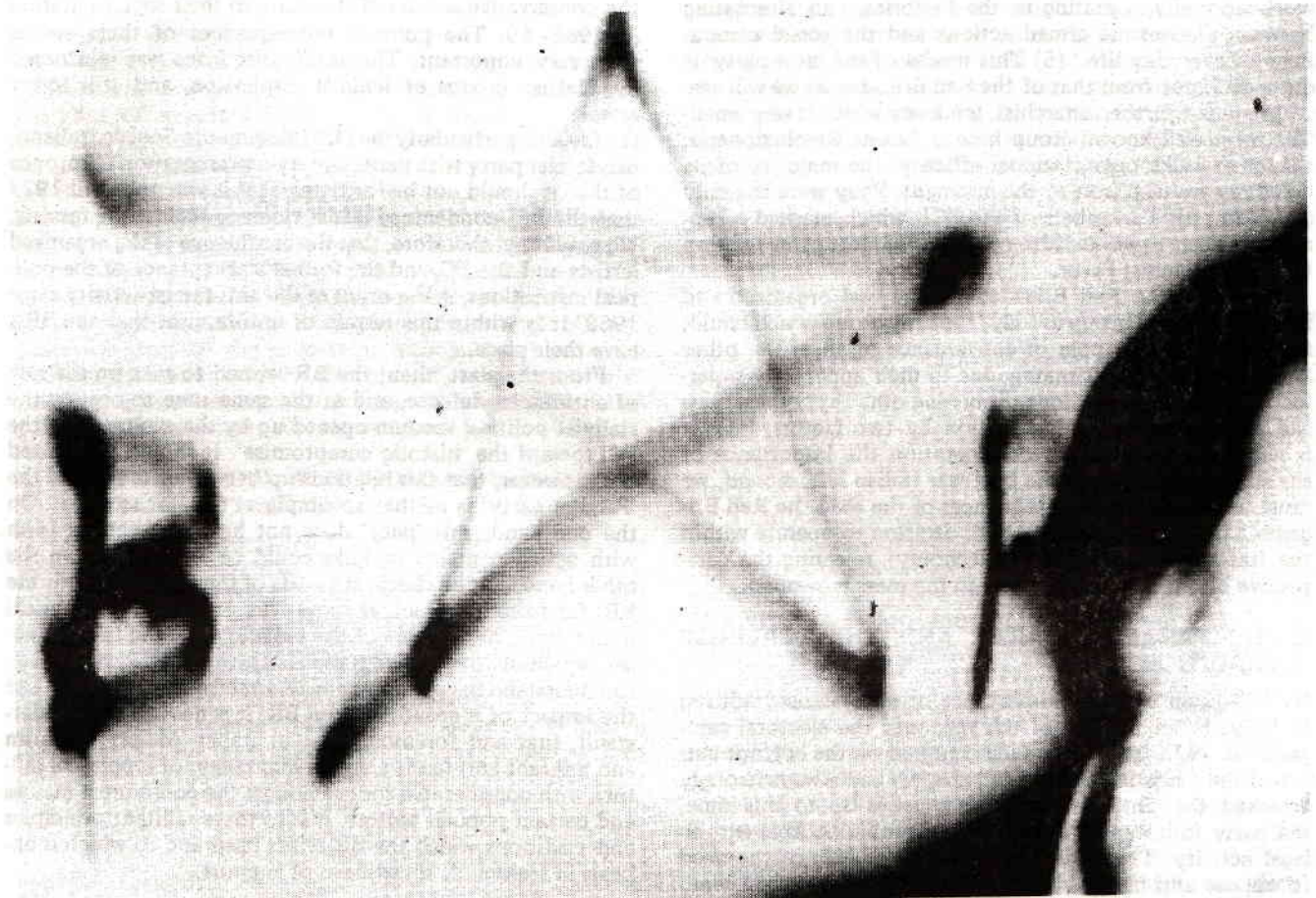


BRIGATE ROSSE



Between Stalinism and Leftism

1. A DIVERSIFIED MOVEMENT

WHEN speaking of the armed groups in Italy it is necessary first of all to emphasize the extent of this phenomenon, and also to distinguish different tendencies within it. During the summer of 1977, for example, the Italian police claimed to have identified about a hundred armed groups, of which only four or five were classified as 'stable', the others being considered 'variable'. At the end of the same year there were over 300 members of these armed groups in prison, of which 152 belonged to the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse, or BR). (1) According to the Italian Communist Party (PCI), 'in the course of 1978 these groups carried out 2,365 armed actions, ie, 10 percent more than last year (37 killed and 412 injured). The majority of bombings and shootings are claimed by the left: 619 as opposed to 55 claimed by the right. One can also note a big increase in the number of these groups. The PCI recorded 209 different groups in 1978, although the bloodiest actions still were due to the BR.' (2)

Almost all the more structured groups with a continuous activity have an ideology of leninist inspiration. Among them, the Red Brigades represent the more orthodox marxist-leninist tendency, while many of the other groups are in-

fluenced by the ideas of Italian 'workerism'. (3) With respect to structure there are, on the one hand, the stable insurrectionist groups, which present themselves as parties 'of a new kind'. On the other hand, there are the variable, 'marginal' organizations which claim to be the armed expression of specific sectors of the Movement*: women, youth, delinquents, etc, and which 'form and disband as the moment or occasion demands, changing their name each time'. (4) They inhabit what is called the zone of 'diffuse terrorism', the growing milieu of individuals and impermanent groups which adopt violent modes of action, from stealing from supermarkets to attacks on minor government officials and factory foremen. The NAP (Nuclei Armati Proletari, or Armed Proletarian Cells), for instance, was created with the objective of supporting prisoners' struggles. These two types of groups also have different conceptions on other questions, such as the type of violence to use, their objectives, their relation to the masses, and so on. The marginalist and workerist groups put forward the idea of the 'armed movement' in opposition to the insurrectionalists' concept of the 'armed party'. Among the insurrectionalist groups the best known are Prima Linea and, of course, the Red Brigades; in fact, these are the only ones which still really exist today, and

there seems to be contact between the leadership of the two groups.

