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The Wildcat Roars in Italy

On a struggle in course: Winter 2003-2004



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INTRODUCTION

The government for its part has done no more than repeat the same old song good for any and every season: “the transit workers are urban terrorists”.

In the meantime, the struggle of the irresponsibles continues and extends itself, armed with the solidarity that has marked it from the beginning. The wildcat strike that began in Milan has reached the majority of Italian cities – despite criminalization, disciplinary and penal procedures started by managers and judges – and it doesn’t appear to have any intention of stopping.

For our part, we who are not transit workers, we can only hope that the cat has nine lives and is an example for other workers. Let’s take advantage then of the time the transit workers give us by preventing us from going to work, from attending school, from burying our lives in a world of commodities. Let’s grasp the occasion in which we can travel on foot in order to rediscover a world no longer enslaved to time, in order to learn to enjoy the taste of absenteeism. Who knows, as we look around ourselves and talk among ourselves, perhaps a fitting manner of returning the favor will come to mind.

From *Quale Guerra* Winter 2003-2004

The events described in this pamphlet can now be seen as some of the earlier signs of the return of the wildcat to class struggle. The situation is certainly very different from the 1960’s and 1970’s when it last roared with any ferocity. At that time the relative strength of the working class combined with a major global movement of resistance and revolt which in some places verged upon revolutionary upheaval. Thus, the various wildcat actions had a more offensive nature. If, for the most part, demands made remained within the context of improvements of living conditions for workers within the current social context, nonetheless, the exploited felt their strength enough to take their struggle into their own hands and act on their own terms, as much against the unions as against the companies.

The wildcat struggle that arose among transit workers in Italy in the winter of 2003-2004, along with the wildcat activity among airline workers in Italy, among contract truckers at the ports in the US, among dockworkers in Spain and so on, have arisen in a very different context. Although there are revolts scattered all over the world, they tend to be isolated and fragmented, and it cannot be said that there is a movement of revolt at this time in the same sense as that which existed in the 1960s and 70s. Workers are very much on the defensive. Most of the wildcat struggles of the past few years have arisen due to workers’ frustrations with unions that have been selling them down the river over and over again. For example, the struggle of the Italian transit workers was sparked by the refusal of the transit companies and the state to honor previous contracts and the willingness of the federal unions to “renegotiate” these contracts over the heads of the works. In the US, the contract truckers at the ports cannot legally unionize because they are defined by law as “self-employed contractors” rather than workers. Many of the Spanish dockworkers are simply fighting against being forced into unemployment.

As an anarchist and revolutionary, I recognize that the reasons people rise up and start to take control of their own struggles are usually quite banal. The sufferings imposed by the current social order, the daily disasters on all levels, the increasing

precariousness of existence can lead to a desperation that feels compelled to act. It has been said quite often, but I will repeat it: my solidarity is not with the suffering of others, but with the ferocity with which they fight against it. Taken in this light it should be clear that the specific grievances that led to the wildcat activity described in this pamphlet and the others mentioned above are of less interest to me than the ferocity of the strikers that appeared at the peak of this struggle.

But more specifically, from a practical point of view, I find it interesting to look at the ways workers have organized their wildcat activities, the sorts of activities that have been done in solidarity with them and various factors that played a role in cooling down the struggles.

We are living in a period when, due to the structuring of production, it is much more difficult for workers at the point of production to take any action that can significantly impede the activity of capital even within a specific sector. The one area where such a capacity still exists to a significant extent is within the sector of transportation of goods and people. In this light, it makes sense that the strongest self-organized struggles of workers in the past decade or so have happened precisely in this sector: truckers, transit workers, railroad workers, airline workers, dockworkers and the like. And these struggles have something to teach us all.

In fact, the blockade of transportation has played a major role in many other struggles as well. Unemployed people in Argentina, Bolivia and Algeria have used blockades in significant ways. People in the Basilicata region of Italy successfully prevented the installation of a nuclear waste facility there by blockading the region for three weeks in November 2003. And train commuters in Italy have been using blockades in conjunction with a fare strike to protest changes in train service and safety since the process of privatization of the train lines began. Of particular interest in this situation is the use of blockades when ticket checkers threaten to fine participants in the fare strike.

I bring these parallels up because they point out that transportation remains a weak point within the functioning of

A FAVOR TO RETURN

The wildcat strike has come back. We almost didn't know what it was anymore, we had lost the memory of it.

And yet for many years it had made the masters' knees tremble, causing the rediscovery of the joy and pleasure of insubordination among those forced to work. Finally a handful of irresponsibles have decided to dust off this old friend of the *enraged*, pull it out of the box where responsible adjustment and civil democratic dialogue had buried it for many years. But these irresponsibles have a particularity, that of being drivers of the streetcars and buses that deposit us at work, at school or at the supermarket every day. And without them, everything stops. This is the impudence that has caused the politicians and masters to get so furious, and it is still the same thing that has managed to fill the heart of so many of the exploited who have seen in the transit workers a rediscovered possibility. A kick in the stomach to imposed rules, a way out from the fraudulent limits of union negotiations, an effort that, for once, has tried to start from self-organization and not from the policy tables.

The transit workers have banished the union hypocrites, accustomed to speaking in the name of all, to the role that lies within their competence: that of the bureaucrat, of the punctilious compiler of lists with the names of rebels (participants in the strikes and pickets), of the attentive and devoted complicit guide of the police. Thus, for once, the unions – that had guaranteed the government that they could control and manage the struggle – have found themselves with a fistful of wastepaper, the union cards that many workers have torn up.

For the first time in many years, the wildcat has forced the regional governors to mobilization. And when it is the police who make the streetcars run, everything becomes clearer: in social struggle everyone gets what s/he manages to conquer through force. On one side there is the force of the exploited who organize themselves autonomously and on the other side that of the state and the masters, of the police and propaganda.

AGAINST THE BUSINESS OF TRANSIT – FOR FREE PUBLIC MEANS IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE WILDCAT

1. Providing oneself with two tickets. Folding up a used one of them and driving it with the other into the slot of the stamping machine in a way that blocks it.
2. Using any tube of rapid gripping glue (optimal liquid steel) with a thin neck and introducing the glue thoroughly into the slot.
3. A more improvised method is that of working chewing gum into the slot and pushing it in a bit with a hairpin.
4. Organizing in groups is still the most effective method putting the machines out of order and for spreading subversive ideas at the same time.

ADVICE TO THE ELDERLY:

not losing time stamping you don't lose a place to sit

In solidarity on foot

capitalism, an area where self-organized resistance by workers, users or any of the exploited and dispossessed can have an effect.

