

Industrial Conflict and Industrial Relations in Italy : New Perspectives

Les relations industrielles et le conflit industriel en Italie

Bruno C. Ramirez

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Résumé de l'article

Par cet essai, l'auteur s'efforce de définir les tendances générales du système des relations du travail actuel en Italie. La longue période de conflits qui a caractérisé la ronde de négociations de 1969 constitue le point central de la présente analyse. Les formes nouvelles qu'a revêtues le conflit durant la période préparatoire et le déroulement des négociations ont eu un effet décisif sur le processus des relations du travail.

L'état de l'économie italienne à la fin des années 1960 ainsi que l'impuissance des partis politiques qu'appuyait la classe ouvrière de réaliser des réformes sociales essentielles a créé un climat de mécontentement qui a favorisé le militantisme à la base. D'ailleurs, ces tendances se sont accrues d'autant plus que les organisations syndicales n'avaient pas assez de leadership pour obtenir des changements qui s'imposaient dans les conditions de travail.

Le militantisme des travailleurs du rang a engendré la contestation du syndicalisme tel qu'il existait dans la plupart des industries italiennes à l'époque ainsi que la volonté bien arrêtée des militants de prendre toutes les mesures nécessaires en vue de s'assurer de meilleurs moyens de contrôle sur les conditions de travail. Cette attitude s'est naturellement reflétée sur la nature des revendications des travailleurs (augmentation de salaires à la base, contrôle des rythmes de travail, élimination des dangers et des nuisances, réduction de la gamme des qualifications et participation des ouvriers à la détermination des critères d'évaluation des emplois) et sur la stratégie de négociation mise au point par les militants. Sous la pression de la base, les structures traditionnelles de représentation au niveau de l'usine — comme la Commission interne et la section syndicale d'usine — se sont avérées nettement insuffisantes.

La recherche de nouvelles formes de représentation a donné naissance aux *Comitati Unitari de Base* (organismes spontanés, donc informels au niveau des usines dans lesquelles les ouvriers se rassemblent en vue de décider les démarches à entreprendre au jour le jour selon les aléas du déroulement du conflit. À mesure que les négociations progressaient et que les questions devenaient plus complexes, la direction des organisations syndicales a repris l'initiative des revendications.

Cette action a considérablement affecté le pouvoir des *Comitati Unitari de Base* mais elle a aussi forcé les organisations syndicales à réexaminer leur ancien rôle vis-à-vis des revendications de la base et, dans plusieurs cas, à adopter de nouvelles structures qui puissent leur permettre d'avoir de meilleurs contacts avec la vie à l'usine.

La ratification des accords à la fin de 1969 a permis de mettre en place de meilleures structures de représentation ouvrière pour répondre aux réclamations des travailleurs du rang. Tels sont les conseils de chaîne de montage, d'atelier et d'équipe ainsi que les assemblées ouvrières formées des délégués des différents conseils. L'importance de ces organismes nouveaux réside dans les pouvoirs qu'ils détiennent concernant l'établissement de la cadence du travail, des conditions de travail et de catégories d'emplois. Ils ont aussi un rôle remarquable dans la transformation du régime de négociation centralisé et national, où les réclamations fixées d'avance au sommet par les dirigeants syndicaux par un nouveau mode de négociation qui, non seulement permet de reformuler les problèmes pendant la durée des accords, mais qui tient compte de la situation concrète des différentes catégories de travailleurs et de la nature des entreprises, ce qui oblige les syndicats à tenir compte des desiderata exprimés par les comités d'usine et les associations locales de travailleurs.

Industrial Conflict and Industrial Relations in Italy: New Perspectives

Bruno Ramirez

The author traces the changes which have occurred in Italy's industrial relations systems as a result of the great wave of strikes of 1969. Special emphasis is placed on the emergence of new structures of workers' representation at the plant level, and on the effect these have had on the method of negotiation.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The widespread industrial unrest which has characterized the Italian scene for the last three years has created a new set of conditions which allow one to anticipate substantial changes in the industrial and labour relations structure of that country.

The first major wave of industrial conflict erupted during 1968 and culminated in what has been called « the hot autumn » of 1969, at which time the negotiation of a large number of important collective agreements occurred. It was in anticipation of, as well as during, that cycle of negotiations that new conflictual traits emerged, as evidenced by the claims put forth by the workers, by the level of militancy displayed at the grass roots level, and by the type of strategy pursued by the unions involved.

