

Antonio Gramsci 1921

Men of Flesh and Blood

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The workers of Fiat have returned to their jobs. Betrayal? Denial of revolutionary ideals? The workers of Fiat are men of flesh and blood. They resisted for a month. They knew how to fight and resist, not only for themselves, not only for the rest of the working masses of Turin, but for the entire Italian working class.

They resisted for a month. They were physically worn out because, for many weeks and months, their salaries were reduced and were no longer sufficient to sustain their families, and yet they resisted for a month. They were completely isolated from the nation, immersed in a general atmosphere of weariness, indifference, hostility, and yet they resisted for a month.

They knew not to expect any outside assistance. They knew that the Italian working class was now rendered helpless, condemned to defeat, and yet they resisted for a month. There is no shame in the defeat of the Fiat workers. We can't ask of a mass of men who, assailed by the most pressing needs of existence, who are responsible for the existence of a population of 40,000 people, we can't ask of them more than was given by these comrades who returned to work, sadly, regretfully, conscious of the impossibility of further resistance or action.

Especially we Communists, who live side by side with the workers, who know their needs, who have a realistic idea of the situation, should understand the reasons for this conclusion to the Turinese struggle.

For too many months the masses fought, for too many years they exhausted themselves in small scale actions, squandering their means and their energy. And this was the reproach that at the end of May 1919 we of “*Ordine Nuovo*” consistently put forth to the heads of the workers and socialist movements: don’t abuse the resistance and the virtue of sacrifice of the proletariat. We were dealing with ordinary men, real men subject to the same weaknesses as all the ordinary men that we pass on the street; who drink in the taverns, talk in groups in the plazas, who are hungry and cold, who are moved when they hear their children cry and their wives loudly lament.

Our revolutionary optimism has always been sustained by this crudely pessimistic vision of human reality, which must inexorably be taken into account. A year ago we already foresaw what the Italian situation would result in if the responsible leaders were to continue in their tactic of revolutionary squalls and opportunist practice. And we desperately fought to recall these responsible individuals to a more realistic, more practical vision, one more congruous and in accordance with the development of events.

Today we are paying for the ineptitude and the blindness of the others. Even today the Turinese proletariat must support the blows of the adversary, strengthened by the non-resistance of the others. There is no shame in the surrender of the workers of Fiat. That which had to happen implacably did happen. The Italian working class has been flattened beneath the steamroller of capitalist reaction. For how long? Nothing is lost if belief and consciousness remain intact, if bodies surrenders, but not souls.

The workers of Fiat fought for years strenuously, have bathed the streets in their blood, have suffered from hunger and cold. Thanks to their glorious past they remain in the vanguard of the Italian proletariat, they remain militants faithful and devoted to the revolution. They have done what is given men of flesh and blood to do. We should take off our hats before their humiliation, because even in this there is something grand that inspires the sincere and the honest.