I have no illusions that wildcat activity is inherently revolutionary – no more so than the class that makes use of it – a class that only becomes revolutionary when those that make it up begin to struggle collectively for the end of their existence as a class through the destruction of class society. Wildcat struggle is a tool. Because it is based in the self-organized activity of the exploited themselves, it is a tool with potential to move beyond the immediate demands that may first give rise to the struggle. But this requires the weaving together of more and more autonomous, self-organized revolts that clarify the potential subversive quality of this sort of struggle.

What ultimately interests me in wildcat strikes and other sorts of self-organized struggles is precisely that people begin to relate to each other in a different way than usual, in a way that breaks down the separations that capitalism and the state impose. This is where the potential for subversion lies. Because if revolution requires the destruction of the state and capital, of all the institutions, structures and relationships of domination and exploitation, this very destruction needs to be carried out through methods which reflect, in a subversive way, the anarchist and communist relationships that I and those who share my vision desire.

To provide a basis for further discussion of such questions, I am publishing this pamphlet that includes a chronology of events, a longer article examining them more deeply*, and various communiqués, flyers and statements of solidarity from the time of the events.

*Wolfi Landstreicher
March 6, 2005*

* Much of this article is a reworking of information drawn from a Movement Communiste article on the topic. Because I do not agree with their analysis in its totality, I used the information and general outline of their piece to write something more fitting with my own analysis.

CHRONOLOGY

December 1, Milan - Streetcar drivers initiate an illegal wildcat strike.

December 15, throughout Italy - Streetcar drivers go on wildcat strike in the cities of Torino and Brescia. Some workers burn their union membership cards. In the cities of Florence, Bari, Foggia, Lecce, Taranto, Brindisi, Cosenza, Naples and Genoa, a large number of transit workers “call in sick”.

December 17, Rome - Airport workers walk out as part of an illegal wildcat strike and blockade the entrances to the airport. The workers are fighting against company plans to lay off 2,700 workers.

December 19, throughout Italy – Official unions, CGIL-CISL-UIL, begin negotiations with transit bosses which will end with a betrayal of struggling workers. Over the next few days there will be wildcat strikes, sick-ins and “work-to-rule” slow-downs among transit workers throughout Italy. Spontaneous assemblies develop in stations for organizing struggles. Many transit workers burn their union membership cards.

December 19, Genoa - Bus drivers go on wildcat strike.

December 20, throughout Italy – The unions sign an agreement with the bosses that is completely against the desires of the transit workers. The workers go on wildcat strike in the cities of Milan, Rome, and Venice, and the provinces of Savona, Imperia and Liguria.

December 22, throughout Italy – Despite government “return-to-work” orders transit workers choose to continue the struggle. Police are called in to force the transit workers back to work temporarily. In some places, such as Brescia, strikers were able to repel the police attacks.

January 9, throughout Italy – Transit workers all over Italy strike against the agreement signed in December by the CGIL, CISL and UIL, the confederal unions of Italy. However, this is a legal strike called by the base unions.

THE MEANING OF A STRIKE

What Is happening in the city? It is simple: some workers have finally decided to react to the hateful exploitation to which all workers are subjected every day.

Starting from the wildcat strike of last December 11, public transit workers have courageously rebelled against the arrogance of the bosses and against a business logic, private and public, the only aim of which is profit and that claims today to assimilate any human activity into itself.

But that’s not all. The transit workers sent the unions to the devil, denouncing their connivance with the owners. They have refused to delegate their demands to others, because they have understood the delegation is a swindle and that the time has come to self-organize through assemblies, also unauthorized, in order to autonomously discuss and decide the methods and times of their struggle.

Finally, the transit workers have given a gift that is as precious as it is unexpected: they have shown us in deeds the wildcat (i.e., illegal) strike is possible once again. If the rules and laws are not established by the majority of the “sovereign people” (the great fiction upon which representative democracy claims to stand), but by a minority of the privileged who control political, economic and media power, then legality is fine and pretty imposture, and the real struggle (not the sham of fake conflict on the part of the union bureaucrats) can only transgress the rules. It is no accident that the authorities have attempted to intimidate the workers with police measures (these, indeed, terroristic!) like the mobilization [to keep the transit running].

“Chaos Risk” has been the headline on some newspapers. And if “chaos” were not a risk, but an opportunity? The only concrete opportunity for us to stop, at least for a moment, and reflect on our way of living, and above all on the social relationships that habituate us day after day to the fear of precariousness and to resignation.

For these reasons we greet the new strike of the transit workers with gratitude. And we hope that their practice of struggle becomes irresistibly contagious.

In solidarity on foot

This is why the transit workers are not alone: all around there are ears ready to take in their suggestions, and complicit mouths quick to whisper it anew. When the unions and the rules decided by the masters are jumped beyond and widespread insubordination makes its way, there are no longer *temps* and *guaranteed employees*, *railway workers* and *unemployed laborers*, *transit workers* or *flight attendants*. It is an entire world that has had enough and begins to rediscover the desire and the joy of taking its life back in hand and rebelling.

In solidarity on foot

c/o Porfido documentation center – via Tarino 12/c Torino, Italy
January 12, 2004

January 9, Venice - The locks of ticket offices were glued shut in solidarity with striking transit workers.

January 12, Milan - Transit workers went on wildcat strike.

January 13, Milan - Transit workers went on another wildcat strike, in direct defiance of a "back-to-work" order from the authorities. The Milan Chamber of Commerce says that the strikes have cost the local economy about 300 million euros (380 million dollars American), either due to lost income to businesses or the absence of transit workers from their posts.

January 14, Bologna – Bus drivers went on wildcat strike for the morning shift. The authorities immediately intervened and service was resumed.

January 19, Rome (Italy) – Workers at Alitalia stage an eight-hour strike that forces the cancellation of 350 flights.

January 30 – Transit workers across Italy strike against the agreement made over their heads.

February – Sporadic wildcat activity here and there, but the ebbing of the more concerted efforts.

THE WILDCAT ROARS

On an Autonomous Struggle in Italy

On Monday, December 1, Milan, Italy, and its suburbs were completely paralyzed as transit workers of the ATM, the company which runs all the transit (apart from rail) of the metropolitan area, autonomously chose to struggle on their own terms, and not those of the unions and the law. Many of the more than eight thousand ATM workers are working under precarious status, i.e., as temporary workers or workers in training with probationary status. The same is true throughout most of Italy.

The immediate reasons for the struggle dealt with wage increases and working conditions, but it has also been a struggle against the state and the unions, the bosses and the left parties, without concern for legality. Several times, during the course of the struggle, transit workers were able to disturb the daily round of official haggling over the terms of sale of their labor power organized by the companies, the unions and the state.