The general outlines of the new situation which grew out of that experience are unmistakable, and yet a certain degree of fluidity is still permeating the world of labour and industry of that country, particularly on account of the highly politicised character of those waves of industrial conflict. This makes it quite difficult to anticipate with any degree of precision the kind of industrial relations setting which will emerge in the near future. Nonetheless, it is possible at this time to attempt a general evaluation of the recent developments and try to locate a number of key factors which can aid one in understanding the direction along which the changes are occurring.

RAMIREZ, Bruno, Teaching Assistant, History Department, University of Toronto (Ontario).

It should immediately be pointed out that the eruption of labour unrest in 1968 was part and parcel of a broader movement of social contestation which encompassed the entire institutional network of the country. The student revolt played a leading role in this broader social movement. It saw large strata of university students engaged in action aimed at critiquing and rejecting the whole structure of higher education. To be sure, the Italian student movement shared the same cultural matrix which characterized most student movements of the 1960s, but its highly politicized character led it to coalesce with the workers movement. Soon, in fact, the students' critique deepened to the point of bringing into question Italy's entire organization of work and production which, by the end of the 1960s, had come into being as a result of a remarkably rapid process of industrial growth¹.

The extremely high rate of internal and international migration of unskilled labour force from underdeveloped areas to industrial centers played a crucial role. The extent and the rapidity with which these migrations occurred created grave dislocations in all sectors of the social services (housing, schooling, transportation, health, etc.) and generated — particularly among the young generation of workers — a strong dose of latent discontent. In Turin — the city which experienced the highest rate of immigration — the more militant workers were young unskilled immigrants from southern regions who found their living conditions in the city unbearable².

A third factor was the dissatisfaction which many workers expressed with those political parties which were expected to bring about substantial social reforms primarily in the interest of the working class, but which instead proved both unable and unwilling to keep their 'promises'. These factors combined and created an explosive social climate within which the workers became increasingly conscious of the nature of the difficulties they experienced daily in their work-place.

As one focuses on the workers, viewed in the immediacy of their work-place, it would seem as if the workers' dissatisfaction with their working conditions grew as the ongoing rationalization of production methods reached a new plateau, under the thrust of Italy's economic growth. The workers could perceive with evermore precisions how managerial policies of technological innovation, as well as the continuous restructurations of the organization of the work-force, were the underlying causes for the difficulties they experienced daily at their work-place.

Their discontent with managerial policies went hand in hand with a fierce criticism against the unions and their structures of representation.

¹ MOVIMENTO STUDENTESCO, *Documenti della Rivolta Universitaria*, Bari, Laterza, 1968, 415 pp.

² Diego NOVELLI, ed. *Dossier Fiat*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1970, 271 pp.

To the militant worker the unions' channels of representation had proved incapable of serving as effective instruments to meet the workers' needs. As a Fiat worker put it, « In that period the union felt that something was going to happen; but it could not exactly perceive what the workers expected from the union. . . the union was a union in appearance only, not in substance »³.

This last point needs to be underlined because it allows us to understand more clearly why in most cases the first cycle of workers' strife often erupted spontaneously, at the grass-roots level, and why these were led in the majority of cases by 'natural leaders', elected in workers' assemblies. Moreover, in carrying out the conflict at the plant and company level, the workers transcended their different union affiliations, and *de facto* bypassed the existing formal structures of workers representation such as the Commissione Interna (Internal Workers Committee) and the Sezione Sindacale d'Azienda (Trade Union Chapter).

NEW WORKERS' DEMANDS

The method of negotiation was one of the first aspects of industrial relations to undergo considerable change. The national contract — the leading form of negotiation since the post-war years — was rejected by most unions in favor of a new form of negotiation. Actually, the struggle over the form or bargaining had been in progress throughout the 1960s, but the unions had not been able to make much headway, although in some sectors they had succeeded in adopting the 'articulated bargaining' method — a form of negotiation which makes provision for integrating clauses in the national contract which deal with specific conditions existing in given plants.

The industrial conflict of 1968/1969 produced what has been called « the crisis of the national contract »⁴. And this was brought about primarily by the pressures from the rank and file, who made it quite clear that they wanted to participate actively in the negotiation process by defining their demands, devising new modes of conflict, exercising control over the day-by-day bargaining developments, and by demanding a say in the ratification of the new terms.