Prima Linea, which regularly carries out armed actions, has a position halfway between that of the Red Brigades—entirely dedicated to the notion of the 'armed party'—and that of the 'marginalist' groups. For Prima Linea, the question is to reconcile 'terrorism with mass based urban guerrilla activity: the only strategy that will avoid separation from the popular struggles, that will allow an enlargement of the bases of support and which will prevent a retreat into total clandestinity. Their members do not live underground but work normally, agitating in the factories, and alternating between clandestine armed actions and the social camouflage of everyday life.' (5) This model of the 'new party' is quite different from that of the Red Brigades, as we will see.

There is a further, anarchist, tendency which is very small. The most well known group here is Azione Rivoluzionaria, though it lacks organizational efficacy; the majority of its members are in prison at this moment. They were the only group to attack members of the PCI, which marked a rupture between them and the other armed groups in relation to the Communist Party.

Presently, the Red Brigades are the best organized and implanted armed group in Italy, the only group which could, attempt to be the pole of convergence of all of the other armed groups. This is mainly due to their apparently superior 'effectiveness'. Without dismissing other hypotheses, we can perhaps explain this situation by two factors. First it is necessary to take into consideration the importance of the stalinist tradition in the post-war Italian left; second, we must understand the consequences of the road the Red Brigades have chosen: namely, their decision to operate within the framework of 'political autonomy', rejecting the perspective of directly linking itself to the mass movement.

2. THE PARALLEL PARTY AND THE STALINIST TRADITION

We will begin with the importance of the stalinist tradition in Italy. From the end of the war until the electoral campaign of 1975 (still very much centered on the corrupt nature of the Christian Democrats) the PCI had always strongly attacked the Christian Democrats (DC). Up to this time, the party followed a double policy, combining legal with illegal activity. The latter was preserved in case of the need to oppose anti-fascist violence to the fascist putschist tendencies which, until very recently, the whole of the Italian left considered a great danger. This double policy was increasingly called into question by the progressive strengthening of the strictly legalist tendencies within the party, proponents of 'eurocommunism' and collaboration with the DC. As a consequence of the debates among the leadership of the PCI provoked by the coup in Chile, the legalist line got the upper hand. But for an important part of the party—above all for the old militants and functionaries marked by the experience of Stalinism and the Resistance and also by a 'class' hatred of the DC with its corruption and cold war line—it was very difficult to accept the new direction signalled by the 'historic compromise'.

This hard-line tendency of the PCI has come to be called the 'parallel party'; it is not officially recognized but it is tolerated. It groups old stalinist cadres, the majority of whom were linked to a clandestine military organization that the PC created during the war called Volunta Rossa. After the war, this organization was converted into the internal police apparatus of the party, its 'iron fist' for dealing with its opponents. It was officially dissolved (others say it went into clandestinity again) during the Cold War. Even so, actions claimed by Volunta Rossa took place in the 1950s in Regio Emilia. Their objectives of 'popular justice' against the bosses and their technique—rapid and effective actions—have a curious resemblance to those of today's armed groups. Some who hold leading positions in this parallel organization of the PCI still today occupy important positions in the local apparatus of the party and openly proclaim their stalinist positions (for example, Vidal, who as a Comin-

tern cadre in Spain in 1936 was responsible for the murders of Berneri and Nin).

More generally, the parallel party forms part of the anti-fascist milieu which is still very strong in Italy. (6) The constant preoccupation of these people has been to build a united front against the danger of a fascist coup d'etat. After the right-wing bombings which occurred in 1969 in Milan, fascist terror again appeared a reality and the problem of fascism could hardly be seen as a mystification. Indeed the bombings created a certain fear within the workers' movement. The workers believed that it was a violent response of the conservative sectors of the State to their social agitation of 1968-69. The political consequences of these events were very important. The anti-fascist front was reinforced by leftist groups of leninist inspiration, and still today attack

the fascists, particularly the MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano, neo-fascist party with parliamentary representation). Apropos of this, it should not be forgotten that it was not until 1973 that the PCI condemned leftist violence against the fascists. We could say, therefore, that the confluence of the organized leftists and the PC, and the former's acceptance of the political institutions, is the result of the anti-fascist activity since 1969. It is within this terrain of anti-fascism that the BR's have their place.

From the start, then, the BR wished to take on the role of anti-fascist defense, and at the same time to occupy the stalinist political vacuum opened up by the evolution of the PCI toward the 'historic compromise'. It should be pointed out, however, that this relationship between the BR and the 'Parallel party' is neither so simple as this nor so direct. On the one hand, this 'party' does not have a structural form with which contacts or links could be established. On the other hand, not all classic stalinists of the PCI agree with the BR; far from it, in fact, as some even propose their physical liquidation, in the name of the same logic of the fascist danger which attracts other stalinists to the BR! Nevertheless, to understand the phenomenon of armed struggle in Italy and the impact of a group like the BR, it is necessary to understand, first and foremost, that in Italian society stalinism and militant anti-fascism are an expression of a political culture with considerable roots amongst the communist masses and certain popular sectors. It is to these militant principles and traditions which the BR refers itself and to which it appeals in seeking its social basis of support.

