

# Italy: the streets are up for grabs

By Fred Mobile

A senior police official got it half-right when he characterized the current uproar in Italy to a reporter as follows: "We are in a gradual and decentralized version of France's May 1968. Italy is a much more flexible society, so it takes longer for it (impending collapse) to show up."

It looks a lot like '68 in Italy these days, if you concentrate on the mass mobilizations of young people, their attacks (physical, even) on the sell-out and sectarian Left, their direct action tactics against the police and the business elite, their counter-culture disdain of all stripes of ideology and authority.

But the Italian Spring of '77, which resulted in the fiercest street fighting seen in Rome and other major centres since the Second World War, has thrust onto the proscenium of political drama a whole new cast of characters whose revolutionary potential was only hinted at in '68.

Among these new actors:

—The Metropolitan Indians, costumed and war-painted, heirs of the Provos and the Yippies. They are militantly "anti-political," and their heavily-pointed derisive slogans are aimed not only at capitalism (as in '68), but at the anti-capitalists as well: "Long Live Sacrifice," "More Work, Less Pay," "Bosses' Power," etc.

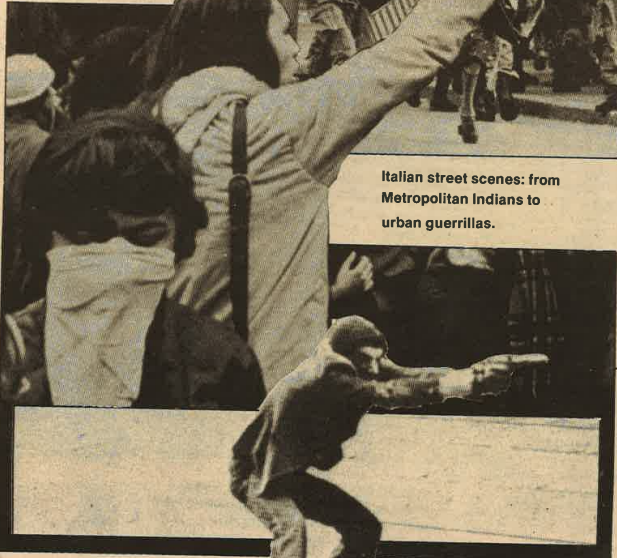
—The "autodiduttori" self-appointed price-cutters who are building a movement based on printing their own bus and theatre tickets and electricity bills and ransacking supermarkets and other business establishments in order to expropriate the surplus on behalf of themselves (the consumers).

—The autonomous groups beyond number and description, bringing together society's "unwashed"—the homosexuals, the feminists, the rank-and-file workers—and steering a spontaneous, irreverent and anti-authoritarian course independent of all parties and politics.

**Emarginated Workers**

But there's an even newer

element: the whole army of "emarginated" workers, former workers and never-were workers who have been jettisoned by the wage economy in this hour of Italian capitalism's crisis. They are the sons and



Italian street scenes: from Metropolitan Indians to urban guerrillas.

daughters of southern peasants, the survivors of the big city ghettos, the "lower middle" clerks and shop-workers who have lost their job security (some call them the lumpen-bourgeoisie) and, increasingly, they are the "criminal" elements who are finally starting to get a clue.

As the Italian journal **Anarchismo** noted (in a report sent to **Open Road**): "The minorities, which have been excluded from the right to work, have found themselves in the ghettos prepared for them by the capitalist bosses. They were given no alternative except that of accepting to be turned into criminals..."

"But if this criminal blossoming had been anticipated by the ruling class, they had not anticipated, on the contrary, the process of politicization of the criminal

elements, a process which has been realized following the propaganda aimed in this direction, and following the strong presence of comrades in the prisons."

The difference between '68 and '77 is put another way by a member of one of the autonomous feminist groups: "May '68 was the revolution of the privileged, the sons of well-to-do parents. '77, on the other hand, is mainly the revolt of the desperate, the unemployed of today and tomorrow, the proletarians" (quoted in the British anarchist journal **Zero**).

Again, unlike '68, the new movement has accepted no leaders, and no mediation by

cities. These people pass **The Open Road** onto their friends, sell it at demonstrations and meetings and take it to local bookstores. We appreciate the work that people do in getting the paper out. If you would like to distribute for us or know of a bookstore that is not carrying **The Open Road**, please write to us. (By the way, Issue No. 1 is completely sold out.)

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A contact list of North American anti-authoritarian groups (periodicals, bookstores, political collectives...) will be published in the next issue of **The Open Road**. If you're not on our mailing list but would like to be included in the contact listing (or are on it and wouldn't like to be included) let us know soon.

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of Italy, but it exploded in its highly characteristic way in early Spring on the main university campuses.

