

“Welcome to the Freest City in the World”¹

I.

“Bologna is the freest city in the world.” Renato Zangheri,² 1977

“The USSR is the most democratic State in the world.” Stalin, 1939³

“Go and preach rubbish to the world.” Dante, *Paradiso*, XXIX⁴

Comrades,

History offers few examples of a movement of social revolt as profound as the one that began in Italy in February 1977, and none in which a Stalinist party not officially in power has so unashamedly fought and insulted the proletariat in struggle. For the first time in the West, a so-called Communist Party has not only proposed to organize the defeat of the proletariat – thus running the risk of being defeated by it (as in Barcelona in 1936) – but also to *triumph over the proletariat* in conjunction with the bourgeoisie. It is useful to state this simple truth with respect to Bologna, which is the Disneyland of Italian Stalinism but also, for that very reason, the stronghold of revolutionary anti-Stalinism.

The so-called Communist Party cannot openly proclaim that its governmental program is to maintain the wage slavery of the working class by any means, but, to earn credibility from its bourgeois allies, it is forced *from now on* to realize its program by repressing and slandering our struggle. To attain power, the Stalinist Italians must criticize their counterparts in Eastern Europe to a certain extent, but in their desire to exercise power, they must do here exactly what there criticize over there. They act like pluralists and democrats among the bosses, and like cops among the workers.

But just as the proletariat no longer has no illusions about the true intentions of the Italian Communist Party, the proletariat should not overestimate the strength of these bureaucrats. Too close to power to not to be its accomplices, the Stalinists are not yet close enough to receive the power and benefits for which they had hoped. Sufficiently far from the working class that they will never be obeyed by it, they are not far enough away

¹ “*Benvenuti nella città più libera del mondo*” was distributed in Bologna, Rome and Milan on 23 September 1977, accompanied by an Italian translation of the Situationist International’s text “Minimum Definitions of the Revolutionary Organization.” Sanguinetti added to the latter a subtitle: “Or How to Recognize Those That Are Not.” The main statement was later translated into French as “*Bienvenue dans la ville la plus libre du monde.*”

² Mayor of Bologna and member of the Italian Communist Party.

³ A poster designed by Vladimir Sachkov in 1984 and posted to reddit.com proclaims, “The Soviet government is a million time more democratic than the most democratic of the bourgeois republics.”

⁴ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Paradiso*, XXIX, line 110, p. 480.

to escape its judgment. Of all the Stalinists, the Italian ones are *the most boastful!*

Everywhere, in all the alienation-factories, wildcat struggles, which the union bureaucrats are no longer able to prevent or hide, break out against work. The workers have found that “the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor that is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases” (*Capital*, Volume III). Here and there, the first forms of the proletariat’s self-organization, in which delegates are recallable [at any time] by the rank and file, are beginning to appear. The more the Stalinists repress our struggles, and the more there is to repress, their dirty work proportionately increases as they engage in it, and their last illusions about their role as the usurping “representatives” of the working class disappear at the precise time when they need them the most. In sum, the so-called Communist Party *no longer has the strength to be what it is not*. And to the extent that the Stalinists want to keep the proletariat prisoner in the logic of their interests in domination, the ICP has become the Bastille of the Italian revolution: if the proletariat destroys it, it will triumph, and then it can take care of all its other enemies.

II

We are here to fight the ongoing repression, not lament it; we must not mouth rhetoric about the repression, but defeat it. The primary goal of all repression has always been to put the revolutionary movement on the defensive. The rhetoric of repression, which forces the movement to be on the defensive, *plays into the hands of the repression*. Instead, our fight against repression must be an *offensive* struggle, as is our struggle against all the powers of class society. Fighting repression, we must always clearly reveal *all those who enforce it and the different ways they do so*. To recognize and *name* all of our enemies is the preliminary condition for all those who fight and win, and meeting this condition increases the ranks of our allies among the workers. It’s already an important fact to have shown that, when it comes to the repression of struggle, we must first speak of the ICP and the trade unions.