3. THE EFFICACY OF 'POLITICAL AUTONOMY'

This said, it remains to be explained why the BR was successful where other groups failed. Although a great variety of marxist-leninist (maoist) groups sought to occupy the political terrain vacated by the PCI only the BR had the wits to understand that it was not possible to compete with the PCI in building a party of the classic type, based on mass organizations. The BR chose another road: the creation of a clandestine military organization, without direct links to 'mass work' in the maoists' traditional style. From the beginning, the BR believed that the revolutionary alternative should be presented at the military level, the level of big-time politics, in direct confrontation with the State.

When, in 1968, while the student movement was still very active, the Collettivo Politico Metropolitano di Milano decided to 'redefine marxism-leninism', it took the first steps in defining the orientation of the BR, formed from the group some months later. The leftist organizations Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio were criticized for their 'immediatist' conception of class struggle and their defense of proletarian autonomy, as well as for their corresponding underestimation of the political dimensions of the struggle and of the political instruments needed for it: in a word, of the party. The hypotheses was that the party could be reconstructed at a military level. (7) Ten years later, the conceptions of the BR have not changed, but merely become more precise, above all with respect to their fidelity to leninist principles. 'The conscious and imperative project of the communist vanguard is to create the conditions of an

alternative to the existing state, to organize strategically the revolutionary potential of the proletariat.' (8) But they have revised the typical marxism-leninism of the present day by affirming that the vanguard—ie, the armed party—cannot 'firmly consolidate the organization of proletarian power other than by the most rigid clandestinity'. (10) For these groups, 'the vanguard armed struggle is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the building of a politico-military organization of the proletariat. The other indispensable condition is the autonomous initiative of the masses.' (11)

Aside from these intervanguard polemics, it appears evident today that the Red Brigades adoption of a strictly military and clandestine line, refusing any mass practice, has kept them within the limits of an armed group, from both the political and security points of view. From the latter point of view, such a line protects militants from exposing themselves in mass activity, as the members of the other armed groups frequently do. This does not mean that members of the BR refuse all and any involvement in (for example) union activity, but that they refuse any identification with leftist-oriented mass activity. Politically, their strict clandestinity prevents the BR from gauging its political efficacy otherwise than by the success of their actions against the political institutions, unlike the other armed groups who attempt to create factory organizations linked to their armed parties, provoke factory revolts. etc.

4. REFLUX OF THE WORKERS' STRUGGLES AND THE CRISES OF LEFTISM

In their development the BR and the other armed groups were able to take advantage of the convergence of two social phenomena: the 'eurocommunist' evolution of the PCI, and the crisis into which the leftist movement entered into around 1974–75. As we have just seen, for the BR the fundamental political question is the confrontation with the State. According to the BR, leftism underestimates this 'moment' and consequently doesn't engage in Politics as the BR understands it. In 1968 such criticism of the leftists fell on deaf ears, as this period saw the social movement reach its height. But the years 1974–75 saw the reflux of the movement in the factories and a consequent crisis of the extreme left. With the decline of the workers' activity, the unions were able to reorganize, integrating newly developed forms of struggle into their structure and absorbing or neutralizing the militancy of the leftist groups. The latter, after a brief phase of growth, gradually became institutionalized, above all as a result of their electoralism. Thinking that they could participate in political power side by side with the PCI, in practice they often supported this party against the DC. The PCI, now involved in the 'historic compromise', abandoned its traditional post-war oppositional role for a policy of 'national salvation' and a social contract. These transformations provoked feelings of frustration and impotent anger among many leftists and radical factory militants. 'Progressively,' recalled a participant in the armed movement, 'we witnessed even our own organizations evolve toward the institutional struggle; they were becoming vaguely 'democratic' and increasingly disassociated from the interests of the workers . . . It was only then that we decided to take up armed struggle as the only form of struggle. This was in the autumn of 1974.' (12)

The revival of union and PCI activity was naturally stronger and more rapid in the industrial North of the country, above all in Milan. It signalled the failure of the leftists, whose idea had been to build a 'workers' leadership based on the Alfa/Pirelli/Siemens' industrial triangle and arising from the 'hegemony of the mass worker', a concept dear to the 'workerist' school. But it was exactly these mass workers who, suffering the consequences of the reorganization carried out in the 1970s in the big industries as well as the social consequences of the crisis, who became quite attracted by reformist unionism. This is one reason why 'Milan became the most favourable terrain on which to revive the hypothesis of the party,' in its armed form. (13)

Thus the years 1970–75 produced a situation in Italy which was very favourable to the proliferation of armed groups, due to the impasse reached by the autonomous tendencies within the working class, by the re-emergence of reformist control over the workers, and by the frustration this produced among leftist militants and active workers. The armed groups of this first phase came especially from the 'workerist' circles, closely linked to the experience of the production line worker and very critical of the political conceptions of the BR, particularly of their idea of the armed party created from above, to which they opposed the idea of a party formed from below, on the basis of workers' organizations and factory nuclei. Today, however, it is evident that this project has not withstood the test of time. Such groups, more easily persecuted by the police, increasingly isolated from the very workers among whom they intended to militate, and, undermined by the incompatibility of clandestine and mass activity, are today—and this is particularly true of Prima Linea, the best known—in the shadow of the BR, whose military efficacy and rigid structure ineluctably came to dominate them.