To the new militants the national contract had become the symbol of rigid centralization which not only promoted the bureaucratization of the unions, but had also proved ineffectual in bringing about solutions to the specific problems arising out of the nature of the work-place. The unions, in turn, came to the realization that the 'national contract' form of negotiation had been instrumental in keeping them removed from the

³ G. BIANCHI *et al*, *Grande Impresa e Conflitto Industriale*, Roma, Coines, 1970, p. 180. (All quotations from Italian sources are my own translations, B.R.).

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

plant confines, thus perpetuating the distance between union leadership and the rank and file which, in time, became one of the leading sources for workers' discontent.

The form of negotiation which emerged after 1969 is one which reflects the extremely fluid industrial situation in which Italy currently finds herself. It is based on a sharp distinction between two separate but coordinated levels of negotiation, — one is concerned with sets of conditions which are broad and national in scope (and thus apply to a whole industry), the other is concerned with specific conditions existing in the individual plants.

The fluidity factor is further increased on account of the rejection by the unions of the « truce clause ». This means — in G. Giugno's words — that « the negotiation may be repropounded at any place and on any issue during the three years the national contract is in effect, which means that there is no longer any guarantee of labour peace during that time span. The contract is signed to put an end to the conflict existing at the time of negotiation, and not necessarily to guarantee the companies from possible future eruptions »⁵.

The movement which brought the method of bargaining to a crisis point and which forced the unions to become aware of their 'distance' from concrete plant and shop conditions goes back to the first part of 1968, when the workers began to voice their deep dissatisfaction with the existing structures for workers' representation. What characterized that early phase of industrial conflict was the fact that militant workers and their leaders were able to locate the sources of their discontent in the specific context of their work-place. This can be seen clearly from the nature of the grievances which, with few exceptions, they all articulated, i.e. dissatisfaction with the speed of work, the 'deskilling' of their job content (resulting from technological innovations), the harmfulness of their specific jobs, the hours of work, etc.

The demand for wage raises was of course one of the central demands advanced by the workers, but until the unions were able to gain control over the eruption of conflict and channel it along a global bargaining strategy, the rank and file militants demanded wage raises equal for everyone. This claim carries with it implications which could be very significant for the future of Italian industrial and labour relations. Philosophically, that demand purports to be a demonstration of worker's egalitarianism (deemed necessary for the promotion of working class solidarity). Strategically, it springs out of a conscious attempt to challenge

⁵ Gino GIUGNO, « L'Autunno Caldo Sindacale ». *Il Mulino*, vol. 19, No. 207, Jan.-Feb. 1970, p. 36. The agreement signed with Fiat in 1968 saw, in fact, the eruption of four major disputes during the ensuing three years. Cf. Gaetano GONGI, « Rapporto sulla Vertenza Fiat », *La Critica Sociologica*, No. 18, Summer, 1971, p. 70.

the traditional wage policies which, for the militants, are used by management to create division among the various categories of workers within a plant, or industry⁶.

Much of the conflict of that period centered over the issue of rhythm of work and the piece-work system. The Pirelli plants (Italy's largest rubber producer) were the main scene of conflict over this issue. There, the workers — after protracted struggle — succeeded in setting up workers' committees which were given the authority to control the hitherto unilaterally imposed production times. Similar workers' committees were successfully established in other major mass-production complexes, such as Fiat and Zanussi. As a team of labour researchers put it, behind the workers' demand for control over production times there is the determination « to defend their physical integrity and to attempt to correlate the pace and volume of their output to humanly accepted rhythms »⁷.

Directly linked to that type of issue, was the rank-and-file's demand for the reduction and the regulation of work hours. Like the demand to control the speed of production, the demand to regulate the hours of work was part of a switch in strategy, initiated and carried out by the grass roots, i.e. to move away from the traditional bargaining policy carried out at the national level, which only led to predetermined monetary compensation for harmful working conditions, and aim instead at the preventive protection of the health and wellbeing of the workers.