A new labor contract for the next three years had to be signed before December 31, 2003. The right to strike for transit workers is limited by law so as to guarantee a minimum service during the morning and the evening peak hours. So an official strike can only begin at 8:45 a.m. (though service begins at 5 a.m., preceded by the arrival of drivers at the depots around 4 a.m.), stopping at 3 pm and starting again at 6 pm.

In view of the approaching due date for the renewal of the contract, the three official unions, CGIL, CISL, UIL¹, proposed two days of legal strike action throughout the country on December 1 and 15. Workers in most cities were almost

¹ CGIL : *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, close to the old or new Stalinists (the PRS and the PDS), and numerically the most important with around 5 million members (but 55 % of them are retired) ;

CISL : *Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Liberi*, close to the Christian Democrats, with around 3.8 million members (but 48 % of them are retired) ;

UIL : *Unione Italiana del Lavoro*, close to the socialists and the republicans, with around 1.5 million members (but 20 % of them are retired).

Let's Block Everything...

...All of it

The transit workers in struggle in all the cities of Italy are not alone. From Paris to Bucharest, from Los Angeles to Rome wildcat strikes, city blockades and riots are spreading over the entire planet, a sign of a widespread impatience with the living conditions imposed on all the exploited. When the masters have less and less to concede, pressed in a crisis that is not a *crisis* but the normal functioning of the economy, when insecurity and fear become the social norm, there is no longer any distinction of category that holds. When there is nothing to mediate, all that remains to the unions – long since pledged to guarantee the resignation of the workers to business and government – is to put on the uniform of the police, as they did in Milan two years ago when they handed the names of the participants in the blockade of the station during the strike of railroad cleaners over to the forces of order.

If the transit workers have caused the *wildcat strike* to re-emerge in our land with so much clamor, the road blockades and the conflicts of the Alitalia workers in Fiumicino have shown that this contagion is quick to extend itself. If the transit workers have stopped up the cities, the inhabitants of Scanzano have given evidence of how the radioactivity of the economy assaults everyone, in every aspect of life.

In an infinite game of returns, it is reality itself that rediscovers and re-actualizes some old methods of struggle and designs the demolition of categorical distinctions and methods of arrangement. Thus, many in the cities blockaded in December, who caught a glimpse of the possibilities of an existence no longer subordinated to production, correspond to the commuters of Abruzzo who block the motorway and refuse to consent to the increase in tolls. The temporary workers of McDonald's in Paris who have seized and held offices and equipment for months, and the transit workers of Los Angeles who paralyzed the metropolis for thirty-two consecutive days correspond to the "exuberant ones" of Alfa Romeo who occupy the tracks in Milan.

Irresponsible, because they blocked the city, preventing us from going to school or work, causing us to rediscover that every day outside of school and work is on more day in freedom.

Irresponsible, because they brought back the virus of the wildcat strike and the blockade of the city, a virus the one of these days may yet spread to the other exploited as well. What then will become of the peaceful sleep of the masters, politicians and unionists?

Irresponsible, because the only responsibility permitted in these dark times is that of submission to every tyranny, silence before a life that is more and more wretched, precarious and dispossessed: the rulers would like us to be scabs, in strikes and in life.

And us? To all those who would like to isolate the *irresponsible* streetcar workers; to all those who depict them as “enemies of the poor people who still have to go to work”; to all those who, frightened by the rediscovery of old and wise forms of struggle, attempt to incite us against each other in order to avert the spreading of the awareness that the exploited have common enemies and interests; to all those who would like to prevent the spread of practices that escape from the hands of the unions, historical guarantors of order and exploitation – we respond that becoming *irresponsible* like the streetcar workers is truly the least that one can do.

**Solidarity with the streetcar workers in struggle!
For generalized wildcat strike!
Blockade the masters’ cities!**

In solidarity on foot

c/o Centro di documentazione “Porfido” Via Tarino 12/C. 10124
Torino, Italy

[Flyer distributed in Turin, in some streetcar depots as well, on
December 16, 2003]

unanimously in favor of striking. Despite growing tension, no one foresaw the Milan revolt, including the many “base” or “class struggle” unions².

December 1: wildcat strike in Milan

The agreement signed by the ATM management and the three national unions in December 2000 called for a uniform increase of 106 euros per month to make up for losses in real wages caused by inflation along with various changes in working conditions. During these three years, none of the workers received any wage increase because companies refused to apply the terms of the agreement, and management proposals for the new contract were absurd. Since the wage of transit workers is barely livable, particularly in Milan, the most expensive city in Italy, it is no surprise that rage was simmering.

This is the basis on which the workers’ revolt broke out in Milan on December 1, 2003. At the beginning of work at 4 a.m., spontaneous assemblies formed in all the big depots and decided, nearly unanimously, to start the strike without waiting and to prevent any service from taking place, effective from 5 a.m. According to the Milan Chamber of Commerce, this strike prevented 150,000 people from going to work and cost 140 million euros. Compact and massive picket lines were placed in front of the gates of every depot so as to prevent any police intervention or demonstrations by discontented users. The latter “expressed themselves” at the end of the morning with exchanges of insults, rocks and various projectiles.

The upholders of order – the minister for Infrastructure and Transit, Lunardi, the municipal authorities, the management of ATM, the union federations (who immediately denounced the illegal action of the strikers) and the various media – denounced the strikers in chorus as a minority trying “to defend their privileges”, and violating the right of citizens to travel, etc.

The regional governor threatened to conscript the drivers according to the law ratified by the previous union agreements. The state made use of this measure to prevent the development

² Like the Cobas (*Comitati di Base*), CUB (*Comitati Unitari di Base*) and others such as RDB (*Rete Di Base*).

of a strike that might actually achieve its demands, which seemed to be the intention of many strikers from the start of the conflict. Immediately the Milan public prosecutor's office began preparing a case to determine individual responsibilities in the hypothetical situation of proceedings for the interruption of public service. The government representatives supported the introduction of legal sanctions better adapted to "wildcat" strikes. Consumers' associations talked about compensation. The Milan municipal councilors from the *Allianza Nazionale* (post-fascist party) and some elected from the Democratic Left (old Stalinist party) even suggested calling out the army if such a situation happens again; others, including the president of Marguerite (left Christian Democrats), Rutelli and the mayor of Milan, Albertini, shouted about subversive infiltration and terrorism.

As usual, the state unions and the representatives of the left distinguished themselves in the witch hunt, in perfect accord with their institutional role as guard dogs of the workers' flock that the ruling classes reserve for them. Always ready to express their false indignation in the face of the government's insensitivity towards the demands of the workers, they also condemned the strikers' lack of respect for the law denouncing a practice which "hits the most vulnerable part of the population".

