably most importantly, the League did not succeed in
addressing important organizational issues and internal factional divisions. In June
1971, the dissenting leaders left the organisation. The remaining members soon decided
to disband.

The Escalation of the Struggle: Turin

In 1966, negotiations for the metalworkers contract at FIAT lasted almost a
year. In comparison to the 1950s, the three trade unions, FIOM, FIM, UILM, found
common ground for action and were able to mobilize workers, on and off, for twenty-
three days with a peak in March. However, unions’ gains after such a lengthy
mobilization were negligible and did not undermine the hegemonic system management
had built during the anni duri.\footnote{Lorenzo Giannotti, \textit{Gli operai della Fiat hanno cento anni} (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 160-162; E. Pugno, S. Garavini, \textit{Gli anni duri alla Fiat} (Torino: Einaudi, 1974).} Therefore, as in Detroit, although for different reasons, the escalation of class conflict in the plant in the next three years surprised both
management and unions.

The following year brought few developments at FIAT. The retirement and,
shortly afterwards, the death of Vittorio Valletta meant the absence of a relentless union
buster. As mentioned earlier, the Communist FIOM had again been allowed to
participate in the round tables between managers and the Commissione Interna and, in
1967, switched to the automatic dues check-off. In these circumstances the adoption of
this system had an entirely different meaning from its use by the American counterpart.
The dues check-off did not mean, at this stage, the bureaucratisation of the union, but a
risky exposure of its members, by providing a complete list of them to the company.
That the union implemented the check-off was therefore a sign of increased confidence
that the type of repression militants had endured during the anni duri had finished.\footnote{Stanley Aronowitz, \textit{False Promises: the Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness} (New York: Pantheon, 1977).} According to FIOM officer Renato Lattes, 1967 was a crucial year for the resumption
of the struggle at FIAT. For the first time, management allowed limited shop floor
bargaining, while FIOM embarked in an important survey of workers conditions in
FIAT plants.\footnote{Interview with Renato Lattes in Archivio Storico FIOM, \textit{Torino 1945-1983, Memoria FIOM} (Milano, Franco Angeli, 1985), 98.} Lattes’ interpretation of that period attempted retrospectively to link the
rise in militancy with a progressive growth of union action and overall history of the
Communist labour movement. However, even under new manager Giovanni Agnelli, nephew of the founder, the authoritarian system built by Valletta went unchallenged. There were few occasions for bargaining, but they resulted from management concessions, not from union victories. Another union official admitted that: "even during 1968, nothing changed in the kind of company pressure against unions, in particular on the occasion of union elections". In general, while Agnelli set out to modernise the enterprise replacing the old class of executives, drawn from the ranks of the foremen and even from the army, with graduates from universities, the lower management on the shop floor and their authoritarian rule remained the same.

The late 1960s were a period of great expansion for FIAT after a stagnation that lasted from 1963 to 1966. In 1967-68 FIAT output surpassed Germany’s Volkswagen. This expansion required the employment of a fresh wave of migrants from the South; the majority found work at the new plant Rivalta and in the company’s flagship, Mirafiori. At the height of its expansion Mirafiori employed 47,593 workers, 15,000 of whom were recently hired Meridionali. It was this last wave of migrants, rather than the patient work of the unions, that ignited the explosion of rank-and-file militancy.

One cannot ignore that in 1968 metalworkers’ unions at FIAT were more confident than in previous years. SIDA, so far a company union, joined FIOM, FIM, and UILM in the national strike for pensions in March and in a firm-wide strike in April on working hours and wages. Without divisions in the unions workers’ participation was high. Fiat made small concessions in wages, and almost nothing on working hours, but union officials were now more optimistic about further developments. However, as the radical groups that started to canvass workers at the gates claimed, these actions represented only a safety valve for workers’ discontent and failed to alter the balance of power in the plant. This seemed confirmed by FIAT’s annual report to the stockholders that, after celebrating the attainment of 21 per cent of the EEC market, concluded with "a warm praise for the spirit of co-operation and sense of duty of our managers, employees, and workers".

In 1969, the Mirafiori plant was, in the words of an historian "a barrel of dynamite ready to explode". On 9 April police shot on strikers in the southern city of

578 Interview with Mario Gheddo, Memoria FIOM...cit., 96.
579 Giovanni Contini, "Shop floor bargaining at Fiat, 1945-1980" in Industrial Relations in the Age of Fordism...cit., 150.
580 Giuseppe Volpato in Mirafiori, Carlo Olmo, ed. ...cit., 62.
581 Giuseppe Berta, Mirafiori (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 68.
582 Gianotti, Gli Operai della FIAT...cit., 168.
583 Cited in Marco Revelli, Lavorare in Fiat (Milano: Garzanti, 1989), 41.
584 Giachetti, Scavino La Fiat in mano agli operai (Pisa: BFS, 1999), 15.
Battipaglia and killed one worker. This distant event caused a great agitation at Mirafiori, no-doubt because of the re-composition of the workforce in the previous months. In the refectory, during the lunch break, a radical worker, Francesco Morini, jumped on a table and, in an impromptu assembly, incited his fellow workers to strike. The refectory provided the ideal place for a speech because it occupied a whole side of the gigantic assemblage plant and gathered up to 10,000 workers. This break of discipline would have been hardly thinkable a few months before, but in the new workers’ mood management responded mildly by transferring Morini to another shop. In any case the entire plant went out the next day on a solidarity strike. The ‘Battipaglia’ strike mattered both because it was clearly a political strike of the kind that had been banned from FIAT since 1953, and because it visibly demonstrated the rebelliousness of southern migrants.585

Clearly, it was not only a matter of regional or working-class solidarity. Unskilled Meridionali were exasperated by working conditions and unsettled grievances. Skilled Piemontesi wanted to avenge fifteen years of union repression and resented the introduction of a new form of automation, the numerical controlled machines, which rendered their skill obsolete and speeded up production in their departments. Workers therefore took the first available opportunity to vent their frustration. Several wildcats followed in production departments throughout April. On the 13 May, the unions announced a one-hour strike, and the rank-and-file struck for two hours. This pattern continued in the next months with the rank-and-file prolonging the strike hours called by the unions, which demonstrated that the grass roots movement was to some extent independent from union leadership.586 At the end of May, the agitation reached the body-assembly line, thereby creating a bottleneck that completely halted production. Every department struck for particular grievances and, in most cases, for pay rise as well. However, what was more significant was the spreading of a rebellious mood in every section of the gigantic complex.587 In the span of a few months, the huge factory had turned from an example of integrated mass production to

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585 Diego Giachetti, Il giorno più lungo. La rivolta di Corso Traiano, 3 luglio 1969 (Pisa: BFS, 1997). 45; For the Battipaglia strike see also “Cronaca delle lotte alla Fiat” in Quaderni Piacentini...cit., 4.
587 “Every shop went on strike on its own, for its own goals. The painting room workers wanted larger booths; the assembly-line workers wanted more money, in the masking shop they wanted safety devices for the welders, and so on. Every strike was peculiar, but they ended up halting everything. If one stopped, the other did it too. Then it was like a chain reaction and some goals were common: a higher wage category, Saturday off, more holidays”. Interview with Luciano Parlanti in G. Polo, I tamburi di Mirafiori...cit., 59.
an unmanageable behemoth. The disruption of production would rapidly increase in intensity throughout the year.

The propagation of the struggle coincided with the increased presence of students outside the gates. Since April 1969, students and workers had organised the students-workers assembly that became a regular discussion place for problems in the plant and a site for production of leaflets and slogans for strikes. Students and young Meridionali found common ground in the anti-authoritarianism with which they approached the institutions to which they belonged, the university and the factory. Young unskilled Southerners were curious to discover the students’ way of life (which was also the Northern middle class way of life) and were fascinated with their superior education. On the other hand, students imbued with Marxism saw workers as the embodiment of their revolutionary ideals. They recruited using a straightforward language, avoiding bureaucratic union jargon incomprehensible to Meridionali. Above all students did their best to demonstrate they were fighting for the same cause. “They make us study to serve your same master - said a leaflet inviting workers to the assembly - [but] the majority of students is aware that their privileges are illusory because work is increasingly meaningless... and similar to the one of workers.”