Another issue which again originated with the rank-and-file and saw unions and managements locked in a long conflict, was the issue centering around job qualifications and categories. This conflict went on in a number of large industrial complexes — most notably Fiat and Italcantieri — where workers undertook to both narrow the range of existing job qualifications and prevent the introduction of new technology from affecting the content of their jobs ('deprofessionalization'). The tactics pursued by the workers in this conflict, coupled with their degree of militancy has led many observers to suggest that the underlying implication of this struggle was the workers' sharp refusal of the present criteria of division and organization of work.

It should not be surprising, then, that a stage of open conflict initiated and carried out by the grass roots inside the plants over issues growing out of concrete conditions of work and production, would lead to a radical questioning of trade-union structures and of their adequacy to

⁶ R. GIULIANI, G. PECORA, « Ricognizione sulle Nuove Forme della Lotta Operaia », *La Critica Sociologica*, no. 15, Fall, 1970, pp. 110-21. Luigi BORRONI, « I Delegati nell'attuale Esperienza del Movimento Operaio », *Quaderni di Azione Sociale*, vol. 21, no. 2/3, April 1971, p. 367.

⁷ G. BIANCHI *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

insure the wellbeing of the workers. Not without reason some talked of a « crisis of workers' representation »⁸.

TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF WORKERS' REPRESENTATION

As this crisis grew, in fact, it involved even a non-union organism of representation, i.e. the Commissione Interna (Internal Committee). Ever since its re-establishment within the Buozzi-Mazzini accord of 1943, after the long fascist interval, the Commissione Interna has played a key role in the development of Italian industrial relations. Owing to the particular weakness in which the labour organizations found themselves at the end of the world conflict⁹, the Commissione Interna took on a wide range of functions. They included the power to insure the existence of proper labour relations within the plant, the power to establish a link between labour unions and workers, power over the health and welfare aspects of plant life, power over hiring and firing policies, power over individual and collective grievances, and — most important — the power to insure the proper enforcement of collective agreements. During the post-war decades the continuous growth of Italian labour organizations resulted in their more direct involvement in the industrial relations process, at the expense of the Commissione Interna, whose functions have become somewhat more limited as a result. Despite the fact that the 1947-1953, and 1966 accords transferred the bargaining and hiring-firing powers over to the unions, the Commissione Interna continued to function throughout that period as the key organ of workers' representation at the plant level and remained closely attuned to the rank-and-file. The unions made ample use of the Commissione Interna in order to carry out their confrontations with management more effectively, and indeed, we may say with G. Baglioni, that the Commissione Interna has always functioned as « the reference point in the unions' organizational apparatus and strategy »¹⁰.

But with the eruption of a movement of social protest in the late 1960s the Commissione Interna began to appear to many as inadequate to sustain the new waves of workers' militancy. Its areas of competence — workers' safety and health, and handling of grievances — began to appear too limited. Its essential character became more and more evident — it served as an « institutionalized instrument of order within the enterprise »¹¹. Its structure began to manifest a high degree of rigidity vis-à-vis the mounting drives to articulate new and specific claims, and initiate new forms of conflictual strategy. As a Petrolchimica worker put it in the course of an interview, « a C.I. of 13 members out of 6,000

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 29.

⁹ F. MOMIGLIANO, *Sindacato, Progresso Tecnico, Programmazione Economica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1966, pp. 106 ff.

¹⁰ Guido BAGLIONI, *L'Istituto della 'Commissione Interna' e la questione della Rappresentanza dei Lavoratori nei Luoghi di Lavoro*, *Studi di Sociologia*, vol. 8, no. 1/2, Jan.-Jun 1970, p. 176.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 188.

workers did only what it could. These 13 persons did not even have freedom to move within the company ; they met once a week in their office — on Tuesday afternoons — to discuss their problems, but they could not go around the shops and see what problems existed there. As a result there was a substantial distance between the Committee and the rank-and-file. For years the C.I. has been a label, something like a decoration within the company »¹². The traditional principle of parliamentary representation upon which the Commissione Interna was based became one of the central points in the criticism waged by the militants. They felt that all that remained for them to do was to endorse a-posteriori the actions carried out by the initiative of the Commissione Interna representatives.

The process through which the Commissione Interna was brought to a crisis point saw one of its most dramatic developments in the rise of the « Comitati Unitari di Base » (CUB) — grass roots councils which grew out of innovative pressures exercised by the workers, at a time when the crisis of workers' representation had clearly reached the lowest ebb. In effect the CUBs represented an immediate answer to the workers' dissatisfaction with the existing structures of representation within the enterprise ; they manifested the determination of the rank-and-file to take into their own hands the initiative in carrying out the conflict. As the CUBs spread rapidly in all major industrial plants of Italy, they became centers of discussion, critique, and formulation of new tactics of conflict, where all the concerned workers participated directly in choosing their leaders and in making decisions¹³.