5. IDEOLOGY AND MODE OF OPERATION OF THE BR

By now the reader will have a general idea of the political principles guiding the BR. Both in their vanguardist conception of the cadre party and in their statist conception of 'socialism' the BR can be seen as a marxist-leninist organization. However, they differ from the other, more orthodox m-l groups in Italy on other questions. The core of the BR's analysis is the idea that capitalism is in a crisis caused by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which will inevitably result in a confrontation between American imperialism and Russian social-imperialism. Here the BR modify the classic leninist idea of the transformation of imperialist war into civil war. For the BR it is necessary to unleash the 'class civil war' in the imperialist metropolises now, in order to forstall a third world war. This political position is both influenced by the maoist notion of 'people's war' and 'red bases' and by the workerists' emphasis on the subjective factor. In the present period, 'in which the principal contradiction is between the metropolitan proletariat and the imperialist bourgeoisie,' the BR regard the Christian Democrats as grouping 'those politicians most closely related to imperialist circles.' (14) Through military confrontation with these 'imperialist politicians'—a task that falls to the 'revolutionary vanguard'—'the class struggle take the form of civil war.' (15) Here we see a convergence between the BR's analysis and the classic anti-fascist ideology of the 'parallel party,' which believes that the legalist line of the PCI robs it of the ability to oppose either an eventual attack on the Soviet Union or a fascist coup in Italy carried out with the collaboration of the DC.

With respect to its mode of operation, the BR obey the laws of all military and clandestine organizations. The ideology of sacrifice and centralized discipline, hallmarks of all such organizations, are here carried to an extreme justified by the stalinist ideology of the party. The BR don't hesitate to declare that it is through their activity that a 'new proletarian person' will be forged:

The political identity of the revolutionary militant means, first and foremost, the Party. It is through the principles, the strategy, the program, and the discipline of the Party that the militant, freely and autonomously, recognizes himself. (16)

The stalinist tradition serves as the cement of the clandestine structure, contrary to what happened within the armed groups in West Germany, where the militants, influenced by a sort of anarcho-individualism, rapidly came into conflict with the principles of clandestine military organization. (17) Unlike the members of these German groups, the BR members (or at least the majority of them) do not always live in total clandestinity. They also lead 'normal' lives, so that they are, for instance, involved in union activities, mainly in the PCI-dominated unions, where they present the image of active but not extremist workers. But this changes from the moment that the militant goes into total clandestinity, which is the

inevitable logic of this type of activity.

The experience of the Italian armed groups gives us a good idea of the functioning of a leninist clandestine organization inside modern society, and the political content of the social relations created within it. In an interview published in an Italian wide-circulation magazine, a militant of an armed group (not the BR) has given an account of a professional of armed struggle. The militants are obliged 'to lead a double life and to follow strictly a certain mode of behaviour, which is the proof of their suitability as militants; they cannot frequent political circles or mix with comrades from the movement. . . All in all, they must lead a regular life. They cannot freely leave the organization, as this is a decision taken centrally. To join the organization the candidate has to present excellent credentials, and even then is followed during an 'apprenticeship' period. Intimate personal relations are forbidden, as these can cause conflicts with the organization. Living as a couple is prohibited unless the relationship is legalized. . . The public image of the clandestine activist has to be that of a model worker. At work, he doesn't discuss politics.' (18)

The same principles regulate the attitudes of these militants in prison. For example, during a revolt in a special prison at Asinara (which 'houses' many members of different armed groups), an anarchist prisoner, Horst Fantazzi, managed to send out a chronicle of the revolt to the journal *Anarchismo*. The prison Struggle Committee expelled Fantazzi from the prisoners' organization and ostracized him within the prison, on the ground that the text had not been ratified by it before being sent out. This exemplifies much behaviour like that of the PCI under fascism, when party members in prison ostracized anyone not in complete agreement with the Party.

The least one can say is that it is hardly by employing such means to combat the old world, both in their own organizations and in relations to others, that the armed groups are going to usher in the new. On the contrary, they do no more than to perpetuate the forms of the old.

6. THE ARMED GROUPS AND THE PCI: FROM CRITICISM TO CONFRONTATION

Given the stabilizing role played by the PCI in the functioning of the parliamentary system and social institutions of Italy today, it is quite normal that the strategy of the armed groups responds to the political line of the party and is sensitive to its tactical changes. We have already seen how the development of armed struggle was closely related to the victory of the line of the 'historical compromise' within the PCI. To a certain extent, the political attitude of groups like the BR toward the PCI has changed in response to the difficulties encountered by the 'eurocommunist' line and also according to the events unleashed by the armed struggle itself. From the beginning, these groups considered it necessary to carry out a political struggle against the present direction of the party—the Berlinguer line. They never question the party, simply its present leadership. Basically, they consider the PCI as a secondary force in the tendency toward the creation of a 'world imperialist state' while they regard the DC as a primary expression of this tendency. Neither is the PCI viewed as the expression of a tendency of national capital in Italy, (19) with interests in the fortunes of Italian capitalism at the world level. At most, it is seen as an expression of the 'labour aristocracy'. Like all other m-l groups, the BR believe that the rank and file of the party have been hoodwinked by the eurocommunist leadership, and that their armed actions will cause the ranks to open their eyes and rediscover the 'correct line'. The BR are quite explicit about this: 'The solution will inevitably be found in the armed struggle, about which it will be necessary to take a position. The PC itself will be involved in this process. We here reaffirm our unitary position in relation to all comrades who chose the path of armed struggle.' (20) This attitude—which the BR share with other groups of the extreme left, such as Lotta Continua and Potero Operaio—is based on the idea that 'the deepening of the crises and the growing class confrontation is progressively reducing the viability of reformism. Such an

analysis, however, fails to understand the historical and structural roots of reformism within the working class, and views its strength only in periods of economic expansion as inherently stabilizing. This type of analysis is therefore incapable of seeing that after the period of the reinforcement of the unions in the factories comes the growth of the role of the reformist party in the management of the crises.' (21) Moreover, this underestimation of the role of reformism in periods of crisis results in 'viewing the State almost exclusively in its repressive aspect.' (22) In conclusion, 'such a practice (in relation to the PC) not only made the armed groups incapable of building an alternative to reformism inside the working class, but also left them indirectly dependent on the reformist project, insofar as their initiatives were directed against those sectors of the capitalist apparatus (the DC) which reformism was also attempting to push to the side.' (23)