In these assemblies workers and students together coined simple but powerful slogans to stir up the protest in their departments: “What do we want? Everything” or “We don’t accept crumbs. We want to work less and earn more.” Union officials maintained that by asking for wage increases radicals were playing in the hands of FIAT. They claimed that satisfaction of this demand would undermine negotiations for a fair contract the following autumn. However, the across-the-board wage rise demanded by Meridionali did not accommodate FIAT tenet to pay more for increased productivity. On the contrary, by demanding that workers should be paid more regardless of their work effort, skill, seniority, or output, Meridionali undermined the very basis of the mass organisation of production.

588 “At school I didn’t learn anything, so I caught the chance to understand things. Them, the “externals”, they were more or less nice and clever, although there was, as everywhere, some asshole. I am grateful to them. They gave me, a southerner who didn’t know anything about anything, the chance to open my eyes on a number of things, of meeting a lot of people. This has changed my way of thinking and my way to be in the factory. Since then I have always been active without waiting for other people to start it off.” Interview with Andrea Papaleo in Ibid. 212-213.
589 Centro Studi Gobetti, fondo Marcello Vitale (FMV), carte Mario Dalmaviva, box 3, folder 1, leaflet 16 April 1969.
590 Centro Studi Gobetti, FMV, Carte Mario Dalmaviva, box 3, folder 1, leaflet 28 May 1969.
591 Leaflet of Fiom, Uim, Uil, Sida in “Le lotte alla FIAT. Documenti” in Classe n.2, 210-211 Charles Sabel makes the correct observation this was “a peasant workers’ challenge to the meritocratic system of rewards” in Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 161.
It was in this period, the end of May 1969, that the rift between Labour and New Left in Turin became as wide as in Detroit. As in the American case, radicals represented a political challenge for trade unions and threatened their legitimacy as sole representatives of the working class. In the Italian case unions suspected egalitarian demands that upset skill and seniority hierarchies. Finally, as time passed, it became increasingly clear that their strategy to achieve these goals was utterly different: while unions used negotiations, radicals preferred conflict. Union officials believed that conflict proved useful as long as it strengthened organised labour at the bargaining table, but could become counterproductive if it brought manufactures and the workers to clash, as workers were always the weaker part. In the words of one official: “We lead workers to a contract. Whoever damages machinery and starts unauthorised strike will end up pitting worker against worker”.\(^{592}\) Because of this frame of mind, certain union officials claimed that, insofar as they prevented a stable organization (under the unions) and exhausted workers’ resources with too many strikes, radicals were at the payroll of the company. A FIOM-FIM-UILM leaflet stated: “Unions feel it is their duty to inform workers that corporations and certain political groups are manoeuvring to stage acts that are only provocative in order to dodge workers’ real demands and, at the same time, prepare the ground for reactionary forces.”\(^{593}\)

Animosity against radical groups was higher among FIOM and PCI officers. While the Catholic FIM looked sympathetically to the new movement, the Communists thought that radical groups aimed at divesting them of their historical leadership of the working-class. In the article “Lotta Continua (contro i lavoratori)” the party paper *L’Unità* defined the participants of the worker-students assembly “sordid individuals” who distributed “rubbish leaflets” and “whose arguments resembled those of the neofascist propaganda”.\(^{594}\) In the monthly *Rinascita* the president of the PCI local at Mirafiori neighbourhood remarked “they are anti-union groups, you feel like beating them up”.\(^{595}\)

By June 1969, walkouts and shop bargaining activity multiplied and escaped unions’ control. The Mirafiori *Commissione Interna*, composed of eighteen union officials supposed to represent the whole plant, was totally inadequate to manage the new situation of widespread agitation. On the other hand, the workers-students assembly met daily and co-ordinated many of these ‘spontaneous’ wildcats in the shops.

\(^{593}\) Quote from Centro Studi Gobetti, FMV, Carte Bobbio, box E1, folder V, leaflet dated 16 July 1969. See also interview with Mario Gheddo in “Le Responsabilità del sindacato tra padronato e contestazione” in *Sette Giorni in Italia e nel Mondo*, n. 127, 16 November 1969.  
The assembly devised a schedule of strikes, usually of four hours or more, compatible with strikes sanctioned by the unions, usually two hours long. However, the assembly was also an exhilarating experience for its participants and an opportunity for people so far at the margin of politics to shape their individual and collective destiny. Student activist Luigi Bobbio recalled that "the claim 'we are all delegates (delegati)', which many considered originated from the ideology of participatory democracy of the student movement, it was actually the workers' watchword. At that time we wouldn't have gone so far. Workers asserted an overwhelming radicalism".

The debate following the introduction of delegates represented, in fact, another arena of confrontation between radicals and unions. After severe production losses in the Spring, on the 26 June, FIAT agreed with the unions to the creation of a new representative figure at Mirafiori, the delegate. Delegates had the task to control changes in the pace of the line and to work alongside (and theoretically under the control of) the obsolete Commissione Interna on shop disputes. Delegates were to be nominated by unions according to their numerical strength, but in the rebellious atmosphere of Mirafiori delegates insisted on being ratified by the rank-and-file or otherwise resign. The establishment of delegati, which served the purpose of reorganizing shop floor bargaining, represented a substantial turning point for industrial relations at FIAT, and functioned as model for other factories and later for the similar figure introduced by the Statuto dei lavoratori in 1971. For the unions it meant a substantial organizational inroad into the production process. But radicals saw delegates as yet another way to bridle rank-and-file militancy. It is at this point that the students-workers assembly coined the slogan "We are all delegates". Lotta Continua argued that the delegates served the purpose of isolating the most militant workers and

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596 I will talk about the limits and problems of the Commissione Interna in chapter two of this thesis.; Centro Studi Gobetti, FMV, box 3, folder 1, leaflet 28 May, 1969; see Giachetti, Scavino, La Fiat in mano...cit., 33.
598 But FIAT insisted that on the contract they would be called only "experts". Management continue to use this more technical denomination long afterwards.
601 Note that the introduction of delegates – as Vittorio Rieser had demonstrated – was not a spontaneous outcome of the struggle, but it had been long debated within the union as an alternative and more effective form of organization in the plant than the Commissione Interna. See Vittorio Rieser, "I delegati tra azione sindacale e azione politica" in Il Presente e la Storia. Rivista dell'Istituto della Resistenza in Cuneo e Provincia. n.59, June 2001, 127-136; What came unexpected for the unions was that the role of the delegates developed outside its original framework.
co-opt them into the unions. However, the institution of delegates, maybe because of these critiques, did not pacify the factory. On the contrary, unofficial delegates joined the official ones and, because they were chosen by and from the rank-and-file, foremen soon found themselves forced to negotiate the speed of the line with the unofficial as well as the official delegates. By the autumn of 1969 the delegates became independent from the unions and the *Commissione Interna*. They organised themselves in a *consiglio dei delegati* and printed a regular newsletter. Their aims were clearly stated: "The delegate, whether or not recognised by FIAT, must absolutely not be the spokesman for the union, but the workers' voice...The delegate, always revocable, is responsible towards his workmates... and must be able to carry on the struggle and its demands without asking for any other authorisation."

The same agreement that launched the *delegati* also introduced limited wage increases and settled specific grievances in some departments, while protecting militant workers from retaliation. On the following 3 July, unions also organised for a citywide strike to protest against housing shortage and overpriced rents. Unions therefore had shown that they tackled some of the problems more pressing for Southern workers. Radicals responded by organising for the same day a procession from Mirafiori to the city centre. For the first time in Turin, the New Left groups challenged the traditional left in the urban space, outside the factory – a risky decision on which the assembly was not unanimous.

