

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY SERIES



CHALLENGING GLOBAL CAPITALISM

LABOR MIGRATION, RADICAL STRUGGLE, AND
URBAN CHANGE IN DETROIT AND TURIN

Nicola Pizzolato



PALGRAVE MACMILLAN TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY SERIES

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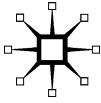
By Nicola Pizzolato

Challenging Global Capitalism

Labor Migration, Radical
Struggle, and Urban Change
in Detroit and Turin

Nicola Pizzolato

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To Ciro and Rosa

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Preface

In 2011, from Zuccotti Park, next to the Wall Street financial district, all the way to San Francisco, London, Madrid, Zurich, and Tahrir square, protesters challenged the injustices inherent in traditional political and economic systems. In the West, the movement targeted the perceived inequalities of global capitalism and crafted a slogan—We are the 99 per cent—that resonated with large segments of people around the world who are economically, culturally, or politically disenfranchised. Although national political identity remains an essential feature of the demonstrations, shaped as they were by domestic structures and the international institutions that national states have created, the media has noticed how the Occupy Movement unfolded across a number of networks beyond national borders and forged, commentators argued, a new form of activism, transnational in scope.

When thinking about the extent of transnational relationships existing among activists and activist organizations—certainly an important feature of today's world—our attention is often circumscribed by the recent past. So it is well-timed to consider earlier periods in the twentieth century during which social movements succeeded to a certain extent in bringing together transnational coalitions in support of a social or political agenda.

This book investigates one important instance of transnational protest movements—one that emerged during the radical end of the left-wing politics in the 1950s and gained momentum in the wake of the social uprisings of 1968. This movement, often narrowly interpreted within the brackets of labor history, had its roots, the book argues, in the societal transformations, such as internal immigration and urban sprawl, that accompanied the period of late capitalist industrialization often dubbed as Fordism.

Challenging Global Capitalism provides a detailed account of the political and theoretical developments that emerged in Detroit and Turin among activist workers and political militants during this period. Workers and activists, located within an interconnected economic system in different parts of the world, were able to form a common understanding of the realities of capitalism and develop similar critiques and strategies of opposition. Interaction between

individuals and groups in Detroit and Turin, through personal correspondence, the exchange and translation of publications, and personal visits, furthered this common understanding. However, precisely as in the social movements that have recently gained media attention, the protesters merged, often unconsciously, the local, national, and transnational dimension of the protest.

The political activism analyzed in this book blended together agitation in the factory and in the city neighborhoods; it involved opposition to car manufacturers as well as labor unions; and it comprised ordinary people who had never been involved before in industrial disputes as well as veterans of working-class militancy. It was also characterized by the interplay of race, ethnicity, and regional provenience as well as class. The analysis of differences between Detroit and Turin in respect of the social identities of the participants opens new vistas to this important period of social unrest.

As a protest movement, the working-class and urban rebellion of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as exemplified in the case studies of Detroit and Turin, left a legacy of innovations that are now embedded in the culture of twenty-first century political activists: they reinvented direct action in the workplaces and in the cityscape; they reclaimed the right to challenge leadership, organizing independently of existing labor organization; they forged a new vocabulary of protest; and they emphasized demands for dignity over economic benefits.

Southern Italians in Turin and African Americans in Detroit demanded the right to self-organize both in terms of production and in terms of strategies of protest. The activists within this transnational community put the emphasis on workers' actions, not the actions of bureaucratized organizations (parties, unions, and states) and its theorists attempted to go beyond existing dogma for a new political diagnosis. Both these aspects resonate with the antiglobalization movement of the past 20 years.¹

Series Editor Foreword

We have published a number of important monographs in the Palgrave Transnational History series. The topics have ranged from transnational individuals and organizations to transnational visions and movements. This volume is unique in that it offers a transnational comparison of two cities, Detroit and Turin, during the turbulent decade of the 1960s that was characterized by labor disputes and violence.

It is a challenging task to bring urban history, comparative history, and labor history into the framework of transnational history. The study of urban history has been in existence for a long time, and, of course, it focuses on specific cities. While they may be compared to one another, what transnational significance would their separate stories bring? Comparative history is of relatively recent origin, and it has sought to analyze such phenomena as feudalism, slavery, and modernization across national boundaries. But often it has failed to make comparisons synchronically, that is, examining such themes as they impacted upon one another in the same time period. Labor history, on its part, has focused on the relationship, usually antagonistic, between capital and labor with emphasis on their respective class interests, ideologies, and strategies. Because of the specific local nature of such interactions, labor history has not yet been a serious subject of study in the framework of transnational history.

How can such diverse fields, with their own methodologies and conceptual frameworks, be brought together to further the study of transnational history? The author of this volume meets the challenge by, in a sense, denationalizing the labor disputes in automobile factories in Detroit and Turin during the 1960s and relating the individuals to each other across national boundaries and to worldwide developments. Nicola Pizzolato has conducted research in a large number of archives, interviewed many who had been participants in the strikes and demonstrations, and made use, often critically, of the existing scholarly literature. The result is a careful and reliable history of the two cities shaken by dissension and violence. Of course, the American city in the Midwest and the northern Italian city were markedly different in some ways, especially in their racial compositions. The influx of African Americans into Detroit, and job and

social discrimination against them, was a phenomenon not found in Turin, where new industrial recruits mostly came from the southern provinces.

Nevertheless, the author argues, certain threads connected the two cities. One was that, going beyond a more traditional class struggle understood in Marxist terms, those involved in the disputes and riots in both cities ardently sought “recognition,” that is, they wanted to be respected as individuals, not as members of a category of people included in the machinery of production. What they sought thus came close to the idea of human rights that was gaining influence at that time around the world. Not class interest or worker’s right, but freedom and dignity of the individual person: that was the transnational idea that was gaining momentum in the latter half of the 1960s. Such an idea pitted itself against “Fordism,” the notion of the efficient production mechanism that had been the leading ideology of capitalism for several decades. In thus opposing individual “recognition” to the imperatives of rational economic forces, these workers may be said to have anticipated the subsequent movements of protest against globalization. That opposition, of course, is a key theme in recent transnational history.

This book also documents specific connections established between some of the labor leaders in Detroit and Turin. Transnational connections of workers involved in labor disputes have been missing in the studies thus far published of the global radicalism of the 1960s, so this book adds an indispensable insight into the study of “the global 1968.” It is to be hoped that other studies will follow and further advance the study of transnational history by bringing into it insights from urban, labor, ethnic, and other fields of history.

AKIRA IRIYE
RANA MITTER

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I am deeply grateful to the many people that I met at one point or another during the long gestation of this book. As with any long-term project, this book has evolved and changed over the years with the help and suggestions of numerous individuals. Rick Halpern, at University College London (UCL), who supervised my MA dissertation, and, afterward, my PhD on a comparison of workers' struggle in Detroit and Turin, has been a great source of inspiration and acted as a mentor during the initial stages of this project. The initial idea took shape after I attended a seminar by Heather Thompson on Detroit's DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) that Rick had strongly recommended. As someone raised in Turin in the first few years of his life, the story of Detroit's radicals sounded familiar and I was keen to explore its similarities and differences with those of the Italian setting. Enrico Dallago, working at the time on a comparative history of US and Italian landed elites, showed me that the comparative methodology was a fruitful one, if one was aware of its pitfalls. Ruth Percy, a fellow PhD student, was researching at that time on her own comparative dissertation, and we shared the excitement and worries of embarking on such an intellectual journey. After Rick Halpern's departure from UCL, Alex Korner took over the supervision of my project; in him I found another keen adept of the comparative method and an invaluable source of stimulating intellectual criticism.

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1

Introduction

In the United States and in Italy, and worldwide, Detroit and Turin are known as the “Motor City” and *la città dell’auto* respectively—two metropolises that have developed around the manufactured product that best symbolized modernity: the automobile. As so high a proportion of all the cars produced in the course of the twentieth century was made in these two cities, they have retained this reputation well after the bulk of the automotive industry had actually abandoned them. General Motors (GM), Chrysler, Ford, and FIAT—the major companies that historically characterized the two “Motor Cities”—are now global corporations that spread their operations across several continents, even though they maintain links with their original headquarters.

The latest economic recession has shaken automakers worldwide, compelling them to restructure and downsize (yet again) and to seek a fresh infusion of cash from governments and investors. In April 2009, Turin and Detroit figured prominently in business news as FIAT’s CEO Sergio Marchionne sealed an important deal with Chrysler: the Italian company would become a leading stakeholder and in exchange would furnish the iconic but moribund Detroit firm with fuel-efficient and lower-emission technology. Chrysler had filed for bankruptcy and this agreement was part of complex rescue package negotiated between the Obama administration, the United Automobile Workers (UAW), and the company’s major creditors. American business analysts doubted the viability of the partnership, describing it as a “gamble.” “Would Detroit Sound Any Better in Italian?” quipped the *New York Times*, reporting an analyst’s opinion that “it will be enormously difficult to make it truly functional. It’s a moon shot.”¹

On the other side of the Atlantic, FIAT’s Italian workers were skeptical too. While the CEOs and the US Department of Treasury were negotiating the agreement and Marchionne was placing a failed bid to acquire GM’s European venture Opel, 15 thousand FIAT workers

from all over the Peninsula traveled to Turin to express their concern about the proposed merger, which, they said, would cause a further reduction in the workforce and the closing of the Italian, now marginal plants, “We know that when there’s a merger, workers always lose,” declared one autoworker.² The protest escalated in tension when a dissident faction bundled a union leader off the stage, claiming that unions were “selling workers out” to the company.³ The protesters—union members and dissenters alike—reminded observers that Turin, just like Detroit, was at a crossroads, and that any global strategy of development should be assessed for its consequences at the local level.

Business analysts may be surprised to discover how closely interwoven the automotive industries of Detroit and Turin were and are, but historians should not be. Positioned at the core of the automobile industry, they have both been hailed as prototype Fordist cities throughout the twentieth century. Though not always synchronized, their histories have often proceeded in parallel, producing similar patterns of industrial growth, urban development, and industrial conflict. In both cities, the automobile industry informed the economic, social, and spatial dimensions of the urban space. It was each city’s largest single employer, and the fortunes of a subcontracting network of small and medium supplying companies relied upon those of the automakers. The hegemony of the automobile manufactures over Detroit and Turin was unparalleled in the United States or Europe respectively. However, the high concentration of manufacturing employment led to dependence, and the destiny of these metropolises became bound to the fortunes and whims of a small handful of corporations.

The central contention of this book is that analyzing the parallel, sometimes tangled, histories of Detroit and Turin provides us with a fresh look at the way Fordism—a transnational process—shaped urban change and social protest in two historically contrasting places. In particular, the book investigates how social movements responded to the urban crises engendered by automobile manufacturers’ practices of expansion, recruitment, and restructuring. By Fordism, I mean not only the technological paradigm that dominated the most advanced industries of that period, the automobile industry among them, but also a system of regulation of the economy (as defined by the theorists of the *régulation* school).⁴ In the 1930s, while writing “Americanism and Fordism” from his prison cell, Gramsci predicted that Fordism would become the paradigm of development of the core industrial capitalist societies, but the

model came into full realization only in the postwar period.⁵ It was a model that, as well as proposing a certain technical solution for mass production, provided the social institutions and the economic incentives to sustain mass consumption. Collective bargaining, the minimum wage, and the welfare state, differently organized across Western Europe and the United States, provided a social wage that expanded internal demand as the economy grew. The state took on institutional powers to influence redistribution; corporations had to constantly innovate and concentrate to maintain high productivity and had to be enlightened enough to accept the system of redistribution; organized labor had to cooperate by maintaining the discipline of the labor force, whose reliable performance was the most important component of the productivity effort.⁶

Through its agglomeration of manufacturing in sprawling urban concentrations, Fordism created within the core states of the world economy large peripheral or semi-peripheral areas, characterized by unemployment, low wages, and “backward” social organization. The American South and the Italian *Mezzogiorno* both fitted this description. In both Italy and the United States, there were many economic and social factors that drove workers to leave home and settle in the industrial centers of the north. In the United States, in rural areas across the South and in the Appalachian region, machines replaced farmhands as subsistence farming yielded to commercial agriculture. The coal industry underwent a similar conversion when it introduced new machinery during a period of slackening demand for coal. These transformations created an employment crisis that induced southerners to look to the northern manufacturing industry for salvation. It was African Americans who suffered the most from this process of economic change, as an entrenched pattern of discrimination denied them the meager opportunities that the region afforded the whites. They eagerly escaped the pervasive system of racial segregation that mocked their rights as citizens and offended their dignity as human beings. This trend continued during the 1950s and in the early 1960s. In fact, although the South was slowly and unevenly changing, the social and political effects of “Jim Crow,” in the light of the “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement, continued to be a significant push factor for African Americans.

In Italy, the *questione meridionale*, the southern question, surfaced immediately after Italian unification in 1861 when a large gap in social and economic development between the southern and northern halves of Italy was evident. For decades afterwards, the problem remained unsolved, and it worsened as the north (the northwest in

particular) developed a strong manufacturing base and the south stalled in a backward rural economy. Agrarian reforms in the 1950s failed to implement an efficient redistribution of land. Even subsequent government policy, always tainted with patronage, to subsidize industrial investments in the region achieved little in terms of employment, since only capital-intensive industries accepted the move to the south. These industrial complexes came to be known as “cathedrals in the desert,” since they were surrounded by desolate rural villages and contributed little or nothing to the development of the region. A parliamentary commission established in 1951 to investigate poverty ascertained that a quarter of Italian households fell into the “poor” category, but a majority of them, some 50.2 percent were located in the south. The most wretched living conditions were in Calabria, where the average income was only 30 percent of that of Piedmont.

Migration from south to north reached a peak in the 1940s and 1950s in Detroit, and in the 1950s and 1960s in Turin. These relocations involved the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of men and women, many of them unaccustomed to life in an industrialized metropolis. In Italy, three million workers left the Mezzogiorno during the 1950s and the 1960s. This mass exodus reached a peak during 1958–1963, due to the high rate of economic growth in northern Italy at that time. In the United States, between 1940 and 1960, more than 5 million people abandoned the American South, of whom 3 million were African Americans. The latter, thus, joined the hundreds of thousands who had left the South a generation earlier, during the first Great Migration. By 1966, only 55 percent of blacks lived below the Mason-Dixon line.⁷

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the radical social and industrial conflict ravaging the fabric of Turin and Detroit manifested the problem of a workforce alienated from both the production process and the established system of industrial relations. Nor was conflict restricted to the workplace, since the unrestrained urban growth had created volatile situations, especially in the neighborhoods and housing projects inhabited by the recent and not-so-recent immigrants. Lack of adequate housing and social services, as well as the racial (in Detroit) and regional (in Turin) divisions between newcomers and established residents exacerbated tensions that exploded in civil disturbances and radical political activism in the communities as well as in the factories.

From 1967 to 1973, Detroit witnessed a wave of radical political activism, most prominently associated with the League of Revolutionary

Black Workers, but which continued even after its demise in 1971. The protest began at Chrysler's flagship plant Dodge Main in the wake of the destructive urban riot of July 1967. The "rebellion," as radicals called it, precipitated a challenge in the car factories to the existing power structure, which, argued the strikers, pitted management and union bureaucracy against rank-and-file workers, and in particular against the African Americans who performed the most demanding tasks on the production lines. The strikes at times saw the participation of thousands of black workers—precise numbers are lacking, but the protest succeeded in halting production and incurring the wrath of both the company and the union. As the struggle spread into other factories, the leaders of the League decided to mobilize protest in the community as well, by taking control of a student paper with a large distribution, by creating their own printing shop and publishing house, and by staging marches and demonstrations in the business district. They soon found themselves under a multipronged conservative and liberal attack, but while individual members of the League were ousted from the factories and the union halls, rank-and-file dissent, increasingly interracial, continued to manifest itself in the plants, most notably through the activity of the United National Caucus (UNC), until the economic downturn sealed the fate of the protest.

In Turin, the period of mobilization lasted from 1969 to 1975. In 1969, *Meridionali*, as southern migrants were called, initiated a wave of spontaneous strikes centered on FIAT's factories. This episode was soon dubbed the *autunno caldo*, or "hot autumn," the period of the greatest mobilization of workers in Italian history, which paved the way for structural reforms of society. Southerners transformed the workplace by resisting the imposition of the Fordist production process, or by embracing it, but interpreting it in terms of their own cultural parameters. Union politics changed as the *Meridionali* brought their own agenda to labor relations and demanded a place and a voice in the system of industrial relations. In some cases, migrants espoused radical tactics and ideologies to advance their demands. Lotta Continua, "The struggle goes on," was the most popular radical group in Turin. Similar to the League, it denounced the unions—even the Communist Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL)—as ineffective in challenging the manufacturers' drive to introduce an ever-increasing pace of work and called for an "autonomous" organization of the working class. As in the case of Detroit, protesters made a loud noise to vent their anger, rhythmically beating machinery during demonstration, or using aggressive slogans

on their placards and uncompromising language in their publications. While unions gradually embraced some of the rank-and-file demands, such as an egalitarian wage increase across the board, radical groups took their protest to the neighborhoods, where they organized for the reduction of house rents and bus and train fares, and for better schools and social services. When some militants went underground, and formed armed groups, they lost touch with the ordinary rank-and-file workers in the factories, who, by 1975, were more likely to protest through absenteeism than by striking.

The stories of working-class radicalism in Detroit and Turin have been extensively chronicled by activists, participants, and scholars. The picture that emerges from these accounts is informative in many respects, but offers no clue as to the reasons why a wave of working-class social protest, both inside and outside the factory, should have arisen almost simultaneously in several Western countries. In fact, while the 1968 student movement is generally acknowledged as an international phenomenon, the workers' movement is mainly analyzed from a local or national viewpoint. Through a comparative and transnational perspective, this book explores instead the interconnectedness of these stories.

In the past decades, historians have often criticized American exceptionalism—the notion that the development of the United States has been differently shaped by the unique combination of social and geographical factors—as ahistorical and inaccurate.⁸ However, the idea of an exceptional process of class formation in the United States is not fully discredited yet, as it remain a commonplace trope in the discussion on American labor on the media. It also regularly returns in one form or another in the academic debate.⁹ This book suggests that the different outcomes of workers' struggle in an American and a southern European city did not originate in the exceptional character of the American working-class or society, but in the choices of unions, manufacturers, radicals activists, and workers themselves in a context of similar production technology. Race, in particular, has proven to be one of the most intractable components of the argument for exceptionalism. Racial discrimination was an integral element of the social structure of the United States; it often constituted a barrier to class solidarity and it powerfully affected the tactics of the labor movement. However, the recognition of the distinctive role of race should not stifle historians' engagement with the comparative and transnational dimension of the history of the American working-class. To do so would be to miss the opportunity to investigate how this factor shaped forms of political

expression of American protest movements akin to others in faraway countries were race not in the political agenda. It is worth reminding here the surprise of Detroit black radical John Watson to discover, when he first traveled to Italy in 1968, that the Italian working-class was fragmented as the American one, even though along different fault lines.¹⁰ The historian who traces the story of working-class protest beyond the boundaries of the American nation might experience a similar astonishment.

During its gestation, this book has been instead inspired by the call of historians such as David Thelen, Ian Tyrell, Thomas Bender, Donna Gabaccia, Daniel Rodgers, and others, who have demonstrated the importance of the interplay of local events with global developments. “Transnational” history, they argue, by enlarging the framework in which we analyze peculiar American events, enriches the way we understand them. In 2000, the Organization of American Historians’ “La Pietra Report” invited scholars “to contextualize the United States on a global scale” and proposed a research and pedagogic agenda not constrained by the politically defined boundaries of the nation: the influence of American activities does not stop at the national borders and American society is not sealed from the impact of faraway events.¹¹ In 2005 and 2008, a cohort of labor historians including Marcel Van Der Linden, Rick Halpern, Neville Kirk, Prabhu Mohapatra, and others, convened in two international workshops and embraced the idea that the history of the working class, shaped as it is by international flows of migration, capital movement, and industrial relocation, would particularly benefit from a transnational and global approach, especially if multidirectional, that is, encompassing the perspective of scholars working outside the American academia.¹² This discussion has greatly influenced the way in which I looked at social movements in Detroit and Turin.

This book contributes to the burgeoning field of transnational history by integrating into its methodology a comparative approach. The comparative method in American history reached its peak in the 1980s, when historians such as George Fredrickson, Peter Kolchin, and Raymond Grew applied it to the study of large historical processes and social phenomena such as slavery or white supremacy. Since then, it has often been criticized for its limits. In the 1990s, the Young Turks of transnational history argued that comparative history validated the implicit distortion of the national framework in historical inquiry. For instance, it reiterated the importance of the nation-state by making it the ultimate unit of comparison, in a moment when globalization showed the interpenetration of national

historical experiences. “Comparisons,” argues Micol Seigel, “requires the observer to name two or more units whose similarities and differences she or he will then describe. This setup discourages attention to exchange between the two.”¹³

This book treats the comparative and transnational approach as simply methodological postures to be adopted according to the historical problem at hand. The comparative method explains the variations between cases characterized by broad similarities, or vice versa; both differences and similarities between distant cases impel historians to search for new interpretations to familiar problems. A transnational approach is best suited to follow processes, ideas, and people across the borders and to explore the interdependence of political and social change across the world. More importantly, both methodologies undermine the idea of unique or exceptional national developments—a notion particular resilient in the history of the American working-class since Werner Sombart famously asked why there is no socialism in the United States.¹⁴

Early accounts of Detroit’s radical working-class struggle were written from an activist’s perspective with little or no reference to a wider context. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* have provided the classic narrative of black radicalism in late 1960s Detroit. The book recounted the activities of the core members of the League, its internal divisions, and its various projects. It suggested that the League represented an inspiring model of grassroots organization, particularly in its ability to reach the community beyond the factory. Georgakas and Surkin were successful in dramatizing the ruthless exploitation, on both a racial and a class basis, of black workers at the point of production, but their book gave the impression that what happened in Detroit was unique to that city.¹⁵

James Geschwender, a radical sociologist personally close to many leaders of the League, covered much the same ground and used similar sources, but he set out to explore which theoretical model of working-class insurgency best fitted the experience of that group.¹⁶ Geschwender thought that the League, though unsuccessful, had been right to link racism to capitalist exploitation, and to organize black workers at the point of production (rather than the *lumpenproletariat*, the underclass privileged by the Black Panthers). He saw the events in Detroit as the first phase of a working-class mobilization that would eventually have involved white workers also. More importantly, argued Geschwender, it showed that a black-led Marxist-Leninist organization *could* exist and therefore provided a legacy to future, perhaps more successful, organizers.

Geschwender's conclusions remained tentative at best, and his prediction that black Maoist organizations would soon become prominent already seemed implausible by the time his book appeared; furthermore, his theoretical ruminations provided few insights into the context of the workplace where these struggles originated. In 1986, a study in industrial relations, Steve Jefferys's *Management and Managed*, addressed precisely these issues.¹⁷ Jefferys's analysis of industrial relations at Chrysler's Dodge Main recorded how resistance was mounted through the long-standing practice of unauthorized strikes. Indeed, the narrow scope of his analysis (a single factory) allowed Jefferys to see that the issues about which black workers protested in the late 1960s—speed-up of the assembly line, the unsafe working environment, and unfair treatment by supervisors—closely resembled those that had prompted white workers to protest a decade earlier. Jefferys, thus, saw the emergence of the League as a direct consequence of labor grievances at Dodge Main, even though the protesters' inflammatory language was tinged with Black Nationalism. Contrary to Geschwender, he did not speculate about its members' blueprint for revolution, any more than most of those involved in the labor disputes of the period would be likely to have done. Jefferys rightly argued that shop-floor conditions at Chrysler set the agenda for the radical struggle, but what was the larger context of these battles?

Only recently, historians have succeeded in extending the analysis of historical context from the factory to the whole city. Heather Thompson, in *Whose Detroit?* contended that black radicalism played a crucial part in transforming the politics of the city, an arena of struggle between leftist, liberal, and conservative forces.¹⁸ Thompson followed black radicals into the factories, where they confronted a management willing to concede on racial grounds to retain control of the productive process; into the union halls, where the UAW adopted a range of different strategies to defeat the black militants; into the law courts, where radicals exposed the brutal effects of racism and deprivation on black Detroiters; and into the neighborhoods, where they staged protests against racial profiling and police brutality. Her extensive archival research has illuminated a number of celebrated episodes and has, thus, shown how politics complicated the racial divide familiar to us by previous studies. Thompson's study is inspiring. However, I suggest in this book that through a transnational and comparative approach, historians can reconsider the processes that generated working-class insurgency by exploring beyond the borders of the nation.

The literature on Turin has followed a similar trajectory in moving from an activist's perspective to a scholarly interest in reconstructing the context of the social conflict. Not surprisingly, the first accounts were produced by the self-proclaimed winners of that period, the unions that made inroads in the automobile industry and, more generally, in Italian society, in the wake of the protest of the hot autumn. These accounts interpreted industrial conflict in a way that emphasized the agency of the unions, in particular the Communist-oriented CGIL. Southern migrants, according to this paradigm, played an important role with their spontaneous rebellion, but they could achieve effective gains only thanks to the guidance of key "class-conscious" leaders within an unskilled workforce. Thus, it was "class" rather than the workers' distinctive migratory experience that furnished the main motives behind their spontaneous rebellion.

However, this view, which suggested that the Turin events were the culmination of a coherent, though interrupted, growth of the union movement from the early 1960s onwards, was unacceptable to New Left historians who have instead emphasized the chasm between the traditional labor movement (the "old" Left) and the mass of unskilled workers. Indeed, they argue that industrial conflict persisted because rank-and-file workers would not abide by the collective agreements negotiated by the unions, even if concessions had been won. In their view, the *autunno caldo* represented a watershed not because it inaugurated a progressive decade in which the union movement became an important protagonist, but because it was then that the labor movement witnessed the irruption of new social forces with a new political agenda. Its claims were expressed by groups such as *Lotta Continua*, and *Potere Operaio* who, it is argued, were receptive to the *authentic* desires of workers at the point of production.¹⁹

Wary of the notion that weak unions or miniscule radical groups could have mobilized such a mass of workers, social scientists have focused on larger political and economic forces. A number of economists pointed out that gains in productivity during the Italian economic leap (the "miracle" of 1958–1963) had not been translated into a rise in wages, and that the workers' protest addressed this economic injustice. Sociologist Sidney Tarrow added that it was a matter of political opportunity: the center-Left coalition that had governed Italy since 1963 made political repression of labor activism inside the plants more problematic—thus, an oppressed working class broke free when it had the political opportunity to do so. Others, Robert Lumley among them, argued that the new political demands of a

modernizing country—such as a social infrastructure, middle class consumerism, and the fair administration of justice—were not met by the center-Left government. Social protest arose after hopes for reform had been dashed, even though, in the process of mobilization, it put forward more progressive demands than those imagined at the outset. Finally, historians such as Paul Ginsborg, Giuseppe Berta, and Marco Scavino have added that workers also lacked representation at shop floor level, where the gap between union and rank and file was growing larger at a time when, in a company such as FIAT, there was a mass of young unskilled immigrant workers who were less deferential toward authority. This gap was filled by radical groups able to mobilize the rank and file with egalitarian demands and new tactics.²⁰

Building upon the work of these scholars, my own analysis recognizes the importance of local and national contexts, but addresses the problem of how a transnational process such as Fordism produced comparable outbursts of social protest in places far apart. My research focuses historical attention on the claim of social scientists such as Beverly Silver that capitalism is intertwined with a spatial dynamic that leads to workers and workers' movements in different regions being interlinked by global political processes and by a global division of labor.²¹ Silver's study is a macrohistorical analysis of recurrent patterns of labor unrest across space and time, and in different industries, and it demonstrates that the relocation of production, that is, globalization, while weakening established working classes, creates new waves of labor unrest in the regions experiencing proletarianization. My research engages with the issue of interconnectedness, but, by focusing on only two cases, draws upon a wealth of different cultural and political contexts, and explores the ways in which the comparison can illuminate each particular case.