After the Moro affair, which should be understood as an attack on the line of the 'historical compromise,' the 'armed party' was obliged to modify its tactical attitude toward the PCI slightly, but without altering the basic analysis of which we spoke above. In fact, the PCI's call for an 'upsurge of democratic consciousness' against terrorism, its campaign of denunciation in the factories, couldn't leave these groups indifferent, the BR above all. In their 'Strategic Resolution No 5' the BR denounce the Berlinguer line as 'representative of a bourgeois front' and an 'instrument of the imperialist state of the multinationals.' According to the BR the PCI, in collaboration with the 'union bureaucracy,' have in practice 'denounced the revolutionary vanguard, trying to destabilize and later smash the resistance of the working class.' (24) In this new situation, it is no longer sufficient just to criticize and condemn 'eurocommunism'. It is necessary to pass to the attack, and the Berlinguer line becomes a target of the armed struggle. After a first attack on a party bureaucrat in Genoa, in charge of the relations between State enterprises and the PCI, the BR directly attacked the Party's policy of denouncing BR sympathizers in the factories, killing the Communist trade unionist Rozza who had informed on a BR sympathizer to the police. This new step in the confrontation with the PC had contradictory consequences for the strategy of the BR. The reaction of the PCI to this attack was very rapid and the whole of the Party apparatus was mobilized in a reaction of self-defense. If up to then the BR's actions always had the goal of causing difficulties for the 'eurocommunist' line, the killing of Rozza was understood as an attack on the Party as such and unified the whole bureaucracy around the apparatus. For the first time there was no convergence between the objectives of the BR and those of the 'parallel party.'

7. THE RELAPSE OF THE 'MOVEMENT' OF 1977

The events of 1977 shook up the Italian extreme left and the armed groups. This movement had very special characteristics. (25) While it spread mainly among the youth, especially the socially marginalized, it also demonstrated a quite sophisticated political consciousness, able to alternate violence with the satirization of reformist institutions and those of the State. Nevertheless, this movement quickly reached a political and an organizational impasse. The mass assemblies which were the organizational forms of this movement were unable to extend beyond the student and marginal milieu. The attitude of the PCI also had an important bearing on this outcome. The PCI never attempted to co-opt the Movement but, on the contrary, from the beginning it did everything possible to oppose it and to isolate it from the working class. A part of the Movement reacted strongly against this isolation, expressing its frustration by introducing new analytical concepts to deal with the situation. The 'social worker' and the 'diffuse factory' were the concepts through which they sought to give expression to the idea of a new revolutionary subject, after the failure of the political project based on the 'mass worker' of the 1960s. This situation was further aggravated by the crisis of the radical factory militants who, very marked by a 'workerist subjectivism',

were forced to recognize their impotence in introducing the new discourse of the Movement into the factories. Once more, after a period during which events had overtaken them, the armed groups rediscovered a favourable terrain for recruitment.

The BR regarded the Movement of '77 as a type of non-political agitation, concerned only with defensive actions. They did not, for instance, hide their disagreement over the street fighting which was a feature of this period. As Sergio Bologna points out, non-political activities can in no way 'influence the institutional balance of the State or the machinery of government. By the way they conducted their Turin trial and the Moro kidnapping, the BR demonstrated to the left-wing workers and to the Movement of '77 these forces' inability to act politically, ie, to have any influence at the institutional level.' (26) Even though this only demonstrates the BR's purely bourgeois conception of politics, the fact remains that a part of the Movement of '77, and above all the more violent 'autonomist' wing, accepted these criticisms as correct, and associated itself with the positions of the armed groups, and in particular with those of the BR. It was not by chance, we may add, that the Moro kidnapping occurred immediately after the failure and the break-up of the Movement of '77; the moment was well chosen by the BR to demonstrate their political efficiency, their capacity to act at the level of the institutions, in contradistinction to that of the crisis-ridden left, of the Movement and of the Autonomists. Of course, many of the militants who passed from the autonomist movement into the armed groups did so without great ideological difficulty, thanks to their leninist conceptions of political action, political power, and revolution. Enzo Modugno of the review *Marxiana*, clearly pointed this out when, in 1977, he criticized those who wanted to exclude the gun-toting autonomists from the Movement: 'It is necessary to understand the reasons why these individuals resort to the gun. These autonomous groups cannot be reduced to three or four homicidally inclined youth; . . . what is today called the ideology of the P 38 was only yesterday the political line of the revolutionary parties.' (27)

8. THE BR AND THE WORKING CLASS

Before dealing with the consequences that the actions of the BR and the armed groups have had for the workers' movement, two points should be made clear. Firstly, many members of the BR are workers. However, it is not by this criterion that we judge the BR to be 'separated or not from the working class.' We consider the BR to be a particular and momentary expression of a traditional tendency within the Italian workers' movement, the stalinist tendency. Secondly, it is important to understand the BR's position on the process of self-organization which dominated the Italian workers' experience since the end of the 1960s. Basically, the BR consider every and any workplace struggle to be defensive, lacking in any political content (in the institutional sense). The only political actions are those which are part of the 'offensive movement of proletarian resistance,' ie, those which have a 'politico-military content.' (28) On the basis of this extremely militarist conception of political activity, the BR reject any expression of autonomist factory organization as a manifestation of 'centrism' (note the typically stalinist terminology). To these autonomist factory organizations, the BR oppose the idea of 'organs of the proletarian State.' (29) Here is an entire political programme in a nutshell.