The CUBs experience was a short lived one, however, (by the end of 1969 most CUBs had either ceased to exist or had receded into the background), but they occupy an important place in the ongoing development of Italian labour and industrial relations, for a number of reasons : —

1. The CUBs represent the first major organized expression of workers' action based on the principle of direct, participatory democracy within the plant.
2. They were the first organs through which there occurred a merger between the workers' strife in the plants and the broader process of protest against Italy's whole institutional network. The CUBs in fact became centers in which students, white-collar workers ; intellectuals, and activists from a variety of extra-parliamentary groups converged to assist the workers in carrying out their conflict. The ferment of ideas generated by the militants and leaders of various groups within the CUBs enabled the workers not only to question critically the whole productive setting of

¹² R. AGLIETA, *et al*, *I Delegati Operai*, Roma, Coines, 1970, p. 162.

¹³ G. BIANCHI, *et al*, *I CUB : Comitati Unitari di Base*, Roma, Coines, 1971, 142 pp.

Italy's industry, but was also instrumental in shaping their consciousness i.e. enable them to see the global implications of their concrete demands. 3. The CUBs contributed enormously to the goal of a unified workers movement (a goal which presently is the most debated issue within the Italian labour movement) in that during their daily actions of contestation, the workers transcended individual union affiliations and made the concrete grievances common to all the only rallying point of their actions ¹⁴.

The impact the CUBs had on the labour relations framework can be seen by the way in which the unions were forced to take into account the innovative nature of the conflict as carried out by the new militants, and carefully assess the philosophical and strategic implications of their actions. After an initial period of hesitation — and perhaps, surprise — the unions were able to 'recover' and thereafter succeeded in taking over the conduct of the conflict and integrating the actions of the CUBs in their own global strategy. The unions' success in their 'integration strategy' has not, however, occurred without they themselves undergoing a process of organizational renewal and decentralization without which they could not have regained their grip on the rank-and-file.

ITALIAN LABOUR'S NEW PROBLEMS

The success of the unions in taking over the conflict led to the establishment of new structures for workers' representation designed to respond to the needs expressed by the rank-and-file. As a result of the agreements ratified at the end of 1969, workers councils, (at both the shop floor and plant levels) have come into being at most important sectors of Italian industry (auto, textile, chemical and refining, rubber, domestic appliances, etc.). The character of these new representative bodies is still ill-defined, especially on account of the diversified circumstances surrounding their origins. Some of them, in fact, emerged almost spontaneously out of the long process of negotiation; some were deliberately promoted by the unions, and still others came into being as a result of rank and file pressures.

In general, it can be said of all of them that they are essentially control and negotiation oriented bodies, and are composed of workers delegates elected by the rank-and-file in shop assemblies. Four out of five agreements studied by the ISRL (an inter-union research institute) display « a certain tendency to make the delegates not only instruments of control over the enforcement of agreements, but also subjects of negotiation » ¹⁵.

The importance of these bodies lies in the powers which they enjoy in matters such as speed of work, job-categories, conditions of the work

¹⁴ P. BELLAGI, G. PELLICCIARI, « I Comitati Unitari di Base : Autogestione delle lotte e sociologic della partecipazione », *Studi di Sociologia*, vol. 8, no. 1/2, Jan.-Jun 1970, pp. 197-214.

¹⁵ R. AGLIETA, *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

environment, working hours, etc. It is widely felt that through this system of workers councils and assemblies at the various levels of production, the workers can now exercise a larger measure of self-control over their own conditions of work. The national agreement ratified in June, 1971 between Fiat and the three metalworkers unions provides again for the establishment of a number of workers councils. A piece-work and rhythms-of-work council ; a work-environment council (which can avail itself of the help from public agencies to ensure that no harmful working conditions subsist ; and a job-categories council. Each of these councils is composed of six workers delegates, two from each of the three unions which represent the Fiat workers. These councils may avail themselves of technical expertise which is provided by the three unions, and moreover, they enjoy considerable freedom of movement within the plant or shops, which enables them to carry out their duties¹⁶.