The book investigates two processes that linked the Motor Cities in the postwar era and that offer a different analytical perspective to that of earlier historians who have failed to take the transnational context into account. In the first place, I consider a process of *transfer* of technology and managerial models within the automobile industry. This process reflected the expansion of the Fordist model from the United States to Europe and the need for Italian manufacturers, such as FIAT, to adopt and *adapt* machinery, models governing the organization of labor, and managerial methods to compete in the mass-production automobile market. In the aftermath of the Second World War, FIAT managers explicitly embraced "Detroit"—a synecdoche for a system and philosophy of industrial production that

went beyond the boundaries of the American city—as a “model” of development, even though they were never blind to their own specific context and to differences in target consumer demand. So close a relationship could not help but have a profound impact upon the social and industrial framework of the Italian city. Turin and Detroit were the product of a similar process, and one that transcended national boundaries.

Second, I consider a process involving the *circulation* of ideas or, to be precise, of ideas that addressed the “problem” of labor relations in the car factories or which questioned the very right of the capitalist system to exist. In thrall to the Fordist cycle of production, Detroit’s and Turin’s automotive industries became laboratories that experimented with the managerial and social problems deriving from the mass-employment of industrial workers. Union strategies in these two cities set the pattern of industrial relations for the rest of their respective countries. American unions attempted to influence labor relations at FIAT—of strategic importance in the global context of the Cold War—by disseminating a blueprint of industrial relations tested in Detroit and meant to be applicable to European countries. The hostile reception in Turin, however, suggested that any wholesale transfer might well prove problematic.

At almost the same time as representatives of the Italian and American labor movement met in countless conferences and study tours, small but influential groups of labor radicals in Detroit and Turin also circulated ideas that challenged a Fordist system then at its high point. Deprived of the copious government funds available to unions, radical ideas were transmitted through letters, small press publications, and, on occasion, men and women who crossed the Atlantic. As we will see, in Detroit and Turin, these radicals criticized the usefulness of the unions and urged workers to develop their own forms of collective organization. In the volatile political climate of the late 1960s, their ideas were to be put into action by a new generation of political activists who were determined to foment industrial conflict in the factories and to force the automobile manufacturers to rethink the model of industrial development that had so far governed the Motor Cities.

Detroit and Turin radicals were similar not only in the ideas that they espoused, but also in the practice of combining intellectual reflection with political intervention. The most committed members of these groups saw themselves as a militant vanguard, which acted in a specific social space and measured its impact in terms

of the actual transformation of the relations of production, rather than the theoretical value of their statements. Raya Dunayevskaya recapitulated this attitude when she wrote that “there is a movement from practice to theory that is literally begging for a movement from theory to practice to meet it.”²² The intended audience for newsletters and pamphlets—their main tangible output—was composed of workers and activists in the labor movement, rather than of members of an intellectual milieu. The distinction between intellectual practices and political practices is slippery (as the former may have a political content and the latter, a theoretical significance)²³ but it is nevertheless important to draw, in light of the fact that a great part of the historical evidence pertaining to those groups casts them, retrospectively, more in the role of intellectuals than of political activists.

A further similarity concerns the reasons why American and Italian radicals, whose activity was anchored in the local industrial context, looked beyond the nation for inspiration and network-building. In part, this flowed from the international purview of their conception of political change, which characterized capitalism as a global phenomenon. However, the transnationalism also stemmed from the numerical marginality of these groups within their own national territory, which spurred the activation of alliances with militants elsewhere. It was, wrote retrospectively post-workerist theorist Christian Marazzi, a way to avoid a “ghettoisation” that neutralized the importance of workers’ autonomist history.²⁴ The repeated travels of some of these radicals and the frequent reciprocal references in their publications also suggest that many of their ideas, practices and tactics were hatched in the transnational arena. However, there was never a “general line” to which these groups subscribed. Differences coexisted within the encompassing language of an “autonomy” of the working-class from the traps of institutionalization and doctrinarianism.

A comparison between postwar Detroit and Turin is particularly compelling for three reasons. First, it shows how the development and the internationalization of Fordism—a system of regulation of the economy as well as a method of production—set off similar social dynamics in different national contexts. Industrial concentration, mass flows of immigration, and unregulated urban-sprawl and inner-city decay characterized Fordism in both Detroit and Turin. It was in the Motor Cities that this system achieved its full potential while generating the irreparable effects that led to its demise. Corporations experimented with sophisticated management techniques that rationalized

the movement of huge quantities of men and materials. The necessary concentration of production irresistibly drew to the Fordist cities a great army of migrants that, in Turin and Detroit alike, recomposed the working class and radically altered the social and demographic characteristics of their entire metropolitan areas.

Second, Turin and Detroit were hubs of union and social movements that were of national, not local, significance. The Fordist cities were embattled arenas where capital and labor faced each other to determine the balance of power in the most strategic sector of the twentieth-century economy. The result of this confrontation reverberated throughout the nations. Quite literally, in the crucial decades of postwar expansion of the automobile industry, the contract agreements between automakers and automobile or (in the Italian case) metalworkers' unions set the standard for what concessions the national working-class could extract from industrial employers. The scores of pitched labor battles fought in the two cities were celebrated in the radical iconography of their respective countries, among them: the sit-down strikes of the 1930s and the postwar GM strike led by Walter Reuther, in the American case; the 1919 *Biennio Rosso* ("the two red years") of factory occupations; and the radical hot autumn of 1969 in Turin. Contemporaries and historians alike regarded the two Motor Cities as "laboratories" where social movements formed, dissolved, and cultivated new tactics and idioms of protest, while they shaped and reshaped the urban and political contexts.

Finally, to reiterate a point made above, the convergences between the Fordist cities were not only the result of parallel developments fostered by the growth of the same industry, but also the outcome of direct connections. Transnational networks between managers, union leaders, political activists, and radical protesters have intertwined the two Motor Cities throughout the postwar period. While the knowledge of the national and local contexts is essential to understand the actions of the protagonists of the histories of Detroit and Turin, historians should also be aware of the numerous ways in which technology, managerial methods, patterns of industrial relations, and radical ideas (as well as the people themselves) traveled between the two poles of the automobile industry.

This approach allows us to reconsider the interplay of race, class, and labor in the two cases. For instance, "race" is deemed crucial in Detroit, where African Americans rebelled at the cusp of the civil rights movement; yet, in Turin, despite the absence of racial grievances, protesting workers framed a similar political agenda and to some extent shared analogous revolutionary language. Racial

discrimination was an inescapable issue in postwar Detroit; yet its power as an all-encompassing explanation of social conflict has to be more cogently demonstrated. In a comparative perspective, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (and its earlier incarnation as DRUM) effectively used race as catalyst for action, which disconcerted the unions' ability to govern the workforce. For the old Left workers were pretty much all the same, but the League knew how to draw on both class and race identity (sometimes the latter more than the former) to stir up trouble and advance its agenda. Race, in a form tinged by Black Nationalism, also offered a political language readily comprehensible to black working-class Detroiters; one which enabled the League to benefit from the discursive legacy of the civil rights movement and its black power offshoot. League members also appeared to switch vocabulary—class or race—according to the audience. To the purist Marxists, this use appeared opportunistic but it was a choice that reflected the complex political upbringing of many key Detroit revolutionaries, who revered both Malcolm X and Mao Zedong.²⁵

Thus, comparison prompts us to develop a broader understanding of the impact of different variables and common patterns. Through a comparative perspective, I would argue, internal migration emerges as a crucial factor that shaped both industrial relations and urban space. Similar to southern Italians, many African Americans, whether recent or second-generation internal migrants, shared a collective experience of mistreatment and exclusion and found, in the struggle, a path to define their identity in an industrial society. Furthermore, my investigation shows that southern Italians' and African Americans' behavior could not readily be contained within any one political ideology. The struggle represented a step in their individual and collective path toward social and political "recognition." Thus, this book brings back the importance of labor migration in the radicalization of industrial workers.²⁶

Far from discounting the way race shaped the experience of industrial workers in the American case, the book shows that the local hues of radical protest existed within the comparable, sometimes connected, processes of labor migration, urban transformation, and industrial restructuring unleashed by Fordism. Blinded by the myriad local differences, historians have considered the stories of Detroit and Turin as self-contained episodes and generally ignored the contemporary perception that what occurred in the Motor Cities was closely related; that the same managerial methods were applicable on both sides of the Atlantic; that industrial relations could be

molded in a similar fashion; and that radical protest in two distinct places could simultaneously undermine a global system.

Indeed, the final contention of the book is that the international cycle of working-class struggle, of which Turin and Detroit were preeminent examples, compelled capitalist forces to restructure swiftly. Located in the assembly line, the strikes touched a neuralgic point in the overall division of labor. In a tightly integrated process, a stoppage in one node of the production flow can bring the whole corporation to a standstill. In other words, the workers' struggle for better working and living conditions, as narrated in this book, exposed the technical and social vulnerability of Fordism—its failures. The response of automobile corporations to the increased bargaining power of those who had up until then been considered marginal workers was managerial decisions and technological innovations that decreased the rigidity of the system of production. FIAT, for instance, initiated a program of massive robotization to achieve the complete automation of engine assembly. Management implemented the novel process in newly built plants in southern Italy, where no tradition of radicalism existed.²⁷ Similarly, the response in Detroit was in line with a process that had been underway for some time—decentralization in locales outside of the traditional industrial regions or outside of the United States altogether, where an allegedly “docile” labor force could be harnessed. These combined measures also allowed for a significant diminution in the size of the workforce to avoid the concentration of migrant labor and industrial production, which had been so problematic for Turin and Detroit.²⁸

Even though still encumbered by their Fordist past, in the form of vast urban and industrial infrastructures that have been abandoned or put to novel uses, post-Fordist Detroit and Turin bear little resemblance to their former selves. Turin has suffered a steep decline in population since the heyday of the late 1960s. It has lost most of its manufacturing base, even though its concentration of automotive firms is higher, relatively speaking, than that in the rest of Italy. Ageing retired factory workers, service sector employees, and new migrants from developing countries now inhabit its once thriving working-class neighborhoods, many of them adjacent to factories that are no more. Since the late 1980s, however, Turin has slowly developed as a regional node of the culture and technological industry, while successfully attempting to redefine its international image, for instance by hosting the 2006 Olympic Winter Games or by reconverting the historic Lingotto plant into a high-profile cultural and conference center. On the other side of the Atlantic, Detroit's scars are visible

even to the occasional visitor. The city has suffered the demolition of entire working-class neighborhoods, the demise of train stations, schools, office spaces, and the appearance of urban wastelands. Since the 1970s projects of revitalization—the Renaissance center, the sports stadia, casinos, and, lately, luxury downtown condos—have had scant success. The overall demise of the city has not precluded the partial gentrification of some neighborhoods as well as substantial investments in the restyling of downtown, but with 34 percent of the population having an income below the poverty level and a large portion of its territory in a state of dereliction, Detroit's regeneration lies in the future.²⁹

In retrospect, it seems that the Motor Cities were at a crossroads in the heady days of radical militancy. The transformations associated with Fordism that had shaped Detroit and Turin had reached the limit of their historical trajectory. Migration had created a variegated labor force, whose multifaceted identity complicated the traditional narrative of a compact working-class and whose emergence had revealed the contradictions of that system of regulation of the economy, then in its mature stage. For the militants, this crisis offered fresh opportunities—some even speculated “on the impact of a joint strike” in Turin and in Detroit, in which workers challenged their unions and their companies at the same time.³⁰ For car manufacturers, their vulnerability to uncontrollable industrial actions led them to reshape the terrain on which social protest operated, shifting geographical location and organization of production. As a system of total social reproduction, Fordism ultimately required the cooperation of the workers. For a brief moment, however, at the cusp of the mobilization, workers, revolutionaries, and capitalists occupied an unfamiliar territory. Detroit and Turin were places in transition, awaiting an indeterminate future that then, as now, would be determined by the dialectic between labor and capital that can best be understood from a comparative perspective.

2

The Making and Unmaking of Fordism

The period between the late 1940s and the early 1970s represented the apogee of Fordism and a crucial moment of transition in the history of modernity. The term “Fordism” evokes images of fast-moving assembly lines, armies of robotized workers, and standardized products. Diego Rivera’s iconographic interpretation of this system at the Detroit Institute of Arts, based on his observation of Ford’s River Rouge plant, depicts a world of giant, intimidating machines and virile workers engaged in strenuous efforts. However, the consequences of Fordism extended well beyond the factory walls; it reshaped the spatial and demographic configuration of cities; it ignited bouts of economic development, industrial concentration, and social conflict. It finally collapsed, or, rather, was transformed, under the weight of economic changes and social protest.

As a technological paradigm, Fordism owes much to the man after whom it was named. At his factory in Highland Park (a small municipality within Detroit city), Henry Ford combined a moving assembly line with specialized machinery as early as 1913. To employ more unskilled workers, who were cheaper and more pliable than workers who specialized in a craft, Ford used standardized and interchangeable parts to produce simple, but sturdy products—affordable cars that could travel on the bumpy American roads. He combined mechanical innovation with the use of “scientific management,” or “Taylorism,” a system of improving labor productivity for the first time in vogue during that period. According to Frederick W. Taylor, any operation could be divided into distinct tasks, each of which could be optimally performed by a single worker through repetition. The management of labor had to become “scientific” because the most efficient production could only be achieved through a detailed study of time and motion within the factory. Thus, Fordism entailed the control of the body of the worker and his time: every movement had to be calculable, justified in economic terms, and performed with precision.¹

From the outset, this paradigm of production proved problematic. It rested on workers' discipline, reliability, and even their collaboration. It demanded that the mass production of goods be matched by mass consumption. In the long term, it required that society be reshaped beyond the point of production and according to the needs of the factory. Ford's introduction of the so-called Five-dollar day (1914) was designed to address some of these concerns. On the one hand, the Five-dollar day—more than double the average pay for an unskilled worker at the time—was never really so, as only few workers qualified for the full wage, but the middle-class prosperity that it promised lured enough workers to solve the problem of turnover and absenteeism that afflicted labor management.² Charlie Chaplin's incisive parody of the Fordist factory in *Modern Times* (1936) described its social cost: it dehumanized and alienated workers and their allegiance could only be retained at a high cost. On the other hand, high wages also allowed workers to buy the very products they were producing, as Henry Ford proudly boasted: cars, which were even more cheaply built as the system was perfected. High wages transformed automobile workers and their counterparts in other highly productive industries into mass consumers who stimulated industrial expansion through their own demand. Thus, the Five-dollar day established, in a rudimentary way, one core principle of Fordism: the link between wage rise and labor productivity. From then on, the more perceptive social commentators discerned that Fordism was not only a system of industrial production, but also a way of regulating the political economy.

Social innovations accompanied technical innovations and control of the social body followed from the enhanced control of the workers' physical bodies in the factory. For a brief period in the Progressive era, Ford established the notorious "sociological department" whose purpose was to determine whether the workers' lifestyle was suited to their sustaining their onerous duties at the point of production. Ford's gospel of efficiency complemented the drive toward rationalization and reform characteristic of the Progressive era. Company investigators visited workers at their homes to inquire about routines, their circumstances, their diet, hygiene, and health care—all judged in terms of adherence to American standards. Unsatisfactory living quarters or bad personal habits, such as gambling or drinking too much alcohol, disqualified a worker from receiving the maximum wage. However, Ford wished workers to change not only their working habits, but also their culture. The company invited immigrants from southern and eastern Europe

who had recently arrived in the United States to attend classes designed to promote “Americanization” and to undergo “melting pot” ceremonies in which they symbolically shed their old cultural ties to become patriotic Americans. The “sociological” department was short-lived; it succumbed to a reorganization of the company in 1920, but its existence indicated yet another enduring characteristic of Fordism: its need to create social institutions regulating individual and collective behavior in terms of the demands of the production process. Predictability, as well as efficiency, was crucial to the functioning of this system.³

Gramsci’s “Americanism and Fordism”

Writing in 1929–1930 from a prison cell, to which the Fascists had confined him, the Italian Communist thinker Antonio Gramsci attained a very subtle understanding of the implications of Fordism. His celebrated *Prison Notebooks* offer valuable insights into the hegemonic potential of Fordism, which he characterized as a system of production and of social reproduction. The notes on “Americanism and Fordism” investigate the questions raised by the emerging system of mass production: How did it restructure the organization of work? How did it reshape the working class? How did it consolidate the hegemony of the ruling class? Was Fordism manufacturing a “new kind of man” as well as a new type of car? Was it transforming capitalism into a kind of planned economy?

For Gramsci, the new methods of work were destined to usher in new forms of social life. The Fordist factory required, indeed, “a new kind of man,” one “suited to the new type of work and productive process,” and one who would be able to sustain the physical and nervous stamina required for the productive operations.⁴ In fact, Gramsci argued, the close attention paid by Henry Ford to the sexual mores, drinking habits, and family forms of his workers was more than simply the expression of his puritanical values. In particular, sexual instincts—as disruptive of workers’ efforts as alcoholism—could best be regulated by the family, where monogamy provided stability and shielded the worker from squandering his energies in the pursuit of “passion.” These concerns were only apparently moral, for Ford was obviously not interested in cultivating the “spirituality” or “humanity” of the workforce. Indeed, only workers who retained creative control of the end product, that is, craftsmen, actually achieved personal fulfilment through work. However, they were precisely those eliminated by the new philosophy of production.

In other words, the control of the proclivities of the workers responded to the need for rationalizing the system, not to the concern for improving workers' personal well-being. Gramsci characterized Fordism as exemplifying a new "psychophysical nexus," that is, a new and "superior" way of shaping the labor force through physical and psychological conditioning: from now on, capitalism would require not only the brute, physical force of men—a tendency always implicitly present in the nature of industrial work, but aggravated by the Taylorist's dream of the "trained gorilla"—but also a psychological pliability of the workforce, to be achieved through *persuasive* means.⁵

Gramsci was particularly concerned about emphasizing how capitalism, being unable to function through compulsion alone, needed to create consent; hence, the innovative phenomenon of Fordism. The factory was designed to be the social nucleus where the ruling class tried and tested its hegemonic power ("hegemony here is born in the factory"). Across the Atlantic, Fordism embodied a tendency of capitalism to dictate social norms that would indoctrinate workers and prepare them for Ford-style factory work. To survive, it would have to subordinate the whole society to the needs of production through intermediaries of various sorts. Gramsci believed that the entrepreneurial élite needed to organize "the general system of relationships external to the business itself."⁶ In sum, a technological process would become a paradigm for the overall organization of society.

However, on balance, Gramsci was not convinced that Fordism's bid to suppress class struggle by means of hegemony would ultimately prove successful. The attempt would fail in at least two respects: In the first place, as explained above, Fordism could not prevent a decline in real wages. Hence, money could not be used in the long term as a means of persuasion. Second, the psychophysical nexus would fall short of fashioning the sort of automaton-workers envisaged by some observers. Here, Gramsci's explanation is more philosophical than socioeconomic. "Mechanized" motion of the body does not dehumanize workers, Gramsci argued controversially, and "it does not cause the spiritual death of man."⁷ When physical movement becomes totally mechanical, as in a Taylorist assembly line, the worker undergoes a process of "adaptation." Eventually, his brain leads his muscles to repeat the same action without any effort, and, therefore, remains free for other occupations. After all, walking does not preclude thinking. Fordism—the most advanced tendency of American capitalism—recognized that the trained gorilla is still a man for all that. He (for Gramsci, the worker is never a she), in fact, continues

to think while performing his unrewarding job and reflection could lead him “into a train of thought that is far from conformist,” that is, into a class consciousness: a particularly worrisome prospect for the capitalist. In Fordism, educational and social activities (maybe, wrote Gramsci, at a later stage to be organized by the state) such as Ford’s are meant to address this potential antagonism and serve to distract workers from ruminating on their own exploitation.⁸

Gramsci believed that the striking novelties of “Americanism” would soon reshape the socioeconomic basis of Western civilization. It was a fitting irony, he observed, that the staunch opponents of this system in Europe were not the workers, the class that eventually would be most affected by it, but the remnants of the old order. What amounted to the “transformation of the material basis of civilization” could only have happened in the United States because it was a country free from the unproductive and parasitic forms of capital accumulation that a feudal past had bequeathed to Europe: the clergy, the burdensome civil service, the rural landlords, and all the other *rentiers* who were “passive sedimentations” of the ancien régime. The still-influential social strata that in Europe resisted Fordism were absent in America, but, even in the old continent, they would eventually “disintegrate” under the pressure of change. However, even though Americanism would reshape static societies, it would not succeed in making them more homogenous. For Gramsci, the idea that American capitalism had disarmed class conflict was a cliché. Indeed, the United States had witnessed “the most unbridled and fierce struggle of one side against the other.”⁹ Fordism was the capitalists’ response to a society characterized by too much, not too little, industrial conflict.

The fact that Gramsci lived in Turin made him particularly attuned to the possible changes that Fordism might set off in Europe. In 1923, FIAT inaugurated the Lingotto plant, avowedly inspired by Ford and other manufacturers in Detroit. The plant was, however, always different in several respects from Ford’s Highland plant, on which it was modeled, but FIAT managers maintained that it reflected the same philosophy of large-scale, mechanized, and incessant production that characterized American manufacturing. The company and the media were keen to report and broadcast the reactions of American visitors to this Fordist adaptation in Italy that FIAT sources grandly described as the Italian response to the American example.¹⁰ By 1930, FIAT employed almost 30 thousand workers in its various plants. As a leader of first the Socialist and, then, the Communist Party, Gramsci was keenly interested in the struggles and the grievances of FIAT

workers, who figured prominently in the leftist imagination as the vanguard of a possible socialist revolution. In the strikes of the summer of 1920 (one of the Italian so-called two red years), for a brief moment, FIAT workers occupied the factories and ran them autonomously through “workers’ councils.” Gramsci heralded this tactic as proof that workers could continue production without the capitalists’ leadership—and as a blueprint for a future socialist state in many respects. Thus, Turin was the ideal vantage point from which to observe the changes that a Fordist society would bring and the revolutionary possibilities that it offered.

“Americanism and Fordism,” like other essays collected in the *Prison Notebooks*, demonstrated Gramsci’s ability to theorize about social transformation, which no doubt reflected his political involvement with the struggles of the Left in Turin, as well as his genius as a social theorist. However, his interest in the topic has to be seen in the context of his emergent concept of hegemony, namely, the social and political control of one class over the others through a combination of coercion and consent, physical force and persuasion.¹¹ In Gramsci’s judgment, such a hegemony could not be established without a leadership able enough to exercise it, and he saw Fordism as just such a development, stemming from the most dynamic and visionary capitalist entrepreneurs. It was a perfect example of how economic and structural concerns required an active strategy of change in the moral and cultural spheres from this leadership. The “question of sex” and of control of “animality”—to which Gramsci devotes a number of paragraphs in his brief essay—appeared symptomatic of the moral and cultural dimension of hegemony to him, one to which the theorist attached great importance throughout his writings.¹²

In summary, many of the issues identified by Gramsci have proven significant for the understanding of Fordism, particularly his prescient insight that capitalism would entail a “plan” for obtaining working-class cooperation to rationalize production (and therefore to maximize profits) through a “skillful combination of force . . . and persuasion.” The hegemonic forging of consent was to be “subtle” and would in all likelihood require the intervention of the state and of other “professional political and ideological intermediaries.” Even though Gramsci was writing some 15 years after Ford’s Five-dollar day, this new historical epoch, and the working-class struggle that would accompany it, still lay in the future. Yet, many of Gramsci’s insights were to be vindicated by the developments of the postwar period, not the least of which was his prediction that Fordism aimed to transcend the boundaries of the American nation.¹³

Fordism beyond Detroit

As a technological paradigm based on one single product mass-produced by a multitude of workers using single-purpose machines, Fordism had a brief life. According to historian David Hounshell, "Ford had driven the strategy of mass production to its ultimate form and thereby into a cul-de-sac."¹⁴ Since the late 1920s, GM's more flexible capacity to produce a wider choice of cars and an annual model change made it a leader in the expanding car market. However, Ford clung as long as he could to the model of maximum integration of the production process geared to produce one single model with the greatest possible economy of scale. GM's stylistic diversity masked a standardization of the same basic components of its cars, but Ford's seemingly lower capacity for product innovation left it vulnerable to variation in demand: it soon lost its predominance in the car market.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the techniques of mass production were spreading across the United States and Europe likewise. In Italy, as in France or Sweden, entrepreneurs debated the possibility of introducing mass production of standardized cars and other products in their industries. They appealed to the state to protect the domestic market from American competitive advantage; they went on study missions to the United States; and they purchased American machinery. In the 1920s, the European emulators of Henry Ford were most interested in the possibility of adapting his principles to the labor process; few shared his intuition that the new system required a new type of worker: an efficient laborer inside the factory gates, and a dedicated consumer outside them.

To what extent was Fordism an international phenomenon in the interwar period? There would seem to be a consensus among historians that the most successful non-American car manufacturers (mostly European, but also Japanese) adopted Fordism, as a labor process, only selectively. The greatest underlying difference in the United States was the extension of the domestic-car market: as the market expanded, so did the reception of Fordist techniques. This was certainly the case in small- and medium-sized countries such as Sweden.¹⁶ However, this correlation is questionable in several respects. Local studies have shown a great variety of situations within the same market. In the French case, for instance, the largest manufacturers (Renault, Citroën, and Peugeot) all kept several models on offer, rejected low-priced cars, and did not use only single-purpose machines. They gradually introduced the assembly line, but retained

the piece-rate, as opposed to the Fordist day-rate (an indication that the assembly line was not, in their case, effective in setting the pace of work). On the one hand, of the three French firms, only Citroën adopted mostly American equipment and hired American engineers, while its founder, André Citroën, paid frequent visits to Detroit. Renault, on the other hand, did not follow suit. Berliet, another car manufacturer, which single-mindedly embraced Fordist standardization and assembly-line driven organization of work, performed poorly and soon disappeared from the market.¹⁷

In the 1920s, Ford introduced his own plants in Britain, but the attempt to replicate his own American strategies in a different national context failed. The single-model idea, the inflexible design of cars (Ford even ridiculed the idea of right-hand drive Model Ts for Britain), and the authoritarian labor relations coupled with high wages and the day-rate were all American features unsuited to Ford's British operations. Most of all, historian Steven Tolliday argues, it was the lack of a sufficient market for cheap and sturdy cars that doomed Britain's Ford in the interwar period. In contrast, auto-maker Morris was successful in satisfying the existing demand for medium-sized, reasonably priced cars in a range of different designs. Morris liked the assembly line, but avoided the capital-intensive investment of single-purpose machines and, therefore, continued to rely on numerous craftsmen who had to fit the pieces for the purpose. They worked under a revamped piecework system that allowed for productivity control.¹⁸ In contrast, historian Wayne Lewchuk has argued that the refusal to embrace American mass production techniques in the British case had little to do with the size of the consumer market. Ford's method could profitably be adopted, Lewchuk argues, beyond a modest demand-threshold. For instance, car production at Austin reached 25 thousand units in 1926, a large number, but, despite some influences, the process implemented differed a great deal from Ford's. Austin, like most British manufacturers, believed that the American's imposition of tight managerial control, the pace-setting assembly line, and the strenuous effort required from the workers had little chance of success in Britain. The firm relied on incentives instead, with schemes that allowed productive workers to earn bonuses, and, as noted above, it retained a high degree of craftsmanship in production through the continued use of multipurpose machines. In essence, social and political relations were of crucial importance for the spread of Fordism. It was in the United States, where employers had more vehemently opposed unionization and where the fragmentation of the workforce could

be more easily exploited, that the seeds of Fordism found more fertile terrain.¹⁹

In a similar vein, historian Stefano Musso has argued that in Italy, after the First World War, workers offered stiff resistance to FIAT's attempts to introduce a Fordist-style rationalization of the production process. Despite Agnelli's attempt to introduce forms of company welfare, FIAT could barely achieve the degree of workers' consent necessary for the full implementation of the American methods. In the late 1920s, just as FIAT unveiled the Detroit-inspired Lingotto plant, it attempted to rationalize the labor process through the introduction of the Bedaux system, that is to say, a subdivision of tasks and motions that made the workers' output measurable in numbers. The result was a tighter control of piecework and a de-skilling of numerous operations. This could be introduced because the Fascist ban on strikes meant that any overt challenge to the manager's rationalization was out of the question. However, Musso argues, workers resisted on the sly, and, therefore, required extensive and expensive supervision. On the whole, the changes served the purpose of boosting workers' output, but were far from achieving the Fordist integrated production process. Thus, according to this view, labor relations were a key element in explaining the varying speeds with which Fordism spreads in different national contexts.²⁰

It is reasonable to assume that the transfer of Fordist methods to other countries was not only a matter of entrepreneurial inclination, but also depended on social (labor and social relations) as well as structural factors (the car market). At any rate, Ford's philosophy of extreme specialization of production proved problematic in the United States too. The GM approach, that is Alfred P. Sloan's idea of "a car for every purse and purpose," had changed the face of Fordism forever, even though it was still characterized by many of its key features. In the United States, Fordism survived because it adapted to the changing times. Similarly, the transnational application of Fordist organization, technology, and production policy was usually successful when general American principles were creatively adapted to fit local circumstances.²¹ Even a manufacturer such as Agnelli, who was mesmerized by American ideas, and whose FIAT Lingotto plant represented the most audacious contemporary example of American influence, was critical of American standards in numerous respects.