In describing the reaction of the workers to recent events, we will schematically consider three aspects of the situation: 1) In the present social economic crisis, a large part of the working class feels an insecurity provoked by the worsening of their living standards. This sentiment is projected—and channelled by the State—into a demand for order and social stability, for the repression of criminality and of the armed groups.

2) It was in such an atmosphere that the political parties and the mass media, as well as the State's ideological appara-

tus, could organize demonstrations protesting against Moro's death. For its part, the Left condemned the BR on two counts. On the one hand, it evoked the danger of a fascist coup, thus resurrecting the old anti-fascist sentiments; on the other hand, employing the well-worn ideology which presents the police as 'workers', it tried to appeal to people's emotions over the five police agents shot dead during Moro's kidnapping. The truth is that the demonstrations which took place were the expressions of a total mobilization of political society. Even sectors of the population not normally disposed to act closed their doors in sympathy. In many factories, workers were paid during the strike of protest at Moro's death. But we should also point out that many people who came onto the streets did so neither to praise Moro nor to bury the BR, but simply to express their confusion about the event.

3) In the following days, all this created a feeling of unease among many factory militants, even among activists of the union left and of the political groups who did not identify themselves with the climate of national unity that the political parties tried to create around the event. This uneasiness was expressed, for example, in Milan, over a proposed demonstration against the murder of two militants of *Autonomia*, killed by the police (or by fascists) after Moro's assassination. In the Milan factories, there was a big debate on whether or not to strike and join the demonstration. Despite the opposition of the PCI, the workers and the factory organizations ended up participating massively; for many, though, this was only reasonable as they had already demonstrated in favour of Moro! In any event, more than 100,000 people, almost as many as for Moro's burial, came onto the streets, and it was evident that the demonstration carried an implicit criticism of the Sacred Union desired by the PCI.

9. THE PCI AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE AUTONOMIST MOVEMENT AMONG THE WORKERS

Following on the heels of the Moro case, the PCI attempted to profit from the general mood of confusion to witch-hunt the radical factory nuclei and to tighten its control over the working class in general. But this policy met with little success, mainly because the workers themselves did not support it. The right and the left within the unions also reacted against this policy as both feared that it would allow the PCI irreversibly to reinforce its repressive power within the factories. The union right maintained that only the State should exercise the function of repression, while the left, fearing that its own members might be caught up in the PCI hunt for extremists, opposed any wave of repression in the factories, though they nevertheless clearly distanced themselves from the BR.

The PCI has accused groups of radical workers of being potential members of the BR. Even in those factories where the PCI is strongly represented, however, the workers have rejected this attempt at criminalisation and denunciation refusing, as they say in Italy, to become the State, to internally police the factories. Only some bureaucrats (like Rozza) from the Communist union apparatus have dared to denounce sympathizers of the armed groups to the police. Nevertheless, there have been cases where the PCI has achieved positive results in its crusade against the activities of the extra-union militants. A good example is what happened to an autonomist workers' collective at the port of Genoa. After distributing a leaflet entitled 'Neither the BR nor the State,' this group was violently denounced as 'brigatisti', which led to its isolation and political weakness. One should recall that after 1977 this group had achieved a certain strength in the port, since the war an untouchable fief of the PCI.

At the same time, however, reformism made other uses of anti-terrorism, above all as a stick with which to beat any combativity in the factories. But here too, things didn't go so well for the PCI, at least in the cases we know of. In SIP (National Telephone Company) in Milan, during the general assembly of workers intended to ratify the contract (May '78), the union attempted to use the anti-BR, pro-national unity line, to justify the need for 'a reasonable attitude in

this period of crisis.' The workers' reaction was straight to the point: We don't care about these stories; we're here to talk about our concrete situation as wage labourers. This case exemplifies the attitude of the mass of workers to the BR: not only do they fail to see what all this military activity has to do with them, but they also recognize that all of the political forces are making capital out of it, from the PCI to the Christian Democrats. For the workers, it is all Politics with a capital 'p', in the traditional sense—ie, exactly the sense in which the BR understand it; an activity completely separate from the workers, from their conditions of existence, from their problems and struggles. It is moreover significant that the union now have much more difficulty in calling protest strikes whenever an armed action is carried out. As a worker said to some journalists during one of these strikes, 'Will you go on strike if they kill me?' while another commented, 'Now that they're knocking off one a day, I won't have much of a wage at the end of the month if we go on strike for all of them.' (30) In January '79, when the PCI called a protest strike against the killing of Rozza by the BR's, 3000 out of the 6000 workers of Alfa-Romeo in Milan stayed at home on sick leave (and for two more days following the strike) in a clear manifestation of the desire to separate their interests from those of the Party and above all of their refusal of such political strikes.

On the other hand, one slogan of the BR, the simplest, is quite well received by the masses, when they insist that 'those responsible for the difficult situation of the people are the corrupt politicians of the DC.' This slogan was in fact used by the PCI for many years. Further, in relation to the BR, the workers very often manifest an attitude of expectation, seeing them as those who can 'do justice for us', beating the corrupt politician, the hated foreman, the exploiting boss. All of this makes it even more evident how substitutionist these types of actions are.