If the official left did its usual dirty work, the "oppositionists", with the leader of *Rifondazione Comunista*, Fausto Bertinotti, and the secretary of FIOM (the metalworkers' federation of the CGIL), Giorgio Cremaschi, at the head, "defended" the struggle of the transit workers in the worst possible way, by assimilating this class conflict into the interclass protests of "anti-globalization" activists, pacifists etc. Their complaints centered on the arrogance (however real) of the bosses in order to explain the anger of the workers.

The "base unionists" had their own recuperative aims: to use the struggle as a way to get workers to join their supposedly "pure organizations", once again turning their struggle over to representatives prepared to negotiate terms with the bosses. The road of proletarian self-management of the struggle would not pass through them.

WELCOME BACK, WILDCAT STRIKE

Irresponsible: this is how the Turinese streetcar workers have been described since the strike on Monday that leapt with one bound over the union rackets, the threats of the provincial governor and the insults of the mayor.

Irresponsible, because they not only declared that they wanted to manage the strike directly, but because they actually succeeded in doing so. For once, the unions – true guarantors of order within the companies – have had to stand back and watch. Accustomed to speaking with impunity in the name of all, on Monday the unionists proved to speak in nobody's name: their eagerness in the face of the company and the provincial governor to keep the strike within the narrow limits established by law vanished thanks to the determination of the streetcar workers in struggle.

Irresponsible, because they forced the provincial governor to mobilization. And when it is the police making the streetcars run it all becomes clearer: in social conflict everyone gets what they manage to conquer with force. On the one side there is the force of the exploited which they organize autonomously; on the other side that of the state, the masters and their organs of propaganda. The thousands of discussions over the right to strike and over guarantees are nothing more than paralyzing chatter.

Irresponsible, because they responded with action to the insults against the Milanese streetcar workers, accused after the wildcat strike two weeks ago of being *urban terrorists*. In the disgraceful lexicon of propaganda, a *terrorist* is anyone who opposes, even faintly, exploitation and the war, and not those who terrorize everyone with the blackmail of precariousness and misery, with the bogeyman of criminality and the war between religions and civilizations. These last are what feed the spreading of terror, the bombing of entire countries, the ordering of police charges, the building of concentration camps for those who run away from poverty and war without the correct documents for doing so.

struggle itself would have to develop adequate instruments of self-defense.

The exploited have shown that they have a vast force at their disposal, but at this point some important questions arise. If the wage increase is granted, how much would the bosses spend to annul it through the increase in prices of goods for consumption? And then, above all, is the misery of our existence limited exclusively to economic misery?

We believe that misery is not determined by the one hundred and six euros denied to the rail transit workers (or by other unsatisfied demands) but above all by the forms of life imposed on every one by capital, and that this very risky struggle is not linked merely to a wage increase, but rather to the conquest of a life no longer subordinated to the compulsory cycle: work, wage, consumption. We desire to put an end to this life characterized by constriction, harmfulness and false needs.

We hope for the downfall of the market system, and we appeal to all those who feel the unbearableness of this survival to continue and extend the wildcat struggles into the totality of everyday life, embracing the destructive and creative fullness of the social war.

FRIENDS OF THE WILD CAT
perpetually inspired by the spread of disorder
[Genoa, Italy, December 15, 2003]

One of the current strategies being considered by bosses, unions and the state is the introduction of a third contractual level in to the process of the labor contract. Currently in Italy there are two levels the national and the company level. The introduction of regional level contracts would be useful in further dividing the exploited – particularly strengthening the division between the rich north and the poor south which has always been a significant feature in Italian class dynamics. The national contract would be definitively buried. The unions and bosses would thus achieve their ideal of a divided exploited class over which they haggle on their own terms.

Some characteristics of the struggle

On that December 1, the assemblies, like the mass pickets with which they merged, were continuous in every depot and communication functioned perfectly on the city level. Without leaders, without official union banners, just workers on strike using their imagination to win. Throughout the day the eyes of the Milan strikers were turned toward their colleagues in Rome in the hope that they would start an illegal strike as well.

Unfortunately, on that day the signal from Milan was not taken up in the capital or any other city in the country. Nevertheless, at 3 p.m., the strikers decided to extend the strike, from the peak hours of the evening until the night. The workers of ATM then stopped the strike on December 2.

Related struggles

Due to its violent impact on the activity of the wealthiest city in the country, the strike immediately took on a national dimension. But it was not the only rebellion that had taken place in recent times in Italy. There was the wildcat action of the 1000 flight attendants of Alitalia (the national airline), in reaction to a plan to restructure the company, with the aim of making at least half of them unnecessary. On that occasion, the workers had decided completely on their own to present sick notes by surprise on the day chosen for their protest. This form of struggle had been chosen to avoid observing the ten days legal warning and the required guarantee of a minimum number of attendees, without incurring the penalties prescribed by the law. And in

November, the entire Basilicata region was shut down when people of the area (particularly the village of Scanzano Jonico) blockaded the region to prevent the development of a nuclear waste depot.

The urban transit strike of December 1 did not spread beyond Milan, but three days later, in Rome, the bus drivers gathered in a permanent assembly. On the same day in Naples, the “hill” metro stopped for a whole day. On December 11, the employees of Alitalia from Fiumicino (Rome) spontaneously came out on strike against the threat of 4100 layoffs and the management’s lack of respect for agreements on wage increases. While they were about it, they blocked the Fiumicino/Rome motorway for two hours. Some skirmishes with the forces of repression followed.

So there was a whole period of agitation and class conflict.

December 15

The union preparation against the illegal strike

All the antistrike forces assumed that December 15 in Milan would be a rerun of December 1. Starting on December 4 the unions went to the depots every day to convince workers not to repeat the attempt. Depot by depot the CGIL called its base delegates together and told them to respect their federation’s orders against the illegal strike to the letter. Faced with the reluctance of the delegates to accept such a step, the CGIL ordered them to leave the depots at 5 a.m., on pain of being expelled from the union and losing all legal protection in the face of probable layoffs. On December 15 at 4 a.m., all the depots of ATM were taken over by heavy squads of union officials, mobilized to guarantee that work took place.

On the bosses’ side, the management held out the prospect of significant increases complementing the national arrangement which was being negotiated. To these tempting promises were added police threats of conscription of the undisciplined strikers. In the end, this tactic paid off in Milan. On that day there were no excesses. But the workers in the country’s other urban transit companies interpreted these management promises as an incitement to struggle. Disrespect for the law had worked well in Milan, so it should succeed elsewhere.

WHICH STRUGGLE FOR WHICH LIFE?

On Monday, December 1, we enthusiastically greeted the return of a practice that many considered to be part of a past that was already exorcised and distant, a struggle that has nonetheless been brought back to life with force by the Milanese rail transit workers: the wildcat strike.