Nevertheless, the thesis of selective adaptations should be interpreted in terms of the larger picture: one of extraordinary European

(and extra European) fascination with the Detroit blueprint. After the 1920s, any discussion of domestic car manufacturing in Europe included a comparison with Ford. The American manufacturer liberally opened its plant to European enthusiasts, who returned to their respective countries eager to preach the gospel of standardized parts, single-purpose machinery, the assembly line, and regimented workers. Even if the Fordist factory could hardly be replicated elsewhere, the influence of its model spread far and wide. For many leading European manufacturers it represented an “ideal production strategy,” a dream of one-car-per-minute production, to be pursued when possible, but to be adapted as needed.²² Far from American shores, Fordism was more than a production method: it was a “language,” a loose ensemble of ideas and terms borrowed by entrepreneurs of different nationalities to imagine, describe, and legitimize every change that would result in greater output by workers. In Europe, Fordism haunted the minds of capitalists long before it had gained control of their factories.

Interlude: The Great Depression

Understood simply as a drive to substitute machinery for workers, to dilute skills, and to speed up the pace of work, Fordism had a long pedigree in the history of capitalism and would have an enduring appeal.²³ However, its most striking novelty, as Gramsci had discerned, was the fact that, for it to persist as a technological process, it required a way of regulating the relation among capital, labor, and the state, as well as an overhaul of social norms and institutions. Such a project came to a halt during the Great Depression and would be resumed with full force only in the postwar period.

With the onset of the economic crisis, the major American companies stopped investment in mechanical and organizational innovation, since, in a period of shrinking demand, it would no longer be profitable. The high wage was obviously another prominent victim of the Depression: it was now cheaper to hire additional labor than to invest in machines. There was no longer any need to mollycoddle workers by means of company welfare or paternalistic initiatives: hard times would make them stay on the job. The Great Depression revealed the mismatch between mass production and mass consumption and brought the implementation of, if not the fascination with, Fordism in the United States and abroad to a standstill. Products could be cheaply and quickly built, but workers could no longer afford them. Productivity had surpassed spending power.

Not only Fordism, but capitalism itself as a paradigm of development also seemed to be in a crisis. In Detroit, the Depression revealed the inner contradiction of unfettered industrial growth at its worst. In 1929, the city's car industry had produced 5,337,000 vehicles; by 1931, it was down to 1,332,000 units. What had once been the symbol of the city's prosperity was now emblematic of its failure to cope with the crisis. Arguably, Ford's former pretense of providing his workers with a family wage caused a bitterer reaction to the company's mass layoffs at the onset of the crisis (Ford's first response to the crisis had been to maintain high wages to fuel spending power, but it failed).²⁴ In 1932, unemployment had hit the city so hard that thousands flocked to the Communist-led "Ford Hunger March" from Detroit to Dearborn, where Ford's headquarters and its flagship plant River Rouge were located. Among the marchers' placards' was one that read "We want bread, not crumbs," which no doubt was an attempt to remind the tycoon of his social responsibilities. The march ended in massacre when the police—probably under pressure from Ford to stop the protest at whatever cost—opened fire on the demonstrators; four marchers were killed and many others were wounded.²⁵ However, repression did not stop protest; the Hunger March was just one of several episodes of working-class militancy during the Depression. Mass unemployment made the kind of incentives and social controls that Ford had envisaged to avoid labor turnover unnecessary, but it also required the firm mobilization of a repressive apparatus if demands for radical changes to the structure of capitalism were to be kept in check. During the 1930s, the automobile industry was the locus of a fierce class struggle that was destined, through an upsurge in industrial unionism, to redefine Fordism. In early 1937, the long and epic sit-down strike at GM's Flint plant consolidated the nascent Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) and enabled industrial unions to establish a foothold in the most crucial manufacturing sector. The UAW used the recognition won at Flint to organize yet other GM plants as well as, in due time, Chrysler and Ford. In particular, Chrysler's largest Detroit plant, Dodge Main, became a hotbed of unionism. A few weeks after the Flint strike, Chrysler workers—not in hundreds (as at GM) but in thousands—shut down Dodge Main thereby gaining swift recognition from Chrysler's management.²⁶ If the breakthrough in industrial unionism had not happened in the auto, steel, and rubber industries, it could have hardly spread to less productive and strategic sectors such as meatpacking or textiles. By the eve of the Second World War, thanks to a government more benign toward the working class than

ever before and to the determination of thousands upon thousands of workers, unionization of mass-production industries was an inescapable reality for manufacturers.

Ford itself was the last bastion to fall when the UAW shut the River Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan, in April 1941 to gain recognition. Ford, a staunch ideological opponent of organized labor, had tried to resist unionization since 1937 and to beat the 1941 strike through bribery and intimidation, but he conceded defeat in ten days. Autoworkers had won a battle, but arguably not the war. It was suspicious, to say the least, that Ford, after a consultation with the government, not only opened the factory gates to the UAW, but also signed a contract far more “progressive” than granted by its competitors; it guaranteed the UAW the “union shop,” that is, the automatic enrollment in the union of the company’s employees and the dues check-off system, so that shop stewards did not have to worry about workers dodging the union dues. It was the first arrangement of its kind. Perhaps Ford hoped that loyal workers automatically enrolled would undermine the leverage of the union, or, more probably, he preferred to deal with union officers, rather than with widespread shop-floor democracy. River Rouge remained full of intractable union troublemakers for several years; many of them were situated to the Left in the spectrum of union politics. However, Ford’s solution was to be widely adopted in the postwar period by his competitors. Perhaps, Ford had once again been a precursor, albeit a reluctant one. By accepting a strong union with which to negotiate wages, but not productivity, he brought industrial relations one-step closer to what a new generation of scholars in the 1970s would define as “Fordism.” This system, already clear in its general contours to Gramsci and perhaps to Ford, would achieve a more precise configuration only after the war.²⁷

The Second World War and the Corporative Experiment

The Second World War was a turning point in the fashioning of Fordism. In the United States, where the war did not bring the immense human and material catastrophe experienced by Europe, December 7, 1941, signaled the beginning of the economic recovery and heralded a period of full-employment. For those who escaped the tragedy of combat, times had never been so good, but it was corporations, not workers, that reaped the benefits brought by the conflict. President Roosevelt’s characterization of Detroit as the “Arsenal of Democracy”

implicitly acknowledged the central role of the “Big Three” in running the show. As car manufacturers converted to war production, their profits soared. Indeed, after a decade of denigration, big businesses recovered their central place in the polity. It was the legacy of the political changes and of the organizing drive of the late 1930s that this occurred in a context of a more secure (even though often challenged) unionization of the industrial workforce. In 1941, CIO workers engaged in more than four thousand strikes, mostly aimed at industries that were beneficiaries, or prospective beneficiaries, of defense contracts.²⁸ These actions compelled both big businesses and, in a different way, the government, to reckon with the force of industrial unionism. What was to be the relation between Labor, Business, and the State in the nation’s critical hour?

More than a decade ago, the most persuasive account of that relationship depicted the newly appointed leaders of the industrial unions entering a sort of Faustian bargain with the government and manufacturers. According to that narrative, they traded workplace bargaining, which could provide workers at the point of production with a modicum of control, for centralized and routinized collective bargaining. Even though its workings were to be fine-tuned in the postwar decade, this system was established during the war. It implied union participation in government agencies such as the tripartite National War Labor Board, which aimed to provide stable labor relations in exchange for union recognition, relatively high wages, and the achievement of the productive rationality necessary, first, to win the war and, subsequently, to sustain prosperity. The ensuing labor truce amounted during the war to a no-strike pledge, occasionally broken by wildcat agitations that demonstrated the untamed militancy of union ranks at the shop-floor level. In fact, collective bargaining also affected the internal organization of unions, since only full-time officials could administer the complex body of contract rules. Officials at the local level were responsible for the application of contracts with regard to the authorities. During the war, industrial unions had grown into centralized organizations that yielded disciplinary powers to their local affiliates. Thus, this Faustian bargain secured rising fortunes for the unions—manufacturers agreed that union membership be a requirement to work in defense industries—but held in check local shop stewards’ struggles and undermined labor’s ability to further industrial democracy and contest the inequities of capitalism.²⁹

The above interpretation, which emerged in the 1970s and was consolidated by the 1980s, was built upon the earlier insights of

the radical intellectuals of the 1940s, among them C. L. R. James, C. Wright Mills, and Harvey Swados, and reflected the impact of the New Left reassessment of the New Deal during the 1960s. The claim here was that an era of corporate capitalism was inaugurated in the 1940s that legitimized the structure of inequality in American society and shielded it from more radical challenges to the system. Even in the final year of the war, when military victory was in sight, CIO leaders stuck to the No-Strike Pledge, and, writes historian Nelson Lichtenstein, "took unprecedented steps to ensure the maintenance of order in their ranks, steps that forced these officials to rely upon increasingly bureaucratic and undemocratic methods of institutional control."³⁰ To do so, the partners in the National War Labor Board concocted a system of industrial jurisprudence designed to resolve shop-floor conflict through mediation. Workers would file a grievance instead of directly bargaining at shop-floor level. Grievances would be subject to a bureaucratic procedure in four stages and, if unresolved, would be decided upon by an impartial umpire. Meanwhile, production would not continue regardless of the underlying conflict. Strikes were not allowed while the case was ongoing. The proponents of this interpretation thus argue that the grievance procedure wrested the levers of power from the shop steward and entrusted them to the union bureaucrat, and, in the process, consolidated the authority of management.

We must review this assessment from the vantage point of the twenty-first century. Since this hypothesis was formulated, the significance of unions in national life and in the workplace has been declining steadily. In 1983, 20.1 percent of American workers belonged to a union; in 2011, only 11.8 percent were part of a union.³¹ Labor liberalism was indubitably designed to curb workers' militancy at the point of production, yet it also delivered formally fair employment rules, which workers often welcomed, good wages and benefits, and, in the case of CIO unions, a progressive voice in national politics.³² It is now clear that the so-called social accord between capital and labor, though scorned by left-wing activists, had been a burden imposed on not only rank-and-file workers, but also on corporate interests. Whilst businesses certainly took advantage of the political climate of the 1980s to roll back the gains of the New Deal labor-liberal coalition, it now also looks as if the social accord had a flimsy foundation in the first place. Jefferson Cowie's powerful analysis of the successive relocations, between 1930 and 1980, of the RCA factories, as the company searched for low-wage, nonunionized labor, inside and outside the United States, shows that the manufacturers never wholly

honored their side of the bargain.³³ Neither did the workers, for that matter, since spontaneous protest continued to erupt from time to time. Even leading advocates of the above-mentioned analysis have been inclined to reevaluate their assessment. "Indeed," writes Nelson Lichtenstein, "if the industrial relations system put in place during the 1940s was so hostile to working-class interests, then why have almost all employers resisted it?"³⁴ Clearly, the grievance procedure was not the best tool to advance democracy in the workplace, but it represented a countervailing power to managerial authority that employers were more than happy to dispense with.

The desirability of a planned industrial economy was always more controversial than it looked to the New Labor History of the 1980s. Indeed, the kind of national planning required to win the Second World War, which included the Office of Price Administration (OPA) and the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), among other agencies, succumbed to right-wing attacks at the end of the hostilities.³⁵ The Progressive era liberals had argued for the usefulness of organizational structures that would meet modern social needs through the regulation of business and labor, but America was hardly ever a country of "consensus capitalism" where labor's rights went uncontested.³⁶ However, even though the "corporative" impulse faded with the end of the conflict, there is still something to be said for the argument that the uneasy collaboration between large unions, major employers, and the state tested during the war bestowed additional authority upon centralized unions, corporate management, and federal bureaucracy. The experience of the conflict had, after all, demonstrated that the great potential power of industrial unions could coexist with the system of mass production at its best. Indeed, according to some theorists and activists, the latter would be more likely to thrive if unionism guaranteed the purchasing power of the masses. Thus, wartime experience confirmed that Fordism was not merely a technological, economic, and social phenomenon, but had, in addition, a specifically political dimension. As Gramsci had discerned, Fordism was the outcome of many different elements and processes that developed in specific historical circumstances. Only in the postwar period, however, would the dynamic of this system come into sharper focus.

The Postwar Settlement: An Organized Capitalism?

Without taking into account the legacy of the Great Depression and the war, we cannot hope to understand the main lines of the

development of capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s, two decades often dubbed as a “Golden Age.”³⁷ Memories of unemployment and political crisis during the Depression informed a general commitment—first and foremost from those in government—to maintaining high levels of consumer demand, which would, in turn, fuel mass production. In the United States, the war had also demonstrated that capitalists’ prerogatives and profits could coexist, however uneasily, with unionization. If there was indeed anything “golden” about the postwar age, it lay in the optimistic belief that an arrangement that balanced high profits, workers’ purchasing power, collective bargaining, high productivity, and the overall political dominance of corporate interests could last. For the generation of scholars who would look at these phenomena from the vantage point of the 1970s and 1980s, capitalism had reached, in its Golden Age, an “organized” form, which was the most refined expression of Fordism.

This settlement had been reached not by consensus, but by a precarious balance of conflicting interests. In the United States, in the aftermath of the conflict, the landslide congressional victory of right-wing forces in 1946 forced the retreat of the liberals. As Alan Brinkley has demonstrated, the New Deal agenda had already shifted away from the notion of a federal state involved in a “corporative” management of the economy by 1945. In 1946, the conservative backlash did the rest.³⁸ The following year, Congress undermined the political significance of the labor movement when it passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which greatly curtailed any opportunities the unions might have had of organizing in the South. Yet, progressive laborites such as UAW’s Walter Reuther, persisted with, and even expanded collective bargaining, under the aegis of the federal National Labor Relations Board (founded during the New Deal and modified several times since then), holding it to be the best possible means of establishing an industrial jurisprudence that would protect workers’ rights in private firms, and an instrument for securing higher wages and benefits, thereby forestalling another Depression at the end of the war. In 1945, Reuther summed this notion as follows: “The war has proven that production is not our problem; our problem is consumption.”³⁹

During the following 20 years, Reuther’s UAW led a cohort of industrial unions keen to insist upon the rights of the working-class to share the high productivity and profits reaped by companies such as GM or U.S. Steel. For decades, at regular intervals, labor leaders sat at the bargaining table with corporations to negotiate workers’ pay, hours, and conditions as well as “fringe” benefits such as pensions

and health care provision, goals shared by liberals hoping to compensate for an inadequate welfare state. In spite of their numerical strength, exceptional in the context of American history, unions such as the UAW in the 1950s and 1960s attempted, but eventually failed, as Kevin Boyle has observed, to achieve an agenda of social democratic reform. The fault lay with a political system that undermined the hold of the unions over the Democratic party.⁴⁰ However, in the economic sphere, corporations, while they agreed to sit at the bargaining table, never lost their leverage. They crippled organized labor's long-term aspirations through constant relocation and decentralization of their activities in nonunionized locales; at the same time, they recouped monetary concessions by passing the costs onto the consumers. Thus, Fordist-style capitalism, even in its alleged Golden Age, could hardly be said to be characterized by a nonadversarial relationship: it was a precarious balance of market liberalism and Keynesian private-public welfare that, so long as it worked, sustained the buoyant internal demand, key to America's gargantuan productive capacity.

A comparable (though nonetheless different) setting emerged in contemporary Western Europe, where there was a stronger intervention of the state in the welfare system, but a weaker postwar union movement. As in the United States, the labor movement was purged (at least temporarily) of the influence of the Communist unions in Western Europe too. In the American context, this result was the outcome of both the United States' politics of Communist containment abroad and European employers' desires to undercut workers' initiatives in the domestic sphere. In France, Germany, Italy, and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain, the noncommunist union movement did not challenge the corporate right to manage with the expectation that, as in America, the gains of productivity would be shared with the workers. Indeed, in Italy's FIAT, even the Communist-led *Federazione Italiana Operai Metalmeccanici* (FIOM) took the decision to abandon revolutionary goals in the name of productive recovery in the aftermath of the Second World War.⁴¹ Collective bargaining did take hold at industry level, but employers eschewed American-style, firm-level bargaining and were unwilling to adopt a bureaucratic industrial jurisprudence that, as the experience of the United States had proved, would have limited their paternalistic authority. Instead, the state gradually expanded welfare provisions that modestly improved the standard of living of the working-class: unemployment benefits, family allowances, cost-of-living adjustments (similar to the cost of living allowance granted by some union contracts in the United

States), minimum wages, and state-guaranteed pension schemes. The resources available to, and provisions made by the different European welfare states varied considerably. A key distinction arose between those countries (such as Germany) when there was a growing consensus around a Fordist-Keynesian paradigm (full employment, a welfare state, and high productivity) and those (such as Italy) where such reforms were only introduced gradually and in a piecemeal fashion after a liberal capitalist restoration had suppressed the left-wing labor movement.⁴² Both paths led toward an interventionist state that, to different degrees, subsidized education, housing, medical care, and other areas of public concern, and which shielded workers from illness, unemployment, and the travails of old age.⁴³

Furthermore, in Western Europe, the state took a far more resolute approach to the upholding of national collective agreements. In a number of countries, a strong confederation of employers and an equally strong confederation of unions were regularly pitted against each other in a confrontation that led to centralized bargaining in every industry. In northwestern European countries, this “corporatist” arrangement of consensual wage regulation (which sometimes involved trade unions’ self-restraint on wage demands) was even more pronounced, in particular when social-democratic parties were in power. In Italy, such agreements were legally binding; courts could enforce them and they affected all workers in the relevant industry, whether they were or were not union members.⁴⁴

In sum, there were important differences in the Western world in the systems that provided social benefits to industrial workers, in the patterns of industrial relations and in the distribution of resources, but, overall, the organization of capitalism converged along similar lines of Fordist and Keynesian inspiration. During the Golden Age, a broad agreement prevailed among the Western democracies, in theory and often in practice, that economic planning, deficit financing, and full employment were inherently desirable and mutually sustaining, but the overall balance between wages and profits was the contested result of collective bargaining between powerful corporation and strong organized labor, under the supervision of labor laws and governmental agencies.⁴⁵ This system was at the root of a prolonged economic buoyancy that lasted until 1973.

Fordism in Crisis: The Régulation School

Since the 1970s, a group of economists gathered loosely under the label of the *régulation* school have been at the forefront of the

discussion about Fordism and the modes of its alleged demise. They have reintroduced the term into the scientific discussion and have scrutinized its meaning. Their crucial contention is that Fordism represents a distinct *regime of accumulation*, that is, a distinct pattern of capitalist formation based on a specific labor process, distribution of wages, and profits and volume of demand. Fordism, in their view, is one of several *regimes* that have characterized the history of capitalism. In fact, regulationists argue, capitalism grows through sharp breaks with past phases rather than through a seamless evolution. Each change is, in some way, a drastic rupture attributable to the crisis of several elements within the previous regime. To each phase, or regime, corresponds a *mode of regulation* (hence the name of the “school”), that is, a set of institutions that govern competition, credit, and the state’s intervention in the economy and monetary system, and which make the myriad of private decisions compatible with the existing regime of accumulation. The school’s contention is that capitalism is not, in fact, a self-regulating market governed by an “invisible hand,” but a complex entity, which needs regulatory institutions for its smooth functioning.⁴⁶ This statement acquired a particular cogency at a time when Western economies displayed a disturbing tendency toward inflation and unemployment. The apparent propensity of capitalist market economies to succumb to crisis rather than enjoy enduring stability clearly required an explanation.⁴⁷

Prominent regulationist theorists, such as Michel Aglietta, Alain Lipietz, and Robert Boyer, trace the origins of Fordism to a productive watershed that occurred in the 1920s in the form of Taylorism.⁴⁸ They use the United States as the exemplary case to illustrate how capitalism develops throughout history and although they recognize that each nation has followed a different path, regulationists argue that Fordism could expand internationally due to American global domination in the postwar period. Regulationists argue that capitalism moved with Henry Ford toward adopting the ingent fixed costs of highly specialized machines to overcome the control exerted by skilled workers over the labor process. The productivity that machines accrued to the system caused a mismatch between a now “intensive” capital accumulation and depressed wages.⁴⁹ Thus, the staggering growth in production achieved through an improved organization of work plus more efficient machinery continued to be associated with a low level of consumption in the market and heralded a crisis for the existing regime of accumulation. This contradiction lay behind the Great Depression of the 1930s—for the regulationists, as for the Keynesians, essentially an

underconsumption crisis. The limited market represented a barrier to capitalist growth and forced enterprises to engage in cutthroat competition that drove prices and wages, together with the whole economy, in a downward spiral. At this point, Fordism (in its full, mature meaning) rose from the ashes of the Depression as a new regime of accumulation that combined intensive capital accumulation and high aggregated consumer demand (through mechanisms that would sustain the working-class wage).

The regulationists envision the United States first and Western Europe later as moving in a similar direction as they solve the problem of underconsumption, which had vitiated the previous regime of accumulation.⁵⁰ The importance of public spending for sustaining aggregate demands often leads regulationists to define the new postwar regime as Fordism-Keynesianism. Although it took 15 years and a world war to prove that it was viable, Fordism-Keynesianism temporarily adjusted the relation between wages and productivity, that is, between production and consumption. Purchasing power, either in the form of wages or social expenditure, was restored through different combinations of collective bargaining and welfare provisions, such as the minimum wage or unemployment benefits. Overall, these measures were beneficial to the stability of the regime because they provided a social wage that expanded internal demand as the economy grew and, at the same time, either prevented unemployment or reduced the impact of unemployment on the business cycle. Thus, Fordism as a regime of accumulation—a macroeconomically coherent phase of capitalist development—rested on a complex, if precarious balance between different factors and social forces. The state had to take on institutional powers to influence redistribution; corporations had to constantly innovate to sustain a high level of productivity and had to be enlightened enough to accept, even if grudgingly, the system of redistribution; and organized labor had to cooperate by maintaining the discipline of the labor force, whose reliable performance was the most important component of the productivity effort. In this way, the relative stability of employment and wages over the long term was beneficial to workers and entrepreneurs and, more especially, to the system as a whole.⁵¹

Although Fordism-Keynesianism existed in a precarious equilibrium, it worked well for over a quarter of a century. The industries that benefited most technologically from the two global conflicts—automobile, steel, rubber, and domestic appliances—led the postwar development. This unprecedented economic growth was concentrated in certain major productive regions, for instance: the American

Midwest, the Ruhr-Rhineland, the Tokyo-Yokohama region, and the Italian Northwest. Fordism, as a labor process, cannot be said to have defined the Western economies in their entirety, but it did characterize these leading industrial agglomerations. A constant exchange of information, technology, people, and capital, across national boundaries, as well as financial links to the major American lending institutions connected these regions in an integrated whole.⁵² Together, they represented the core—the most dynamic, efficient, and profitable part—of the world capitalist system. However, their fate was always interlinked with other more “backward” regions of the world economy. For the core to expand (and thus survive as a core) it needed to extend existing markets or to find new ones. This is an important point as, arguably, the limits to market expansion into developing countries constituted a major obstacle to the survival of Fordism.⁵³ American dominance in the international order played an important part in the stabilization of this regime of accumulation. Under American guidance, international treaties and institutions laid the foundation for multilateral economic integration and, thus, for the further expansion of capitalist trade. The Bretton Woods agreements assigned a central role to the dollar, and the establishment of GATT, the IMF, and the OECD served to guide Europe past the balance-of-payments problem and toward the market economy.⁵⁴ However, American hegemony hardly went uncontested. Over time, these institutions also allowed the Western European and the Japanese economies to catch up and become collectively as strong as the United States. At the same time, the relatively lower productivity of US corporations undermined the role of the dollar as a stable international reserve currency. In 1971, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreements—finally abolished two years later—and the introduction of a flexible exchange rate between the dollar and the other currencies signaled the anticipated end of the “American Century,” as Henry Luce had defined the twentieth century in 1941. By 1973, rising inflation, the oil crisis precipitated by the OPEC countries, and the diminution of American military expenses after the end of the Vietnam War caused a worldwide recession that coincided with the reorganization of capitalism.⁵⁵

In fact, in the account given by the regulationists, every regime of accumulation eventually comes up against an inevitable tendency of the rate of profit to decline. The Fordist organization of work based on Taylorist principles, the assembly line, shop-floor, top-down organization, and specialized machinery was bound to reach a ceiling that checked any further growth in productivity. According to

Aglietta, the fragmentation of tasks, if taken to the extremes, has an adverse effect on the productivity of workers because, among other reasons, it reduces them to nervous exhaustion and, as all the tasks are roughly similar, makes it more difficult for capitalists to divide the workforce politically. Another shortcoming, or “internal contradiction,” of Fordism lay in its tendency to favor rigid capital investments. Vertical integration, the assembly line, transfer machines, and the complementarity between different machines not only allowed a great boost in efficiency and productive capacity, but they also increased the technical rigidity of the system. The Fordist quest for efficiency produced internal limits in the labor process. From the mid-1960s onwards, argues Aglietta, Fordism underwent a crisis of productivity, which became a crisis of profitability, and entered a process of disintegration. Existing institutions of regulations failed to stabilize competition, driving capitalists to further reduce real wages and therefore, once again, affecting the purchasing power of workers. This undermined the crucial contribution of Fordism: the nexus between the process of production and the mode of consumption.⁵⁶

This account of Fordism and its crisis is problematic in many respects. First of all, was Fordism, in the regulationist sense, really widespread and did it constitute a major epoch in capitalist industrialization? On closer inspection, even in the leading industrial countries, the number of workers employed in mass production or benefiting from collective bargaining was always a minority of the working population, in particular if so-called marginal groups, such as women, ethnic, and racial minorities are taken into account. Furthermore, consumer demand was never, or not predominantly, satisfied by mass production alone. However, these objections do not undermine the claim that there had once been a Fordist age. Arguably, the Fordist sector influenced the form of production and the wage-productivity nexus also in the non-Fordist sector, and dictated the state’s monetary, industrial, and welfare policy. The mass-production sector during Fordism was the most profitable one and set the pace of technological, managerial, and organizational innovation.⁵⁷ A second, more damaging, objection concerns the spatial and temporal dimension of the analysis. Clearly, to talk about decline of mass production at the end of the 1960s is to adopt a profoundly Eurocentric point of view. Developing countries entered mass production after that period. Western deindustrialization meant industrialization for them. Fordism may have changed its geography rather than its *modus operandi*, reproducing, outside the United States and Western Europe, similar dynamics in the organization of

work and in the resistance to it.⁵⁸ Any decision to restrict the analysis of capitalism to a single national framework risks obscuring the complementarities between national regimes of accumulation. During the Golden Age, the predominant American model was a powerful source of ideas, projects, and strategies. The Fordist paradigm was significant, and has serious repercussions even for countries that did not fully adopt it.