This defiant demonstration summoned a significant number of workers and students from out of town. Of course they all gathered outside Mirafiori. Some carried placards like: "Contro il padrone: blocco della produzione" (Against the master: halt production) or "Sindacato e padrone: accordo bidone" (Unions and company: swindle agreement). As soon as the procession started moving, the police force, under the command of the infamous vice-superintendent Voria, charged the demonstrators. The latter responded by throwing stones at the prison-vans and at an ambulance that had 'accidentally' driven into the mass of workers at full speed. When the procession reached the wide Corso Traiano, the clashes turned into a riot. The police charged
several times and manhandled the protesters, but the disturbance spread in the working class neighbourhood. From their windows residents threw flowerpots at the police, while unlocking the front doors of their apartment buildings to shelter the demonstrators. The confrontation continued into the evening and the night with more people joining when the first news of the riot spread into the suburban working class enclaves. The police took advantage of the chaos to raid the Communist local near Mirafiori and assault its members.⁶⁰⁷

The “riot of Corso Traiano”, as the papers called it, was significant in two ways. It served to give visibility to the workers’ struggle at Mirafiori, so far deliberately neglected by mainstream media, in the first place La Stampa, and amplified the ideas of the New Left groups. The events of Corso Traiano, though they did not lead to any new development in the plant, represented also a symbolic turning point for many of its participants. In fact, the dedication with which superintendent Voria charged a peaceful demonstration unveiled the political dimension of the rebellion against FIAT. In the following months radicals capitalised on the collective memory of that day, and could synthesise a whole political message within the few words ”Remember Corso Traiano!”⁶⁰⁸ While the Turinese riot was in important respects significantly different from the 1967 Detroit riot, it nonetheless similarly dramatized the divisions between the different power groups: the company, the unions, the radicals, the police. One could argue that in Corso Traiano the barrel of dynamite had finally exploded.

The rest of July saw no significant agitation at FIAT, but observers knew that this was not pacification. It only meant that workers did not want to lose any pay before the holidays in August.⁶⁰⁹ Paradoxically, only now did labour relations at FIAT occupy the main pages of national, as well as local, newspapers. The simultaneous occurrence, at the end of July, of both the unions and the radical conventions, gave the opportunity to reporters to expound the peculiarities of the new political subject. In general, unsympathetic accounts of the radicals’ convention tended to stress the differences between workers and students, and the fragmentation within the movement itself. Similarly to American media, Italian ones ‘framed’ the New Left through a description that emphasized the polarization, the triviality, and the marginality of the movement. This served to give the reassuring message that the agitation at FIAT originated from a handful of presumptuous students without real hold to the common sense workers.

⁶⁰⁷ Mario Dalamaviva ”Tra movimento studentesco e classe operaia” in Per il Sessantotto. Studi e Ricerche. Diego Giachetti eds. (Pistoia: Centro di Documentazione, 1998), 76; in another occasion the residents of middle-class Via Roma locked the front door and demonstrators got a severe beating from the police; interview with Pasquale De Stefani, April 2001.
⁶⁰⁹ The whole Fiat shut down every August for holidays and retooling.
Radicals were characterised as *contestatori*, who grew Marx-like beards, spoke a boring ideological jargon, and had no sense of organisation. A worker was quoted as saying: "They’re good chaps, but they talk too much". On the other hand, media commented positively on the unions’ convention. Even *La Stampa* underscored the "senso di responsabilità" and praised the "open and constructive discussion" among the three, now united, unions. This was an explicit attempt to legitimise unions in front of workers and the public opinion before the bargaining for the national metalworker contract in autumn. Fiat, as well as the other manufacturers, expected negotiations to bring a further disruption in the plants and preferred a stronger group of unions that could handle the discontent. In August, the financial paper *Il Sole 24 Ore* foretold that negotiations would be difficult and aptly characterised the forthcoming months as "autunno caldo".

During the following months rank-and-file disaffection from organised labour took a more militant direction and adopted new forms. It is remarkable that this happened in time of contract renewal when unions could also take a more aggressive stance towards the company and thus secure the allegiance of workers. However, workers, not the unions, started the strikes straight after the holidays, in September. Worker Gerolamo Chinzer has given a vivid account on how rank-and-file kept the initiative on the shop floor:

I remember we had established with my team - we were a reference point for the others - to stop at ten sharp. Already at ten to ten everybody stared at my team. And everybody in my team stared at me. I was continuing to work unperturbed. I worked until ten sharp, then turned off the (welding) blowpipe and went to the alley. It was impressive: as soon as I went to the alley I heard a whistle. The presses halted completely, then the lathes, finally the blast furnaces. Gradually everything halted. In a few minutes the whole shop was silent. And everybody sat at his place. Further down they didn’t even know why they stopped. They did so because they assumed that if we had stopped there had to be a reason. Then we waited. After a couple of hours the *Commissione Interna* came. They wanted us to go back to work. We organised an assembly in the refectory. There were two tables. On one I was standing alone. On the other one the members of the *commissione* spoke, one after the other. We had a confrontation for many hours. They talked about the contract.  

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611 "I sindacati concordano le richieste per il contratto dei metalmeccanici", *La Stampa*, 26 July, 1969. In the light of the famous distinction that Valletta had made between "constructive" unionised workers and "destructive" union members, that *La Stampa* now would characterise unions as constructive was paradoxical; *Sole 24 Ore*, 10 August, 1969.
I argued for 100 lire pay rise and the 36-hour week. What inflamed the shop was the passion and militancy with which I confronted the counterpart.\textsuperscript{612}

Gerolamo Chinzer's account contains many of the characteristics of the *autunno caldo* at FIAT. The stoppage of one team spread to the whole shop as more and more workers shut off their machines or abandoned their posts without exactly knowing the reason. The rank-and-file interpreted the action as an act of *liberation*, while unions could endorse it only if contributed to *negotiations*. The scene of two haranguers addressing a mass of workers on the refectory tables graphically conveys the proportion of workers' antagonism towards the unions.\textsuperscript{613}

The fact that the agitation at Fiat had entered a new phase after the walkout in shop 32 did not escape the management or the unions. FIAT chose a confrontational stance. Firing those responsible for the wildcat would have ignited more strikes, therefore, management suspended all the workers in the shops affected by the strike in shop 32 (about 40,000 workers). While the excuse for this action was that these workers would have remained idle, having the strike created a bottleneck in the flow of production, the underlying reason was probably to cause a reaction among the moderate workers who resented the loss of pay. However, the suspension did not produce this effect. Quite on the contrary, it was regarded as an unfair reprisal and even members of parliament pushed for an official enquiry into its motivation.\textsuperscript{614}

Unions faced the dilemma of how to keep pace with increasing radicalisation in the plants and, at the same time, conduct negotiations and deliver a reasonable contract. In this case, after the episode of shop 32, they decided to anticipate the opening of negotiations with a number of strikes for the whole metalworkers sector - FIAT workers included. Contrary to the usual practice FIOM-FIM-UILM this time decided that strikes could take place even during negotiations. Their bargaining agenda introduced most of the demands that *Meridionali* had put forward in spring: across-the-board wage increase; reduction of the work week to forty hours; equality of benefits with clerical workers concerning sick leave; right of internal assemblies. Unions announced strikes for the whole sector on the 11, 19, and 25 September. But, again, radicals questioned both the bargaining agenda and the strikes. Lotta Continua argued that the unions' requests were now inadequate, that aim of the struggle could not be the contract, but workers' power, and that workers should economize on strike hours and opt for a more effective way to bend the company than the external strikes called by the unions. For

\textsuperscript{612} Interview with Gerolamo Chinzer in Marco Revelli, *Lavorare in FIAT...*cit., 46.

\textsuperscript{613} This episode and wholeclimate of the *Autunno Caldo* is well described in the controversial film *La classe operaia va in paradiso* by Elio Petri (1972).

\textsuperscript{614} Centro Gobetti, FMV, Carte Luigi Bobbio, box E4, folder 3, minutes of the students-workers general assembly in Turin 6 September, 1969; Giachetti, Scavino, *La Fiat in mano...*cit., 60.
Lotta Continua the internal strike, as practiced on and off during the spring was a far more successful tactic. By striking in different hours of the day workers would halt production without losing the entire pay. On the contrary the “external” strike deprived workers of a whole day pay and could eventually become too onerous to continue.615

At the end of September, while union strikes had obtained a success of up to 95 per cent of participation, the company still resisted the kind of big concessions that the unions demanded, and they were not at all interested in the demands of the radicals. Workers were not further amenable to expensive external strikes. They therefore returned to the spontaneous disruption of work that had characterised the spring and that frightened the unions.616 These forms of struggle were difficult to control by unions officials as only a few shops had union stewards. From the unions’ point of view, another risk was that spontaneous actions could have ended up in harming the machinery or injuring the staff, which would have undermined their positions at the bargaining table. However, only by shifting to more radical forms of protest were FIAT workers able to continue the struggle, and eventually achieve substantial benefits.