A strike that has been able to damage and put in check not only the enterprise responsible for the wretched material conditions of its workers, but also the economy of exploitation and the alienated life of the entire metropolis. In its realization, this strike has also and above all managed to leap over all the bureaucratic and political forces appointed to the containment of the rage of the exploited: unions, the “left” and parties that cannot tolerate anyone who escaped from the ranks.

The chorus of condemnations that are predictably raised from the palaces of power have been amplified by the infamous complicity of the mass media that has tried to transform the self-organization of a struggle against ruling class arrogance and exploitation into an indiscriminate attack against the citizens.

Expressing our solidarity with all those who have taken back direct control of their problems and of the methods for resolving them, we want to oppose ourselves to every attempt to repress them – in the first place through the mobilization – ,criminalize them and isolate them.

Today, December 15, with the legal general strike, the lowest level from which the recuperation of the struggle can start, the union leadership claims its historical role as those who bridle conflicts in order to lead them into channels useful to the perpetuation of the current order of exploitation.

In fact, it is clear that the infinite constraints to which governments and unions have bound strikes over time have the sole aim of rendering them harmless for capital.

The spontaneous struggle overcomes these dangers, but finds itself facing other problems of a repressive nature (look at the preventive mobilization suggested by the infamy of Furio Truzzi – Assoutenti president – and immediately carried out by the provincial governor) against which the self-organization of the

Statement of the self-organized local transit workers of Milan*

Once again the workers of ATM have decided autonomously to cease work with the aim of saying "no" to the national agreement signed on December 20, 2003 by the confederal unions, the government and the company. The aim of the local transit workers is to re-open discussions at a national level to enable us to receive the long-agreed €106 wage increase against inflation and around €3,000 back pay. The local transit workers of Milan are refusing localized discussions which cannot resolve the situation regarding a national labor contract which provides less money, and we have no intention in trading off our work breaks in exchange for "advances" of our own money. The local transit workers believe that the much-talked-about consultation referendum is useless as it is offensive towards the sacrifices which the striking workers have made. We believe that the extremely high participation in these strikes is the only true referendum.

The local transit workers of Milan, January 12, 2004

The wildcat spreads

Once again, the workers brought back the bad memories of the bosses and unions. The "wildcat strike sickness", as the newspapers defined it, hit hard in Brescia and Turin as well as in Genoa, Perugia and Florence. The workers again showed all their determination to get what they wanted without burdening themselves with respect for the antistrike legal system, against their allied adversaries: the companies, the state and the unions. Some strikers expressed their attitude toward the unions by burning their union membership cards.

But this time this reactionary social and political bloc reacted rapidly: conscription orders signed in flurries by the regional governors, the relaunching of discussions between the bosses and the unions and the sending of police into the hottest places. But attempts by the police to disperse the pickets met with some violent reactions from the strikers. Even in the absence of pickets, many workers refused to leave the depots. When strikers were forced to leave at the wheel of their bus, the majority of them chose to apply the driving rules to the letter, going at a very slow speed. Finally, the weapon of sick leave was abundantly used, as in Apulia and in some towns in Calabria, where almost half the workers made use of it.

Milan

The antistrike union setup functioned perfectly in Milan. Bus, metro and trams ran during the peak hours. Milan had the lowest strike rate in all of Italy for that day. The SlaiCobas never called for a wildcat strike despite the active participation of many of its members in the one on December 1. It was more interested in showing that the three official unions didn't represent the workers. The three unions, of course claimed the opposite.

Beyond these sorry quarrels in the union market place, it is certain that the victory won by the ruling order in Milan was not easy. In many depots, stormy assemblies took place where many workers showed their firm determination to oppose an eventual conscription. Once again, you could hear numerous critiques of the unions, responsible for having publicly denounced the deeds of December 1. The workers also insistently accused the unions of having isolated the strikers of Milan, the day after their most

determined action, by organizing a fake day of action for the day before the reopening of the national negotiations.

In the depot of Viale Sarca, a hundred or so drivers met in front of the gates around braziers supported by the students of the state university and some precarious youth in struggle from a neighborhood social center. A central delegate from the CISL was greeted with hostile shouts: “our one day strike did more than all your fake days of action!” In the assembly this representative of the CISL conceded that December 1 had been important, while exhorting the workers to stay calm because “the unions are subject to an enormous pressure from the municipality and the ATM”. For this union representative, the essential thing was to make sure that the fire of the Milanese workers was under control, that the autonomous thrusts had been crushed. Despite these efforts and the relative setback of December 15 in Milan, the fire still smoldered.

Turin

Despite the conscription decreed by the police chief, workers adopted the Milanese model of December 1: between 6 and 9 a.m., no bus or tram moved in the city and very few on the suburban lines. The willingness to fight was confirmed during a demonstration of a hundred or so drivers who confronted the forces of repression. The conscription involved around 200 drivers, “prevented” from complying by the blockade of the other strikers. As in Milan on December 1, reactions were hostile: denunciation of the “disgraceful” strikers, defense of the rights of service users, criticism of the unions for being unable to control their rank and file, etc.

But beyond these disagreements, the unions, the firm and the municipality hoped to rapidly come to an agreement so as to prevent the continuation of the illegal strike. At the same time, the minister for Social Protection, Roberto Maroni, leader of the extremely racist Northern League, and the undersecretary of state for Work and Social Policy, Maurizio Sacconi, threatened to suspend the negotiations if the strike continued.

Monday morning, January 12, all the depots of the ATM chose to go on wildcat strike: no transit operated, again putting the city in turmoil. Though the action in Milan found very few echoes in other cities, within the city it found solidarity. Despite a government conscription order, the workers went on strike again on Tuesday, January 13. Other workers in the city also went on strike in solidarity. The road to the Milan airport was blocked and there were conflicts with the police at the blockade. The regional governor’s offices announced penalties from 250 to 516 euro for each day of illegal strike. In Genoa, the penalty was already there: A thousand drivers received fines of 250 euro.

Although transit workers in Bergamo, Monza and Brescia, joined the Milanese strike, the attempt to generalize the strike failed. In Brescia, after a conscription order from the regional governor, half of the workers returned to work and the strike ended. This also happened in Bergamo and Monza.

The lack of real outside support or possibilities for expanding brought the strike to an end on Wednesday morning.

Nonetheless, in Bologna, workers of ATC called a wildcat strike. Urban transit was paralyzed. But the regional governor, Vincenzo Grimaldi, quickly enacted conscription. Only the depot of Due Madonne resisted until the afternoon.

But the desire for autonomy had not disappeared. On January 19, workers of Alitalia went on wildcat strike in Rome again, forcing the cancellation of 350 flights. And there were other one-day wildcat strikes in various industries in Italy in February as well.