In spite of the fact that unions can bring to bear their influence in the process of choosing new delegates, there are indications which suggest that the delegate is primarily bound to the will of the rank-and-file. Indeed, in many cases his mandate is subject to recall, depending on the judgment of those workers who have conferred that mandate. This has been the case in the experience of Alfa Romeo, Italsider, Marzotto, and Petrolchimica¹⁷.

Indeed, the figure of the worker-delegate is currently the subject of a most delicate debate within the Italian labour movement. Unions which traditionally adhered to a bargaining strategy based on the acceptance of an industrial-capitalist order tend to view the worker-delegate as the equivalent of the British shop steward' — essentially a negotiating agent who is well integrated into the industrial politics of the trade-union to which he belongs. The more militant and ideologically oriented unions, see in the worker-delegate an instrument through which they can preserve contact with the rank-and-file, the link through which innovative impulses coming from the base can immediately be transmitted to the union, which in turn will translate them into a global conflictual strategy.

A third view has also emerged from various groups of the extra-parliamentary left, some of which were extremely influential among the grass roots during the industrial conflict of 1968/1969. In their view, the worker-delegate should be a highly politically conscious subject, who could readily translate in political terms the human, economic and organizational needs expressed by the rank-and-file. As *Il Manifesto*, the leading one of these groups, has put it, « . . . the worker-delegate's essential nature, namely, bearer of what springs up from the immediate and collective experiences, and manager of problems which are in the reach of all, make out of the structure of the worker-delegate the most favour-

¹⁶ M. P. L. NOTIZIE, vol. 2, no. 25/26, Jun. 1971, pp. 9-15.

¹⁷ R. AGLIETA *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 95-99.

able ground for a political battle aimed at building up a mass organization which is able to express the class autonomy of the workers, their militant thrust, the affirmation of proletarian values »¹⁸. In this sense, the worker-delegate would guard against any possible integration of the worker into reformist policies coming from both management and organized labour. He would be the agent who insures — to paraphrase sociologist P. Bellasi — the existence of a dialectic of conflict between the grass roots, the unions, and management, thus undermining the possibility of any crystallization of power within the enterprise.

It is obvious that the figure of the worker-delegate is charged with a high degree of ambiguity due to the fact that he functions both as the center around which plant-level political strategies should revolve, and as negotiating agent in a formal sense. One cannot but wonder if the worker-delegate can carry out such a dual role and sustain the tensions deriving from it. In many ways the long and arduous process of negotiation which occurred throughout the spring of 1971 when the Fiat management and 185,000 metalworkers engaged in the renewal of their national agreement, has confirmed the legitimacy of such fears. On the one hand, the ratification of that agreement has shown how the worker-delegate and the workers councils have become an accepted fact in Italian industrial relations, and how well both management and labour have been able to integrate their functions in their bargaining policies. On the other hand, however, such ratification was achieved only at the cost of much frustration and discontent among large strata of the rank-and-file who feel that these new structures of representation have been 'used' by the union leadership to contain the workers' original claims, in an attempt to reach a quicker 'comprise' with management¹⁹.

This sense of betrayal among many workers leads one to suggest that industrial conflict on this issue will soon erupt again, especially in view of the new wave of negotiations forthcoming in the fall of 1972.

The search for a solution to the problem of adequate structures for workers' representation will probably go on for many months to come. What appears certain at this stage of the development is that the recent institution of workers councils, assemblies, delegates, will make the old Commissione Interna obsolete, and will probably replace it entirely (except for the small plants, where the Commissione Interna will continue to play a central role).

The complexity of this debate is deepened on account of the current political developments surrounding the Italian industrial scene. The suc-

¹⁸ IL MANIFESTO, vol. 2, no. 3/4, Mar.-Apr. 1970, p. 49; Cf. also G. PANNONZO's article, « Delegati e Sindacato » *Il Manifesto*, vol. 2, no. 6, June 1970, pp. 57-58.

¹⁹ Gaetano GONGI, « Rapporto sulla vertenza Fiat » *La Critica Sociologica*, no. 18, Summer 1971, pp. 68-91.

cessful offensive of the workers movement and its achievements at the labour and industrial relations level must now reckon with the extremely delicate political and economic situation which has arisen in the last three years. Italy is not only experiencing one of its most serious economic crises of the last two decades, but its political framework is also undergoing continuous re-alignments underscoring the difficult process of arriving at the political formula necessary to launch another stage of economic development²⁰.