Do not forget, comrades, that the violence of repression is inversely proportional to the violence of the struggle and the number of the combatants. When many break the law and deny social conventions, no one is punished, and while limited battles are easily repressed, great and serious ones are rewarded with victory. To the extent that it exists, repression is a reality that we have to fight by returning to the offensive; we must prevent the current repression from escalating, not by making ridiculous appeals to the bureaucrats in Belgrade,⁵ but by *generalizing the offensive* and unleashing new struggles that make the old ones seem insignificant. At this time, any of us can be arrested or killed with impunity, but we should remember that one cannot escape danger without facing danger, and that we should not be afraid of repression, because it is the bureaucrats and bourgeois who fear our struggles. A movement that has prevailed and grown only when it is attacked will face defeat if it abandons this strategy.

Returning to the offensive means generalizing and radicalizing insubordination

⁵ The location of the first follow-up meeting to the Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe (CSCE), held between 4 October 1977 and 8 March 1978. On 1 August 1975, the CSCE had signed the Helsinki Accords.

against every hierarchy; exercising our destructive creativity against the society of the spectacle; sabotaging the machines and the commodities that sabotage our lives; promoting general wildcat strikes of indefinite duration; gathering together in assemblies in all the separation-factories; electing delegates who can be recalled [at any time] by the rank and file; constantly connecting all the places in struggle, without overlooking any of the technical means (radio, etc.) by which useful communication can be spread; giving direct use-value to everything that has exchange-value exchange (commodities, etc.); permanently occupying the factories and public buildings; and organizing the self-defense of the conquered territories. Let the music play!

It's hard to say how long this State will survive. It's easy, however, to foresee that it will not agree to be destroyed without putting up resistance. As long as it exists, this State will make a habit of repressing our struggles and resigning itself to sacrifice whatever remains of its "liberal" and "democratic" illusions. As for us, we will have to get used to even greater repression, and getting used to it primarily means getting used to fighting it. Fighting repression means fighting the forces that enforce it all the time and everywhere. Proletarian revolutionaries should not expect any leniency from their enemies, nor should they show any for them.

III

So far, all the repressive measures, from the minimum to the maximum, from slander to tanks, *have not benefited power those in power*, because *they have failed to prevent anything that has happened*. But we must never forget that the smallest mistake made by the movement can harm us irreparably. A lack of theoretical and practical clarity on a strategic issue, such as the issue of weapons, risks producing very serious consequences if the radical movement cannot quickly overcome it. Weapons must be *when everyone is ready to use them*. And everyone will be ready to use them when their use has become *indispensible*. The issue is not tactical, but strategic. Whoever plays with weapons today plays with power, which is better armed than we are, and we must not play with power; we must destroy it.

From the practical point of view, using weapons during a demonstration of 20,000, when only 100 are armed is not only useless, but harmful, as well: thousands of comrades who can not defend themselves would be exposed to the police's bullets. All the police officers are armed; as soon as they decide to shoot at us, there arises a situation in which those few demonstrators who are armed cannot effectively defend either themselves or the others, and those who are unarmed can only defend the others by forming a protective shield, *but without having adequate defensive tools to do so effectively*.

From the theoretical point of view, those few who come armed to demonstrations want to constitute, and in fact do constitute, a *new separate power* within a revolutionary movement that precisely fights *against every separate power* and, as such, condemns it. Recourse to the use of weapons is not a voluntary or abstract matter, but a practical necessity that certain situations require, but by *the entire* revolutionary movement, and not merely *a part of it*. Those comrades who are anxious to possess weapons today are naïve: when we really need weapons, we will quite simply take them *from the enemy*. And we must not neglect the possibilities for provocation that the casual

and reckless use of weapons offers police officers who are suitably disguised [as demonstrators] for the occasion. If we really want to fight repression, we must also fight that which provides a *pretext* or a justification for it.