The procession through the several departments of the immense Mirafiori complex became the most characteristic expression of workers militancy during the Autunno Caldo. This form of industrial action plunged FIAT’s repressive system of surveillance into crisis. Internal processions implied an immediate, face-to-face confrontation between the strikers and the hierarchical structure. Foremen could fine and discharge individual workers who abandoned their posts. The procession was therefore a risky form of action that could achieve some results only if it mustered unanimous participation in the department.

The procession went through the departments incorporating the workers on the way, and the foremen as well. We would go behind all of them unfolding long ropes and suck them in, foremen included, although the latter would disentangle themselves and run away. But workers remained and typically those last included would then use the ropes to incorporate other workers in the following department.617

The internal procession worked as an instrument that effectively persuaded the reluctant and afraid workmates, a tactical necessity to avoid company’s retaliation

615 “La piattaforma dei sindacati diventera’ contratto?” L’Espresso, 15 September, 1969; Centro Gabetti, FMV, Carte Mario Dalmaviva, box 3, folder 2, leaflet 25 October 69.
617 Interview with Dino Antonioni, in G. Polo, I tamburi di Mirafiori...cit., 83.
against the few. The visual effect of a procession advancing while chasing frightened foremen, ridiculed the authority of all the hierarchical system. A foreman recalled that when the procession approached with great commotion of drum beating: "it gave the impression of a bellicose army." The most radical workers believed that the degree of violence necessary to stage these internal actions had its rationale as a response to the capitalist violence of the employer imposing brutal working conditions. A Fiat worker called it "counter-violence". One common practice during the *autunno caldo* consisted, in fact, in forcing foremen and sometimes white-collar staff to run the gantlet between two long lines of workers. The unfortunate victims were covered with spits, kicked in the back, and hurled with obscenities. Other times it could be outright beating. In a few instances, workers yielded to acts of Luddism by overturning cars on the line and raiding the refectory. The same worker concluded that: “in a plant you both exert and suffer violence”.

The internal procession expressed the workers’ need for liberation from the oppressive factory system. However, as Lotta Continua had asserted, it represented also the most effective tactics *vis-à-vis* the determination of the company. As the initiative inside the plant was effectively in the hands of the radical workers of Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio, FIOM-FIM-UILM progressively endorsed these types of strikes, called also chequerboard because they paralysed different departments at different times. In particular they did so towards the last round of the negotiations for the national metalworkers agreement, in the beginning of December.

Unions and *Confindustria* finally signed the contract on the 21 December, almost three months after the beginning of negotiations. PCI and unions considered it the most important achievement for the Italian labour movement in the postwar era. The contract introduced a substantial across-the-board wage increase, the reduction of the

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619 D.L. Norcia, *Io garantito. Frammenti di vita e di pensieri di un operaio Fiat*, F. Torora, ed. (Roma: Edizioni del lavoro, 1981), 51-54; “Smashing the dirty food-warmers in the refectory and toppling the assembly lines was our first timely reply to the boss’ reprisal, which consisted in not paying wages for the idle hours when the line stopped for lack of material [which was due to strike in other departments]. This was our answer to the inhuman exploitation that FIAT jailers forced on hundreds of thousands of workers on the line. This happened during the “democratic” postwar period.” in “FIAT: la violenza operaia come strumento di lotta” *Potere Operaio*, 13 November, 1969); from Lotta Continua: “a number of workers have vented their rage through chasing strikebreakers. Since these are increasingly difficult to find, they aimed at the more passive workers or at smashing machinery and tools. This is an important point: when workers see the machine as their enemy they are right. Theirs is not a primitive or rough rebellion. It is a conscious revolt against the capitalistic use of machinery to enslave workers” in “Torino: la legge del padrone” in *Lotta Continua* 7 November, 1969.
workweek to 40 hours (it was previously 44 hours), and limits to the overtime. The contract also recognised many union rights such as the right to hold assemblies during working hours and the establishment of delegati. As a whole it sanctioned the end of the Valletta-style of discrimination against labour organization. Lotta Continua still maintained that the contract brought in negligible improvements for the workers, only significant gains for the unions. Radicals expressed the concern that the contract might bridle rank-and-file militancy and channel it in a bureaucratised unionism. From a comparative perspective with the Detroit case, this was more than a legitimate concern: this was precisely what happened after the militant CIO organizing drive in the late 1930s. However, in the FIAT case, the contract ushered a period of union growth, without totally expunging shop floor militancy. Notwithstanding the contract, Lotta Continua looked back favourably upon the autunno caldo. "The struggles have been useful. We are now stronger. We have taken the fight in our hands in the crucial moments and we have imposed the internal strikes...we have done the assemblies...we, body-assembly workers, by disrupting production eight days in a row, have imposed the signing of the contract". These words, with a justified emphasis, commented on a unique period of rank-and-file struggle at FIAT which was in the process of reverberating its effects on the whole Italian society.

Two Different Paths

In Detroit, the demise of the League did not pacify Chrysler plants. Violence, absenteeism, and wildcat strikes remained endemic between 1970 and 1973. A journalistic account characterised the Chrysler Hamtramck plant as "a barrel of dynamite [where] one in every five assembly workers is on narcotics and one in three carries guns at work. This situation is almost out of hand, with management afraid to supervise workers for fear of physical attack." Similar tensions existed in the other plants. For example, in 1970, at Jefferson Avenue plant autoworker James Johnson killed two foremen and job-setter, and in 1973 autoworker Tilden Engle shot to death the plant general foreman. These were extreme cases, but exemplified the state of Chrysler labour relations in the aftermath of the DRUM movement. The company had

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621 For the FIOM stance in those negotiations see Bruno Trentin, Autunno Caldo. Il secondo biennio rosso. Intervista di Guido Liguori (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 99-108; for further details see Giachetti, Scavino, La Fiat in mano agli operai...cit., 115-128.
622 Centro Gobetti, FMV, Carte Luigi Bobbio, box E2, folder 3, leaflet of Lotta Continua, 22 December, 1969.
623 ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, newspaper article reported in Ed Liska, Diary, entry 24 June 1971.
mitigated its most blatant racist policies by employing more black supervisory staff. The UAW had also encouraged the emergence of compliant local black union leaders such as President Andy Hardy at Local 3 Dodge Main and President Elroy Richardson at Local 961 Eldon Avenue. None of these developments, however, improved working and safety conditions on the shop floor.624

The rank-and-file movements that protested these conditions emerged in a climate that the DRUM movement had profoundly shaped. For historian Heather Thompson "the politics and the platform of the RUM groups had circumscribed the UAW’s tolerance for any and all rank-and-file militancy after 1971".625 Unlike prior internal dissent caucuses, DRUM had politically and culturally threatened the leadership of the union. It had offered a competitive model of unionism and established an alternative cultural and political agenda. Whether Chrysler’s threat to shut Dodge Main was real or not, in the eyes of the union leadership DRUM had also gambled with the very existence of the plant. If in other cases, where it had wider margins of negotiations, the UAW proved able to embrace rank-and-file militancy, it instead suppressed dissent in the Detroit context of rapid deindustrialisation, and in a case where its leadership had been severely challenged.626

A few episodes are indicative of the new climate in industrial relations in Detroit in the early 1970s. In May 1971, the election for Eldon Avenue’s Local 961 presidency became a battleground between dissent groups and the UAW bureaucracy as much as the election at Dodge Main had been in 1969-70. Jordan Sims, a black shop steward belonging to the United National Caucus (UNC), an opposition caucus that had affiliated groups in many locals, confronted Frank McKinnon, a staunch Reutherite. Sims was more a reformer than a revolutionary, but also commanded the respect of more radical elements of the workforce, many of whom had been involved in ELRUM. The Eldon Avenue plant had been the theatre of two significant incidents that in 1970 had mobilised the workforce into radical forms of action. One was a wildcat over the firing of black worker John Scott who physically confronted his foreman after the latter repeatedly abused him with racist language. Another was the death of black worker Gary Thompson who had been killed by a defective jitney that had tipped over onto him.