**University Parking Lots**

The reason: it had finally dawned on the tens of thousands of working class and peasant young people that the post-'68 reforms opening the university to them had become merely a convenient way for the State to park a large number of unemployables for a couple of years. Already, one-third of unemployed youth in Italy were graduates of universities or colleges, and now Big Capital was pushing further austerity measures to make the working class pay for the dislocations caused by the Vietnam War and the profiteering of the multi-national energy cartels.

The fuse was lit when the Christian Democrat State education authorities attempted to take back some of the concessions they had yielded in '68-'69 by instituting a "block" system of degree programs under which the majority of students would be shunted out of the university after two years into underpaid and precarious employment.

The resulting massive student protests during the winter and early Spring brought violent retaliation from the police and the armed fascist vigilante squads. The series of incidents that set the course of future events took place on February 1, when a group of fascists armed with hand guns entered the University of Rome and wounded two students, one of them critically.

This outrage occurred in full view of the police, who took no action. The next day, during an officially-sanctioned protest against the shootings, 3,000 people broke away from the main assembly and took to the streets, attacking the fascist headquarters with molotov cocktails and rocks.

On their way back to the university, the students were themselves attacked by police in civilian clothes, with the result that two students were wounded and subsequently arrested for carrying arms. That was the final straw.

Two days later, the University of Rome campus was occupied by the students. The police, with the aid of collaborationist Communist Party hooligans, surrounded the campus and laid siege for two weeks, but failed to break the occupation.

**CPers Molotowed**

On Feb. 17, 2,000 CPers and running-dog trade union bureaucrats staged a deliberately provocative rally on campus at which head porkchopper Luciano Lama denounced the occupiers as criminals and called on the police to shut down the centres of subversion. Lama & Co. were driven off campus by 2,000 autonomia (members of autonomous groups) armed with molotov cocktails, iron belts and paving stones.

From this point, the conflict started to spread, and

the new movement reached out to energize thousands and then tens of thousands of people over a wide spectrum of society. While the movement had no clearly-defined political focus, all the disparate groups and individuals were united in their resistance to the cutbacks, whether in the university, on the job, in housing, transportation, consumer goods or essential social and public services.

By mid-March, the resistance had become a virtual revolutionary counter-attack. For four days (March 13-to-16), the entire country was convulsed by an unprecedented wave of street fighting in response to the killing in Bologna of a militant of the vanguardist Lotta Continua by the police during a demonstration.

In Bologna, Rome, Milan and Turin and even in the South, a hundred thousand partisans of the new movement engaged in military struggle with the forces or order. Processions of people would come under fire from the police and the military, they would draw back, break into small groups, flow around the police barricades, reform on the other side, put up their own barricades, stand and fight, then disappear in the darkness.

The entire population was on the offensive, choosing and mastering the urban terrain, checkmating the superior fire-power of the State with its own mobility and spontaneity, hammering out tactics and strategy in street-level "battle committees" and coordinating all the sectors via a network of pirate radio stations.

As one bourgeois (naturally hostile) newspaper described it on one particular day:

"For seven hours Rome was in the grips of full-scale urban warfare. The gunshops were ransacked for firearms, innumerable shops, cafes and hotels were damaged, and hundreds of cars and many buses were smashed up, overturned or burnt. . . . Signor Francesco Cossiga, the Interior Minister, described their actions as 'a prearranged and criminal plan of guerrilla source,' and the youths certainly gave that impression. They moved deliberately and without emotion, calmly doing as much damage as possible."

**Calm of Beirut**

Eventually, calm returned to the cities (some said it was like the calm of Beirut). Particularly, it was the result of the martial law tactics of the authorities, but in large measure, it was due to the campaign of slander and vilification waged by the Communist Party in its desperate attempt to drive a wedge between the new movement and the great mass of Italian workers.

Like the other Eurocommunist parties (Spain, France, even Mexico), the Italian CP hopes to grab electoral power by proving to the real bosses of the country that it can tame the working class

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## On the Road

Having survived the summer doldrums, a depleted collective, overwork and underfun, our fortunes seem to be on the rise once more. New people are coming around and expressing interest in working with us. The response to Issue No. 3 was gratifying and compensated us somewhat for missing one of the best (meaning rainless) summers Vancouver has had in quite a while.

As far as money goes, our sustainer campaign has gotten off to a promising start: fourteen individuals and groups contributed \$50 each in response to our ad in Issue No. 3. Our goal is 100 sustainers, so we still have quite a ways to go; that's why we're pulling out all the stops in the campaign this issue (see ad, page 7).

Up to now, we have made up any shortfalls by passing the hat among friends, but contributions in all amounts are now urgently needed if we are to continue this anti-authoritarian publishing project. For the record, our expenses for this issue (covering a three month period) are roughly: printer, \$1300; typesetting, \$400; office rent, \$400; and mailing, \$600.

Our mailing list is growing as word spreads, but for distribution we rely heavily on individuals and groups in various