Just as we have no leniency for our enemies, we should have none for ourselves, and we must pitilessly criticize the mistakes that can be fatal to the growth of the movement as a whole. The critique of weapons can never be separated from the weapons of critique. Because it anticipates repression, the impatience to use weapons today, at all costs, actually *delays* the arrival of the moment when the proletariat as a whole will have recourse to them. Those who gratify themselves with the reckless use of weapons are not the most advanced or the “hardest” part of the current revolutionary movement, but the rearguard of its theoretical and strategic consciousness.

As for terrorism, it has absolutely no utility or justification in Italy today. Historically, terrorism has only been effective when all other forms of revolutionary activity have been rendered impossible by a complete suppression and a significant part of the population has thus been brought to side with the terrorists. But in Italy today, the current movement has already obtained the sympathy of the working class, while terrorism, starting with the [bombing of the] Piazza Fontana, has always benefited the State, even when the secret services have not perpetrated it.

IV

Knowing what must be *avoided* is equally as important as knowing what should be done. In an era when *ideas have once again become dangerous*, we must, first of all, defend with our struggle the driving ideas of the movement, which the Stalinists and bourgeois have, naturally, preferred to accuse of having no ideas. Their choice is understandable, because these ideas *imply their negation*. Moreover, if ideas are really so unimportant, which is what the Stalinists and bourgeois are trying to make people believe, then they cannot explain why ideas have been able to create a movement that is so vast, deep and long-lasting as the current one. In the same way, we ourselves could not explain what has caused the hysteria and fear experienced by Cossiga⁶ and Berlinguer.⁷ By accusing our movement of a lack of ideas, these men are in fact accusing it of not sharing their own *inability to think*.

By the simple fact that it manifested itself in the forms that it did, this movement is the definitive rejection of all political parties and all hierarchies; it is the living critique of all ideologies and political specialists; it embraces the refusal of work and unemployment, and the taste for free communication and dialogue, and thus [the taste] for festivity and games. How did this come about? The protest of the young proletarian generation became revolutionary as soon as it detached itself from the hierarchies of the groups and parties with extremist claims that, after 1968, were tasked with recuperating and leading that protest into the blind alley of alienated militancy. Comrades, we must be careful to prevent from forming among us bureaucratic hierarchies and small groups that

⁶ Francesco Cossiga (1928-2010), a Christian Democrat, the Minister of the Interior from February 1976 to May 1978.

⁷ Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984) was the National Secretary of the Italian Communist Party from March 1972 to June 1984.

have the pretension to lead us! We must combat the imposture of the backwards Leninist and neo-Bolshevik groups: the degree of *real autonomy* from the corpses of the past that we will be able to attain will decide the fate of our movement. We have no need of public safety committees⁸ to tell us what to do or not do: our intelligence is always sufficient to understand the necessities of the situation. Public safety committees commit more abuses of power and errors than they prevent; their police-role within the movement in fact reproduces a separate, counter-revolutionary power. Such committees form the basis for recreating hierarchy and become the tool of those who, having understood nothing of this movement or social revolution, have the ambition to become its leaders. Both past experience and modern revolutionary theory teach us that “the revolutionary organization must learn that it can no longer *combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle*” (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*).⁹

What is needed now is precisely what was needed at the beginning of the revolutionary proletarian project: namely, the autonomous action of the working class in its struggle for the abolition of wage labor, the commodity, and the State; the entrance into conscious history, and the suppression all separations and everything that exists independently of individuals. The proletariat already knows its enemies, and it knows that one can only fight and win by organizing Workers’ Councils. The Councils are clearly the only solution, because all the other forms of organization have achieved the opposite of what they proclaimed.

Comrades, let us sow the wind and reap the whirlwind! Spread these slogans everywhere, by every available means, radio, posters, writings, speeches, etc.:

Abolish class society!

All power to the Workers’ Councils!

Work is the sabotage of life: sabotage work!

Destroy the society of the spectacle!

Humanity will not be happy until the day that the last bureaucrat is hung with the guts of the last capitalist!

Immediately release all those arrested!

The emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself!

The Association for the Propagation of the Contagious Epidemic of Anger
Bologna, 23 September 1977

⁸ *Servizi d’ordine* (“security services”).

⁹ Adopting the translation in Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), Thesis 122, p. 89.