The crisis of Fordism heralded the formation of a new regime of accumulation, loosely labelled post-Fordism, the configuration of which is still difficult to pinpoint with precision. The post-Fordist labor process strives for a more flexible production based not on economies of scale, but on outsourcing all but the most fundamental operations (both productive and administrative) of the company to subcontractors, specialists, and consultants. What does remain is often produced according to the philosophy of “just-in-time,” which minimizes the gap between what is stored (an investment subject to devaluation and a cost) and what is needed in the production departments. Flexible production also requires multipurpose machines, now available due to more sophisticated technology, such as microelectronics, and polyvalent workers (countering the Fordist tendency toward the homogenization of skills). In post-Fordism, the most productive sectors of the economy employ far less workers than in Fordism; as a consequence, for the majority of “peripheral” workers, in the industrial as well as the service sector, employment is more insecure and labor, more intense. The consumer market can no longer be fully satisfied by mass production, but is increasingly segmented and mutable, requiring swift changes in product specifications that cannot be met within the rigid Fordist paradigm. By moving production outside traditional industrial districts into areas of “flexible specialization” or into developing countries, entrepreneurs have been able to curtail most of the trade unions’ bargaining leverage. This is all the more so because in this new paradigm, regular employment is often replaced by temporary or part-time employment, frequently subcontracted to external employment agencies, which makes union organization difficult. The collapse of mechanisms serving to sustain the workers’ wages has, in turn, led to intense competition, which undercuts profit. With production overflowing national boundaries, the state has partly renounced its role in managing national demand and in guaranteeing income, while the policies of international institutions such as the IMF undermine the capacity of nation-states to shield enterprises from global competition. At the same time, labor legislation has changed to reflect the

shift toward flexibility—a quintessential post-Fordist buzzword that sometimes masks new forms of labor subordination. While certain areas, such as the “Third Italy” or the California’s Silicon Valley, have been proposed by the literature as exemplars of the new paradigm of production, post-Fordism, by definition, does not have core regions but is dispersed in a world-system increasingly connected through fast transport and internet connections.⁵⁹

As a model to account for historical change in the structure of capitalism, regulation theory has been subject to trenchant criticism.⁶⁰ However, its broad account of Fordism and its demise has been widely accepted. In many respects, the regulationists’ analysis harked back to Gramsci’s pioneering intuition about the potentialities of Fordism to change society. The regulationists are Gramsci’s heirs in some sense; their analysis, like his, is concerned with the wider impact of Fordism, not only simply upon the sphere of production, but also upon the inner workings of the state and the social reproduction of labor. Their account of the demise of Fordism is vague and is not supported by incontrovertible evidence, but the timescale for which they argue tallies with the perception of contemporaries that the early 1970s constituted a moment of systemic change in which the balance between the various elements of capitalism, as it was then functioning, began to crumble: the investments needed to maintain high productivity; the efficacy of industrial relations in regimenting the workforce; and the political and financial viability of the state’s commitment to the welfare state.

On the basis of the historical experience of Detroit and Turin, two eminently Fordist cities, what is perplexing about regulation theory is its explanation of the crisis of Fordism, that is, the reasons it gives for the disintegration of the existing regime of accumulation and for the, no matter how slow and tentative, formation of a new one. To the regulationists, the demise of Fordism is explicable in terms of a crisis of productivity. This explanation has several versions. In one, the gigantic operations of the corporations reached a limit of productivity of invested capital. In other words, there were inherent limits in the technology and organization of work beyond which profitability would be undermined. When employers downsized their firm in response to lower profits, the consequent rise in unemployment led to increasing pressure on the welfare state and to a domino effect upon all the other pillars of regulation.⁶¹ In another version, external events, such as the oil crises of the 1970s, caused wages to rise more than productivity. In yet another, it was market expansion that had reached its limit in the West (while for financial

and political reasons, Eastern Europeans and developing countries had not yet opened their markets) at a moment when Europe and Japan had caught up with the United States and made competition in the remaining markets more intense.⁶²

Actual historical analysis of Detroit and Turin offers a privileged vantage point from which to probe into the organization, the consequences, and the shortcomings of Fordism. It is there that the causes of its ultimate decline come into a sharper focus. The story—comparative, transnational, or merely local—of these two cities validates many points in the regulationist argument, contradicts others (in particular regarding the actual existence of a labor-capital accord), but especially begs the question of the role of the working-class agency. To be fair, early studies, that of Aglietta for instance, considered class struggle to be an “expression” of the crisis of Fordism, but in his view, in fact, this struggle was simply the consequence of management’s “frontal attack” on the purchasing power of workers, an assault motivated by the diminishing profitability of their investments.⁶³ The origins of the crisis lay wholly in wage relations, that is, the diminishing capacity of the regime of accumulation, at a time of falling productivity, to provide for the social reproduction of labor. Alternatively, they see class agency in terms of individual employees’ dissatisfaction with the organization of work, and they are simply recasting the idea here that there are intrinsic limits to the functionality of Fordism as a system of production. The argument that working-class protest was caused solely by an erosion in real wages, and that the former was directly and mechanically determined by the latter, is however undermined by what we know about the years of the Fordist crisis when wages, in fact, were not at the top of the protesters’ agenda. Furthermore, one could view working-class protest not as evidence of the technical limits of Fordism, but as proof of its success in improving its living standards and employment opportunities, thereby boosting labor organizations.⁶⁴ In any case, class agency has subsequently been marginalized and, in their attempt to explain the crisis in the regime of accumulation, the regulationists have tended to focus instead upon the collapse of the various elements of structured cohesion in that regime.⁶⁵

An historical, as opposed to a theoretical, study of Fordism grounded in two exemplary cases, can enhance our understanding of its functioning and demise. Three key developments common to both Detroit and Turin bring the working class back into the picture in ways unexplored by regulation theory. First of all, new light can be cast upon the familiar idea of “inherent limits of Fordism” if we

suppose these limits to be social and not merely technological. In the two cities in which the project of Fordism was taken to its logical conclusion, the requirements of the automobile industries brought about a complete transformation in the urban environment. Fordism not only gave rise to a more intense accumulation of capital and mass consumption, but it also effected a demographic transformation (through immigration into the cities) that fuelled social conflict. With its tendency toward consolidation and concentration of industrial plants, Fordism radically recast the spatial configuration of the cities; it stimulated the chaotic growth of areas where inhabitants suffered every degradation, not the least of which was the indignity of segregation. It stifled the development of a diverse industrial and service sector, created a huge concentration of workers, and linked the prosperity of large metropolitan areas to the fluctuations and vicissitudes of a single industrial sector. In sum, the way Fordism had reshaped society, not merely the factory, engendered the systemic contradictions that spurred working-class action, which, indeed, in the late 1960s, manifested itself outside as well as inside the loci of production. As a system that marshaled the unemployed and the underemployed (as consumers and reserve labor), as well as the actual workers, Fordism was, in the end, undermined by the conflicts and tensions that it generated in the urban society as a whole.

The second development concerns the role of agency. Workers struggles in Detroit and Turin unmade Fordism. Far from being a mere "expression" of a crisis essentially rooted in a decline in productivity, working-class struggles in Detroit and Turin would seem to have had a crucial part to play in the transformation of Fordism. The empowerment of workers at the point of production was definitely an unplanned result of the dynamics of the system. The rigidity introduced by large per-capita investments eventually amplified the disruptive potential of rank-and-file actions that were spontaneous, that is, occurring outside the framework of normal industrial relations designed to link wages to productivity. Through strikes, marches, community protests, and even riots, automobile workers and urban dwellers initiated change, as well as reacted to it. They forced capital to shift to a different paradigm of production and toward new forms of labor organization—a shift already underway in some cases, but rendered inevitable by the international cycles of protest of the late 1960s.⁶⁶

The third key development follows from the other two. At the twilight of Fordism-Keynesianism, it was the marginal workers who, in great numbers, were the protagonists of a decisive wave of militant

working-class action. The prominence in the ranks of the protesters of African Americans in Detroit and southern migrants in Turin struck managers and union officers as unexpected, and was, in fact, misinterpreted as a phenomenon alien to the dynamics of industrial relations and belonging rather to the “cultural” sphere. Yet, it meant that notwithstanding managerial regimentation of workers on the shop floor and the support offered by organized labor in meeting production, Fordism failed in its hegemonic project. Even at its apogee, internal tensions challenged the Fordist-Keynesian order in Detroit and in Turin. There was always considerable resistance to its bureaucratic rationality and its unrelenting drive to increase productivity. The exclusion of sizeable groups of workers from employment security and living standards enjoyed by the prime industrial workforce exacerbated these tensions. In this regard, the Fordist labor market functioned as a “dual” market whereby workers in a “competitive” (precarious, low-pay) sector did not share the standard of living and political clout of the employees in the “monopoly” sector of the big corporations.⁶⁷ As we will see in the cases of Detroit and Turin, the two sectors divided along the lines of race and ethnicity, as well as gender. Such changes within Fordism are still to be studied, not the least in the global context, but it is safe to say that for *Meridionali* in Turin, and for African Americans in Detroit, as well as, for instance, Turkish workers in Stuttgart, or Portuguese migrants in France, the “regime” had so far not accorded them the social recognition (or in some cases even the citizenship rights) that it granted to the established “native” working class. This contradiction exploded in a display of open dissent against the Fordist’s regimentation of labor and against its hegemony. Workers’ struggles complemented the militant activities of other social groups—such as students and racial minorities—who found in antiauthoritarian practices a means to initiate change in society at large. Movements outside and inside the factory often merged in a wave of opposition to the system that anticipated a postmodern age of capitalism.⁶⁸

3

The “American Model” in Turin

A black-and-white photograph from 1934 preserved in FIAT’s archives shows the company’s founder Giovanni Agnelli and Henry Ford standing outside a Detroit plant.¹ The two men appear dignified and self-confident, yet with a stern gaze befitting to the blighted prospects of the Depression era economy. At the time the joint portrait was taken, Agnelli and Ford were elderly men each heading two of the most powerful corporations in their respective countries. Most Americans who owned a car in the 1930s would have driven one manufactured in Detroit, most probably by Ford; by the same token, the majority of Italian car owners bought a FIAT. Agnelli had long been fascinated by Ford. He had first visited Detroit in 1906, and returned to the city again and again, modeling his two most productive Turinese plants on Ford’s flagship plants.² However, the Atlantic crossing was more frequently made by FIAT engineers eager to learn from and report on the rise of mass production in the Motor City. In 1919, when FIAT was still based on craftsmanship, a Turinese engineer was struck by the “well-organized shops” and “the intensity of the individual tasks” he found in the Michigan plants. Workers toiled as hard as if they were doing piecework—he noticed—but their effort was the result of “continuous and automatic production,” not of the incentive of a reward; “workers who are unsuitable, incapable, slow, or lazy cannot resist. They are automatically selected and removed from production.”³

FIAT engineers saw in the continuous flow of the Fordist assembly line an organizational method that they could use to standardize the production process, which in their own company was still greatly hampered by the leverage of skilled workers. Agnelli was very taken by the notion of importing the American philosophy of scientific management, and its variants, to Italy.⁴ His interest in Fordist mass production is evident in the structure of FIAT’s Lingotto plant (1923) and of the Mirafiori plant (1939), inspired, respectively, by Ford’s Highland Park and River Rouge plants, though the Italian

entrepreneur could not directly transpose Fordist methods to Italy. FIAT did, in fact, manufacture a wide range of different models. Italy, at that time, lacked the mass market for small cars and this made standardized production difficult to achieve. Moreover, labor was cheap and readily available, so that it was less urgent to pursue the combination of rationalization and high wages that constituted the basic premise of Fordist productivity.⁵

Under Fascism, any application of Fordism to the Italian situation became markedly more difficult. In place of mass consumption—the basis of American industrial development—the regime advocated moderation in private consumption for the benefit of a national program of investment in infrastructure and rearmament. During the 1930s, the trips of Italian engineers to industrial America continued, but in a political climate characterized by the vilification of American materialism and the Fascist exaltation of tradition.⁶ Finally, as the war approached, the regime intervened more frequently in FIAT production strategies, emphasizing the need for the recycling of precious metal scrap rather than for the rationalization of the organization of work. In sum, although FIAT adopted certain features of Fordism before the Second World War (such as the conveyor belt, the Bedaux system, and the vertical integration of production), these transformations did not undermine the importance of the skilled workforce. Increased production was more likely to be achieved through intensification of work rates, in the context of labor laws that denied workers the right to strike.⁷

FIAT Postwar Development

Only after the end of the Second World War, during the period of Italian industrial reconstruction, did FIAT managers advance steadily toward mass production, with the help of American technology and capital. Vittorio Valletta, FIAT's CEO for two decades after the death of Giovanni Agnelli in 1945, championed Americanization by renewing the old transatlantic links interrupted by the war and by establishing new ones. Responding to a Ministerial Economic Commission in 1946, Valletta maintained that Italy met the requisite criteria for a rapid industrialization. The automobile industry, he argued, was poised to introduce new technology quickly, and even find a niche in a segment of the world market that the Americans could not tap because of the high cost of transporting fully assembled vehicles across the ocean and the high levels of demand from their own internal market.⁸ In the following years, FIAT selectively

adopted American technology and work-organization practices, and subscribed to a model of development founded on increasing productivity. The experience of FIAT, similar to that of other European car manufacturers in this respect, confirms that the transnational dominance of the Fordist paradigm of production was more pervasive in the second half of the twentieth century than during its Golden Age in the 1920s.

Valletta secured financial assistance for his projects through significant loans from the Bank of America and the Export Import Bank. FIAT's ability to obtain credit from prestigious American institutions made it possible for the company to take the lion's share of the total funding allocated to Italy by the European Recovery Program (ERP). From 1949 to 1951, FIAT received \$30.9 million, or 21 percent, of the national total for the heavy industry.⁹ FIAT's ERP funds boosted the transnational transfer of technology and techniques from Detroit's auto industry to Turin's. The company purchased specialized machinery for the construction of standardized pieces as management, quite correctly, anticipated an increase in the demand for cars. Grinding, boring, and lapping machines permitted the gradual substitution of unskilled workers for the craftsmen who used to perform these operations. The single most important investment was the purchase of mechanic and hydraulic presses from Budd—Detroit's leading manufacturer in this sector. These presses allowed a more rapid cycle of production and could be employed for working at hot and cold temperatures.¹⁰ Workers were bewildered by and "astounded" at the introduction of cutting-edge machinery after the long hiatus of Fascism. However, although the ERP grants facilitated the update of many key departments, these innovations were not yet integrated into a coherent system. The reorganization of production was, by all accounts, a lengthy process at FIAT and it continued until the late 1950s. The importance of ERP funding was that it allowed FIAT to catch up with American technology in a relatively short period, an achievement that could not be taken for granted at the end of the war.¹¹

Personal connections between car managers in Detroit and Turin led to the signing of a formal agreement of "technical co-operation" between FIAT and Chrysler in April 1947. For Valletta, the most fruitful part of the agreement was the opportunity it offered "for our engineers to gain knowledge of all the advances made by Americans in the field that concerns us" in exchange for the future possibility of outsourcing assembly of American parts to the Turinese factories.¹² Soon, similar agreements were reached with GM, Ford, and

Packard. These collaborations showed that it was in the interest of the American automobile industry to stimulate the development of its European counterpart.¹³

Technological transfer between Detroit and Turin, thus, occurred in the context of the reconstruction of Western Europe underpinned by the ERP and its anticommunist aims. However, the way in which it occurred was profoundly shaped by the personal and business networks of the individual manufacturers, which gave some of them, FIAT for instance, an unrestricted access to American know-how and to the purchase of machinery. At the same time, it was not an instance of simple Americanization. As in the case of France or England, this transnational transfer was a process of selective adaptation rather than mere replication.¹⁴ Reports of FIAT engineers who traveled to the Midwest plants revealed that, despite the significant technological gap between the American and the Italian industry, the Italians were always able to analyze critically what they observed in the American plants, without being dazzled by the sheer scale of production. In doing so, they fulfilled the goal of their mission, which was to select machinery and work-organization methods that were suitable for FIAT, rather than choosing those that were theoretically more efficient. For instance, transfer lines for the making of the engine block observed at the Buick plant or machines for multiple welding found at the Fisher plant (all in Michigan) were deemed inadequate for FIAT's needs. FIAT engineers also had their doubts about the procedure witnessed at Chrysler's Dodge Main plant and in a GM Cadillac plant of piling up large stocks of reserves on the line; instead, the engineers suggested that only the daily needs be kept on the line at FIAT. One could say that these experts undertook to translate industrial practices.¹⁵

On other occasions, the transfer of procedures and technology was supervised by consulting firms that were contacted on the basis of the observations made by the engineers on their American trips. Cooperation occurred within the legal framework set up by the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship between Italy and the United States, which put American firms on an equal footing with Italian ones in tendering for either public or private bids.¹⁶ In 1947, FIAT initiated a long-term collaboration with Giffels & Vallet, Detroit's prominent architectural and engineering firm, for the expansion of its plants and for the construction of a new painting department and a new foundry. The constant process of "adaptation" is discernible in the selection of technical solutions that departed from American standards, such as, most notably, the use—against the

advice of Giffels & Vallet—of hook conveyors for the body parts in the painting and casting departments, though such conveyors were unusual in the Detroit plants visited by the engineers.¹⁷

The "Productivity" Drive

Reports from the United States frequently referred to "production" and "productivity," terms that echoed the American insistence that their Western allies overcome their lag in efficient manufacturing. For American policy-makers, "the politics of productivity" served as an ideological device designed to mask and defuse the political challenge of social and economic problems to government stability in Western Europe. An efficient use of resources, it was argued, would deliver American-style abundance—and, as a consequence, the end of class-based social conflicts that derived from scarcity of resources.¹⁸ In Europe, at the end of the war, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) launched productivity as a shorthand for the American style of management. The Americans encouraged the creation of the European Productivity Agency (EPA), which would back the productivity efforts of every single participant country.¹⁹ Many countries, Italy included, established National Productivity Committees to recruit and train managers in American methods. These efforts achieved only limited results. The programs of Productivity and Technical Assistance set up in the early 1950s were met with resistance from the Italian government, which did not want to divert resources from balancing the budget, and from conservative businessmen. Angelo Costa, the head of Confindustria (the association of leading Italian industrialists), argued that the American system of mass production, distribution, and managerial organization was unsuited to Italy.²⁰ For the typical Italian entrepreneur, the drive for productivity merely amounted to a speedup of the work flow. In poverty-stricken, postwar Italy, the average employer preferred to pay low wages to more workers rather than invest resources in an improved productive process or bargain for productivity gains with unions in exchange for increased effort from workers.

FIAT's Valletta, however, was enthusiastic about American initiatives of efficient production, although he too appropriated its rhetoric for his own political purposes. "Production," wrote one of the FIAT engineers on a mission to Detroit, "is in America the base of everything. When there is an obstacle that hinders it, everybody, from the top manager down to the worker, struggles to solve the problem." This kind of report complemented Valletta's strategy of recovery and

made it easier to label any trade union resistance as “against production.” During an executive board meeting, he remarked, in turn, that, “for us too, as for the Americans, production must be the base of everything.”²¹

Detroit’s productive efficiency could be used to legitimize drastic changes in Turin’s labor relations. For Valletta, product differentiation, repression of labor activists, and technological reorganization together served to implement his plan of mass motorization. But the cornerstone of this strategy, and the key for FIAT development in the postwar period, remained the constant drive to increase productivity in the plants. In Turin, as in Detroit, the “gospel of productivity” spurred the call for change in the manufacturing process and in industrial relations.²² Valletta’s definition of productivity resonated with the Fordist meaning of this term, centered on mass production, and founded on rationalization, mass consumption, and high wages. “Productivity,” he explained, “summarizes the practical aim of industrial progress, which is to provide to increasing masses of consumers, increasing quantities of useful goods at low prices, in order to achieve economic prosperity and a better standard of living for the people, both in a material and a moral sense.”²³ However, as we have seen, even as Valletta embraced the grand American ideological model in front of the shareholders (and the public), he was supervising a transfer process that only selectively absorbed what the Americans had to offer.

FIAT foresaw the forthcoming expansion of the internal market in the 1950s and pursued greater efficiency not through the half-hearted government initiatives on productivity, but through its own channels of communication with the United States, especially with Detroit’s automobile industry.²⁴ Its adoption of the American technology enabled FIAT in the late 1940s and early 1950s to achieve a massive increase in automobile production. Not only did it rapidly reach prewar levels, but it soon surpassed them, tapping the vast possibilities of foreign markets and, following this, the internal market. In 1947, FIAT produced 40,144 cars and trucks, but production reached 153,365 in 1953, increasing exponentially in subsequent years. The escalation in production was the result of technological reorganization and the additional exploitation of workers, pursued in conjunction with antiunion activities and red-baiting. In 1955, the year of the release of the 600 model for the mass market *and* of the crippling defeat suffered by the Communist union FIOM, car production leapt to 250,072, making Turin the propelling center of the Italian economy.²⁵

Valletta's vision of productive growth based on the American model was thus vindicated. In the 1950s, Italian manufacturing grew in a spectacular fashion, generating the "economic miracle" that allegedly closed the gap between the standard of living in Italy and that of other northern European countries. Durable consumer goods such as automobiles, washing machines, and refrigerators became the norm in Italian households. FIAT adopted up-to-date systems of scientific organization, such as the Methods-Time Measurement (MTM). This system, developed at Westinghouse Brake, spread after Maynard, Stegemerten, and Schwab popularized it in a book with the same name in 1948. MTM analyzed all the motions required for a task, even eye movements, and established a time standard for that operation. The precise measurement of all required workers movements allegedly eliminated all superfluous motions and improved productivity. FIAT first applied it in the early 1950s on the 600 line, presenting it to the Italian public opinion as a scientifically objective test.²⁶

The Lure of "Automation"

From the 1950s onwards, productivity came to be linked with a newly coined word first introduced in the United States: automation. The American debate on automation occurred almost at the same time as the concept was crossing over to Europe, where it found new adepts among the automobile manufacturers.

When Harvard Business School professor James Bright wrote about in his classic study of automation in 1958, he recognized that the word had been "twisted to suit a multitude of purposes and phobias... It has been used as a technological rallying cry, a manufacturing goal, an engineering challenge, an advertising slogan, a labor campaign banner, and as the symbol of ominous technological progress."²⁷ In fact, by 1958, the term was more than a decade old. In 1946, a Ford manager had introduced it to describe automatic work-feeding and material-handling devices and when, the year after, the company launched a short-lived automation department, the term became a catchword for the type of industrial technology scholars imagined for the future. After having lost a substantial share of the automobile market in the 1930s and 1940s to its main competitors Chrysler and GM, Ford used the neologism to signal its comeback in the market as an innovator. The opening of the first "automatic factory" in 1951, a new engine plant in Cleveland, served many purposes, not the least of which was as an expedient marketing tool that demonstrated that

the company was using cutting-edge technology once again.²⁸ The *American Machinist* defined the word as “the art of applying mechanical devices to manipulate work pieces into and out of equipment, turn parts between operations, remove scrap, and to perform these tasks in timed sequence with the production equipment so that the line can be put wholly or partially under push-button control at strategic stations.”²⁹ But definitions abounded: as popularized in the 1950s, automation was a catchword, applicable to every kind of technological development that displaced workers.

Even defined in these vague terms, automation in the automobile industry, in 1951, actually referred to mechanical linkages between different transfer machines. It was hardly a “push-button” system that “ran itself,” as the technical press described it. It needed the intensive labor of many workers, in particular to ensure that feeding stations would work smoothly. It was an integrated system vulnerable to even the most minimal disruption.³⁰

Until the early 1950s, the Ford Cleveland engine factory remained the most advanced example of automation: “One will find here an almost unbroken chain of sequential operations, with work moving continuously from receiving to the individual machines, and to the assembly line, while constantly guided automatically,” boasted *Automotive Industries*.³¹ Although few firms in the United States had the resources or the expected sales volume necessary to afford the expensive mechanization of production, automation fever gripped the nation. Two books by MIT mathematician Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics* (1948) and *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950), depicted the introduction of automatic machinery as both inevitable and catastrophic. He compared the automatic machine to slave labor and maintained that “any labor which competes with slave labor must accept the economic conditions of slave labor.”³² Wiener took his role as a prophet of automation utterly seriously. He became concerned about the consequences of automation for the labor movement. He restricted his collaboration with the corporations and, in 1949, wrote to Walter Reuther asking him to “show a sufficient interest in the very pressing menace of the large-scale replacement of labor by machine.”³³ By the early 1950s, and although the scope of its practical applications was limited, automation became widely discussed as the new trend in technology that would shape the future of manufacturing.³⁴

Despite the high costs involved, automation became “the order of the day” in the mid-1950s. Automobile manufacturers were initially quite candid about the main motivation behind automation. One

anonymous Big Three manager frankly defined it as "any operation that removes a man from production."³⁵ The *American Machinist* commented: "With labor costs generally rising steadily, industry is forced to seek economies in other areas. That accounts largely for the accelerated search for more and better automatic devices."³⁶ By mid-1950s, automation was in the process of changing the automobile industry. The introduction of the new "philosophy," in fact, suited only manufacturers with a high-volume of production, as it required substantial initial investment, frequent maintenance, the cost of a "debugging" period when machines required frequent adjustment, and an overall increase in fixed costs. "Since automation generally implies a continuous use of equipment," wrote business analyst Reuben E. Slesinger, "delays become unusually expensive. A slight delay at one stage of operations may generate a considerable long jam in the productive process."³⁷ As a result, automation increased the trend in the industry toward greater concentration because only large corporations could afford the rigidity of operation it entailed.

Notwithstanding assurances that it would diversify, not reduce, the number of jobs available, the initial effect of automation was, therefore, to shrink the number of autoworkers in the whole sector, despite the fact that the Big Three automakers actually expanded their workforce.³⁸ Few auto-executives at the time grasped that automation provided those workers not displaced by the process with increasing potential leverage at the point of production, but an autoworker at the Cleveland plant explained the vulnerability of the automated system in a concise way: "Everything had to work or nothing worked."³⁹

"Detroit's Automation" in Turin

The debate over automation would soon cross the Atlantic. A conference held in Milan in April 1956 on the "problems of automation" saw constant references to the work of Nobert Wiener, Peter Drucker, John Diebold, as well as to UAW's Walter Reuther's cautionary remarks about the spreading of automation.⁴⁰ The speakers concerned with the social effects of automation tended to waver between Reuther's apprehension about the possible negative effects on levels of employment and the material conditions of the working class and the more optimistic business-oriented prediction that in Italy, as in the United States, automation would cause an increase in production and productivity that would allow workers supplanted by technological innovation to be absorbed by the expanding economy.⁴¹

Walter Reuther had been immediately responsive to the challenge of technological innovation in the auto industry. As the president of CIO, he sponsored a National Conference on Automation in 1955 and, in the same year, presented a report to a congressional committee appointed to investigate the matter. His views were appreciated in Italy by those sympathetic to laborites and scholars who responded to his call that companies be made responsible for the displacement of workers. However, the Italians thought that, in their country, the government should shoulder the main responsibility for alleviating the social cost of technological progress.⁴² In any case, in the Italian context, the problem of the social effects of automation could be addressed only in the abstract, since the novelty still affected only a handful of companies.

An opposite view, albeit consistent with the standpoint of American business, was taken by one of the most prominent guests at the Italian conference—FIAT's technical manager Olinto Sassi. He claimed that his own company's experience lent credence to a different interpretation: not only had automation at FIAT boosted production in the automated departments but, as a side effect, it had also increased employment in those departments not yet affected by this change, such as the bodywork assembly line.⁴³ Automation, in his opinion, initiated a virtuous circle that, by lowering the cost per unit, generated more consumer demand and, therefore, more employment.

FIAT had actually only recently begun experimenting with "material handling technology," as automation was defined in the auto industry. In 1955, FIAT engineers visiting the famous Ford Cleveland plant took note of "the efficiency of a large number of feeding mechanisms" and expressed the opinion that those devices could also be used in Turin.⁴⁴ But the company proceeded at first with great circumspection. Automation required a large market demand, which the company initially underestimated, and the cost of purchasing and debugging transfer machines could only be justified if there were a considerable volume of production. Furthermore, automation required a seamless flow of integrated processes between different operations, which the company had yet to achieve. As Sassi explained, the use of automation had increased substantially only with the introduction of the 600 model, the small car for the mass market, whose potential volume of sale suited a wholly rigid kind of investment. In the mid-1950s, automatic transfer machines were built for specific operations, and their cost could only be recouped in three to five years. Their "rigidity" constituted an obstacle to the introduction of automation even in a large company such as FIAT,

which would have needed a production ranging from five hundred to one thousand units per day to pay back the investment. Furthermore, as the primary rationale of automatic machines was to replace workers—Sassi was wholly candid about this—it was natural for automation to spread more rapidly in the United States where autoworkers commanded higher wages.⁴⁵

The lure of automation, however, proved irresistible in the 1960s when FIAT's production reached the unprecedented level of a million cars per year. Faced with a market that appeared limitless, FIAT managers abandoned prudence. They applied automatic transfer machines to a large number of different operations. The engine department alone took on 60 such machines, which, according to an internal evaluation, enabled it to produce 150 engine blocks per hour in some lines, more than FIAT's American or Japanese competitors.