625 Ibid., 191 and 201.
626 Stanley Aronowitz, False Promises...cit.; Lordstown GM plant prove a case in point.
burying him under tons of steel. Both episodes exemplified the condition of discrimination and safety hazards that workers endured at Chrysler. Sims argued that the workforce received "inadequate representation and untimely union presence when the trouble develops." 627

These issues fanned the flames of rank-and-file discontent and increased the demand for militant local leadership too. However, the UAW held the opinion that it was the radicals of ELRUM – at this point almost non-existent as an organization – who had stirred the membership into agitation. UAW officials failed to recognise that significant differences existed between the coalition led by Jordan Sims and the old ELRUM. 628 The former, in fact, disapproved much of the latter tactics and rhetoric. As at Local 3 two years earlier, the police and the UAW security flying squadron guarded the Local 961 election site in order "to prevent extremists and outsiders from disrupting the election process." 629 Jordan Sims, won enough votes for a run-off two weeks later, but then lost to McKinnon by a handful of votes. Chrysler fired Sims and the UAW leadership believed that black militancy was successfully subdued at Eldon Avenue. However, Sims and the UNC enjoyed a genuine widespread support in the plant. Sims then filed a charge with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission against the discriminatory practices of UAW officials during the election, and used a controversial clause that permitted discharged union members to run for officials to finally win the presidency in 1973. 630

Jordan Sims' ascendancy to the Presidency was a story of personal determination, but it also illustrates the origins of the decline of the American labour movement: the incapacity of a bureaucratised union to understand and serve its own constituency. In an interview Sims stated: "If your end is justifiable and you've pursued all reasonable and rational courses, and met with utter defeat, you take any course that's open to you and you go for broke. Because broke is exactly what you'll be, I believe, when the 70's come down, if you don't get together". 631

The UAW viewed every dissent group as Communist-inspired and as 1973 – the year Sims won the election at Eldon Avenue – continued with a wave of wildcats

627 "An election message from Jordan U. Sims", leaflet in ALUA, DRM collection, box 4, folder 1.
628 That the UAW considered Sims and ELRUM (or ELDRUM as they called) the same thing is clear from a letter addressed to the membership accusing them of extremism and of wanting to take over the union. ALUA, DRM Collection, box 3, folder 12, Leadership Local 961 to Local 961 members.
630 H. Thompson, "Southern Migrants and the Transformation of..." 22-25; Georgakas, Surkin, Detroit...cit., 103.
throughout Detroit plants, this impression was reinforced. Although the *Detroit Free Press* had run an article denouncing safety hazards in the Chrysler plants, the UAW continued to ignore the workers’ discontent surrounding this issue.632 This was sometimes combined with workplace racism where it still existed. At the Jefferson Avenue Plant, in particular, foreman Tom Woosley was notorious for his racist remarks and his disrespect of black workers in his department. Black workers circulated a petition for his removal which 70 per cent of the department signed. They opened a grievance file, but with no result. In July two black workers, Larry Carter and Isaac Shorter, initiated a protest against the foreman by locking themselves in the power cage of the metal body shop thereby cutting off all the energy to the line. The UAW accused the two workers of hijacking the whole department, but when Chrysler sent its personnel to forcibly open the cage and restart the line, more than 150 workers protected Shorter and Carter. A UNC leaflet commented: “These workers, black and white, young and old, male and female, demonstrated the kind of militancy and solidarity necessary to defend us from corporate abuse... Where is our leadership when we need them?”633

To the dismay of the UAW, Chrysler gave in after thirteen hours, discharged the foreman, and took no reprisal against those who had participated in the action. The company responded pragmatically, as it did at Dodge Main, because the strike did not directly address questions related to production. For the UAW, instead, the success of the wildcat exposed a major flaw in the grievance procedure and, ultimately, in the union’s commitment to address the workers’ problems. The *Detroit News* expressed the sentiment of top union officials when it asked: “the big question today is whether Chrysler Corp. – in capitulating to the demand of the two workers – has set the pattern for work stoppages of the future” 634

At the origin of the wildcat at Jefferson there was not only racism, but workers’ frustration over recent speed-ups (about seven per cent) between summer 1972 and 1973 – what Chrysler called a “productivity drive”.635 The same conditions triggered another wildcat at Chrysler Forge plant a few weeks later. This plant had been operating for the previous six months on a compulsory seven days a week on all three shifts for

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632 *Detroit Free Press*, 15 August 1973
633 Interview with I. Shorter and L. Carter in *Black Voice*, vol.3, September 1973; see also transcript interview with Shorter and Carter, *The Lou Gordon Show*, ALUA, UAW Region 1B Collection, box 73, folder 12; for the quote see leaflet, United Justice Caucus, (February 1973) ALUA, UAW Region 1B Collection, box 73, folder 5.
635 *Ibid.* 11
the majority of workers. As usual fatigue and insufficient maintenance led to frequent safety accidents. At Forge the old League's affiliate FORUM had virtually disappeared, but the issues of racism and safety still existed. When, on the 7 August, workers refused to return to the plant until these issues had been settled, the Local President urged workers to go back to work because "we [have] a contract and we [have] to go by the contract". But workers carried on the strike until UAW Vice President Douglas Fraser, after a dramatic tour of the plant on the 11th, announced that workers' complaints were legitimate and that he was ready to authorise a strike if the company did not correct those conditions. However, he would not do so until everybody was back to work. This statement sounded militant, but Fraser aimed in reality to lull workers back in the plant with long-term promises. At the same time the company gave an ultimatum that workers who would not return would be fired. One third of the workers were convinced and on that night broke the strike. The next day all the rest joined except for eighteen leaders of the strike who were fired. The International Executive Board never authorised the strike.

One important characteristic of this new wave of strikes was that it united workers across racial and political boundaries. This constituted the substantial novelty of this movement compared to DRUM, which, because of its Black Nationalist connotations had been unable to appeal to whites or to moderates. This also should have proved to the UAW the authenticity of the motives of the protest. But the union was unable or unwilling to do so. The UAW rationalised the accelerated succession of wildcats as the product of pernicious external influence, Fraser claimed the protesters "been reading Marx and Engels", or simply used this argument in attempt to defuse challenges to the compromise the union had reached with the company. The final episode in the wildcat summer of 1973, the strike at the Mack plant, bore evidence that the UAW would not tolerate these challenges.

The day after Forge workers returned to their posts, another strike erupted at Mack Plant. The multiracial United Justice Caucus, an offspring of the United National Caucus denounced the appalling working conditions in the newsletter the Mack Safety Watchdog. The publication also helped workers from different departments create a common awareness of their situation in the plant. Two workers (one white, the other black) belonging to a small Marxist group, the Workers Action Movement (WAM), had initiated a strike in their department by returning to work after they had been fired for a
previous walkout and by refusing to abandon the line. As in the case of Shorter and Carter, hundreds of workers soon gathered to protect them from the security and the police. Several clashes occurred leaving two guards injured. To the UAW the WAM activists’ initiative confirmed the assumption that “reds” masterminded the action. They defined WAM as “a Communist splinter group that wants to disrupt so that they can take over the union and the companies.” After the precedent at Jefferson Avenue, Fraser urged the company “not to put a premium on lawlessness”. Chrysler followed his advice when it locked out the workers throughout the plant and allowed sixty policemen in full riot gear to evict the strikers. Even after the eviction, however, workers voted to continue the strike until the fired workers were reinstated as at Jefferson. This was an unequivocal case of working class solidarity that hardly could have been the achievement of a few agitators.

The next morning a thousand officers and stewards from the 20 Chrysler locals in the Detroit area met at the Mack plant to break the strike. UAW secretary-treasurer Emil Mazey allegedly told the crowd “[the strikers] are a bunch of punks, [and] we are not going to let them destroy everything we have built”. Union officers carried baseball bats, pipes and other weapons and physically assaulted the protesters. The paradox of the situation did not pass unnoticed to the papers. The Detroit Free Press titled: "UAW MEN HELP POLICE OPEN PLANT". A reporter of the Detroit TV station WXYZ commented that for the first time in history "the UAW mobilised to keep a plant open". The reality was more complex than that, as the struggle between UAW and what they considered radicals concerned the type of strategy to be adopted by the labour movement as well as the sheer instinct for self-preservation by its leaders. However, this episode represented also the unequivocal manifestation of the trajectory that American industrial unionism had travelled since the organising days of the 1930s. By giving up its capacity to mobilize rank-and-file at the point of production the UAW had also unwilling opened the door for a managerial attack on its basic prerogatives.