As is often the case, the particular reasons that sparked this revolt are not very interesting. They are the usual problems every worker faces in the struggle to live in a world based on commodity exchange. What is of interest is the way in which the exploited, in this instance, chose to move beyond the confines set for them by the unions and the law in their struggle. In this way, they began to act autonomously, organizing their own activity without leaders or institutional control. And in this method of acting for oneself, a subversive seed exists that reflects the possibility of completely overturning the social relationships that now define our existence.

Lessons from these events

By calling this one day legal strike, the base unions acted as a safety valve for the workers' anger. They reinforced their position in relation to the official unions as representatives of the workers while giving a pledge of absolute control over their potential excesses. After this strike, the government proposal for local negotiations based on the principle of additional payments in return for productivity was not closed. It remained very much in the news in the big cities of the north where local governments and the transit companies could afford such a concession in order to undermine the combative energy of the workers.

All the unions including the national coordination accepted the CGIL proposal to organize a national referendum of workers to validate the national agreement of December 20. Recuperative strategies seemed to be successful, channeling the struggle into the limits established by the authorities, including the left opposition despite the massive opposition of the workers.

But it is possible to see things otherwise. In Milan, for example, many workers complained about the uselessness of the legal strike, declaring the necessity of illegality in order to get anywhere.

But it is necessary for workers to remember their own capacity for self-organization. If they choose to take advantage of officially sanctioned strikes, they must decide their own tactics and strategy from the start and immediately take the initiative away from union representatives and other leaders, banning them from the struggle to the extent that they act in these roles. The necessity for continuous conflict was also made clear as the "Christmas truce" provided a space for the authorities and the recuperators to draw up their forces.

In this situation, the left and the unions were forced to openly line up on the side of the bosses and the government in the active condemnation of workers' illegality, clearly exposing their place in the social order.

January 12-13

The legal strike of January 9 was not the end. In Milan, the anger of the transit workers continued to smolder and the uselessness of following the rules had been well proven. On

Brescia

From 4 a.m. on, after voting for the strike, the workers of the only depot on S. Donino street occupied the garages in mass. None of the buses of the urban lines of the Brescia Trasporti company left for the town. It was the first complete stoppage of minimum service in the whole history of urban transit in Brescia. The picket, composed of 300 to 320 strikers, warmed itself with shots of warm wine and *grappa*. At 11 a.m. the forces of repression turned up in front of the gates. Their provocations brutally escalated the tension which ended up in an open clash. The strikers gave a good account of themselves and the occupation carried on without any other problems. Some service users, some rank and file delegates from other firms and some members of social centers came to express their solidarity. Morale returned to a high level, reinforced once again by wildcat strikes in other towns. Earlier at 9 a.m., the management had called for the application of conscription orders by the chief of police. The Urban Transit Company of Brescia also sent its representatives to discuss things with the strikers, threatening them with disciplinary measures and calling on the union reps to make them respect the law guaranteeing minimum service.

On the strikers' side, the desire to fight remained strong and the will not to give in over the 106 euro raise persisted. The press presented Maurizio Murari, a member of *Rifondazione Comunista* and of the *Magazzino 47* social center, as the leader of the strike. He mainly distinguished himself by openly challenging the legality of the first conscription list drawn up by the chief of police. Some technicalities had slipped in, which were rapidly corrected after 2 p.m. with the delivery of a new list of conscriptions. But this time the forces of repression drew a blank because the strikers from the first shift couldn't be found, having gone home. At 2:30 p.m., at the start of the second time period for minimum service, the strikers barely wavered. At the beginning of the afternoon, the mayor, Paolo Corsini, leader of the Democratic Left, condemned the wildcat strike. The three unions organized a demonstration for one hour and blocked the bus station. They accused some nonunionised people of being led and influenced by the *Magazzino 47* social center, which in fact restricted itself to broadcasting the general assembly

discussions on its radio and sending a few of its members to the depot.

The union leaders in the city were in agreement that this autonomous initiative of the workers was “useless” and “no longer” necessary. For them, December 1 was, at best, an accident that might prove useful in negotiations with the bosses, but it was necessary not to let it happen again.

Maurizio Murari of the *Rifondazione Comunista* Party saw no further than the 106 euro pay raise and the supposed evils of privatizations. He proclaimed that if the unions took the pay raise demand seriously, then they were “listening to the base”, completely missing the fact that through their own self-activity, the workers were making the unions irrelevant.

Naples

In Naples, from the start of the working day, the transit depots fell into the hands of the workers. The ambiance was rather good natured. Most workers took active part in the strike. The unions had been informed that pickets were in place and did not interfere. Workers’ assemblies were held in front of the depots and various individuals and groups came to express their solidarity. At 5 p.m., the beginning of the evening peak service, the forces of repression intervened at the via Nazionale delle Puglie depot to prevent supporters from joining the pickets. After a short runaround in the roads surrounding the depot, the demonstrators got back into their stride and were involved in a blockade for around half an hour.

And throughout Italy

In Florence, some groups of drivers managed to delay the departure of urban buses from ATAF by one hour at the start of the required minimum service period in the evening. Their colleagues on the suburban lines of Sita did the same.

In Perugia, Umbria, the piazza Italia (the central square in the town) was taken over for an hour between 9.30 and 10.30 by buses driven by strikers, while the APM drivers (suburban lines) demonstrated in front of the regional government office.

In Rome the strikers respected the legal strike hours. But in Sicily participation was nearly complete in all the major cities. In

western part of the town didn’t have a bus service, while a few were running in the east.

Milan

In Milan, the legal strike succeeded in paralyzing the metro lines. Only Line 1 functioned with fewer routes and a reduced frequency. Bus traffic was erratic. While the strike took place, SlaiCOBAS and the three big national unions quarreled over who represented the workers, but all called for a referendum on the national agreement of December 20. On the other hand, the workers in Milan, who had already shown their capacity to act without representatives or leaders, had more interest in a new wave of surprise strikes starting Monday, January 12.

Brescia

Most of the workers of Brescia Trasporti participated in the legal strike. The periods of public service were mostly respected though service was incomplete from 5 to 6 in the morning when only 3 buses out of 25 ran. A demonstration at the regional administration building organized by the COBAS was escorted by 20 buses on strike.

The official unions used the situation to their advantage, claiming not to be against the strike. Maurizio Murari, of *Rifondazione Comunista*, who had made political capital off the December 15 wildcat strike here, joined the national coordination and made overtures to the official unions stating: “the strike is not directed against the three confederations” but only “against the December 20 agreement”. Attempts at recuperation were well under way.

The government plays for time and wants to turn the page

The government stayed in the background during the legal strike day. They preferred to leave the field free to the unions so they could try to reduce the anger of the transit workers. Nevertheless, there were more threats of sanctions against strikers and a call for the official unions to take their share of responsibility in dealing with the crisis at hand.

in Venice, for example, one worker in three continued to call in sick. The dissatisfaction continued.