Today in Italy, after a few years during which its control was severely weakened by the development of the autonomist struggles of the workers, reformism has returned to dominate the scene, including the factories. It is true that oppositional tendencies still confront the line of 'national sacrifice', but these nuclei of opposition, above all in the service sector, by and large feed off the demagogic and unsophisticated way in which the PCI presents its policy of 'historic compromise' and 'national salvation'. As the economic crisis deepens, fear conquers a growing number of workers (though this doesn't mean that the situation could not rapidly change); and, more than the political spectacle offered by the BR, the actions carried out by the armed 'workerist' groups run the risk of reinforcing that fear, facilitating the acceptance of the reformist project. The case of Alfa-Romeo in Milan is worth considering in this respect.

This enormous factory, the stronghold of workers' agitation since 1969, is something of a thermometer of the Milanese working class. An autonomist workers' collective is active inside the factory and has led to some important struggles. (31) When the factory management decided to reestablish compulsory overtime, this collective mounted pickets at the factory gates. Their action, however, was not well received and they failed to carry the majority of the workers with them. For the first time ever, some PC-goons tried to expel the workers of the collective from the factory. Shortly afterwards, an armed group sabotaged the machinery. The workers, in response, fearing that they would lose their jobs because of the risk of the factory closing down, showed less hostility to the union policy of sacrifices, working an extra Saturday to recover production lost because of the sabotage.

The radical factory collectives which still exist, more or less throughout Italy, have only just begun to discuss, though hesitantly, the question of terrorism. Their main and immediate problem is to defend themselves against the PCI's attempts to outlaw them. Thus far, they have done so by exploiting the contradictions of the PC, in particular its changes in attitude toward the DC, by refusing to discuss the question of the armed groups with the Party, and by opposing the question of the workers' living conditions to

that of the 'danger of terrorism'. Nevertheless, many workers' collectives have already explicitly criticized the armed groups and their adverse effects on revolutionary activities in the factories, attacking in particular the substitutionist character of their actions. (33) But these collectives have yet to discuss the basic principles of the armed groups, or the problem of the State and its relation to revolutionary activity. Indeed, the echo found by political terrorism in Italy among many militants from the leninist left has been in large part due to the inability of this current to deal with the problem of the State. Each time that the social movement has had to confront the State, in 1972 and again in 1977, leftism was capable only of an electoralist response, in contrast to which the BR could present themselves as 'effective' in the realm of political action. It is in this sense that we can say that the relation between the radical factory nuclei on the one hand and the BR and the armed groups on the other reflects the impotence that the former feel in relation to the reigning social reality above all in the factories. In the same way, 'the experience of armed struggle expressed and still expresses, for a part of the proletariat, the need for a radical break with the present state of things. The problem resides not in the need to exorcise this necessity by tactical means, but to locate it within the worker himself, since only when this necessity is expressed through a process of self-organization will it then have a role, one based not on strictly political objectives like that of the confrontation with the State, but on the process of the growth of class power.' (34)

10. THE IMPOTENT ARMS OF LENINISM

In modern capitalist society, any armed activity must necessarily be based on an organization of a military type. As such, it cannot escape the logic of the State which, in the last resort, determines the whole of its organisational functioning and internal social relations, as well as its relations to the social environment.

Therefore, the model of the armed struggle organizations is perfectly compatible with the bolshevik conception of the revolutionary party. For the BR, as for the German RAF, this organization must be built on, and through, armed struggle. As has already been pointed out, the RAF 'added to the substitutionism of Lenin, who replaced the proletariat by the Party, by replacing the Party by the armed struggle.' (35) It is, then, quite correct to see in the emergence of these groups and activities 'more the product of the end of a period than the signs of the emergence of a new one.' But these old conceptions of revolution and the leninist foundations of these groups are not merely evident in their form of organization. They are also to be found in the content of their revolutionary project, in the violence against the State which they see as the essential aspect of social transformation. This is why it is wrong to see these groups as raising 'the problem of the destruction of the State.' On the contrary, their conception of the revolution remains an essentially political one—the objective is the destabilization of the State—while their principles of functioning rapidly lead toward the creation of a mini-State organization, a mirror-image of the enemy it is fighting against.

Furthermore, we might also refer to the famous 'military question' of the revolution that many people also believe has been raised by the activities of these groups. To be sure, the 'military question' was one of the specific aspects of the bourgeois revolutions of the past, characterized by the weakness of the working class and the resulting strategies of class alliances. The end of the nineteenth century in Europe, the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia and, later on, the upheavals in the countries which freed themselves from colonialism, provide us with plenty of examples. Today, however, in the countries where capitalism rules in its most developed form, not only can the social revolution not be conceived as a 'party question', but it also cannot be conceived as a 'military question'. In modern societies, where wage-labour relations have become generalized throughout private and collective life, the subversion of the capitalist order can only be realized through the takeover and control

of the productive apparatus, through its transformation on the basis of new social principles, under the control of the producers themselves. While the attempt to accomplish this is bound to lead to violent confrontations with the bourgeoisie, its State and the political and social forces which defend state capitalism, there can be no doubt that these confrontations will mainly occur within the framework of this process of taking over the apparatus of social production (because its control is the key to political power in society) and not on the traditional and specialized level of military action. It is therefore hard to imagine what use the 'military experience' of the armed groups would be. On the contrary, the success of the anti-capitalist forces in these confrontations will depend on their superiority and not on any so-called military efficiency of a specialized group (which in fact would be difficult to imagine, given the efficiency of the repressive forces of the State).