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641 “Mack Plant Working! Who gave 10 people the right to tell 5,400 workers - "no bread, baby?" leaflet in ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 14.
643 Thompson “New Workers…”, 198-199.
Robert Lumley has written that the *autunno caldo* "was one of the exceptional moments when popular protest erupted into national politics".\(^{647}\) Rank-and-file struggle, initiated by unskilled *Meridionali*, changed the character of industrial relations, and the extent of state's responsibility towards workers for a durable period. Something similar, as Charles Sabel has noted, happened, in American terms, only with the rise of CIO and the second New Deal.\(^{648}\) By the end of 1969, Italian unions, at a national level, recuperated control of the strike movement.\(^{649}\) While the protest spread from the manufacturing to the service sector, and from North to South of the peninsula, the unions ripened the fruit of the conflict. The CGIL rose, for instance, from 2,461,000 members in 1968 to 4,313,000 members in 1976. Since then, unions have played an important institutional role and have lobbied for the passage of progressive pieces of legislation.\(^{650}\)

While the *autunno caldo* had a long-term impact on Italian society, in the short term it served as a catalyst for the enactment, in May 1970, of the above mentioned *Statuto dei Lavoratori*. The *Statuto* had a twofold impact on the shop floor at FIAT. First of all, it reduced hostility towards unions. Secondly, it eroded the influence of the radical groups over the rank-and-file, so much that the radical groups finally collapsed. *Potere Operaio* disbanded quietly in 1973. Although *Lotta Continua* folded in 1976, by 1973 it was, in the words of one of its leaders: "a stiff organization impenetrable from the outside; for a year it had attracted no new member; the greater internal cohesion [was] rather a sign of his political weakness towards the exterior".\(^{651}\) In 1971 and 1972, New Left groups had shifted to more radical positions concerning the type of struggle to be conducted. They often condoned acts of violence against machinery or supervisors, and advocated, although ambiguously, an armed struggle. One of the songs of *Potere Operaio* went "off the line we’ll embrace the rifle/come on comrades it is civil war/Agnelli, Pirelli, Restivi, Colombo/ enough words, now it’s the bullets".\(^{652}\) In a 1972 leaflet it was suggested: “the path that every day thousands of workers choose,


\(^{649}\) This generalization though does not describe the situation at FIAT

\(^{650}\) Data cited in Ida Regalia, Marino Regini, "Italy: the Dual Character of Industrial Relations in Changing Industrial Relations in Europe…472

\(^{651}\) Luigi Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), 118; note that the total union membership at FIAT reaches 30 per cent of the workers and 10 per cent of the employee. Source, Berta, *Mirafiori…cit.*., 46

\(^{652}\) “Via dalle linee prendiamo il fucile/ Forza compagni è la Guerra civile/ Agnelli Pirelli Restivo Colombo/ Non più parole ma pioggia di piombo” in undated document of *Potere Operaio* found in a folder with 1971-1972 documents. Centro Gobetti, FMV, Fondo Dalamaviva, box 1, folder IV;
both in the factory and in the neighbourhood, to confront masters’ terrorism and state violence is the armed struggle. This is the road to victory.\textsuperscript{653} Two factors explain this evolution. Firstly, groups reacted to the so-called \textit{strategia della tensione}, the attempt by certain sections of the forces of Law and of right-wing political lobbies to blame the radical groups for the bomb of Piazza Fontana in Milan on 12 December 1969, which killed 16 people. On the contrary, it was soon clear that extreme right militants together with ‘deviated’ sections of the Italian secret service had accomplished that terrorist act.\textsuperscript{654} Secondly, once unions inside the plants endorsed much of the demands of the early wildcat strikers, groups felt that it was the right time to press for the socialization of means of production and for drastic changes in the social structure. Radicals demanded \textit{a salario garantito}, a salary guaranteed to the worker whether he works or not, and free rent and transportation.\textsuperscript{655} These goals, however, mobilised only a fraction of the workforce and further pushed the moderates towards the unions.

At the same time, in fact, the bargaining structure remained decentralised and controlled by \textit{delegati} elected by all the workers, whether union members or not. The entirety of \textit{delegati} formed the \textit{Consiglio di Fabbrica} (factory council). As shop floor bargaining became the norm, managers complained that: "since 1969, no day has passed without conflict".\textsuperscript{656} The usual pattern was for unions to give its recognition to wildcat strikes \textit{a posteriori}, since now many of these occurred under the leadership of \textit{delegati} who worked within the framework of the union. In the process of institutionalising the movement, therefore, unions themselves became more democratic, stopped emphasising the primacy of skills, and promoted throughout the 1970s across-the-board wage increases.\textsuperscript{657}

In both Detroit and Turin the verbal extremism of dissent groups ended up discouraging moderate workers from joining them, and thereby eventually undermined the very existence of these groups. However, we also observe an important difference: in Turin, radical groups did so in the effort to keep abreast of unions in mobilizing workers. In Detroit, this choice was instead consequence of a mistaken strategy wholly determined at the internal of the groups. This strategy consisted in mobilizing the more militant workers first, while ignoring more backward elements. In other words, while in

\textsuperscript{653} \textit{Ibid.}, leaflet dated 1972. Another leaflet, always in the same folder, stated that “the militarization of the movement is on the agenda, as sole political defense against the state’s aggression”.

\textsuperscript{654} This thesis is summarised by Giorgio Boatti, \textit{Piazza Fontana: 12 dicembre 1969: il giorno dell’ innocenza perduta} (Torino : Einaudi, 1993).

\textsuperscript{655} For an example see leaflet “La rivoluzione non è un pranzo di gala: organizzazione e violenza” in Centro Gobetti, FMV, Fondo Dalmaviva, box 1, folder IV.

\textsuperscript{656} Quoted in Marie-France Pochna, \textit{Agnelli I’irresistibile. La storia di un uomo, di una famiglia, di un impero} (Milano: Sperling and Kupfer, 1990), 303.

\textsuperscript{657} Aris Accornero, \textit{La Parabola del Sindacato} (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 30
Turin the unions’ strategy politically confined groups in a non-winning position, in Detroit this was rather the result of a flawed approach whose sole responsibility lies on the radical leadership.

The period 1970 -1973 saw an expanding workers’ intervention into the organisation of production and the fight against safety hazards, as well as increased participation in the policies of the unions. However, this was not the landscape that the New Left had envisaged for the years after the *autunno caldo*. Lotta Continua, for instance, predicted the growth of a revolutionary organisation from the bottom up in absolute contrast with the union organisation. Adriano Sofri wrote in September 1969: "We expect a widening gap between proletarian struggles and the political control of the labour movement on them." It was a serious short sight and a political mistake for the radicals to take, during the *autunno caldo*, the demise of unions as granted. On the contrary, as we have seen, by slowly giving in to rank-and-file demands unions had implemented a strategy to win back moderate workers, to act militant, and to counteract the radicals, without appearing to threaten to the social order or offend the public opinion.

By 1970, suddenly, unions showed an unexpected capacity to adapt to the needs of the *Meridionale* mass-worker. It was the unions that managed the new balance of powers emerged in the plants after the *autunno caldo*. At national level, unions also launched a campaign for social reforms. This campaign, which aimed at the expansion of the Italian welfare state, channelled workers’ militancy towards reformist, rather than revolutionary goals. In this way unions undermined much of the support for the New Left program of shifting the focus of the struggle from the plant to the community. Lotta Continua inaugurated its program "*Prendiamoci la Città* - Let’s take the city" in the autumn 1970. The program prompted local chapters of Lotta Continua to organise collective action to protest rising prices either by picketing stores or using certain services – busses and trains, for instance – without paying. This was intended to educate workers in using direct action to undermine capitalism, with a direct reference to how the Civil Rights movement in the US had defeated legal segregation.

One branch of this program that met with relative success was the squatting of inner city and suburban slums in Turin and Milan and the organisation against police efforts to evict the tenants. In the peripheral districts of Falchera and Nichelino, at the outskirts of Turin, the housing and services situation remained dramatic throughout

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606 -La giornata nazionale di lotta", *Lotta Continua*, n.16, 17 September 1970
607 See for instance "La riforma della casa ce la facciamo da noi", *Lotta Continua*, n.20, 16 December 1971
the early 1970s. “At the end of the 1960s – says former activist Giovanni Contini – Nichelino was unimaginable. There was nothing in it. It was just a dormitory. You couldn’t do any shopping. Wives would go crazy, they didn’t know how to bring children to school”.