While the CGIL called for assemblies on January 7 and 8, the base unions focused on the strike of Friday January 9. The coordination they organized called all the workers to keep the strike legal. In Milan, in some depots, the drivers didn't hide their disappointment. "It's better to take them by surprise", a bus driver said, declaring that all the unions, including the base unions were selling the workers out. Things moved towards another "normal" day of trade union action, even if it contested a national agreement signed by the three official unions. Everything seemed to be in place for an "uneventful" strike.

January 9, a legal strike

With the exception of an attempt in three depots in Genoa, the strike was mainly legal. In most of the towns of the north, there was massive participation, but in the south of Italy strikers were few in number. In Florence, "users" expressed solidarity by means of a ticket payment strike.

Traditionally a strong place for base unions, Venice and the surrounding region had massive participation in the strike. In addition, unknown supporters sabotaged ticket machines in solidarity with the strikers.

But in Turin, drivers were massively conscripted by the regional governor, Achille Catalani.

In Bologna, almost all the employees of the urban transit companies participated in the legal strike. A demonstration took place in front of the regional administration building calling, amongst other things, for the lifting of sanctions following the illegal strike of December 22. The march went to the central station to express its support for the three rail workers laid off for denouncing the working conditions.

Genoa

Once again, the workers of Genoa refused the limits of legality. From 4 a.m., the Mangini della Foce depot was on total strike with buses blocking the exit from the depot. A bit later, the situation was the same in the depots of Sampierdarena and Boccadasse. The metro line and the elevated train didn't run. The

the companies serving the countryside participation in the strike reached 70 %. In Calabria as well, participation was nearly complete. In Cosenza and in Crotona, the strike continued all day. In many of the cities where wildcat strikes did not take place, large numbers of workers called in sick, thus effectively accomplishing the same thing – preventing the normal functioning of the transit system. This list is far from exhaustive.

Some analysis

At best, the left did not understand what was happening. The *Rifondazione Comunista* "supported" the strikes in Brescia and Turin only as an expression of workers who had been pushed beyond the limits, but could be reined in if the unions took account of their wage demands. The rest of the left and the unions, recognizing the deeper significance of this autonomous activity, opposed it condemning the illegality.

For the workers, the outcome of events so far was positive over all. The illegal actions in Brescia, Turin, Naples and elsewhere showed that the determination of the strikers was not confined to the big city of Lombardy which launched the movement, but had spread pretty much all over the country. The concessions promised by the management of ATM reinforced the determination to engage in illegal strikes, a mode of struggle perceived as effective, despite the flurry of conscription orders and the determined opposition of the unions. The audacity of the workers of ATM taught a lesson. And not only in urban transit. On Wednesday, December 17, following a long series of agitations against the reorganization of the enterprise, the ground staff of Alitalia in Fiumicino (Rome airport) stopped work and demonstrated in mass on the airport's access roads. Some 80 flights were cancelled.

But there were limits to the movement. Coordination between the various local struggles was not well-developed. Furthermore, although union representatives were sharply opposed in the assemblies, they were not removed from the depots, which allowed them to denounce the "illegality" of the workers. Finally, most of those who sided with the strikers only acted within a strictly supportive and defensive framework. Few grasped the importance of this struggle as an expression of self-

organization with the potential to move beyond defensive struggle. The base unions used the situation, without great success, to strengthen themselves to the detriment of the big official confederations but they refused to encourage the autonomous self-organization of the struggle.

December 19 and 20

The government, the transit companies and the unions needed to reach an agreement quickly. Since the strike of December 1, from their point of view, the social climate had become rather unhealthy. The strike of December 15 showed the workers' disrespect for legality and their capacity for self-organization. So something had to be done quickly, before Christmas.

The negotiations resumed in Rome on the evening of December 19. It was a signal that the workers' assemblies immediately translated into strikes. While service functioned normally in Rome and Milan, the assemblies held there were very tense. This time the fuse would be lit by the transit workers of Genoa. From the start of the service in the Staglieno depot it was occupied by a massive and compact picket of 300 workers. Buses were placed in front of the exit. Nothing moved any more. Workers in assembly at the depot decisively rejected an appeal from the mayor and the head of the transit company intended to obtain the suspension of the strike. The discussion was lively, the workers stood firm and refused to give in and apply the minimum service requirements. The strike continued.

The workers' assault of December 20

At 5 a.m., after twelve hours of negotiations, the unions left the table claiming that the government proposals were lacking. All sides among the "social partners" claimed that the others were to blame for the breakdown in negotiations, but the unions expressed their willingness to take up negotiations again right away.

When the breakdown in negotiations was announced, at the start of the morning service, the workers of Genoa reacted. The strike was unanimous. No bus left the depots. The fear of the workers' anger returned. In Lombardy the unofficial strike had

From December to January

Workers largely respected a "Christmas truce", thus giving their adversaries a chance to make their own moves. This included the opening of local negotiations (based on the national agreement) which, in the places where the movement was fiercest, included offers of extra bonuses. In addition, workers who participated in the wildcats were threatened with penalties of up to 1000 euros in an attempt to scare them out of taking further action. The unions were also able to advance their recuperative agendas.

The official unions needed to safeguard the national agreement, and so tried to bring the workers under control. The CGIL called for assemblies (under their control) that would begin on January 7. In the meantime, sporadic agitation and assorted demonstrations took place on December 29 and January 4 in Venice, Padua, Genoa and even Cagliari to protest against the bosses' first repressive measures.

The base unions organized a legal strike day for January 9 in the hope of increasing their influence. On January 3, there was a national conference in Florence involving a hundred or so urban transit workers from several towns in Italy. Members of the base unions promoted this event, but members of the official unions and nonunionised people also took part. This led to the constitution of a national coordination of struggle, open to workers who were not card-carrying members of the base unions. These unions tried to invite themselves to the national negotiation table by means of a day of action. Their aim was to renew the official talks with urban transit companies and the state in order to obtain the objectives fixed by the workers: 106 euros increase per month and 2900 euros back pay on the contract signed in 2000. In this way, the base unions hoped to enlarge their membership and compete advantageously with the three state unions.

But the game was far from over. The workers had already shown that they were able to rid themselves at a stroke of the straightjacket of restrictive strike laws and at the same time of union control. Autonomous struggle had emerged quickly and been able to distinguish itself on a clear class basis from the whole of civil society and its political and union forms. And so

Genoa, Venice, Siena, Varese and Trento, where the strikes did not weaken.

In Genoa, the workers, meeting in an assembly from 4 in the morning, chose to stop work until 24 December. The injunctions and exhortations of the mayor, Giuseppe Pericu, to respect the “rights of service users” and the conscription orders of the regional governor fell on deaf ears. At the start of the service, only two buses ran.