In this framework of political-economic instability, the new industrial relations structures appear to be far from stable. In the attempt, presently underway, to re-assess at the national economic-political level what has been gained at the level of in-plant workers-management conflict, the attention of all those concerned is focused on the three labour confederations and on their current attempt to achieve organic unity. Such a unity — unquestionably a result of the unifying process engendered by rank-and-file pressures — would appear to be the only concrete guarantee against a return to pre-1969 structures of industrial relations.

Les relations industrielles et le conflit industriel en Italie

Par cet essai, l'auteur s'efforce de définir les tendances générales du système des relations du travail actuel en Italie. La longue période de conflits qui a caractérisé la ronde de négociations de 1969 constitue le point central de la présente analyse. Les formes nouvelles qu'a revêtues le conflit durant la période préparatoire et le déroulement des négociations ont eu un effet décisif sur le processus des relations du travail.

L'état de l'économie italienne à la fin des années 1960 ainsi que l'impuissance des partis politiques qu'appuyait la classe ouvrière de réaliser des réformes sociales essentielles a créé un climat de mécontentement qui a favorisé le militantisme à la base. D'ailleurs, ces tendances se sont accrues d'autant plus que les organisations syndicales n'avaient pas assez de leadership pour obtenir des changements qui s'imposaient dans les conditions de travail.

Le militantisme des travailleurs du rang a engendré la contestation du syndicalisme tel qu'il existait dans la plupart des industries italiennes à l'époque ainsi que la volonté bien arrêtée des militants de prendre toutes les mesures nécessaires en vue de s'assurer de meilleurs moyens de contrôle sur les conditions de travail. Cette attitude s'est naturellement reflétée sur la nature des revendications des travailleurs (augmentation de salaires à la base, contrôle des rythmes de travail, éli-

²⁰ Cf. Michele SALVATI, « L'Origine della crisi in corso » *Quaderni Piacentini*, vol. 11, no. 26, March 1972, pp. 2-30, for a very detailed analysis of the recent difficulties of the centre-left formula and their impact on the Italian labour movement.

mination des dangers et des nuisances, réduction de la gamme des qualifications et participation des ouvriers à la détermination des critères d'évaluation des emplois) et sur la stratégie de négociation mise au point par les militants. Sous la pression de la base, les structures traditionnelles de représentation au niveau de l'usine — comme la Commission interne et la section syndicale d'usine — se sont avérées nettement insuffisantes.

La recherche de nouvelles formes de représentation a donné naissance aux *Comitati Unitari de Base* (organismes spontanés, donc informels au niveau des usines dans lesquelles les ouvriers se rassemblent en vue de décider les démarches à entreprendre au jour le jour selon les aléas du déroulement du conflit. À mesure que les négociations progressaient et que les questions devenaient plus complexes, la direction des organisations syndicales a repris l'initiative des revendications.

Cette action a considérablement affecté le pouvoir des *Comitati Unitari de Base* mais elle a aussi forcé les organisations syndicales à réexaminer leur ancien rôle vis-à-vis les revendications de la base et, dans plusieurs cas, à adopter de nouvelles structures qui puissent leur permettre d'avoir de meilleurs contacts avec la vie à l'usine.

La ratification des accords à la fin de 1969 a permis de mettre en place de meilleures structures de représentation ouvrière pour répondre aux réclamations des travailleurs du rang. Tels sont les conseils de chaîne de montage, d'atelier et d'équipe ainsi que les assemblées ouvrières formées des délégués des différents conseils. L'importance de ces organismes nouveaux réside dans les pouvoirs qu'ils détiennent concernant l'établissement de la cadence du travail, des conditions de travail et de catégories d'emplois. Ils ont aussi un rôle remarquable dans la transformation du régime de négociation centralisé et national, où les réclamations fixées d'avance au sommet par les dirigeants syndicaux par un nouveau mode de négociation qui, non seulement permet de reformuler les problèmes pendant la durée des accords, mais qui tient compte de la situation concrète des différentes catégories de travailleurs et de la nature des entreprises, ce qui oblige les syndicats à tenir compte des desiderata exprimés par les comités d'usine et les associations locales de travailleurs.

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