In Falchera the situation was even worse and when a public housing project of 1,300 flats was initiated it was occupied weeks before completion. Lotta Continua then tried to mediate the tensions between the occupiers and the legitimate grantees of the flats. Both were southern migrants. In general, the radical succeeded in organising a pressure on municipal institutions concerning the housing problem in the suburbs, though at a dear price: in 1975 25-year old Tonino Miccichè, a Meridionale radical active in the occupation movement, was killed by a fellow southerner whose lock-up garage had been squatted.

After the autunno caldo the radical left still proved able to lead workers in episodic outbursts of anti-capitalist revolt, on the shop floor and in the community. On the whole, however, the New Left lacked a broader strategy that could offer the same real gains, in the plants and in the reform of the state, that the official union movement could offer. It seemed that, in the 1970s, radical revolutionary propaganda could have a certain appeal on specific goals, but did not provide a realistic political outlet for the working class.

In both Turin and Detroit, the rank-and-file militancy of the ‘new’ workers shaped the future of industrial relations in the auto industry. Because radical groups such as DRUM and Lotta Continua proved popular among the younger and more disadvantaged strata of the workforce both the manufacturers and the unions crafted responses aimed at neutralising their appeal. In doing so they acknowledged the presence, and the strength, of a new industrial subject – Meridionali in Turin and blacks in Detroit.

The history of these groups was moulded by local and national factors. They maintained strengths and weaknesses from the movements that antedated them, such as the student movement in Turin and the Black Nationalist groups in Detroit. They adopted and reinterpreted the ideas and ideologies of the intellectual milieu that

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661 Interview with Giovanni Contini 7 Settembre 2001, in Futuro Anteriore... p.2
662 A journalistic account of the struggle in Falchera and of Tonino Miccichè is Filippo Falcone, Morte di un militante siciliano (Torino: Lighea editore, 1999)
663 “Padrone di se’ e sicuro quando si trova sul suo terreno originario, nello specifico dell’officina o del rione, il movimento, quando i suoi compiti si allargano sembra incontrare difficoltà e limiti insuperabili” in P. Ferraris, “Strategie a confronto”, Il Manifesto, 4 September 1969
nurtured their leaders. However, while national historiographies, by focusing on single cases, underscore the peculiar traits of the revolutionary movements that shook the auto industry, I would like to call attention to their international dimension. My analysis is restricted to two cases which, notwithstanding the different political and national setting in which they developed, shared much in terms of goals, tactics, and language. If not every point on their agendas coincided, as important issues were different, they were similar in many respects, to the extent they could dialogue with each other.\textsuperscript{664} I stress here the similarities because I believe I have so far extensively covered their peculiarities. The similarities include their confrontational stance to unions and the old left as well as their rhetorical and ideological jargon. They were also similar in the way in which they engaged, and betrayed, participatory democracy by not elaborating definite rules for representation and therefore perpetuating the leadership of few charismatic activists. Finally, they challenged the trade off between wages and workers’ effort that guaranteed the stability of Fordism-Keynesianism.

I suspect that this catalogue of affinities is not restricted to the Italian and American case, but concerns also other Western countries with a new workforce.\textsuperscript{665} Once we stop studying these movements in isolation we can better appreciate their collective effect in changing the nature of the system of accumulation. At an ideological level, the uprising of groups such as Blacks and Meridionali put into question the relevance of class as an analytical category and opened the crisis of those ‘grand narratives’ that had so far been used to explain the social.

In their national settings a series of factors moulded the responses of unions and auto manufacturers to the revolutionary groups that challenged their prerogatives. The process of deindustrialisation that was already well underway in Detroit, had not yet started in Turin. When, in 1969, Dodge Main managers met Local 3 officers to discuss the increasing radicalisation, the latter were told that the recent turmoil and lack of discipline of the workforce were jeopardizing their existence. The union officials understood that that was no exaggeration or false menace.\textsuperscript{666} Dodge Main was, in fact,

\textsuperscript{664} When the League’s John Watson toured Europe to promote the film \textit{Finally Got the News} he found buyers only in Italy where he lectured in several cities, among which Turin. See interview with Dan Georgakas, April 2002. According to Eula Powell, who was a DRUM member in 1968 and who visited FIAT in Turin in 1975, exchanges between American and Italian New Leftists were regular. The \textit{Collettivo CR}, edited by Sandro Sarti, regularly published excerpt from DRUM’s newsletters as well as other radical American essays. \textit{Collettivo CR} newsletters are kept in faldone 4, fascicolo G, Fondo Vittorio Rieser, FVN;

\textsuperscript{665} For the workers the only attempt remains \textit{The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968}, C. Crouch, A. Pizzorno, eds. (London: MacMillan, 1978) in which he examined the case of Italy, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Belgium.

\textsuperscript{666} Ed Liska Diary, Jan 6\textsuperscript{th} 1969, Nov 19th, 1969.
a multi-storey plant built in 1910, where automated technology could only partially be employed. Chrysler workers rightly maintained that production schedules could only be met with extra human effort. If production were to be disrupted for too long, Chrysler would consider the operation of this outdated plant non-profitable. In fact, Chrysler finally shut Dodge Main in 1980. Conversely, Fiat Mirafiori, the theatre of the most significant class conflict in 1969, was of much more recent construction, allowed linear assemblage, and contained up to date transfer machines. It continues to produce cars today.667

A second factor to be considered was the different strength of unions vis-à-vis the manufacturers at the moment of the workers' uprising. In comparison to the Italian metalworkers' unions, the UAW enjoyed a high membership (due to the closed shop and the due check-off) and a more robust steward organisation on the shop floor. Because the UAW's negotiating power depended on its ability to govern industrial conflict, it had little to gain and much to lose from a rise of militancy. On the contrary, at Fiat, unions, apart from being weakened by ideological division, were still in the process of recovering from the anni duri, the years of repression and anti-unionism, under FIAT manager Vittorio Valletta. Italian unions accommodated conflict to the extent that it did not threaten the existence of their organisations. Only after the autunno caldo FIOM-FIM-UILM secured clauses such as the dues check-off and pervasive shop steward presence that their American counterpart had enjoyed for two decades.

The manufacturers' response must be evaluated in the light of past industrial relations as well. FIAT locked out workers indirectly affected by the strikes, thereby creating widespread resentment, and resisted a settlement with unions for three months, which led to continuing conflict. The rule of Vittorio Valletta had in fact bequeathed to management a philosophy of industrial relations based on authority and repression. Chrysler, on the other hand, obtained the collaboration of the UAW and, while disciplining the most outspoken radicals, "cuddled" the rest by offering better positions. As long as production was not disrupted, Chrysler had in fact nothing to lose in undermining the authority of the UAW officials.

A third factor is the role of the state's legislative and judicial powers. As historian Giovanni Contini has argued: "A series of legal and political forces were converging in the late 1950s and 1960s to promote a revival of shop floor bargaining" in Italy. In particular unions found the backing of the sympathetic Minister of Labour Carlo Donat Cattin "who restrained the full force of employer reaction and helped to

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667 Charles K. Hyde, Detroit: An Industrial History Guide (Detroit: WSU Press, 1982); Stefano Musso in Mirafiori C. Olmo ed...cit.;
extend the range of concessions". Moreover, after the passing of the Statuto dei Lavoratori also lower magistrates in court were prepared to give an interpretation of the law favourable to workers. In the United States, UAW and auto manufacturers boasted that they could regulate the sector without the intrusion of government. Indeed, it would have been exceptional for a cabinet member to intervene in contract negotiations, but in this way a crucial ingredient present in the Italian case was absent in the American one. At local level, however, state intervention could play a role in labour relations in the aspect of manufacturer's friendly court injunctions to stop picket lines.

These differences determined the development and the outcome of the rank-and-file struggles in Detroit and Turin after they had reached a peak in both cases, broadly speaking, in 1969 until the end of the period under examination. In Detroit's plants, unauthorised industrial strife continued in Eldon Avenue, Jefferson Avenue, and Mack Stamp plants, but posed fewer challenges for the UAW and the company, and it eventually received a coup de grace in 1973. In Turin, the Autunno Caldo opened a season of shop floor bargaining, persistent agitation, but in which the militancy of radical groups was checked by the growth of unions' power.