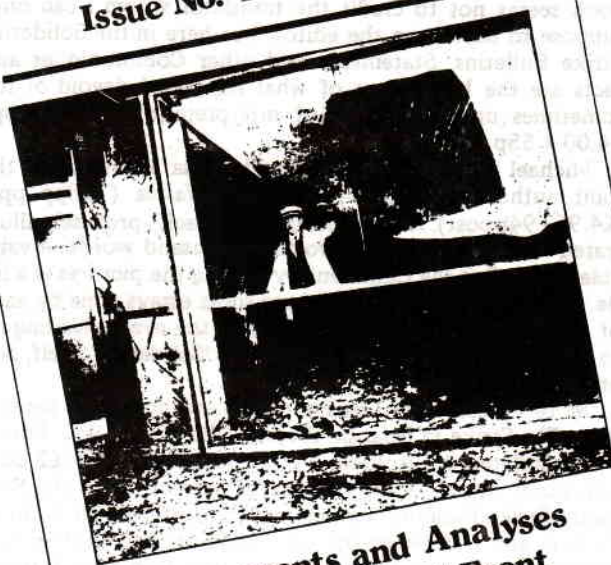
The recent experience of the Portuguese 'revolution' of 1974-75, despite its limits, makes this point clearer. When the right-wing putsch of November 25th took place, what remained of the Portuguese proletariat was insufficient even to consider opposing a coup which clearly represented the beginning of a period of the imposition of law and order. What this implies is that the workers were unable to develop and organize a different and clearly anti-capitalist social project, so that the defense of the 'revolution' was delegated—automatically and without discussion—to the specialized apparatuses of the 'military question,' the populist sectors of the Army and the armed cells of leftist groups. The result is well known. In other words, here as elsewhere, the 'military question', was raised because the *social question* had been buried (or solved) beforehand. In fact, if the bourgeoisie is able to push the class confrontation to the strictly military level, the proletariat will be smashed in advance. Earlier in history, the much more important example of the Spanish revolution of 1936 also showed how the development and predominance of military activity meant the neutralization of the social revolution.

If the present crisis of capitalism deepens, if social confrontations erupt and spread, and if the wage laboring masses begin to lose faith in the system, then, little by little, we will see capitalism and its State forced into a situation where the choices will be few. The use of the traditional mechanism for integrating the working class will basically depend on the capacities of the parties and the unions to control the responses of the proletariat. If this does not produce results, the capitalist State will be obliged to use its repressive machine, with far greater force than the armed

struggle groups have obliged it to use up to now. If, despite all this, the working class is able to find in its struggles the determination and initiative to go further, to organize itself on a new basis (refusing leaderships, the delegation of power and strategies of class conciliation) to build a framework for subverting the present order and system of production, then circumstances will be transformed. The politics of a radical social movement will replace military strategies of the apprentice officers of the 'brigades' and 'armies' of all kinds, devoid of any anti-capitalist perspective for the mass of wage labourers.

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NOTES

1. Monicelli, "L'Ultrainistra in Italia, 1968-1978" (Bari: Laterza, 1978), pp 160-161.
2. "Le Monde", 7:1:79.
3. 'Workerism' was a political tendency that appeared in Italy in the sixties around the journal "Quaderni Rossi" (later "Classe Operaia"), whose best known theoreticians were Tronti, Cacciari, Rosa, Negri, Scalzone and Bologna. Tronti's book "Workers and Capital" (several chapters of which have been translated and published in "Telos") is a basic text of this current, which had a strong influence on the Italian ultra-left in the sixties and seventies. Workerism emphasized the 'subjective factor' in social change and, drawing on the experience of the struggles of Southern workers in Northern Italian factories, looked to the 'mass worker'—in contrast to the skilled craftsman of the past—as the agent of change. The recent evolution of most of the workerist theoreticians attests to the Leninist basis of their theories: Tronti, Rosa and Cacciari have joined the PCI and today are part of the Party's ideological apparatus, while Negri and Scalzone play a significant role within the neo-leninist tendency of Autonomia Organizzata. (Both were recently arrested, accused of complicity in the Red Brigade killing of Aldo Moro.) In his latest text, Tronti defends the eurocommunist conception of the State, characterizing it as 'neither more or less than the modern form of the autonomist organization of the working class.' Only Sergio Bologna and the group around the journal "Primo Maggio" have opened themselves to a critique of Leninism.
4. Monicelli, op cit, p 160.
5. Ibid, p 164.
6. It is interesting to note that Italy is the European country with both the strongest Communist Party and the strongest fascist party, the MSI.

7. Collective text, 'Note sul' esperienza di lotta armata,' in "Collegamenti" 1:3-4 (1978).
8. Brigate Rosse, 'Risoluzione della direzione strategica delle BR.' in "Moro, una tragedia italiana" (Rome: Saggi, 1978), pp 103 and 106.
9. Ibid.
10. 'Parla un terrorista,' interview with a member of an armed group, in "Panorama" 6:6:78.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. 'Note sul' esperienza di lotte armata,' op cit.
14. The PCI-controlled National League of Cooperatives, which groups firms from a number of sectors, including agriculture, commerce and construction, is the third largest economic group in Italy, with investments in other countries (especially in the Third World).
15. Interview of BR spokesman in "Espresso" (September 1971).
16. 'Note sul' esperienza . . .' op cit.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. "Le Monde" 26:1:79.
20. See Sergio Bologna, 'La tribu delle talpa,' in "Primo Maggio" 8.
21. Sergio Bologna, text on the BR (unpublished, but circulating in Milan in radical political circles).
22. Monicelli, op cit, pp 151.
23. 'Risoluzione della direzione strategica . . .' op cit, p 95.
24. 'Secondo documento delle BR' January 1973.
25. Monicelli op cit pp 183 and 185.
26. See the articles on Italy in nos 9 and 10 of "Spartacus".
27. "La Repubblica" 12:6:78.
28. 'Note sul' esperienza . . .' op cit.
29. Ibid.
30. 'La Bande a Baader' in "La guerre sociale" 2 (1978).