In the late 1960s, FIAT engineers continued to visit American plants, but the tone of the comments was notably different: "American machines are no doubt a model that has always inspired us...however, current FIAT production of transfer machines cannot be deemed inferior to the American one."⁴⁶ This comment anticipated the American realization that they had lost their preeminence in manufacturing, which paved the way for the restructuring of the Fordist factory in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the massive introduction of automatic transfer machines, with the associated problems in synchronizing production, exacerbated the structural rigidities of FIAT. The company had, in fact, increased production not only by introducing new machinery, but also, more traditionally, by expanding its plants and its workforce. Mirafiori, already its largest plant in the 1950s, went through two rounds of expansion until it had eventually doubled in size. In 1967, Mirafiori was a behemoth that employed 54,000 workers and covered 1.2 million square meters. The "Hot Autumn" of 1969 would show management just how vulnerable such a complex was to radical, ungovernable labor struggles. However, until industrial conflict brought the need for flexibility and decentralization to the fore, the Mirafiori plant, the core of FIAT, showcased how well the firm responded to the challenges of rapid expansion. It represented a successful example of transnational technological transfer. Although not always in an "American way," FIAT had matched, if not actually surpassed, Detroit's standards of automation and productivity by the late 1960s.

4

The Cities of Discontent

Throughout the twentieth century, automobile manufacturing made and remade Detroit and Turin. Managerial choices about recruitment and plant location affected workers and their families in the first place. However, the cities' entire social and economic structure was driven by the car industry as the prosperity of the urban commercial middle-classes and the solvability of the municipal governments were linked to the spending power of the industrial working-class and the tax revenue originating from car manufacturers. A large number of suppliers' firms, small or medium in size, also relied on the presence of car manufacturing. The needs of the automobile industry figured prominently in the priorities of urban planning. As a result, the very spatial configuration of the Motor Cities resulted from or responded to the desiderata of the automobile manufacturers. Urban sprawl, overcrowding of working-class neighborhoods, and uneven standards of municipal services were the outcome of the periodic bouts of expansion of the car industry, which attracted flows of immigrants to the cities.

Since the 1940s in Detroit and the 1950s in Turin, conflicts over housing, jobs, and resources escalated. They reached a boiling point when hundreds of thousands of migrants from the south of the respective countries moved to the Motor cities for escaping a backward and repressive social environment and pursuing self-improvement. In Italy, the *Mezzogiorno*—the southern part of the peninsula—had traditionally been a pool of migrants to Turin and other northern industrial cities such as Milan and Genoa. After the Second World War, the southern migratory flow shifted from overseas destinations, such as the United States, to northern European countries and, increasingly, to Italy's northwest. Both in Italy and the United States, southerners saw migration as the only alternative to a life of material poverty and a society of traditional values that was at odds with the image of a modern Italy conveyed by the mass media. The north offered, they believed, opportunities for quick economic

advancement because wages in manufacturing more than tripled those in agriculture. Young southerners were also attracted by the lure of the city life, which markedly contrasted with the oppressive social order and the dull routine of rural villages.¹

Migration from Appalachia and the American South was exclusively internal to the United States, but it was equally informed by the migrants' desire to move from rural to urban areas in search for economic opportunities. For both white and southern blacks, migratory chains followed extended family ties, which often led entire kin groups to cities such as Chicago, Detroit, or Cleveland. Thus, in both the United States and Italy, an extensive southern region provided the necessary flow of labor to the industrialized north. This dual pace of internal development was not so much a contradiction as it was an essential precondition for the consolidation of Fordism in the postwar period. Spatial concentration of highly productive and high-technology manufacturing—a key feature of that mode of production—drained labor from less developed regions and, at the same time, accentuated long-run income inequalities within otherwise affluent countries. In the United States, these depressed regions became part of the “Other America” that the public opinion “discovered” in the 1960s². In Italy, the same phenomenon was characterized as the “Two Italies,” an expression that stood for the long-standing economic, as well as cultural, separation between the two halves of the Peninsula.³

Migrants Become Residents: Detroit in the 1940s and Turin in the 1950s

As Fordism's immigrants swarmed into industrial cities, racial and ethnic cleavages exacerbated the ever-present social tensions between established residents and newcomers. Although southern black and white migrants moved to Detroit as early as the 1910s, their impact on the city's race relations became especially noticeable in the 1940s. The Great Depression had hit hard Detroit, but the onset of the Second World War heralded a dramatic expansion of its manufacturing base and a quick economic recovery. Employment opportunities skyrocketed in auto plants that had quickly converted their lines to provide the “arsenal of democracy.” For southern farmers and returning soldiers, Detroit offered the possibility to fulfill the American Dream. Black Americans, in particular, were eager to take advantage of the new opportunities that the war offered to them, either on the front or at home. Blacks, more than whites, were willing

to travel long distances to take up manufacturing jobs.⁴ In part, the histories of black and white southerners ran together, as similar were the economic and social forces that uprooted them. However, the paths they followed in their destination set them apart, as a result of overwhelming racial and social constraints.

Southern migrants of either race did not receive a warm reception on their arrival in Detroit. "The feeling towards the white Appalachians was about the same as the black and white feeling was" remembered an old Detroiters still residing in the city in the 1990s.⁵ Native Detroiters considered both groups a stain on the city's image. They provided cheap labor, but they were stereotyped as lazy, unreliable, and violent. Their rural ways stunned native Detroiters who labeled them as unfit to live the city life.⁶ When industrial sociologist Arthur Kornhauser conducted a survey of the city's "attitudes" in 1952, he recorded astonishing results that belied a simplistic image of polarized race relations. Detroiters put on the top of the list of "undesirable" people "criminals and gangsters" (26 percent), at the second place "Poor Southern whites; hillbillies, etc." (21 percent), and only at the fourth place "Negroes" (13 percent). An overall 22 percent was collected by two other categories "Non-self supporting, transients, drifters, etc." and "People who had come lately," which revealed the greater importance of the divides of class and community, rather than of race.⁷

The results of the survey also hinted at the central importance of culture, as well as class, in the construction of race. White Detroiters saw southerners, whatever their color, as cultural others. In the eyes of northerners, white and black southerners shared a great deal in terms of dialect, idiomatic expressions, food habits, lifestyle, and attitudes toward modernity. Detroiters regarded rural folk ways as an obstacle to assimilation. Since black migration had preceded southern white migration in the 1910s, the arrival of white people displaying many attributes usually ascribed to the black race confused the racial perceptions of the natives. Detroiters' reaction was by no means unique. Historians have noticed how northerners who came in touch with white Appalachians accused them of playing "nigger-rich," that is, squandering their salaries on alcohol and games or indulging in frivolities—alleged traits of black people—while being incapable of adopting thrift and moderation. This is a significant appellation that, by transposing a degrading connotation associated with African Americans, attests to the continuous interplay between class and race.⁸ A municipal study discovered the most Detroit residents (though not blacks) considered "Hillbillies" as

a “pariah subgroup” (another definition that could have also applied to African Americans too).⁹ Arguably, white Appalachians were a kind of “in-between” people, possessing the physical traits of the white Anglo-Saxon heritage, while contradicting the mainstream representation of Americanness.¹⁰

The answers to Kornhauser’s survey in 1952 also revealed mainstream Detroiters’ interpretation of the racial and social tensions that had traversed the city in the previous decade. The prevalent assumption was that the escalation in violence was due to the clash between blacks and lower-class white southerners. In 1941, the rapid conversion and creation of factories in response to the wartime military demands had attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants who scrambled to find accommodation in Detroit and the outlying region. The influx of job-seekers swelled the population to an extent visible even to the casual observer. “An aspect of the war which is very obnoxious to everyone”—wrote a British diplomat in Detroit, Arthur Bray—“is the crowding.” Whether on the pavements, in public transportation, or in parks, theaters, or shops, the city looked congested with boisterous newcomers who, observed Bray, considered themselves citizens of other places and appeared to feel no responsibility or concern for Detroit. Southerners dressed less formally, and boasted vivid ties and “sham jewelry,” and wasted their money on spirits, nightclubs, and bowling. With a British understatement, Bray commented that “the old Middle Western expansiveness and open attitude to strangers shows very worn at the edges.”¹¹

Apart from the irritation of rubber-necking with strangers on streets and tramways, the housing problem was at the center of latent and manifest conflict in wartime Detroit. The rules of discrimination forced African Americans into jam-packed ghettos, the largest of which in the East Side, where landlords overcharged them for substandard facilities (a problem that would continue in the postwar period, as we will see). “Hillbillies,” however, crowded in areas near the factories where “sewage and water facilities [were] primitive in the extreme” and tempers flared up easily.¹²

In the postwar period, while regional prejudice would never completely disappear from view, it would be racial factors that would mostly shape migrants’ path toward integration or exclusion. In fact, southern migrants found in Detroit and other Midwestern cities, patterns of racial discrimination that reminded them of the South. “When I first came to Detroit,”—recalled NAACP leader Arthur Johnson—“I thought of it as most Southern blacks did: it had to be better than what we were living in.” However, to his

disappointment, Johnson discovered that blacks in the North were denied the opportunities of social, as well as spatial, mobility that—prejudices notwithstanding—even white Appalachians enjoyed.¹³ African Americans, remarked black attorney Kermit G. Bailer, were living “a very narrow life in a large dynamic city with a host of opportunities but for ‘whites only’. There’s almost nothing you can ask me about the first fifty or sixty years of my life that was not controlled by matters of race.”¹⁴

These frustrations were worsened by the fact that, between 1940 and 1960, African Americans grew into a very large “minority.” They represented only 9.2 percent of the population in 1940, but their numbers increased to 16.2 percent ten years later. By 1960, Detroit was 28.9 percent black. It is significant that while blacks became increasingly visible, it is instead difficult to measure the exact weight of white southern migrants. Since the census specifies race but not geographical origin, and since, contrary to ethnic groups, southern whites did not carry distinct surnames, they disappear in the statistics. When the 1940s turned into the 1950s, it is already impossible to collect evidence about the “Hillbillies” path to integration, which suggests a relatively rapid assimilation into the mainstream of city dwellers.

“The Most Urgent Single Problem”

Long after the war, “the most urgent single problem” of the city remained the scarcity of housing.¹⁵ The impulse for public housing had largely subsumed after the late 1940s and it received a final blow when, in the 1949 mayoral election, the liberal candidate, George Edwards, was defeated overwhelmingly—in a union town—by Republican Albert Cobo. The issue of public housing proved pivotal. Cobo, elected on a platform of anti-public housing, pledged to protect Detroiters who had invested in single-family areas from the pernicious effects of public housing projects. As a result, observes historian Thomas Sugrue, “when cities throughout the country took advantage of federal funds made available in the 1949 Housing Act, Detroit ranked eighteenth among the twenty-five largest cities in the ratio of low-rent starts to all housing starts.” In the 1950s, Detroit continued to be a city where accommodation was private, expensive, and source of considerable social tension.¹⁶ Even as some public housing projects became available to blacks, the Detroit Housing Commission clung to a policy of segregation that was reversed only after a series of lengthy trials initiated by civil rights groups.¹⁷

In the competition for decent accommodation, African American migrants continued to carry a special disadvantage: their color. A combination of economic factors, discriminatory attitudes, and racially driven political choices restricted their opportunities in the estate market at least until the 1960s. By the end of World War II, the great majority of African Americans, whether established residents or newcomers, lived within the invisible barriers of a ghetto in the lower eastside of the inner city. Its economic and cultural center was misnamed "Paradise Valley," characterized by widespread black homeownership (but not single-family occupancy as houses were partitioned and rented to newcomers), home to black Detroiters' most prominent institutions, such as churches and fraternal associations, and thriving black businesses, some of which, such as the Gotham Hotel, compared in splendor with their white counterparts. However, in spite of its name, the area was hardly heaven on earth. It was overcrowded, afflicted by poorly maintained housing stock, increased delinquency, and plagued by poverty and disease. Next to it, the area known as "black bottom," as its name suggests, was even poorer, and more dilapidated. Overall, in the wake of the war, this area comprised 70 percent of black Detroiters.¹⁸ Another black "pocket," known as black West Side for its location, was originally characterized by better quality homes, but also deteriorated following the influx of migrants from the South, which pushed landlords to transform home in apartments and boarding house, without the necessary sanitation and safety maintenance. Only the small enclave of Conant Gardens, on the Northeast side, provided better quality housing and became a refuge for the black middle class—ministers, businessmen, teachers—who, mostly, owned it. Another small black community, at the intersection between eight mile avenue (the boundary of the city) and Wyoming Avenue, was for many years prevented from growing by a six-foot tall wall built by real estate speculators to prevent the fall in property values that would follow black expansion.¹⁹ Outside of these already densely populated areas, there were very few locations where African American workers could find accommodation at an affordable rent. Black residents paid a higher rate than whites for accommodation of lower quality. In fact, it was not unusual for landlords to increase the rent, while at the same time cutting maintenance, as they opened formerly all-white buildings to African Americans. In 1960, the wartime emergency long gone, black Detroiters were still paying higher rents in absolute terms and relatively to their income. That "the Negro pays more for less" was a phrase of common place usage in Detroit that still rung true decade after decade.²⁰

Many studies have pointed out that the rapid growth of black population after the Second World War and the spatial reorganization of American cities that followed programs of urban renewal amounted to the creation of a "second ghetto," which replaced the earlier black enclaves created by the Great Migration before 1930. Black residential areas, formerly contained within few blocks, now encompassed whole neighborhoods whose "color density" was more black than ever before. However, rather than being a legacy of the Great Migration, the "second ghetto" was a postwar development, a creation of demographic expansion coupled with discriminatory practices of real estate agents, the Federal Housing Administration, the municipal government, as well as white homeowners.²¹ During the 1940s and 1950s, projects of urban redevelopment exacerbated the class and racial divide of cities such as Detroit undergoing drastic demographic change. As elsewhere in urban America, Detroit's city planners recognized that the building of cross-city expressways, would have the double advantage of improving the city's economy, by means of a rapid connection to the suburbs, and of redeveloping or clearing "blighted" inner-city neighborhoods. Given the working of the housing market in Detroit, black-populated areas were the prime target of slum clearances and found themselves in the path of highway construction. In particular, the Gratiot redevelopment project, planned in the late 1940s, which made room for the Oakland-Hastings Freeway, devastated densely populated parts of the "Black Bottom" and "Paradise Valley," with little regard for the many cherished black institutions in the area.²² Gratiot was the pilot project of a "Detroit Plan" of redevelopment sketched in the wartime period, but implemented only in the 1950s. Municipal and federal agencies selected the affected area accordingly to seemingly "color-blind" criteria, such as age of buildings, multifamily occupancy, record of juvenile delinquency, incidence of welfare enrollments, and median income, which were, in fact, coded language for the presence of blacks. By 1950, the site was 98 percent black and so were almost the totality of the 1,950 families relocated.²³ The Housing Commission in charge of drafting a relocation plan was perfectly aware that race nullified the chance of most of the families involved to find suitable accommodation elsewhere in the city. Yet, it adopted an optimistic standpoint by stating that, as the Supreme Court had recently ruled against racially restricting covenants, available housing would trickle down to African American buyers and renters.²⁴ Mayor Albert Cobo, if cynical, was more realistic when he commented that the displacement of scores of low-income, African

American families was the “price of progress.”²⁵ The politics of urban redevelopment, after all, reflected the political reality that residents of the black ghetto, because of their race, class, and often recent arrival, had little voice in the administration of the city.

In 1962, urban sociologists Robert J. Mowitz and Deil S. Wright, commenting on the slum clearance plans of the early 1950s asked rhetorically, “As the displaced slum dweller seeks new shelter and penetrated new urban neighborhood boundaries, what pathologies of social tension will occur, with what resultant costs to the city?”²⁶ It was a perceptive remark. In many respects, as racially conservative Detroiters well understood, urban redevelopment encouraged or even forced blacks in the old ghetto to migrate to other parts of the city. Thus, urban redevelopment conflicted with the “containment policy,” synonymous with segregation, which the municipal government adopted *de facto* too. From the mid-1950s onwards, these concerns proved more critical as the tide of black migrants continued to invest in the Motor city and the sheer demographic pressure—with the complicity of ruthless “blockbuster” real estate agents—opened formerly white sections, especially those adjacent black areas, to African Americans. The 1940s are traditionally regarded as the decade of most intense southern migration to the industrial north, but African American migration continued unabated for the following 15 years, even though in a context, as we shall see, of declining economic opportunities. Between 1950 and 1960, an average of 145,700 black migrants per year moved to northern metropolises. This number increased to 162,000 between 1960 and 1966. It amounted to a flow that, counting black migrants only, slightly surpassed the average of the 1940s (159,700) and by far the one of the earlier “Great Migration” (45,000).²⁷ Between 1940 and 1960, African American population increase in Detroit by 333,000, even though the overall city population was declining.²⁸ The city, therefore, was becoming more “black” both in absolute terms and relative to the white population. The, sometimes rapid, transition in racial character of whole neighborhoods, meant that African American could, at least from the late 1950s, have access to a better housing stock than previously available. Furthermore, in that period, civil rights groups, often interracial, became more vocal in combating housing discrimination and segregation. In 1962 an umbrella organization, the Greater Detroit Committee for Fair Housing Practices promoted a Fair Practice Code for Real Estate Brokers and Agents, which would ban discrimination in sale and “blockbusting” as well as “Covenant Cards” where neighbors would underwrite their pledge to welcome newcomers without

regard to their race or religion. Another activity, the Fair Housing Listing Service, was a register of property available for sale or rental to any person.²⁹ However, these initiatives attracted only limited support and, on the whole, the index of segregation increased during this demographic transformation. In Detroit, neighborhoods in transition, explained urban sociologists Mayer and Hoult, gave the false impression of integration, because, once the transition was over, the ghetto "walls" were more impenetrable than ever. Whole areas were becoming "ghettoized," a neologism that indicated an increase in the agglomeration of blacks. The center line of the concentration of white and black population (a statistical way of calculating the density of segregation) were overlapping to a certain extent in the 1940s but were far apart in the 1960s.³⁰ It was then a process of racial succession, not of racial integration, that segregated blacks in the "inner city," while whites spread to the larger metropolitan area.³¹

From the mid-1950s and for a decade afterward, neighborhoods became a contested terrain between Detroiters of different races and of different political orientation. Both the Open Housing movement (for integration) supported by civil rights, religious, and liberal groups, and, even more, the several homeowners associations (against integration), supported by conservative civic associations were grassroots movements. Their battles in court and on the streets were a symptom and symbol of heightened racial tension. These conflicts did not seem to reflect the problem of congestion, which characterized the wartime period and its aftermath, anymore, but the reaction to a measure of black empowerment, as better off African Americans had now the resources to move into "respectable" neighborhoods and the will to test racial boundaries. They were unlikely to be recent migrants, but more established families who, against all odds, had managed to secure steady and relatively well-paid jobs.

Homeowners "improvement" associations protested in a number of ways against black "pioneers" who ventured beyond the frontier of the ghetto. They lobbied the municipal government, wrote letters to the media, and even bribed black buyers out of their turf. They also threatened and, sometimes, exercised violence upon the newcomers. Signs reading "If you're black go back to Africa were you belong" or "Negroes moving here will be burned, Signed Neighbors" were posted to houses sold to black families. Often these associations tried to preempt the threat of a racial change by discouraging African Americans visiting the neighborhood. When the Dodge Community Center started being used by some black families, more than 40 residents wrote to the center complaining that "this gives

the impression that this is a Negro neighborhood,” and more explicitly: “The value of our property is affected by so many colored people in the center.”³²

Actual violence either against blacks newcomers in the block, or against white families selling to blacks, could follow verbal or written intimidation. Historians have recorded hundreds of racial incidents in all major cities—from Chicago to Louisville, from Dallas to Los Angeles—where neighborhoods underwent racial transition in the postwar period. Violence also followed a similar pattern throughout urban America: it was usually triggered by the arrival of the first black families who bought or rented in the neighborhood.³³ Detroit was no different in this respect. Vandalism and bombing, the most common incidents, were usually ascribed to individuals. But tactics of escalating violence sometimes confirmed that the homeowners associations were behind the carefully planned campaigns. When, in 1953, the Woodsons, an African American family, moved into their new house, they received an anonymous letter stating: “Get off this street or we will blow you off.” A few days later, a neighbor shot at their front door. Finally, a spokesman for the “citizen committee” approached the family and convinced them to accept a thousand dollars more than they had invested to move out. The Woodsons accepted. The spokesman commented: “Practically every family in the neighborhood contributed money to help settle this problem, and we hope to foster this community spirit by working together on other projects.”³⁴ Violence was a powerful deterrent in the short term and black homebuyers who resisted violence were an exception but, in the long term, all the “infiltrated” neighborhoods did change their racial composition. It was a case of self-fulfilling prophecy, which brought about block-by-block expansion of the ghetto rather than actual integration.

With few exceptions, the most blatant violence subdued by the mid-1960s. In the 1960s, the battle over housing occurred within the context of an invigorated civil rights movement. The majority of white Detroiters became less tolerant toward episodes of fire-bombing or vandalism. They were also aware that the expansion of the black middle class in formerly all-white neighborhoods was somehow inevitable.³⁵ However, the conflict only shifted to the fringe of the city and to the wider metropolitan area. Whites fleeing the city strove to create suburban municipalities secure from racial change by using the consolidated discriminatory practices that had long “ghettoized” blacks in Detroit. The same freeways that displaced hundreds of African American families in the “slums” permitted middle and

working-class whites to escape beyond city limits while continuing to enjoy the benefits of urban life. Figures of racial dissimilarity show that suburban lines proved more difficult to cross than urban ones. Writing in the 1970s, geographers Robert Sinclair and Bryan Thompson observed that “the black presence in the central city contrasts markedly with its complete absence in most suburban communities.” Ironically, “the executives who commute daily... to the administrative offices of the Detroit Inner Zone are effectively screened from the realities of life in that zone.”³⁶ From the point of view of the 1980s, the most conspicuous feature of the Detroit metropolitan area was its uneven development, marked by a line that divided the suburbs from the city, a line that baffled any strategy of redevelopment based only on Detroit, and a line which increasingly tallied with the boundary between black and white.³⁷

Residential segregation was not only a humiliating experience for its victims, but it also cost them their jobs. As geographer David Harvey has pointed out, the spatial ecology of the city provides different groups with different access to resources and public goods. African Americans tested the validity of this theoretical point in their daily lives.³⁸ Sociologist John Kain first examined the correlation between housing segregation and employment distribution in 1968. He resolved that the distance of inner-city African Americans from available jobs in suburbs, the lack of information, and the reluctance of employers to hire blacks “from the ghetto,” are all evidence of how residential segregation diminished employment opportunities for African Americans. In his view, the absence of public transit between the “ghetto” and the suburbs was a political choice that affected African Americans greatly: purchasing a car and traveling miles for a low-wage job discouraged applicants from the inner-city. Therefore, the cost that housing segregation imposed on blacks was greater than traditionally assumed.³⁹

In this context, the effects of the mismatch between jobs in Detroit and in the suburbs were pernicious. A trend toward disinvestment in the urban area and relocation became visible in statistics in 1958 (a year of deep recession) and continued unabated for the second half of the twentieth century, when Detroit’s employment rates in manufacturing and retail started to decline steeply in comparison with the suburbs and (with a the brief exception of 1963–1967) in absolute terms.⁴⁰ Capital flight followed the freeways to Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties both stimulating and responding to suburban migration. In 1967, a report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Labor Department

lamented that the rates of African American poverty—increasingly an urban poverty—were comparable to those in the Great Depression. Black workers and their families were being forced outside the “opportunity structure” of American life.⁴¹ Retrospectively, we can observe that they were enmeshed in a process that trapped them in a decaying postindustrial city. Yet in the 1960s, they also looked for the opportunity to reverse the pattern of race and class disparity in a city that had up to that point confined them to second-class citizenship. As in Detroit’s Italian counterpart, to seize these opportunities meant to challenge several tenets that had underpinned the development of the Fordist cities.

Turin: A Divided City

As in Detroit, in postwar Turin, the apportionment of the urban space conveyed the class and ethnic divisions of its population, but race and racism, at least in the American understanding of the term, were not an issue. In Turin too, Fordism had attracted vast flows of immigrants from the south who too encountered significant bias, poverty, and fewer opportunities than those available to native Piedmonteses. However, in their case, no discrimination equaled the impact that race had in the daily lives of African Americans.

In 1950s and 1960s Italy, however, comparing southern Italians and African Americans did not seem far-fetched to contemporary observers and commentators. In 1967, during one of the innumerable roundtables on the theme of immigration, one trade unionist juxtaposed Meridionali to black Americans. Meridionali were Italy’s “white negroes” who were held up in a vicious circle that, like for their American counterparts, prevented them from moving up the social ladder. Another expression of common usage was “European negroes.” Turin’s “ghettoes” (a term that although originally Italian was borrowed by the American sociological literature), lacked blacks, but were filled with southerners whose relative social position—it was argued—was similar.⁴² As we will see, this comparison was inaccurate in many respects, but revealing of the perception of the problem of internal immigration in Italy. It also touched upon some good points: lack of social mobility, residential segregation, subtle employment discrimination, and social prejudice affected the life of southern Italians in the north and created a de facto two-tiered society with different standards of citizenship. This comparison had a ring of realism precisely in a moment when the news of urban riots bounced—ominously—from the United States to Italy: Would

Meridionali's discontentment explode in a similar way in Italian's industrial metropolises?

While the United States had always been a land of immigration, Italy was always rather a land of emigration. Policy makers were therefore rather unprepared when, in the postwar period, northern cities became the destination of immigrants, far surpassing the usual movement from country to city. In part because internal mobility had been strongly discouraged during the Fascist period, at the end of the Second World War, Turin, like other industrialized cities, did not resemble a metropolis, but, with its half million residents, a large town. A substantial immigration movement started only in the late 1940s, after the reconstruction of the city's industries, and continued in waves. The immigrants initially came from rural Piedmont and Veneto. It continued with Meridionali, peaking in the early 1960s (southern migrants did not outnumber migrants from northern regions until 1955). Immigration also concerned the outskirts of Turin, and, as a whole, the Turinese metropolitan area increased from 1,281,000 to 1,662,500 in the period between 1951 and 1961.⁴³ In the 1960s, Turin had the dubious honor to be labeled, after Naples and Palermo, the third largest "southern" city. (Similarly migrants referred to northern metropolises such as Detroit as "Up South" or "Alabama North").⁴⁴ Then it slowed down considerably during 1964–1966 because of a brief recession. Another wave of Meridionali arrived between 1967 and 1969 due to an upsurge in the automobile industry. Immigration continued during the 1970s, slowly decreasing until 1980.⁴⁵

It was in consequence of the process of migration that southern Italian were constructed, in the 1950s and 1960s, as belonging to a distinctive ethnic group, with their own cultural and racial characteristics. In fact, *Meridionale*—and its pejorative like *terrone*—was an appellation that initially did not carry any particular meaning for the southern migrants. Their identity was rooted in their village or, in some instances, their region (Sicily, Calabria, and so on). They lacked a communal notion of being part of a *Meridione* until they encountered northerners who were not acquainted with differences in the south. For instance, Sicilians and Apulians could not understand each other's dialect. Habits and language of Meridionali were diverse and only the shared experience of migration made communication among them easier than with natives. Similarly, immigration historians have shown that Italians migrating to the United States underwent a similar process of identity-building.⁴⁶ On the contrary, African Americans had developed a distinctive, even alternative,

culture throughout centuries of slavery first and then of segregation. In their case, a collective identity had been arguably prompted by white action, but this occurred much earlier, when slavery had slowly eroded the diverse African ethnic origins, while creating a constructed racial cleavage between whites and blacks.