This analysis stresses that the divergent results between an American and an European case did not originate in the "exceptional" character of the American working-class nor in any intrinsic feature that sapped its potential for militancy and radicalism, such as the racial divide between black and white workers. It rather stemmed out of the choices of unions, manufacturers, government representatives, and the radical themselves in a context of similar production technology. This finding falls in line with the recent historiography that has revised the once predominant exceptionalist paradigm.

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669 ibid.;
At the intersection between modernity and post-modernity the breakdown of industrial relations and the radicalisation, even if temporary, of a sizeable minority of workers epitomised the limits and the contradictions of the regime of accumulation know as Fordism-Keynesianism. The militancy of marginal workers questioned the labour process, the racial and ethnic hierarchy, the value of work, and the distribution of resources, both material and immaterial. In other words, they questioned the validity of those fundamental social and economic institutions of which the automobile was the symbol. In doing so they precipitated the transformation of mass production into another stage.\textsuperscript{671}

Conclusion

Italian thinker Mario Tronti (a former Quaderni Rossi contributor) retrospectively encapsulated the meaning of this period with these words: "That situation, at that time, was Red indeed, [...] although it was not the Red of a dawn, but the Red of a dusk". The cycle of struggle that, from the point of view of its protagonists, promised to unlock the basis for a radical transformation of capitalism, was actually the last sparkle of the epoch of class struggle based on the factory worker. It probably represented the last moment in which industrial workers had the structural importance and the organizational strength to challenge the tenets of world capitalism.

This decline was not coincidental: despite the various ways in which industrial conflict was eventually settled, with the workers’ defeat as in Detroit, or the opposite as in Turin, this latter wave of militancy accelerated the geographical and organizational restructuring of the paradigm of capitalist production. This transformation resulted in a sharp decline of the industrial working class in western capitalist society. This study suggests that the very successful development of postwar Fordism created the conditions that hastened its demise. The post-Fordist system eliminated many of the rigidities that had made capitalism vulnerable in the late 1960s. Capitalism, in its most dynamic and profitable version, consists now of flexible production for volatile markets in which capital is highly moveable across national borders, and the link between workers and firms are transitory and indirect.

In fact, the working-class is now disaggregated and dispersed among diverse regions and continents on a scale unknown during Fordism. The automotive industry had transformed Detroit and Turin by attracting migrant labour from depressed areas, but from the 1970s this situation was reversed and it was automobile manufacturers, as other corporations, who moved their plants to areas of depressed wages and unemployment - thereby breaking up the dominating configuration of the Fordist economy.

In Turin the connection between workers’ struggles and corporate reorganization appears more discernible. From 1973, FIAT established new plants

672 Mario Tronti, “il rosso c’era nella situazione di quel tempo[...] però non era il rosso dell’aurora ma era il rosso del tramonto” Interview included in the CD-ROM of Futuro Anteriore...cit., 6
along the peninsula in small rural towns including Cassino, Termoli, Sulmona, and, later, in Melfi, and Termini Imerese. For the first time, FIAT managers followed the advice of union officers and politicians who suggested that car production should also take place in the Mezzogiorno. However, because these southern plants were equipped with up-to-date numerically controlled machines that required relatively few workers, and because of the worldwide decrease in demand for the automobile, they did not become a generator of income and subcontracting networks. Therefore, they did not fundamentally alter the economic configuration of the South as had happened in Piedmont during the 1950s.\(^{674}\) FIAT also increased its international operations with a new plant in Brazil, thereby joining the trend of internationalising manufacturing.

During the 1970s, at Fiat, continuous workers’ unrest made relocation and downsizing increasingly urgent for its managers. In 1975, another year of peak shop floor conflict, a personnel manager remarked, “for five years now there hasn’t been a day without conflict”.\(^{675}\) Meanwhile, terrorist acts against the middle-level management added to the overall crisis of the company. Umberto Agnelli reported to the shareholders that “1975 has been the most difficult year since the war”, with a 24.5 per cent cut in production.\(^{676}\) It took FIAT another five years to implement the plan that would eventually rescue the company from decline. In 1980, the company announced the lay off (but with a cassa integrazione salary paid by the state for two years) of 23,000 workers, which constituted the premise for higher productivity and the launch of new competitive models. Such a drastic measure had to confront the collision with the unions, now one of the most important protagonists in the political arena. Between September and October 1980 a thirty-five day strike paralysed the Turinese plants, but it took place within a context of increased division among the components of the workers’ movement and dwindling public sympathy for the strikers. This episode resulted in a resounding defeat of the labour movement that was as symbolic as the success of the hot autumn had been, and the beginning of a reversal of the balance of power on the shop floor.

In contrast with the events at FIAT, after 1973, Chrysler subdued much of the militancy at the point of production, but it nevertheless suffered managerial inefficiencies mainly related to the old condition of its plants and the lack of investment.\(^{677}\) It is an analogy (which confirms how the automobile industry was

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\(^{674}\) Giuseppe Volpato, Il caso Fiat. Una strategia di riorganizzazione e di rilancio (Torino: UTET, 1996); Gad Lerner, Operai (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), 103-140.

\(^{675}\) Quoted in Gianotti, Gli Operai della Fiat hanno cento anni... cit., 210.

\(^{676}\) Relazione agli azionisti, Direzione pubbliche relazioni Fiat, Torino, 30, aprile, 1976, 3.

\(^{677}\) See Jeffrey A. Hunter, Structural Change in the US. Automobile Industry (Lexington, Ma: Lexington Books, 1983).
intertwined globally) that Chrysler too traversed a severe crisis until a turning point in 1979. In that year its new president Lee Iacocca, famously convinced the US Congress to grant $1.5 billion to save the company from bankruptcy. As part of the operation, UAW president Douglas Fraser persuaded its membership to concede three wage and benefit cuts in thirteenth months. Fraser became a member of the company’s board of directors for the following three years.678 The financial rescue of Chrysler involved the gradual closing of the Detroit’s plants and the lay off of their workforce. Dodge Main, the flagship of the company since 1910, shut in 1980. However, unlike events in Turin, the closure of the Chrysler plants in Detroit represented only the last stage of a process that had begun in the 1950s.679

Detroit and Turin have quite distinct post-industrial landscapes – the consequence of different political (in the widest sense) dynamics that now seem overwhelming. Turin continues to have a limited industrial base, but has also developed as a service centre for the northwest of Italy. Deindustrialization has been gradual, softened by welfare instruments such as the cassa integrazione. The auto industry is still important, and has symbolic value, although the great majority of its former operations have been relocated elsewhere. However, the threat of a final wave of downsizing and relocation still exists. Detroit has almost completely lost its manufacturing base and has experienced a tremendous loss of tax revenues that has undermined its effort to reconstruct its economy. The image that the city conveys today is still the one sketched by journalist William Serrin in 1975, who remarked: “nowhere in America can the nation’s disregard for its cities and the failure of the nation’s economic policies be seen so clearly as in Detroit.” 680

The businesses in the former core regions of Fordism operate differently today. They employ workers through several forms of subcontracting, outsourcing, and temporary agencies in order to minimize disruption to production through labour unrest. Where Fordism generated rigidities, the new economic orthodoxy prescribes ‘flexibility’.681 As capital becomes increasingly globalized, the leverage of workers engaged in local struggles becomes negligible in the overall struggle between capital and labour. As Tronti has observed, the struggles initiated by ‘marginal’ workers did not lead to a revolution. Rather they opened a period of complex changes and reactions that have eventually undermined the power of the labour movement and social

democratic forces. In light of these developments this three-decade old story of rank-
and-file struggles in the auto industry reminds us of an historical period when a
segment of the working classes believed that the political scenarios open to them were
numerous. They fought with courage, but more often with desperation, to shape their
own destiny as well as that of their cities. The transformation that has globalized capital
will, in turn, engender, in a dialectic that has always accompanied capitalism, a new
response from the working classes, and a new social organization of production. The
shape that this future struggle will take remains to be seen.
APPENDIX A

Results of the Commissioni Interne elections at FIAT, 1948-1963

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CGIL voti</th>
<th>CGIL seggi</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>CISL voti</th>
<th>CISL seggi</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UIL voti</th>
<th>UIL seggi</th>
<th>%</th>
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