In Bologna, the assemblies massively rejected the Rome agreement. A mere dozen out of 500 buses ran. The three depots (via Battindarno, via Ferrarese, via Due Madonne) were in the hands of the workers and were surrounded with massive pickets. Buses had been put across the entrances from 4.30 a.m.

In Venice, at ATCV, the Cobas successfully called for an illegal strike. No buses ran in the city center but a few boats served the Lagoon.

In Modena, a strong minority of strikers prevented buses from leaving in the morning. Only the line serving Bologna airport functioned.

In Varese (Lombardy), the workers of AVT and the suburban companies massively stopped work. The same situation occurred at Rovereto and Trento, where the workers on the local railway joined the movement.

In Siena, the workers of the train company closed the access road to the depot of Due Ponti. No bus left. In Reggio de Calabria, the strike was total at the municipal company ATAM. Not a single bus left the depot of Foro Boario where workers had arranged to meet in front of the gates. A delegation went to the regional administration building at 7 a.m. to set out the reason for the strike: to protest against the national agreement.

In Milan, in the morning, two bus depots were completely paralysed. Assemblies were held there. Although metro lines 1 and 2 functioned normally, on line 3 the service was seriously disrupted. At 7 a.m., the workers voted for a return to work.

In Brescia, the buses regularly went out in the town with banners stuck to them saying “conscripted worker”. Some drivers carried out a go slow by scrupulously following the highway code. In Florence, you could see some sporadic work stoppages.

never been stronger. Milan, Brescia, Bergamo and Como were paralysed to various degrees.

In Milan, only 20 buses out of 1200 ran and the 3 metro lines remained at a halt. At 11 a.m., the regional governor, Bruno Ferrante, called together the union representatives to try to reach a compromise. The union center delegates of ATM were escorted by a demonstration of 500 angry workers. Under these conditions no agreement could be found. With outrageous cheek, the head of the Trade Union Center in Milan, Giorgio Roilo, concluded that “the three unions the CGIL, CISL and UIL have made the spontaneous strike of the workers their own”, a blatant attempt at recuperation to which the lie would be given in a few hours. ATM called both workers and unions irresponsible.

In Brescia, the strike started at noon. No bus from the Brescia transit company left the depots, but on December 20 the strike wasn’t accompanied by a significant participation of strikers at the gates of the depots.

In Bergamo as well, the buses didn’t leave their garages. But there were few workers from ATB on the picket lines. Around half the drivers preferred to stay at home. The town was paralysed all morning. The regional governor, Federico Cono, called together the union representatives and then decided to resort to conscription of the workers who stayed at home. It was the first conscription enacted in that town in 13 years. Despite this the service remained weak in the afternoon and was only reestablished the next day.

In Como, the situation was similar – no buses in the morning and a town completely blocked for several hours. Only the conscription order launched in the afternoon by the regional governor, Guido Palazzo Adriano, allowed the partial reinstatement of the service.

In Rome, the strike began at 5:30 p.m. The two metro lines and the suburban trains (RomeViterbe, RomePantano and RomeLido) didn’t run a single train. The stoppage of the bus service began at the rail station Tiburtina, and then extended to the whole town.

In Naples, the buses returned to their depots when the signing of the accord was announced. That Saturday, thousands of passengers coming to do their Christmas shopping found

themselves without means of transit . Some users of the CTP (the company serving the northern suburbs) tried to organize a protest, at Piazza Garibaldi, near the central station in Naples. The demonstration, with a passably violent tone, was dispersed by the forces of repression. The strike carried on.

In Venice, the employees of the ACTV went on strike. No buses or boats ran.

In La Spezia, the workers of ATC organized a permanent assembly. No buses ran. Strike movements were also seen in Savona and Imperia in Liguria, Massa Carrara, Pisa, Livorno and Pistoia in Tuscany as well as Ancona, in the Marche region.

An agreement made to measure

An agreement sponsored by the government was signed by the three official unions and the representatives of the bosses at 5:30 p.m. on December 20. The agreement granted the workers a monthly wage increase of 81 euros and a bonus of 970 euros in a retroactive payment for the two previous years. The strikers demanded 2900 euros, particularly in Milan, where the cost of living is very high. The reaction of the workers was not what the union leaders expected. From the announcement of the signing, the strike intensified, particularly in Rome, and in some cities many workers tore up their union cards.

December 21

On Sunday December 21, the workers refused the agreement signed the day before. The agitation continued. Unannounced strikes broke out in several big towns across the country: Milan, Venice, Rome, Padua, Brescia and Florence. Despite the conscriptions issued by the regional governors, work stoppages followed one another in Bologna, Genoa, Turin, Cagliari (ATR), Ragusa, Trento, Siena, Varese, Reggio de Calabria, Modena, Garbagnate Milanese and Montebelluna.

Most of the buses and streetcars in Milan didn't budge. Only one streetcar and two bus lines functioned. ATM denounced the "irresponsible" and "illegitimate" character of the strike as well as the "the complete contempt for the wishes of the citizens". Here, the workers also fought for a local wage addition, necessary to deal with the extremely high cost of living. A few

hundred of them joined a demonstration in front of the head office of ATM, in Foro Buonaparte.

In Venice, buses and boats were paralysed. A demonstration, which was joined by workers on spontaneous strike from Vicence, Treviso, Conegliano, Padua and Rovereto, was organized in front of the office of ACTV, the public Venetian transit company. According to the latter, only two shuttles operated on the canals to assure the connection with the neighboring town of Mestre and the airport. The demonstrators did not hide their anger in the face of intervention by the forces of repression in front of some of the depots in Milan and Padua. Union delegates tried to calm workers by promising them additional negotiation time with the local authorities, without much of effect on the demonstrators.

There were no buses in Florence, where a picket of drivers had immobilized a big vehicle depot. In Rome, the metro functioned normally but, despite the regional governor's conscription order, the bus and tram service remained disrupted with only 50% of vehicles effectively operational, according to the figures put out by the local company ATAC. Another notable factor in the disorganization of the service was that the stopped lines expanded the saturation of car traffic considerably.

The government hardens its tone

Faced with this new flare-up of wildcat strikes, the Italian government announced on Sunday that it would have recourse to generalized conscription against the insubordinate workers who persisted in blocking the urban transit of many large towns, despite the signing of an agreement on Saturday. The Minister of the Interior, Giuseppe Pisanu, declared that he has taken precise measures so that each violation of the legislation in force will be recorded by the judiciary. The government brutally hardened the terms of the conflict and applied the laws guaranteeing minimum service and the notification of strike action to the letter, for the first time in ten years.

December 22

The regional governors' conscription orders, signed from the morning of 22 December onwards, did not have an effect in