Meridionali arrived to Turin from several southern destinations (Sicily, Calabria, Campania, and Apulia) mostly by train. The night train from the south took some 22 hours to complete its journey from the farthest end of the peninsula. The “sunshine train” left from both Palermo and Siracusa, in Sicily, to join at the southern end of the Booth and then travel upwards through many of the poor regions of the Mezzogiorno. Some migrants arrived from Sardinia on a boat to Genoa (itself another destination of migration) and from then into a two-hour train ride to Turin. Thus, the Central Station *Porta Nuova* provided southerners with the first impression of life in the north. Migrants often grasped with a glance the geographical and social difference of the city. “I arrived at *Porta Nuova* one morning in November 1961,”—declared a Sicilian—“straight from Messina with two suitcases and no address. When I stepped outside I couldn’t see anything, only a grey and humid wall, I could hear the city and imagine it, but I couldn’t look at it. At home, I didn’t even know what the fog looks like.”⁴⁷

It was not only the weather that made migrants feel a sense of remoteness from their own origins, but the encounter with native Turinese and Piedmonteses. Meridionali found opportunities in Turin that were not available to them in the south, but confronted a local population that welcomed them with mixed feelings. First of all, these feelings were reflected in the coverage of the local press, in particular during the peaks of migration waves, in the late 1950s and the late 1960s, when the media ran campaigns that reaffirmed Piedmontese stereotyping of southerners. As expressed in the press, Piedmonteses regarded southerners as distinctly backwards, impolite, unreliable, unclean, male chauvinists, and prone to violence. In many respects, this characterization resembled that of white and black southerners in cities such as Detroit or Chicago and it tallies with the common description of immigrants in different times and places. In Turin, the first newspaper of the city, *La Stampa*, was prominent in running these campaigns. This was ironic because the newspaper belonged to FIAT, which had indirectly initiated this flow. The newspaper stuck to a middle ground between the reluctance of the car company to alienate immigrants and the feeling of the Turinese public opinion. Most telling of the latter attitude was the

section devoted to the letters from the readership—*Lo Specchio dei Tempi* (“The Mirror of Times”)—whose selection reflected both public opinion and editorial intervention. “Maybe not everyone knows what life in a Sicilian family really is.”—wrote a reader in 1962 “... It is humiliating and enslaving for women, either wives or daughters. Piedmontese women, marry Sicilians if you prefer it and you will, if allowed, come back to your home black-and-blue... Sicilians are warm-hearted, but it has to be proven that women prefer a jealousy entailing constant confinement, corporal punishment for trivial reasons, and many, many children.”⁴⁸ Although the writer did not go as far as cautioning against miscegenation, he or she (probably a male) expressed the sense of a cultural difference between Piedmontese and southerners that resonated with the readership. The choice of the topic also hinted at the threat to cultural homogeneity that derived from immigration, which was most explicit in the “mixed marriages” (a definition adopted by sociologists investigating the phenomenon) between Piedmonteses and southerners. Sociological inquiries showed that such marriages incurred the disapproval of the Turinenses, in particular when they involved southern males.⁴⁹ The media propagated other stories about southerners’ unsuitability to city life that made the newcomers look ridiculous as well as social deviants. For instance, a Piedmontese college teacher explained on TV that Meridionali utilized the bathtub as a big vessel to grow basil. In Turin as in Detroit, the propagation of such anecdotes, whether true or false, served to reinforce the social distance between older residents and the newcomers.⁵⁰ Another reader of *La Stampa* summed up the Turinenses’ feelings when he wrote that he wished “that this was the smallest city in Italy, but with only Piedmonteses.”⁵¹

The differences between natives and southerners congealed in a representation that depicted the latter as irrational, violent, lazy, vulgar, and the former as active, strong-willed, polite, and civilized. In a survey conducted in Piedmont in 1969, 53.3 percent of the respondents declared that they did not wish to have any kind of contact with Meridionali (the survey was about Calabrians in that instance).⁵² Although, as another contemporary survey shown, Meridionali were perceived as having different racial features (especially in height, skin, and hair color), the majority thought that in northern urban environment, they had been given the chance to relinquish their habits and adopt the work ethic and sober temperament of the Piedmontese.⁵³ Environment, not biology—that is culture, not race—was deemed to be the cause of the newcomers’ difference—a point stressed by presumably “objective” highbrow literature. “It is

well known," wrote sociologist Cataldo Di Napoli, "that his environment bequeathed to the *Meridionale* (in particular, the Sicilian) . . . an excessive moral severity towards his wife, of whom he continually controls the faithfulness, and his daughters, whom he keeps locked up. Totally different is the behaviour of the Northerners who usually concede a rather wide freedom to the female members of the family. Of course, I am merely stating a fact and have no intention of judging which attitude is superior."⁵⁴

More sophisticated scholarly analysis of social psychologists and work psychologists (Turin was a key center in Italy for the development of these disciplines), gave a scientific aura to these notions by demonstrating through tests and questionnaires that southerners were either potentially pathological subjects prone to deviancy and unable to integrate into the industrial city and to industrial work; or victims, rather than agents, of migration, whose fragile psyche was subject to considerable strain in the urban environment. The early 1960s was the moment when psychiatrists, in industrial cities such as Turin, lamented a steep increase in the number of southerners that they were treating. Sociologists were, at the same time, investigating social labeling and ethnic prejudice. In their scholarly surveys of Turin's public opinion, Renzo Canestrari and Marco Batacchi pointed out the Meridionali were the target of characterizations, such as being impulsive, distrustful, and jealous of their honor, which fostered the interiorization of a social stigma. According to their polls, Turinenses avoided, if they could, contact with southerners and were offended if they happened to be mistaken for one of them.⁵⁵ The conclusions of all these scientists were that the stark difference between social environment and the cultural heritage of south and north transformed southerners into pathological subjects. But their investigations were not free of cultural bias: the standard of social normality was northern Italy, not southern Italy.⁵⁶ The southern intellectual Francesco Compagna criticized some of these arguments in his book called, with a hint of irony, *Terroni in città*—"terrioni" being the slang, pejorative word for peasants with which southerners were welcomed in the north—but his was a lone voice.⁵⁷ The consensus was in any case that southerners were a different ethnic group apart from the northerners. It was appropriate then that in the early 1960s, the Turinese Federation of the Communist Party, unable to bridge the gap between Turinese communists and the newcomers, planned to recruit and transport a number of organizers from the south, so that they could speak to the immigrants in terms compatible with their own culture—a plan that never came to fruition.⁵⁸

In the 1950s, “racial” prejudice toward Meridionali found a political outlet in the activity of the Movimento per l’Autonomia Regionale Piemontese (MARP or Movement for Regional Piedmont Autonomy). This was a movement initiated by a handful of local politicians and it achieved substantial electoral success in administrative elections at local and regional level. MARP appealed to the sense of true “Piedmontesism” threatened by the barbaric invasion from the south. It evoked a Piedmontese heritage of superior civic virtue and untainted work ethic and demanded the immediate expulsion of the immigrants. The latter was, at least theoretically, possible since the Fascist law against urbanization was still on the books (and was abolished only in 1961). MARP obtained 31 thousand votes in Piedmont in 1951, but its popularity waned through the 1950s, and the movement disappeared in the 1960s. The demise of MARP, in a period of increasing immigration and congestion in the city, can largely be explained by its marginalization by the big players in Turin: FIAT and the labor movement. Even if *La Stampa* reiterated stereotypes about Meridionali, the paper and the company would not lend support to a political movement that eventually might have undermined the policy of expansion of automobile production.⁵⁹ Furthermore, MARP’s political language was too explicitly racist. At the end of the nineteenth century, Italian social Darwinist theorists, notably Cesare Lombroso and Alfredo Niceforo, had associated the complexion of southerners with those of an inferior race that had a strong tendency toward wrongdoing and mischief. They characterized southern Italians as lagging at an inferior stage of social evolution.⁶⁰ However, after the enactment of the Fascist racial laws and the Holocaust, these theories, and the political language associated with them, had become inadmissible in public discourse. They would be revitalized in Italy only in the 1990s, when the memory of the Second World War had faded.

All this stands in stark contrast to Detroit, where the rhetoric of racial difference had profound historical roots in the fabric of society, which further discrimination could exploit. Contrary to Detroit, the political fault lines in Turin developed along class and ideology (Catholicism and Communism), not along ethnicity or race. This difference was also due to structural factors. Although clear statistics are lacking, contemporary accounts show that home-ownership was less widespread in Turin than in Detroit. There is no evidence that Turinese tenants were concerned about the depreciation of their homes and their neighborhood. Furthermore, landlords did not suffer competition from the suburbs, as the most desirable

homes continued to be located within the borders of the city, even though in areas not inhabited by southerners. Italian middle classes remained urban throughout the postwar period. In Turin, it was the suburbs that instead saw the greater influx of migrants and that bore the consequence of the chaotic growth of the metropolitan area. As a result, prejudice against the newcomers in Turin never fuelled a grassroots movement parallel to the Detroit's homeowners' association. Oral history sources show that southerners *did* perceive prejudice as "racism." Meridionali, who looked differently, talked strangely, and appeared backward, were the "other" in an urban environment that had conserved its homogeneity up to 1950s. However, they did not undergo a process of racialization once they arrived in the north; their difference was rationalized in terms of culture.⁶¹ Furthermore, as we have seen, racial discrimination was institutionalized in the United States. It was inscribed in the practices of local, state, and federal agencies, it affected the relation between the police and the community, and was only rarely undermined by legislation and court decisions. Italy's southerners, as members of Parliament, contributed to write laws; they staffed the public sector, and comprised the majority of the police force. Workers' organization complained of a class bias in the institutions, but never of an ethnic or regional one.

Therefore, the parallel between Meridionali and African Americans did not lie in a similar process of racialization, but in the comparable class position the two groups had. This point of view was articulated in Turin by sociologist Anna Anfossi when in 1967 she observed that on an average, the Turinenses greeted the newcomers with scorn for failing to adopt the middle-class values that they set as their standard.⁶² Turinense hold southerners to be socially inferior in reason of their cultural background and position in the labor market. The comparative perspective with Turin invites us to investigate the class as well as the racial aspect of the social discrimination. In Detroit, the language of class difference was present alongside the language of racial difference. This could be observed in the frequent juxtaposition between black and white southerners, in particular "Hillbillies" in the early 1940s and 1950s.

As in Detroit, the social problem most visibly associated with inundation of immigrants was the lack of available accommodation. In both cases, the severe housing shortage was the most important cause of tension and a sign of the impact of immigration to the city discernible to both the general public opinion and the scholars. When, in 1962, sociologist Magda Talamo set out to conduct a methodical

enquire into Meridionali's housing conditions, she concluded that the search for accommodation was "the most tormenting and immediate problem the migrant has to face on the arrival." In addition, this remained to be so for the whole scope of the period covered in this book.⁶³

In the 1950s, Meridionali initially settled in dilapidated parts of the city center, sometimes destined to demolition, where absentee landlords subdivided buildings in rental units with a high turnover of tenants. Basement cellars became makeshift homes too. Landlords charged for this accommodation well above the market prices. In Detroit, high prices for mediocre accommodation was associated with racism, but it was a common predicament of immigrants elsewhere. At much slower pace, the newcomers also encroached in the traditional working-class neighborhoods of Turin, such as Borgo San Paolo, Borgo Dora, and Barriera di Milano, which were inhabited since the late nineteenth century by Piedmontese workers employed in the areas' factories and workshops. These areas were the center of a distinctive Turinese working-class culture. From the late 1950s, they also settled in Mirafiori Sud, the area that surrounded the largest FIAT plant in town.

In the early 1960s, the pace of arrival increased. The city's population swelled from 916,652 in 1958 to 1,114,300 in 1963. *Porta Nuova* station sheltered those at night who did not have any other alternative. Numerous boarding houses sprung up nearby the station packed with male single immigrants, but only those who had found a steady job could afford them. Unscrupulous landlords could transform boarding-houses into dormitories where, as an immigrant explained, lodgers would sleep "in bunches, one over the other in bunk beds...with 7 toilets for 120 persons" served with poor quality food.⁶⁴ An even cheaper arrangement was the notorious "bed-sharing": two or three immigrants working on different shifts would share the same bed in a rented room. Probably the most shocking evidence of the social degradation that hit immigrants where the shacks built in several parts of the city—veritable shanty towns that lodged up to 70 families. When a TV crew went to visit one of these slums, they interviewed southern tenants who, in a flawed Italian, stated: "Only animals could live here."⁶⁵ But the surge in price was not only the response of the market to higher demand for accommodation; landlords denied Meridionali better quality housing, often by posting, in the buildings' front doors and in the classified ads, warnings such as "*Non si affitta a Meridionali*"—not for rent to southerners,—which severely restricted the pool of housing, at the

disposal of the immigrants.⁶⁶ Middle-class areas such as Crocetta, “collina,” and “pre-collina,” (Turin’s “hillside”) and various lower middle-class enclaves on the west side of the city were “fortresses,” wrote historian Stefano Musso, de facto inaccessible to the growing southern population.⁶⁷

As in Detroit, the construction of public housing met with the stiff resistance from powerful interests, though for different reasons. In 1950s, conservative politicians, some of them belonging to the right wing of the Christian Democratic party, in control of the city’s coffers insisted on two points: that preference to allocation of housing be given to native Turinese, municipal employees, and veterans and that confiscated land be paid at current market price to the owners. These two requests greatly constrained the possibility of the city government to buy land for public redevelopment at the inflated real estate prices of the 1950s and limited its beneficial effects on the question of housing the immigrants.⁶⁸ In the following years, the ascendancy of a national center-Left coalition, and the discontent breeding in the city congested by the new arrivals, undermined these forces. In 1962, the Fanfani government enacted a law that allowed cities to expropriate land for public use and pay compensation below the market price. As a result, the city adopted a “Piano casa”—a housing plan—that boasted construction of public housing first on municipal land and then on expropriated land. The criteria for allocation changed too. Apartments were to be assigned first of all to families that inhabited substandard or overcrowded lodging—just like those often occupied by immigrants. Between 1963 and 1971, a number of public agencies (a veritable alphabet soup, including the IACP, INCIS, ECA, GESCAL) developed public housing projects. They built 13,813 apartments in less than a decade.⁶⁹ However, though a step in the right direction, it was not enough to alleviate the housing problems. For the allocation of the first six hundred apartments, the city received 13 thousand applications. In the 1960s, similar to African Americans in Detroit, Meridionali had more opportunities to move into better quality accommodation. However, contrary to the American Motor city where native Detroiters moved to the suburbs at a steady pace and left available accommodation behind, Turin’s population continued to grow unabated. Thus, the political and social question of housing shortage remained prominent, and even increased in importance toward the end of the decade.⁷⁰

Describing Turin in the early 1960s, French urbanist Pierre Gabert noticed that “the rapid extension of the new neighborhoods is pursued without a logically organized plan . . . As a result, there are serious

problems of public transport between the different neighborhoods of an agglomeration that exceeds one million people."⁷¹ Whether the accommodation were cheap private homes or subsidized public housing (for which the allocation criteria favored the poorest and more numerous families), Turin's new neighborhoods fostered a de facto segregation of its residents, mostly immigrants, which did not reach American levels, but was nevertheless a significant feature of the urban social geography. Geographers have represented patterns of demographic distribution in Turin on the basis of municipal districts ("circostrizioni"), which were the statistical units used by the government census. The maps produced according to these criteria show a concentration of Meridionali in the center, in the north, and in the southwest of the city. The index of concentration is roughly 40–50 percent in 1957 and 34–40 percent in 1979. However, this representation is misleading because the districts comprises large areas with different demographics characteristics, for instance blocks historically inhabited by the Turinese working-class adjacent to new housing projects almost exclusively inhabited by immigrants. If one takes smaller units of analysis the index of segregation in 1970 rises up to 84 percent.⁷²

In practice, immigrant families scattered in temporary or sub-standard accommodation around the city were concentrated in new lodgings in the least desirable sections, where even basic infrastructures such as asphalt roads and public lighting were yet to be built.⁷³ The aggregation of families often below the poverty line and the lack of municipal services meant quick degradation, while the scarcity of public transport increased the feeling that immigrants inhabited a world apart. As in the case of the public housing complex of Via Artom, the municipal agencies moved immigrant families that did not have a steady income, whose members often lacked even basic literacy, and lived of precarious jobs, perhaps in the illegal economy, sometimes forcibly, to redeveloped areas. These groups lacked the political influence to demand improvements to their new neighborhood and were shunned by other working-class families in adjacent areas who shout hostile slogans at them, such as "Terroni, go back to where you come from!"⁷⁴ Paradigmatic was the case of Vallette, a housing project that comprised two huge tower apartment-blocks built in only three years and completed in 1958, that soon acquired the appellation of ghetto for the immigrants. Vallette comprised 13 thousand apartments and lodged 20 thousand tenants in the far periphery of the city. The representation of Vallette as a ghetto by the local press reflected two different sides of the question of

immigration. On one hand, *La Stampa's* characterization of the area as overcrowded by dirty, noisy, and immoral tenants, reflected the stereotypes of Meridionali that had gained currency in Turin in the previous years; on the other, 82.6 percent of the new area was inhabited by immigrants and located in a marginal and underdeveloped area, referred to as "dormitory" because no other service, neither commercial nor cultural, was available⁷⁵ Similarly, the neighborhood of Falchera, built in the same period, though better planned, was so disconnected from the city that its inhabitants complained that they had to "commute to Turin" for work.⁷⁶ For decades afterwards, inhabitants of these areas carried the stigma of degradation, poverty, petty crimes, and drug peddling associated with the housing projects.⁷⁷

In contrast to Detroit, Meridionali settled not only in the dilapidated inner-city buildings and in the ghettoized projects, but also in the suburbs—the small, formerly rural, municipalities just beyond the borders of the city. However, these were not the Italian version of the American "crabgrass frontier," enclaves of single-family houses with their own lawn, but agglomeration that replicated urban problems.⁷⁸ From the mid-1960s, small towns such as Nichelino and Grugliasco, came under media attention for their decay, after having grown threefold in the previous decade.⁷⁹ The most glaring example of how the policy of the car industry conflicted with the lack of metropolitan planning occurred perhaps in 1967, when FIAT opened a new plant in Rivalta, a small municipality of five thousand people just outside Turin. Rivalta suddenly found itself hosting 11,613 new workers, mainly immigrants, some of whom brought along their family. This occurred at the same time when FIAT enlarged the existing Turinese plants, most notably Mirafiori. As a result, by the end of the decade 60 thousand more migrants were attracted to the Turinese metropolitan area.

At a time when American plants were moving out of industrial cities, FIAT pledged to a productive model that involved the maximum concentration of activities into a single metropolitan area. FIAT managers remained indifferent to requests from the city administration and the state to spread operations along the peninsula. Until urban problems started jeopardizing its planned production output, FIAT conformed to the Fordist paradigm of horizontal concentration and refused to take responsibility for the congestion of the city. After all, as CEO Giorgio Garino stated at the time, FIAT's was in the business of making cars, "let the GESCAL [one one of the public housing agency] build houses."⁸⁰ This statement was partially misleading. FIAT, after all, had been in the business of building apartments (with

public funds) for its workers. From 1943 to 1958, FIAT built about four thousand units, but these were inhabited mainly by Piedmontese workers, the only who at the time fulfilled the seniority required for applying.⁸¹

The overall result of the workings of the housing market and the politics of public housing in Turin's metropolitan area between 1955 and 1975 was a growth that did not allow the integration of the Meridionali into the fabric of the urban life. Market and institutional forces confined immigrants, together with other poor, in pockets of degradation within an affluent city where crime, promiscuity, overcrowding of schools, and social ills prospered. In comparative perspective, the housing problems that contemporary observers in Detroit and Turin deemed distinctive had much in common. Though the population was not classified by race, indexes of residential segregation in Turin were comparable, even though not equal, to Detroit, a city where racial relations were polarized. However, in Detroit, the options available to African Americans homebuyers and tenants in the racialized housing market were also shaped by the strategic decision of the automobile industry, whether in the direction of industrial concentration (at least until the late 1950s) or of decentralization (afterwards).

In both cases, Fordism uprooted labor force from "backward" internal regions and concentrated them into mass-production industries in manufacturing centers, but the automobile companies did not cushion the social consequences of the process underway. Due to its economic leverage, the car industry did not need to come to terms with the necessities of city governments.⁸² Thus, Fordism resulted in different access to services and resources, hardened patterns of unequal distribution of wealth and social discrimination, reshaped real estate values, the social, ethnic, and racial composition of neighborhoods, and the demographic fault lines of entire metropolitan regions.

Becoming Fordist Workers: African Americans and Meridionali in the Motor Cities

For African Americans and southern Italians in the Motor cities, the achievement of material gratifications came usually after a journey through a number of dirty, dangerous, demeaning, and poorly paid occupations. The car manufactures' ability to offer steady jobs and relatively high wages meant that they could enjoy a large "reserve army" available to join the ranks of their workforce. Fordism was

characterized by the presence of highly profitable industries, of which the car industry was the paradigmatic example, which combined technological investment with mass production, and enjoyed an oligopolistic control of the market, in contrast to low-technology industry, in highly competitive fields (textile, shoes, parts supplies, etc.) with a low rate of profit. This division was reflected in a dual labor market that reproduced social structures of inequality. The primary market offered secure jobs, often unionized, in big companies, competitive pay and benefits, the opportunity for promotion, and the credit advantages related to continuous employment and the attachment to a respected employer; the secondary market offered menial work, low wages, long hours, safety hazards, and arbitrary layoffs in small workshops and the least productive firms. The great influx of migrants tinged these two tiers of the market with different ethnic and racial hues. The impact of prejudice or (in the American case) racism, lack of skills, inferior education, and rural ways all contributed, in different measure in the two cities, to employers' decisions and pushed migrants toward the lower scale of the labor market.⁸³ Only during favorable economic upturns that tightened the labor market, would the sought-after jobs, such as those in the auto plants, be opened to those associated with the stigma of secondary employment. In other words, the experience of second-class citizenship that migrants often encountered in the housing market also continued to shape their life as workers, but the way cultural and racial cleavages functioned within the world of work differed from their wider urban experience.

In Detroit, the dual labor market created a cleavage between African Americans and white Americans. The former were confined to the less coveted jobs, while the latter enjoyed access to more desirable occupations and the chance for an upward mobility. Furthermore, African Americans were more likely than whites to lose their job in a recession and to remain unemployed longer—another characteristic of the secondary sector. Racial inequality on the job market characterized, with some regional variety, the entire United States, but in Detroit, the disparity was particularly evident for the concomitant presence of a large percentage of blacks and a wealth of industrial jobs.⁸⁴ Thus, race discrimination was all evident for whites and blacks alike, even though the job market was more stratified than it is usually acknowledged. For instances, sociologists Philliber and Obermiller observed that white Appalachians were twice as likely as African Americans to find steady occupation but were themselves victims of discrimination in comparison to native whites. In other

words, there existed a segmented job market with three layers where the best jobs went to the “dominant” group, the next being the white rural migrants. Whatever was left was offered to the blacks. The disparity was evident in the different treatment of college graduates. A degree delivered entrance into mainstream society to whites of any background. Not so for blacks, for whom education improved opportunities for social mobility to a much lesser extent. Obviously, gender was another variable that acted in conjunction with others to determine the occupational status. For instance, black women were barred from most clerical work, an opportunity instead available to white women, but were sometimes hired as sales clerks, a job not available to black men. Overall, however, once the brief window of wartime opportunity was shut, the domestic sector long remained the most likely occupation for black working-class women.⁸⁵

In 1953, Walter Reuther noted that roughly 82 percent of the job advertisements in manufacturing, clerical, sales, and professional jobs discriminated against blacks explicitly, and those employers who did not discriminate in written form did so at the gates. The Mayor’s Interracial Committee had arrived to similar conclusions in 1951. The Committee reported that blacks were almost nonexistent in certain sectors, such as building trades (in Detroit a reserve of ethnic white workers), while they were concentrated in occupations such as elevator operators, doorkeepers, janitors, and stock handlers in retail stores. These positions involved as little public contact as possible. No African American man—a potential threat to sexual conventions—was employed as sales clerk at that date. This division of labor reflected many of the assumptions of racial segregationist related to the symbolic value of reaffirming the social “distance” between whites and blacks.⁸⁶

The auto industry in Detroit had a mixed record on black employment. On the one hand, it was the largest employer of both whites and nonwhites. For example, in 1945, blacks comprised 15 percent of its workforce, even though this percentage declined in the 1950s. It also offered some of the highest wages in manufacturing as well as good retirement plans and fringe benefits. On the other hand, it conserved overwhelming racial barriers at its internal level and lacked uniform antidiscriminatory practices. This contradiction was perhaps most famously exemplified by Henry Ford who employed, since the 1920s, a relative large number of African Americans at his massive River Rouge plant, where they represented 18 percent of the plant’s workforce, but were usually confined to the foundries, where workers confronted daily perilous heat and noxious fumes.

Before the 1960s, black Detroiters made major inroads into the car plants during the war-time labor shortage and in those occupations that whites would no longer accept, such as hazardous or menial janitorial jobs and only occasionally in production jobs. A 1960 survey of employment in Detroit-area car plants has shown that blacks were distributed in a haphazard manner across plants and firms, ranging from 60 percent in Detroit's GM Chevrolet Gear and Axle, to 1 percent at Livonia's Fisher Body, but the difference depended on the discretion of plant managers rather than on recurrent factors.⁸⁷ Recruitment personnel sometimes marked African Americans' application with a red dot and rejected them with formal "color-blind" letter, but very often discriminatory practices were hardly disguised. The NAACP, the Urban League, and the UAW received complaints of racial disparity as a matter of routine. "Mr Mays applied for work at the Dodge Truck plant,"—reported UAW's black officer William Oliver—"although there were a number of applicants filling out forms, the man at the employment desk refused to give Mr. Mays a form, saying that there was no job for him... and began to confer with the next man in line."⁸⁸

Even when blacks made it to the factory shop floor, the sought-after "off-line" jobs and the skilled trades, such as the tool and die makers or the electricians, continued to be the reserve of white labor. This disparity occurred with the connivance of the union. Apprenticeship programs that excluded de facto blacks and women, were after all negotiated between the company and the UAW. Seniority rules too were structured in a way that greatly disadvantaged minority groups. The UAW's preference for departmental and occupational seniority lines trapped blacks in the undesirable occupations for which they had been hired and transformed them in dead-end jobs. "This seniority provision,"—wrote NAACP labor secretary Herbert Hill in 1957—"as it is enforced by the Union and the Company constitutes a separate line of progression for white and Negro workers. Negroes are hired exclusively in certain departments and have seniority rights only within these departments. White workers are hired in production and skilled classifications and hold seniority rights in operations which permit promotions and development of skills in a significant number of job classifications."⁸⁹ Furthermore, nothing in the seniority system mitigated the disadvantages of being the last hired—a common situation for African Americans. If it represented a real guarantee against the caprice of the employer, it also worked against the new employees by putting them in a more vulnerable position in case of recession.⁹⁰

In Detroit, it was skin color that determined to a great extent which workers would station in the primary or in the secondary sector of the Fordist labor market. However, discrimination at the hiring gate did not necessarily determine race relations on the shop floor where workers' racial attitudes changed in ways that can be explored only on a case-by-case basis. The Marxist lore of "superstructure" posits that race was a false ideology that capitalists used to fragment the workforce. The history of Detroit suggest that the racial divide could benefit the employer and the individual white worker, but that it was the choice of workers and activists whether to bridge the racial gap or deepen it. In fact, scattered evidence suggests that race relations could be more fluid on the shop floor than in the neighborhood. A 1950s survey of autoworkers' opinion tells the story: "You'd say, 'Do you object to working with a black?' 'No' 'Are they entitled to the same seniority, same jobs?' 'Yes' 'What about eating in the same lunch room?' 'No Problem.' Then 'What about a swimming pool in your neighborhood? What about a next door neighbor?' They draw the line."⁹¹ The assembly production lines in the 1950s were populated in majority by whites and opened slowly to blacks in the following decade, but here was context where black and white workers intermingled to a degree unknown to the segregated neighborhoods. For instance, interracial "doubling-up," the practice where one worker performed two operations while a mate rested for a few minutes, surely required solidarity among the accomplices to succeed. Evidence of the existence of this practice gave hope to radical historians of the 1970s that class solidarity could indeed erase racial fragmentation.⁹² In addition, it was not only a matter of cooperative work effort, if it was true that at lunchtime, "Negroes never sit just to themselves. On our line we're all mixed up unless a hot issue involving Negroes comes up. It has to be something very serious if we're not all eating together. Then we eat with our buddy but we may go in a corner to speak alone"—an anecdote that illustrates how workers might mobilize for different set of issues at different times without creating permanent divisions.⁹³ Even at Chrysler Dodge Main, where black radicals later lamented the effect of a vicious racial discrimination, the 1960s saw episodes of wildcat struggles conducted by black and white workers against managerial decisions to increase the tempo of production.⁹⁴

Episodes of interracial sociality and of cooperation, whether to carry on production or to undermine it, provide a multifaceted picture of race relations on the shop floor, but, in a way, they confirm that race was a factor to be reckoned with and to be frequently

negotiated at the workplace. The racial connotation of workplace inequality was particularly prominent in the relationship (antagonistic, in any case) between foremen and workers—the former overwhelmingly white. In postwar automobile plants, foremen were no longer involved in shop-floor bargaining with workers and their stewards as was common in the 1930s and 1940s. GM, Ford, and, lastly, Chrysler, had all negotiated contracts with the UAW that, through the grievance procedure, shifted challenging issues, such as safety and speed up to the higher echelons of plants and the union's personnel. As Heather Thompson has remarked, all that was left to foremen was their disciplinary role, which, in the case of black employees, pitted them against workers with whom they did not share ethnic or friendship connections, lifestyle, or neighborhoods. Increasingly, in the 1960s, it was also a generational clash between traditional values and youth culture.⁹⁵

Mistreatment, abuse, and foremen's arrogant attitudes were common on the shop floor, where middle-level management was under pressure to maintain production standard even if it meant trampling over workers' rights and personal safety. Here was a terrain of a potential working-class solidarity that could transcend racial lines. But white workers seemed to fare better in one respect: because of the stereotypes associated with their race, line supervisors and foremen harassed black workers with particular viciousness for alleged negligence and disrespectful behavior. In this period, the NAACP received hundreds of complaints from black workers mobbed into leaving the job or declassified to dangerous jobs because of flimsy offences.⁹⁶ The late 1960s and 1970s would show that foremen's abuse, more frequently than anything else, was likely to trigger workers' protest, and as long race precluded the promotion of black foremen, this issue was susceptible to a racial hue.⁹⁷

To many black workers and union activists, labor rights and civil rights demands were inextricably connected on the shop floors of the car factories. In theory, Detroit was a favorable city to tackle racial discrimination in employment and racial harassment in the plants. Detroit's NAACP was one of the largest in the country and active on the many fronts—housing, education, police brutality, and health—of the civil rights battle. The UAW, which had its headquarters in the Motor city, sponsored moderate civil rights groups such as the NAACP and the Urban League. It donated money and its leaders went on the record as supporters of civil rights legislation and court decisions, at state as well as federal level. In Detroit, UAW officers attended NAACP events or joined as members, sometimes collectively. Detroit's

Chrysler UAW #7 was just one of the many locals that joined “for life” by raising a \$500 check.⁹⁸ At central level, the union had established a Fair Practices Department (FPD) in 1944 to investigate charges of racial discrimination on the shop floor and among locals. The very presence of the department was a sign of commitment toward its black membership and was meant to have an educational task toward white workers. It was symbolically important the UAW president Walter Reuther formally presided over the FPD too. However, the department was emasculated of any effective power to change entrenched discrimination in the union—let alone the companies. As an offspring of the “International,” that is, the Central Executive Board, the FPD could not conduct autonomous investigations without the cooperation of regional directors, who were more likely to feel the white workers’ pressure to defend the color line at local level. William Oliver, Reuther’s choice to direct the center lacked any ascendancy in the black community and over the recalcitrant regional directors. His appointment assured that the FPD would initiate only perfunctory change.⁹⁹

In 1957, a group of black UAW officers openly questioned the unions’ gradualist strategy toward civil rights and Reuther’s reluctance to face discriminating locals and regions head on. Calling themselves Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC), aspiring union leaders such as Horace Sheffield, Robert Battle III, Sheldon Tappes, and Mark Stepp accused Reuther of not living up to his rhetoric.¹⁰⁰ In particular, TULC was frustrated by the lack of progress in two areas of union concern where African Americans demanded more leverage. One was the failure to advance blacks’ entrance in the skilled trades, where the problem of discrimination was most entrenched. The second was the demand that at least one black member be given entry to the powerful UAW’s International Executive Board (a post that Sheffield coveted for himself). Opposition to the first request was local. It meant overpowering regional directors and local presidents hostile to change. Obstruction to the second came from the established top leadership. Reuther maintained that a member of the International Executive Board should not be elected solely on the basis of his race. This opinion was apparently color-blind, but infuriated Sheffield because it suggested that no black was fit for top leadership in the union.¹⁰¹ The goal of having a black member on the Board eluded TULC for a few years. (It was finally achieved in 1962 with the nomination of the moderate Nelson Jack Edward, a second African American was elected in 1968), but the protest gathered considerable attention.¹⁰² Between 1957 and 1965, TULC became a

political reform group to be reckoned with. It had become vocal not only within the union but also in the wider black community and it demonstrated its influence in 1961 when it became instrumental in the election of the liberal, civil-rights friendly, Jerome Cavanagh as Mayor of Detroit against the incumbent, racially conservative, Louis Miriani, supported by both the UAW and the business community.¹⁰³ After this electoral debacle, pragmatically, the UAW defused the challenge by coopting many of its leaders into the executive posts—after all TULC's activists had always claimed a greater share of institutional power. In 1965, TULC assigned its annual "freedom award" to Walter Reuther (as well as to Frank Sinatra). It was an acknowledgment of the prominent position of the labor leader in the national coalition in support of civil rights, but also a sign that TULC had returned to mainstream UAW politics.¹⁰⁴ As its acronym spelled out, TULC comprised highly placed black union officers, not rank and files. However, TULC's initial popularity indicated the existence of a deep discontentment among Detroit's African American car workers, which even TULC failed to address. For lower-class blacks, entrance into skilled trades or union leadership were not pressing issues. Their concerns would have to be taken up by more militant activists who would argue that changes for the working-class could also occur outside the union fold.

TULC should also have taken notice that the urban and economic context of these reform initiatives was changing quickly in the late 1950s and early 1960s. First, the city of Detroit had been hit by the concomitant impact of disinvestment and decentralization. In fact, by the end of the 1950s, the extent of relocation of city's traditional manufacturing base—automobile and supply parts industry—was remarkably visible. The trend increased during the 1960s and 1970s. Manufacturers, led by the auto industry, fled in search of cheaper labor costs in rural areas, inexpensive land where to build state-of-the-art single-storey plants, and lower property taxes in nonmetropolitan areas.¹⁰⁵ From 1958 to 1963, Detroit's share of investment within its metropolitan area fell from 44 percent to 30 percent, a trend that went along with the parallel process of suburbanization of Detroit residents. Between 1963 and 1967, in the build-up to the American involvement in Vietnam, manufacturing jobs increased in the central city in absolute numbers, but, in percentage, continued to grow less than in the suburbs. Finally, between 1967 and 1977, when commercial activities too moved to the suburbs, the flight of capital investment and jobs became irreversible ushering in a postindustrial era at Detroit.¹⁰⁶ Unemployment rose for all segments of Detroit's population, but,

positioned at the lower end of the labor market, African Americans were enormously affected by these trends detected by the statistics. It was the paradoxical that the city press boasted Detroit was “the city of promise to Negro” and their “land of Canaan” and continued to attract migrants from the South, albeit at a lower rate.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, prospects in the Midwest compared favorably to the Deep South, but this type of account produced the impression of an abundance of jobs that crushed the expectations of the newcomers and worsened the situation for those already settled.

Second, in the wake of the southern civil rights movement, protesters against discrimination in employment became more vocal in the North too. Picketing and boycotting became common tactics. In addition, political activism opened more opportunities within the heavy industry and in the commercial and public sector, though color still dictated what positions were available. For instance, the city government offered African Americans jobs as janitors, heavy laborers, sanitation men, and bus conductors or in clerical positions in departments such as Welfare and Housing that interacted with blacks. But the police department and fire department, temples of white masculine culture, had an abysmal record of integration.¹⁰⁸ By the end of the 1950s, blacks had secured a firm foothold in Detroit’s auto plants (now fewer in numbers), though again only in unskilled and semiskilled roles. Within the perimeters of a city now increasingly black, 20 percent of Ford’s and 24 percent of Chrysler’s workers were African Americans.¹⁰⁹ This was hardly a sign of racial harmony, and racial tensions actually mounted to a new level, but it meant that the struggle over dignity and fairness in the workplace would now shift to the UAW locals themselves and on the shop floor where a large number of black workers would vent their grievance without the mediation of established union leaders.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Italian Motor city was similarly traversed by tensions in the labor market due to the increasing numerical importance of southern Italians in the city. In Turin, discrimination against Meridionali did not acquire a racial connotation. It is confusing that contemporaries described the disparity in terms of “racism” and made occasional comparisons with American blacks; the combination of individual prejudice, racial ideology, and institutional discriminatory practices that existed in the United States did not characterize Italy. It is, therefore, significant that, difference notwithstanding, the labor market was segmented in much the same way as it was in Detroit, even though, in Turin, ethnic prejudice, lack of skills and of personal connections—not race—represented

the most likely barriers for Meridionali. The comparison graphically reminds us that rather than being the creation of a racial discrimination typical of the American context, the dual labor market was a product of Fordism.

In 1950s Turin, immigrants were often offered only humble, hazardous, and unsteady jobs. In a city where the building industry was booming, southerners were numerous in construction work, a sector that was totally nonunionized, poorly paid, and scarcely regulated in Italy. In fact, such employers were often unlicensed subcontractors who hired workers without a contract and social security. A 1959 statistic revealed that 40 percent of immigrants worked in such positions, but the data only pertained to the legal economy.¹¹⁰ This was also true of immigration to other northern cities. In the case of Milan, sociologist Massimo Paci observed that southerners were also grouping in construction sites through migratory chains according to their regional origins, and that the possibility to sleep on site in barracks contributed to explain their considerable presence in this trade.¹¹¹

The second most likely sites of employment for Meridionali were the small workshops and factories that dotted Turin and its metropolitan area—a sector characterized by high competitive pressure. As small enterprises that employed up to one hundred workers and that usually supplied to FIAT, these companies were hard pressed to meet orders in metal carpentry, car body works, spare parts, plastic components, and so on, in the worry that they be replaced by other suppliers—a typical pattern of the secondary sector in Fordism. To maximize profitability and lower supervision costs, they paid workers by the piece, demanded overtime and night shifts, and lower safety standards. In the 1950s and 1960s, the inspectors of the department of labor—too few to effectively monitor the situation—found innumerable shop floors where workers were regularly maimed by machines, particularly heavy stamping equipment or blazing-hot machinery.¹¹²

In fact, the corollary of the exclusion of Meridionali from primary sector jobs was that they were disproportionately suffering work-related accidents and injuries. In 1960, Turin's Department of Labor investigated the matter and discovered that more than one-third involved southern migrants. This was a number superior to their relative presence in manufacturing jobs.¹¹³ The majority of these work-related injuries, sometimes fatalities, occurred in construction work where safety standards in scaffolds were primitive. In 1961, Turin's Department of Labor registered nine fatal accidents, six

involved southern construction workers.¹¹⁴ At the same time, leftist observers argued, the higher rate of accident was to be explained with the mere fact that immigrants, in Turin or elsewhere, worked, day after day, longer hours, and in more exploitative conditions than the natives.¹¹⁵

Jobs suppliers firms were hardly better paid than construction work, but offered more continuous employment, even though high turnover characterized this sector. As these occupations were so precarious and unrewarding, Meridionali changed them very frequently, in an indefatigable search for economic improvement. In the absence of an upward mobility, they enjoyed a sort of “horizontal” mobility. Goffredo Fofi, an acute observer of the phenomenon, calculated that two-thirds of the migrants had changed their job twice in their first year at Turin.¹¹⁶ They could do so because Turin, as opposed to Detroit, did not suffer any major period of recession and, as we will see, the pattern of capital investment remained concentrated in city until the early 1970s. However, the high level of turnover, together with recurring residential changes, added to the experience of shiftlessness that hindered Meridionali’s integration in the city.¹¹⁷

The different employment record of southern and Piedmontese newcomers belied contemporary explanations for Meridionali’s fewer opportunities in the job market: their lack of industrial experience. In the 1950s, northern entrepreneurs called for the establishment of training courses in migrants’ region of origins, which could prepare the newcomers for the industrial work they would perform in their city of destination.¹¹⁸ Social psychologists purported that work had, for southerners, a “scant psychological significance” that made them behave unpredictably on the workplace (and therefore made it less palatable for efficiency-seeking employers).¹¹⁹ That these opinions circulated widely is even more surprising given that, in this period, a Tayloristic division of labor had taken hold in the car industry: in the era of mass production and semi-automated machines, any obstacle to recruitment of migrants had less to do with their lack of training or industrial culture, and more with the choices of the recruiters.

Automobile managers were not immune to the prejudices prevalent in Turin. The “first wave” of southern migrants (1950–1963) found considerable obstacles in entering the car factories. In that period, FIAT, under the leadership of the old school manager Vittorio Valletta, had a policy of employing Meridionali only after they had acquired substantial experience in smaller industrial firms so that they had purportedly assimilated the work habits of the Piedmontese. Furthermore, FIAT screened the workforce to avoid “troublemakers,”

that is, applicants enmeshed in political activism. References from members of the clergy counted a great deal as did being friends and relatives of existing, dependable FIAT workers—the closer the relationship, the higher the chance of being hired. Valletta's slogan of FIAT as a *grande famiglia* referred to these family connections among workers as well as to his own paternalistic managerial attitude. It was not unusual that several generations of workers associated themselves with the company. Giuseppa Battagli, a Piedmontese worker, summed this up when she said to an interviewer: "We are a FIAT dynasty. My father brought my older sister; they subsequently had me hired, and finally we got the last one hired, to the point that four of us were working at FIAT."¹²⁰ In 1956, Valletta articulated this policy when he emphatically declared, "Fathers, mothers and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters working for the same company are a kinship network which naturally strengthen the firm and its spirit of unity. Children carry on the work of their parents... Thus in a large and modern industrial firm we find the same characteristics of the age of craftsmanship."¹²¹ However, for obvious reasons, as long as this type of recruitment network continued to be prominent, southerners could not gain a foothold in the industry, notwithstanding their overwhelming presence in Turin's working class.

In the 1950s, a time when the Italian welfare state was still underdeveloped and few companies offered a union wage, a job at FIAT represented a working-class dream. The company offered the relatively high wages associated with the primary sector. Furthermore, company paternalism rewarded loyal workers with a number of benefits. Until 1966, FIAT offered its own health insurance scheme, the MALF (Mutua Autonoma Lavoratori FIAT), more comprehensive and efficient than the public one. The company also built a small number of apartments to allocate to its blue- and white-collar staff. FIAT's apartments could not alleviate Turin's housing crisis, but its standards compared favorably with municipal public housing and it served to bolster the paternalistic image of the company. Since only workers with a clean disciplinary record would be eligible for the privilege, this was also a powerful means for the company to regiment the workforce. For Piedmontese worker Pierina Rabaglino, a job at FIAT was a *posto sicuro*, a secure employment, which also worked as guarantee for a small loan with a bank or credit with the local grocer. At the time, working for FIAT "really meant something."¹²²

As so few southerners made it into FIAT until the mid-sixties, being employed was considered a privilege and a chance to achieve a higher standard of living. Southerner Peppino Muscarà, who was hired in the

late 1950s, recalled his wife's reaction to the news: "She was excited. She thought it was like entering the university. She used to say 'Oh, My Lady, finally' (*Madonna, finalmente!*)."¹²³ For Domenico Del Pero, hired in 1959, it was like "reaching one's Mecca." For southerners, it was the fulfillment of an "aspiration" that, according to another interviewee, had positive associations even back at home: "In my village when you went back and said you work at FIAT you were considered a lucky one with a prestigious job."¹²⁴ During the 1960s, the number of southerners who had experience in industrial jobs (in the secondary sector) increased steadily and so did their percentage among FIAT's workforce. This rise was due, in large measure, to the continued expansion of the market and to the same technological innovations that were occurring in Detroit, which increased the number of unskilled positions. The first wave of migrants entering FIAT could compare employment conditions in the auto company, in particular the material benefits they derived from high wages, with the precarious, often illegal, conditions they had experienced elsewhere. As we shall see, the mindset that stemmed from this experience of mobility differentiated them from a second wave of FIAT southern workers hired at the end of the decade—a difference of crucial importance for the history of industrial relations.¹²⁵

As we have seen, the category of race is unsuitable to describe the type of discrimination that Meridionali experienced. Recruitment was selective, but not necessarily discriminatory, and the employment of southern Italians never led to blatant episodes of intolerance. However, even in absence of a racial divide, it would be misleading to conclude that the infusion of southern migrants at FIAT proceeded without tensions. On the contrary, the encounter between Piedmonteses and Meridionali resulted in a clash of cultures, in the factory as well as in the neighborhoods. As in the case of African Americans and white "ethnic" workers, it was a complex and ambiguous relation in which class, culture, and age interacted in a myriad of ways.

In the workplace, as in the city at large, Piedmonteses welcomed migrants with circumspection, even though, similar to the American case, they were less adverse to having Meridionali in the workplace than in the neighborhood.¹²⁶ For Turinese FIAT worker Pietro Borretto, "many *Meridionali* had pretensions of several kinds. Some of them asserted they had come, as a matter of fact, to change FIAT. We replied that FIAT had been built, as it was, by our ancestors."¹²⁷ For another fellow worker, "When *Meridionali* come here they expect to change everything, even the weather."¹²⁸ This was a recurrent

theme, in natives' account of the encounter with southerners: that the latter wanted every right but no duty. FIAT's paternalism could elicit enduring loyalties from Piedmonteses who had been employed by the company for several generations, but southerners lacked this sense of belonging to a "family." Natives were aware that the entire city's economy had developed around the car manufacturer. For southerners, autowork only reminded them of their migratory experience. Their factory was a place of wonders and horrors that contrasted markedly with the world that they had left behind.

Another recurrent theme, intertwining with the latter, was migrants' alleged "lazyness," or lack of work ethic. Some Meridionali "kept doing nothing."¹²⁹ This was more than a simple stereotype; it rather exemplified the cultural distance between the two groups, a gap that widened with the second wave of Meridionali, hired, in 1969, directly from the south. For the older generation of Piedmontese workers, who could still remember the relative importance of craft skills in the 1950s, or for those who had been toiling for generations on industrial shop-floors, there still existed the myth of the "demiurge" worker—the worker who created a manufactured good with his own hands and skills; the worker who shaped the elements of nature to make an artifact. Amongst the native population, this myth served as a touchstone for individual workers to identify with their class. For this reason, it was even stronger among the left-wing union militants, than among worker members of Catholic unions.¹³⁰ Indeed, according to historians Luisa Passerini and Marcella Filippa, "precisely for those who defined themselves as militants, skills and work ethic were *conditio sine qua non* to be in action, to establish relations of trust with other workers, to be able to negotiate at the various levels of the hierarchy."¹³¹ The content of this ethic consisted in seeing work as duty, a necessary burden that molded workers' personal identities, and eventually led to self-esteem and self-realization. Young southerners' perception of factory work was different. They confronted the mass production process without any cultural reference to a mythical past of workers' control. Due to their rural background, they associated work with *fatica*, toil, physical exertion, without an uplifting content.¹³² Ironically, precisely their lack of cultural connections to the new working environment, the factory, allowed Meridionali to escape the illusion of the "value" of work and its accompanying rhetorical and ideological baggage. If the "first wave" was more amenable to factory work because they compared it with less palatable situations; younger, "second wave," southerners were then well positioned to reject the Fordist organization of work.

It was also ironic that cultural differences toward industrial work, made it difficult for left-wing workers, who subscribed to the notion of class solidarity, to relate to Meridionali. Turinese unions, especially the red FIOM, considered work ethic to be a precondition for the achievement of class-consciousness. To be a dedicated and professional worker was a necessary and desirable weapon in the battle against capital. Workers with skills, they argued, would not become “integrated” into a consumerist system because they retained the capability to resist capital. Those who lacked this ability and mindset, such as the unskilled Meridionali, would be subdued by the system more easily. In their opinion, it was no coincidence that, traditionally, the leaders of the labor movement in Turin came from the ranks of skilled workers. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Communist literature reiterated this point. For instance, left-wing sociologists such as Minucci (also a Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) officer), Vertone, and Bonazzi, conducted surveys that demonstrated that migrants’ lack of an “industrial culture” caused their alienation from class politics. Communist viewed unskilled workers alienated from organized labor because they could not relate to the meaning of their work¹³³ In addition, these conclusions echoed with a political intent by Communist unionists and militants who campaigned in the car factories.¹³⁴ Through this kind of approach, Communist supporters in the factory distanced themselves from the newcomers. They were skeptical of the latter’s willingness to join forces and resist company demands, and assumed that only the skilled and class-conscious workers should and would take the lead in a possible resurgence of class conflict at FIAT. According to Communist officer Adalberto Minucci, Piedmontese skilled workers believed FIAT hired Meridionali to foster class divisions. In their opinion, as far as class struggle was concerned, not much was to be expected from the newcomers. Minucci thought that the older Piedmontese communist workers were enthralled in a “*subcultura antimeridionalista*”—an anti-southern subculture.^{135, 136}

Indeed, the differences between cultural attitudes to industrial work and class conflict were to explode in full force later on, when migrants talked of liberation *from* work, while the old Left aimed at “liberation *through* work.” But until that moment, the Communist’s image of the Meridionale was misconstrued. Migrants’ different cultural background hardly meant acquiescence to the whims of the company. Communists failed to recognize the political potential of immigration in the same years when the radical Left celebrated it as an opportunity. Instead, they posited a model of “class integration”

to play off capitalist integration, which involved a sort of tutelage of the Meridionali. The solution to their lack of class-consciousness was to "situate migrant workers, shoulder by shoulder, with the advanced political vanguard of native working class, in the context of the international proletarianism."¹³⁷

Ironically, in fearing the social consequence of the masses of uprooted immigrants, the Communist found themselves in an unholy alliance with the most conservative Catholics who, conversely, thought that, in the metropolis, the newcomers would lose their religion and their adherence to the Catholic values so secure in a rural environment, and that they would embrace a materialist creed, or even a Communist one. For the Turinese bishop Maurizio Fossati, the construction of new churches and the deployment of more clergy was of paramount importance "otherwise [the immigrants] would remain isolated, easy target of materialistic associations [i.e. Communist], which will turned them into atheists, deniers not only of God and any religious principle, but also of the Fatherland and every social order."¹³⁸ Ironically, these remarks paralleled the Communists internal complaints that the opening of new branches proceeded at a much slower pace than the demographic growth of the city.¹³⁹ However, for the militants of the two competing ideologies, reaching out to the southern immigrants in the industrial context of Turin, meant to adopt a more malleable political stance, one which would lavish less dogmatic tenets on and more moral and material assistance to the immigrants.

The Communists were notably slower on this front. Throughout the 1950s, they seemed to have been less aware of the demographic and social changes that immigration brought within the city and did not have an agenda to tackle the problems that ensued. In part, the lack of insight toward the question of southerners' integration into the fabric of the city reflected the rooted conviction that immigrants were part of an undistinguished working-class and did not require a specific strategy of proselytism, to the extent that, in Bardonecchia, a village in the province of Turin, the local Communist federation welcomed the newcomers by organizing a cultural event where classic party songs such as *Bandiera Rossa*, "Red flag," were performed by the party chorus.¹⁴⁰ It is also to be considered that Turinese Communism was so rooted in the local culture that militants were naturally suspicious of strangers. This lack of openness was exemplified by the common usage, throughout the 1950s, of Piedmontese dialect in Communist meetings (whether in the party or in trade unions), a language that Meridionali who attended could not understand.¹⁴¹

The 1960s opened a renovated Communist interest toward the immigrants. On the one hand, in 1961 Parliament expunged the old legal obstacles to internal migration; immigrants could now exercise full voting rights in their new destination (even though citizens were not allowed to do so before as illegal residents). On the other hand, their gradual and, toward the end of the decade, accelerated, entrance in the large car factories made them more central than ever to the working-class and to the PCI's political strategy. In that period, a handful of Turinese Communists took notice of the cultural and political gap between Meridionali and Piedmontese militants on the shop floor—a problem that Communist officers and leaders had neglected. The “overcoming of misunderstandings and diffidence towards immigrant workers, in particular the southerners” made it into the party agenda.¹⁴² However, the internal debate continued to hinge on the contentious theoretical issue of the southerners' position within the working-class. To the comparative historian, this resonates with the American discussion on the role of black liberation within a socialist revolution. Were southerners' (or African Americans', for that matter) problems identical to those of the general working-class or did they occupy a specific place in it, which called for different cultural and economic considerations? But also, how to organize the newcomers? In the neighborhoods, where they were often separated, or on the industrial shop floor, where Communist had lost ground in the 1950s? A handful of party militants of southern origins, such as Vito Damico and Giuseppe Rizzo, insisted throughout the decade that to win over immigrant workers required to tackle the human and social consequence of their uprooting and their specific cultural traits as well as their general needs as workers. They argued that the participation in party activities and electoral approval could only follow their general integration in the Turinese society. However, notwithstanding party-sponsored activities that went in this direction, overall the party steered away from considering migrants a different social category. It was revealing of the distance between party leadership and workers on the shop floor that Communists at FIAT still believed that the greatest obstacle to overcome was Meridionali's lack of class-consciousness, which stemmed from their rural, not industrial, background. Turinese Communists defended their role as the vanguard of class conflict and predicted—wrongly, as it turned out—that southerners would coalesce with the politically mature workers once they would be made aware, through political education, of being exploited. In their view, since Fordist capitalism (often called “neo-capitalism” in party literature) had

fragmented the working-class, any resurgence could only occur after a process of reunification of that class.¹⁴³ Thus, in front of the overwhelming changes, in the factories and in the neighborhoods, wrought by immigration, the old Left failed to recognize the political significance of the presence of these new subjects within the industrial, and in particular automobile, workforce and their autonomous capacity for mobilization. As they did not resemble the prototype of the Communist worker, the Communist failed to develop a political language that could really appeal to the newcomers with their difference and with their own social identity. The radical Left would instead better understand the political consequences of the social transformation that invested Turin. As we shall see, the latter also found more effective ways of communicating with what they recognized as being a “new” workforce.

African Americans’ and Meridionali’s experiences in the Motor cities were by no means identical. It is legitimate—and customary—to explain their woes and struggles without reference to each other. However, a full understanding of the significance of the social movements that saw them as protagonists requires placing them in a broader context. In the 1950s, Fordism, as a productive process and a system of societal regulation, functioned on the basis of a segmented job market that pushed southerners in Turin and African Americans in Detroit toward the lesser rewarding occupations. Discrimination, spatial mismatch between residence and jobs, paucity of information and network, and lack of skills that commanded higher wages all contributed, to a different extent in the two cases, to curtail opportunities unjustly. Furthermore, housing discrimination, segregation, limited access to municipal service, and the consequent poverty—the too urban consequence of Fordist-style development—reinforced their feeling of enjoying only a second-class citizenship.

Two differences are particularly revealing of the cogency of local factors. First, racism was of great significance in Detroit. It was the merciless reality of everyday life for African Americans, while it was only of symbolic importance for Meridionali. Though a social construct, race engendered fears, prejudices, institutional practices, and everyday behaviors that became autonomous from the social and economic relations from which they emerged. For instance, the assumptions prevalent in a racist society made it arduous or impossible for an African American to be granted a loan for his or her business or home; exposed him or her to unwarranted police brutality; and made him or her a social outcast even among peers of the same class. In other words, race was a factor of oppression in itself.

Race, however, does not explain everything. The comparative perspective unveils the extent to which the racist decisions of employers, bankers, and homeowners, took place within the political, economic, and social context fostered by Fordism. The structure of the labor market required that artificial criteria be adopted to determine which individuals or groups would concentrate in the poor-paying secondary sector jobs and which in the relatively secure primary sector. Within large, competitive, and profitable firms, a further division, required by the labor process, existed between menial and unskilled roles, and skilled and supervisory positions. In the city at large, residential segregation, overcrowding, and dilapidated housing appeared, or at least increased, as a consequence of urban industrial concentration. Decisions over employment and housing were made by individuals and institutions embedded in a specific culture, but all operated within a similar Fordist context, a similarity that was particularly pronounced in the Motor cities. Discriminatory decisions must be seen as historically specific to Fordism as well as to Detroit. Race tinged discriminatory practices that also existed in Turin. In the Italian case, southerners were at disadvantage in both social and economic interaction because of their perceived differences in language, regional provenience, culture, lack of connections as well as (maybe the least important factor) physical appearance: all characteristics that also applied to American southern immigrants in the 1940s and 1950s, whether white or black. That race was not one of the causes of inequitable decisions was a significant advantage for *Meridionali* in comparison to African Americans. In this respect, contemporary juxtapositions between the two groups made by Italian political activists and social workers were inaccurate. However, they touched a nerve in exposing that *Meridionali* too resided, as a group, in a marginal social condition within an affluent society.

The second crucial difference lay in the economic context in which the demographic transformation of the Motor cities took place. By 1958, first large firms (the primary sector), and afterward small ones (the secondary sector) were in the process of disinvesting from Detroit and moving their most productive plants out of the city or out of Michigan altogether. It mattered that African American immigrants, who continued to arrive into the 1960s, found reduced opportunities—even within the secondary sector. It mattered too that the plants left behind in Detroit were the least productive and automated and those that required a more intense exploitation of the workforce to remain competitive. On the contrary, in the same period, manufacturing jobs in Turin grew by leaps and bounds, with two key

moments of expansions, 1958–1962 and 1967–1969, to which corresponded matching waves of immigration. In the 1960s, under the thrust of the expansion of market demand, FIAT doubled the size of its flagship plant Mirafiori and built several plants, among which was a large one at Rivalta, at the outskirts of the city. At the closing of the decade, Turin became the “100,000-workers factory.” It would never ever again host such a high concentration of workers and factories devoted to producing cars and vans. By that time, Detroit’s economy was already in visible distress. It would be indulging in counterfactual considerations to wonder what would have occurred to Meridionali in Turin in a context of a distressed economy and of high unemployment rate, even without the aggravating factor of racial discrimination.

In 1982, Italian urbanist Paolo Ceccarelli, drew an explicit comparison between Detroit and Turin, in a paper presented at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he characterized the Motor cities as “fragile,” and their urban planning history as a cautionary tale of modernization gone awry. In both places, he argued, Fordism had sparked a demographic upheaval through immigration and, following its demise, emigration. The inordinate growth had generated slums, segregation, and a society divided along fault lines of race, ethnicity, and class. Finally, from the perspective of the 1980s, Fordism had left in its wake a desolated urban landscape of abandoned plants complexes and dilapidated neighborhoods (in Detroit) or pauperized and marginal peripheries and slums (in Turin).¹⁴⁴ However, Ceccarelli failed to notice that in both cases, Fordism had eventually caused a far-reaching recomposition of the working class in the auto plants. African Americans and Meridionali had, by that time, not only inhabited urban spaces plagued by social problems, but molded the workplace with their own presence and sometimes participated in a struggle for dignity and equal treatment. Those who did so often challenged the prevalent system of industrial relation and the accepted wisdom of their subordinate place in society. In the process of forging a new collective identity, they transformed the workplace. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was “marginal” workers such as Meridionali and African Americans who exposed how “fragile” the Motor cities were.

Labor Dissent in the Motor Cities

In both Turin and Detroit, the idea that an American-style collective bargaining should govern industrial relations in the automobile plants had gained some credence among noncommunist unionists

in the 1950s.¹⁴⁵ However, it had been challenged by conservative employers, and, on the left, also fiercely criticized by a number of intellectuals and militants. In the United States, disillusioned activists who had supported or contributed to the growth of industrial unions in the 1930s regarded the postwar purge of the Left from the labor movement and the centralization of the bargaining process as evidence that unions were no longer capable of transforming society or empowering workers. In Italy, dissident leftists criticized the inability of the PCI (the Italian Communist Party) and the Communist-backed union, the CGIL to understand the changing nature of work and workers in the automobile plants. As a result, they argued, they were failing to counteract the management offensive on the shop floor as well as the state's Fordist "plan" to defuse class struggle by offering limited welfare benefits to workers. In both cases, the small, but vocal groups that were arguing, in Detroit as in Turin, for a radical new departure in labor relations also did so in opposition to traditional Communist political groups that regarded the Soviet Union as a model: a model that gave more prominence to the role of a Leninist party than to workers' grassroots organization.

In the United States, many political activists had ceased to believe in the radical potential of the labor movement in the late 1940s. During the war, New York-based intellectuals such as Daniel Bell and Dwight MacDonal had often commented upon labor's unwillingness to contest the growing power of the corporations and had predicted that, in the postwar order, labor would accept a subordinate position to business. Bell polemically revived George Bernard Shaw's sardonic definition of unionism as "capitalism of the proletariat" to depict labor unions as atrophied bureaucratic organizations that rejected radical change in favor of power sharing through collective bargaining. He predicted that they would play a steadily diminishing role in society as white-collar overtook blue-collar occupations.¹⁴⁶ In his 1948 *New Men of Power*, C. Wright Mills, who had initially sympathized with the CIO's more progressive unions, such as the UAW, famously characterized labor leaders as "managers of discontent" who delivered "a well-disciplined union of contented workers in return for junior partnership in the productive process." Mills saw labor leaders as cooperating with management in defusing radical threats of workers' control on the shop floor in return for short-sighted economic gains for its membership, at the risk—later to become reality—of abandoning the crucial goal of acting as a catalyst for social change. Mills located a significant tension between the union rank and file, where radical ideas might find a receptive

audience, and the labor leaders, who lacked the vision and the will to oppose what Mills called “the main drift” toward an authoritarian corporate state, stabilized with the contribution of labor.¹⁴⁷

These ideas reflected the influence of the ongoing discussion within anti-Stalinist leftist organizations such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), led by James Cannon, and the Workers’ Party led by Max Schachtman, with which intellectuals such as Mills were familiar. These organizations subscribed in their different ways to Trotsky’s concept of “permanent revolution”—the necessity of the proletariat to carry out a revolution through their own political organizations—and spurned both capitalism and Stalinism. While intellectuals such as Mills, Bell, MacDonald, and others became increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of changing American society through labor activism, these groups persevered in organizing workers inside and outside the factories, for them the loci of social and political change.

Common goals, however, did not sustain a cohesive organization. Within Trotskyism, the constant debate on strategic issues meant that splits and factions were all too common. In the Workers’ Party, a miniscule but prestigious faction, led by the West Indian intellectual C. L. R. James, went even further in its critique of the capitalist organization of work by arguing that the Soviet Union had nurtured a system of “state-capitalism” that, similarly to its Western counterpart, rested on the exploitation of workers. During the 1940s, James (known then as “Johnson”) had developed this position independently of, but in parallel to, Raya Dunayevskaya (known as “Forest” in the party), a Russian émigré intellectual and naturalized American who had once been Trotsky’s secretary. The group came to be known as the Johnson-Forest Tendency; its main leaders and members were based in Detroit.

The Johnson-Forest Tendency in Detroit

By the early 1950s, the contention that state or private ownership of the means of production made little difference (as both implied total control of the workforce) and that the Soviet Union was not a workers’ state, had driven out Trotskyism from the group altogether. They dropped the name Johnson-Forest and opted for Correspondence, in reference to the Committees of Correspondence of the American Revolution, and published a monthly newspaper with the same name. Both C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya were original

and profound thinkers, but the group also attracted other talented individuals, notably James and Grace Lee Boggs, Martin Glaberman, Charles Denby, George Rawick, and others who, in turn, earned a nationwide reputation as committed intellectuals and militants. Correspondence was also an interracial organization that comprised whites, blacks, and Chinese, such as Grace Lee.

In 1953, C. L. R. James—an undesirable alien radical according to the FBI—was deported from the United States and settled in England, from where he continued to offer guidance to the Detroit comrades. Soon afterwards Dunayevskaya and her followers left Correspondence to form another organization, News and Letters. The remaining members of Correspondence continued to interact with autoworkers and young radicals, although they were not very successful in expanding the actual membership of the group, which numbered some 25 people in the 1950s. James Boggs, Martin Glaberman, and Charles Denby had been autoworkers for long periods of their lives and they were able to relate to the actual situation in the factories much better than Dunayevskaya or James, who had never had factory jobs.

In the issues of *Correspondence* and in a number of pamphlets, the Detroit-based group outlined a critique of American unionism specifically based on the kind of industrial relations that the UAW was partner to in the automobile plants. The major themes of this critique were the adverse effect of union bureaucracy on the everyday life of workers and labor's lack of vision and leadership in the working-class struggle. A 1947 pamphlet, Paul Romano's *The American Worker*, was one of the group's most influential early publications. Written just after trade unions had curtailed a period of intense strike activity, the pamphlet's novelty lay in presenting, in a worker's own words, a realistic representation of factory work and in decrying the union's failure to address the issues that mattered most, such as the speed up, that is, manufacturer's drive to constantly increase the tempo of production. "Most union leaders do not react to most situations as the rank and file does. It is not rare for a committee man to attempt to persuade a worker not to put in a grievance," Romano observed in order to illustrate the conflicting interests of workers and union leaders.¹⁴⁸ The latter's business-like demeanor and cordiality toward management further demonstrated the divergence between the unions' rhetoric and their practice. Romano also touched upon two important claims: the existence of a latent and spontaneous workers' resistance to the regimented life of the factory, irrespective of any actual union organization; and

their instinctive ability to organize their work in a more humane, but equally effective way: "Many workers become angry because of the fact that suggestions which they put in are ignored. These suggestions would add to efficiency and also increase production as well as save money. There is a general tendency in all strata of the working class to work in as efficient a manner as possible." However, the exploitation to which they were subject forced them to oppose the managers' efforts, resorting in their pent-up frustration to justified acts of sabotage and vandalism.¹⁴⁹

Correspondence further developed these themes during the 1950s. In the pamphlet *Punching Out* (1952), Glaberman expanded on the constraints of labor bureaucracy. He was particularly well-placed to deliver a trenchant assessment of the unions because he had worked for 20 years as an autoworker before devoting himself to writing, lecturing, and political campaigning. Trade unions were a source of strength, but, at the same time, the "enemy" of the workers, and the "administrator of capital"—a definition that echoed the analysis of *New Men of Power*. Workers, he claimed, "do not look to the union for the next steps to be taken. They resent and oppose the domination and interference of union bureaucracy." Although written by Glaberman, *Punching Out* reflected the collective debate within *Correspondence* as well as the influence of James. Indeed, the implicit renunciation of the Leninist tenet of the vanguard party was particularly telling. The rejection of any form of bureaucratic control had instead lead James and his associates to advocate workers' self-organization. The desire of workers to organize production, asserted Glaberman, was already visible in the myriad ways in which they opposed company domination on the shop floor. "Every worker is always looking for ways to make the machine serve him."¹⁵⁰ The "New Society," a truly free one, could only be based on the principle of self-organization, applied both inside and outside the factory. Nationalization amounted only to a different type of domination, as Dunayevskaya and James had argued. It is the task of those who produce to resist supervision and to self-organize production. So long as this basic aspect of the economic life is denied, capitalism will always be in a state of latent crisis, since workers "won't let anyone else organize production at their expense."¹⁵¹

Both the monthly paper *Correspondence* and the pamphlets published by its members betrayed a certain sense of inevitability about workers' spontaneous drive toward self-organization, but it was by no means clear what form this organization would take or what kind of obstacles workers would face in the course of the struggle toward the

"New Society." *Facing Reality* (1958), coauthored by C. L. R. James, Grace Lee Boggs, and Pierre Chaulieu (a member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, discussed below), acknowledged these limitations, but tried to provide a more incisive answer than *Correspondence* had previously provided. The book continued to characterize trade unions such as the CIO as the "bodyguards of capital," though able to offer to workers limited gains. Their repressive action manifested itself in two elements: the steward system and the grievance procedure. Both had originally been devised to protect the union and the worker from the whims of management, but now they acted as a straightjacket restricting workers' capacity to organize production on the shop floor. The steward secured workers' compliance with the union contract, rather than representing workers in front of the management. The grievance procedure defused conflict with management through an "elaborate" process that removed the issue of conflict from the workers' hands and transferred it to the labor bureaucracy. Later, observers on the liberal Left would uphold the idea that the grievance procedure was an ineffective way to solve workers' complaints, but the main critique of James and the others was that it gave management the power to schedule and control the production flow and the organization of work. This criticism was not wholly fair since the union's encroachment on the shop floor did *after all* check the arbitrary power of management to some degree, but it also touched a nerve: the UAW had, in fact, succumbed to the auto manufacturers' wish to control and organize the point of production as they saw fit, even though individual workers were now less vulnerable to retaliatory layoffs and wage cuts. According to *Facing Reality*, this contradicted workers' desire for self-organization, even though the latter was not a conscious program, but simply something "inherent in all their actions and in the discussions they hold among themselves."¹⁵²

In the second half of the 1950s, the uprising in Hungary had finally provided a possible model of organization that was an alternative to socialist and communist parties and compatible with the alleged spontaneity of workers: the workers' council. *Facing Reality* dedicated an ample section to the "lessons" of the recent Hungarian revolution. There, workers had been prominent in the opposition to the Soviet invasion and had created workers' councils, representative bodies that had controlled, although for a brief time, every aspect of factory life and that had appointed a manager directly responsible to them. For James, Lee, and Chaulieu, the Hungarian revolution provided an example that fitted their agenda perfectly: it was an instance of opposition to "state capitalism" as well as of organization

from the bottom-up, which allegedly gave each worker a fair chance of making his voice heard. The American working class, "indifferent" to leftist parties, might find, according to the authors, a more suitable model in the councils.¹⁵³

Correspondence's ability to reach out to workers and students, and not be restricted to its own narrow circle, was due to its strong belief in giving a voice to the grassroots, and in constantly referring to the everyday experience of the working class. It attracted to its meetings, a generation of young radicals whose names later figured in the chronicles of the rank-and-file strikes and in the radical politics of Detroit in the late 1960s.¹⁵⁴ Dan Georgakas, a radical activist who published books and memoirs about that period, remembers that people such as James Boggs made a strong impression on the audience in those meetings, particularly on African Americans such as Luke Tripps, Mike Hamlin, General Baker, and Charles Johnson who later led the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Boggs, who was an African American, took greater care than did some of his comrades to avoid the complicated jargon that usually marred communication in Marxist circles. "When he spoke about workers," wrote Georgakas, "he described the kind of people we all knew rather than the idealizations projected by other radical groups and even other members of his own circle... he spoke and acted in terms that had immediate application."¹⁵⁵

But the magnetism of Correspondence also derived from its eagerness to tackle a decisive issue for Detroit autoworkers and political activists: the racial composition of the working class or, as it was often referred to in the 1940s and 1950s, the "Negro problem." In approaching this question, *Correspondence* had drawn inspiration from C. L. R. James's musings on the topic of the black working-class and further developed them in reference to the situation in Detroit. As a West-Indian black living in the United States between 1938 and 1953, James had come to realize the importance of an autonomous mobilization of African Americans. Ironically, he argued, the "special degradation" of the black proletariat and its exclusion from American capitalism provided it with an autonomous impetus to challenge this.¹⁵⁶ Particularly relevant to the prospects of Detroit's black radicals was James's insight that Black Nationalism and integration into American society stood in a relation of "dialectical contradiction": nationalism and "Negro chauvinism" ironically provided African Americans with the necessary organization, self-respect, and strength to fight for integration. Once African Americans were integrated into the working-class, races would join together to transform capitalist society.

Since the late 1930s James had, at times successfully, persuaded Trotsky and the Socialist Workers' Party to devote more resources to organizing African Americans, "potentially the more revolutionary section of the population."¹⁵⁷ By the mid-1940s, the Trotskyists had reluctantly come to accept James's position that an "independent Negro struggle" would be desirable without white leadership, whether in the party or in the unions.¹⁵⁸ In the 1950s, James's splinter group, itself an interracial cohort, further elaborated on the African American predicament within the car factories. The most important document in this respect was Charles Denby's *Indignant Heart. A Black Worker's Journal* (1952), which circulated widely among black radicals and the New Left and achieved the status of a classic in radical literature.¹⁵⁹ Cast in the form of an autobiography, but cowritten by the white radical Constance Webb and incorporating the debate within the Johnson Forest Tendency, *Indignant Heart* presented the story of a black southern migrant who had moved to Detroit to work in the car factories. The narrative, rich in evocative and self-contained anecdotes, touched upon all the issues advanced by the "Johnsonites" (as they were sometimes called): the efforts of trade unions to restrict the spontaneous militancy of the working class; workers' disaffection from an union bureaucracy that stifled democratic participation; and workers' ability to organize production on the shop floor without supervision ("We ran the job just as we wanted to," testified Denby in one instance)¹⁶⁰ as well as the hypocrisy of both liberal unions and leftist parties in matters of racial equality. The book took a particularly strong stand in support of both the possibility of interracial cooperation among workers and the necessity of an autonomous black struggle. It sharply criticized the idea—much favored even by the Trotskyites, some of whose positions the book sought to challenge—that "Negroes will have to forget they are Negroes and be Marxists." Denby recalled with great emotion having heard "a leader" (actually no other than C. L. R. James) announcing at a party convention that the "Negroes' independent struggle had a vitality and validity of its own."¹⁶¹ This position was adopted by the convention, but failed, according to Denby, to alter the everyday politics of the party. The book did not recount the dynamics of the split of the Johnson-Forest Tendency from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which had not, in fact, been precipitated by the issue of black struggle, but on the question of the capitalistic nature of the Soviet state. After James's departure, the SWP continued to argue, at least in theory, that blacks should be organized independently, and this allowed it to share some of Malcolm X's agenda and to attract a black audience.¹⁶² However, it

was *Correspondence* that had fully integrated the independent black struggle into the tradition of Marxism.

In 1953, James's banishment from the United States left the group without its most inspiring leader. Shortly afterwards, Dunayevskaya, who resented the subordinate status that she felt James had assigned to her, left *Correspondence* with a small cohort, including Denby and Zupan, to form *News and Letters*. The political motives underlying the split remained unclear even to the members of the group. But the decision, in 1954, of the Subversive Activities Board to include *Correspondence* on its list and the poor management of finances on the part of Dunayevskaya, might have exacerbated the tension and the antagonism between the latter and those members, such as Grace Lee and Glaberman, closer to James.¹⁶³ Ideological differences were less discernible than personal ones. In 1958, the last chapter of Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom* fundamentally reiterated the positions discussed in the past ten years within the Johnson-Forest Tendency that "capitalist relations of production exist, no matter what you name the social order," and that workers opposed continuous resistance to the plan of capital, or the state, to realize a surplus and invest it at the expense of the workers.¹⁶⁴

Never a large group (even though able to disseminate its ideas to a large audience) the "Johnsonites" suffered another split in the early 1960s, which further reduced their membership and eventually drove them to dissolution. In 1961, James Boggs, long-time autoworker and editor of the *Correspondence*, drafted an internal "paper of evaluation" in which he concluded that the next revolutionary phase in the United States would see not workers, but the "outsiders," above all African Americans as protagonists. This paper was later published in a book form with the title *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*.¹⁶⁵

The paper was written in the context of the sit-ins that were staged in the South to desegregate public facilities and the resurgence of Black Nationalist tendencies in Detroit, in particular within African American churches. From London, C. L. R. James denounced the position as a rejection of the working class as a viable revolutionary force and urged the group to organize education classes in Marxism. James and Grace Lee Boggs felt this to be a patronizing response from an intellectual imbued with theory and books, but out of touch with the changes that were taking place in America. Together with a few other members, they left the group and retained control of *Correspondence*. Behind the political controversy, there was also, once again, some personal antagonism: Grace Lee, the closest James collaborator, had

married Boggs despite James having urged her not to do so, and relations between the two black men had never been more than outwardly cordial. The 25 or so remaining members of whom about a half in Detroit, started calling themselves Facing Reality (as in the title of James's 1958 book); under the leadership of Glaberman, the most prominent and experienced militant among those who remained politically close to James, they continued political activity. As the struggle in Detroit's factories and neighborhoods radicalized in the late 1960s, Glaberman realized that the group was not able neither to influence political action in any significant sense nor to recruit new members, even though it was a moment of intense working-class mobilization. In 1970, "despite increasing interest in our ideas and our publications," he thought that the organization had "outlived its usefulness" and moved to dissolve it, against James's advice.¹⁶⁶

The importance of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a group that never comprised more than a hundred members, lies in the theory that it developed and the method of activism that it espoused. Theoretically, the Johnsonites were among the first groups to advocate the autonomy of the working class from its "natural" organizations, the trade unions and the Communist Party. They emphasized the historical and contemporary ability of workers to break in unexpected ways with those who tried to bridle them. In "Notes on the Dialectic," James argued that the workers' "new organism will begin with spontaneity, i.e. free creative activity, as its necessity."¹⁶⁷ In essays such as *Punching Out*, the Johnsonites had characterized the union contract and collective bargaining as ambiguous efforts to obtain benefits for the workers as well as to control them. The contract was, however, constantly challenged by workers through wildcat strikes and other "spontaneous" actions. From their base in Detroit, the Johnsonites also engaged in a different method of active intervention in the workers' struggle. In the early 1950s, James had organized, in New York, a "Third Layer School," where rank-and-file workers would tell intellectuals about their life in the factories, rather than meekly listen to them. The empirical study of the everyday life and struggles of workers continued through publications such as *The American Worker* and *Indignant Heart*. Their belief in spontaneous organization led the Johnsonites to research the actual condition of the working class, setting aside the entrenched representations of unionists and communists. As we will see, the theoretical and political work of the Johnson-Tendency served as an inspiration to other groups in Europe and a precious legacy to a new generation of revolutionary activists who made headlines in Detroit in the late 1960s.

Atlantic Crossings

A similar dissatisfaction with union bureaucracy, the role of the Communist parties, and the development of the Soviet Union featured in the analysis carried out by a small number of labor activists in Europe, in particular in France and Italy, but also in Great Britain and the Netherlands, where the Americans were in contact with critics of Trotskyism such as Tony Cliff (in England) and the septuagenarian Dutch Council Communist Anton Pannekoek.¹⁶⁸ In 1949, in Paris two former Trotskyists, Cornelius Castoriadis (who sometimes used the name Pierre Chaulieu) and Claude Lefort, founded *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the name of a group and of a journal that argued for the importance of workers' struggle at the point of production unhindered by official unions or party organizations. Working in parallel with the Americans, the French group had developed arguments similar to those debated by James and others in *Correspondence*. Very soon, they started a close political and personal relationship. For six months in 1948 Grace Lee Boggs resided in Paris and established a "daily collaboration" with the members of the group, which "allowed them to enrich and develop their ideas."¹⁶⁹ According to Claude Lefort, "[*Correspondence*] had come to conclusions similar to ours concerning the USSR, bureaucracy, and the conditions for an autonomous struggle of the exploited. Their conception of workers' everyday resistance in Industry was particularly fruitful."¹⁷⁰ *Socialisme ou Barbarie* ran a translation in eight installments of Romano's *The American Worker*, hailed as proof that workers could resist the traps of alienation, consumerism, and union bureaucracy, and wield power on the shop floor. Romano's pamphlet inspired a member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Daniel Mothé, to write an account of workers' struggle at Renault from a similar perspective. The book criticized the unions' tendency to integrate with capitalist society and the factory without challenging the dominant mode of production. According to Mothé, the causes of the unions' tendency for accommodation lay in the lack of internal democracy and the division between the leadership and rank-and-file members. In Mothé's judgment, however, the workers were well able to organize autonomously, whether inside or outside the union. The strike committees at Renault were a case in point: a form of direct, participatory industrial democracy, which achieved goals that unions had always postponed. Castoriadis reiterated this point when he said that "the revolutionary organization could not be a "director" of the working class but, rather, an instrument—one of the instruments—of

the revolutionary struggle; and that it could be inspired only by the organizational forms the proletariat had created and by the 'spirit' of those creations." In other words, nothing should constrain the autonomous drive of the working class.¹⁷¹

In early 1950s Italy, this analysis appealed to those left-wing activists who questioned whether the dogmatic Marxist narrative propounded by the Italian Communist Party really applied to the actual conditions of the Italian working-class. In the mid-1950s, the ideas of the Johnson-Forest Tendency began to filter through to dissident Marxist circles in Italy through the translation of Romano's and Mothé's work by Danilo Montaldi. Montaldi was an essayist and sociologist who had left the PCI after the war, remaining critical of the old Left throughout his life. He came to wider public attention with the publication in 1960 of an inquiry into the condition of southern migrants in Milan, but he had long interacted with other prominent radicals, at home and abroad. In his preface to the translation of *The American Worker*, Montaldi acclaimed it as a sign that, contrary to the prevalent assumption, the American working-class remained class conscious and had not fallen for the ideological blandishments of capitalism. In his native Cremona, Montaldi founded, in 1957, a group called *Unità Proletaria* that distanced itself from the Communist Party and established direct contact with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, *Correspondence*, *News and Letters*, and European groups that espoused the same line: the British *Solidarity for Workers' Power*, the Belgian *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, the Dutch *Spartakus*, and others. Montaldi described *Correspondence* as the American "revolutionary vanguard," a group that understood that "the worker is first of all someone who lives at the point of production of the capitalist factory before being the member of a party, a revolutionary militant, or the subject of coming socialist power. It is the productive process that shapes his rejection of exploitation and his capacity to build a superior type of society, . . . and his class solidarity." The development of this fundamental idea, wrote Montaldi, was *Correspondence's* crucial contribution to the contemporary revolutionary movement.¹⁷²

Montaldi's account constituted a challenge to the PCI's analysis of the Italian situation. For the Communists, Italian capitalism was backward and rested on the predominance of decaying monopolistic concentrations, destined—the party claimed—to be absorbed by the state when they failed. They, therefore, emphasized the importance of seizing control of the political levers in Rome and abandoned the notion of initiating the struggle at the point of production. Italian Communists did not even deem it necessary to use the social sciences

to study the working class. “Bourgeois” science, they claimed, was not suited to investigating the “objective” conditions of the working class, on which only the Marxist tradition as interpreted by the Communist Party could shed any light.

Quaderni Rossi and Autonomous Marxism in Turin

Soon, however, local groups of dissident Communists and Socialists came forward to propose an alternative analysis. The best known is the group that gathered around the review *Quaderni Rossi*, directed by Raniero Panzieri. Edited and published in Turin, *Quaderni Rossi* was also particularly interested in autoworkers, and cultivated an interpretation of Marxist theory more geared to understanding its actual impact on workers caught in an ever-changing production process, as opposed focusing, as leftist parties and unions did, on its philosophical and historical meaning. *Quaderni Rossi* explored in depth the question of workers’ autonomy vis-à-vis the party; the group came to propound the thesis that the working class was not the passive victim of changes in capitalism, but had the power to initiate struggle and to force change on the capitalist structure. This contention underpinned the so called *operaismo*—workerism—of the Italian New Left in the 1960s.¹⁷³

This stance reflected that of the Detroit radicals, but was sustained by a subtler theoretical analysis. Panzieri, for instance, “re-read” several passages of *Capital* to advance an interpretation of capitalism at variance with that of the traditional Left. In “The Capitalist Use of Machinery of Neocapitalism,” Panzieri criticized the received wisdom on the left that technology was an objective variable that could be turned to advantage of the working class—that is, if the working class gained control of it politically. As James and Dunayevskaya had shown in the case of the Soviet Union, the control exercised by the socialist state was not always preferable. Panzieri added force to this critique by characterizing simple faith in technology as misguided, and a revival of the romantic idea that machines would liberate men from work. He argued that technological development could only serve the purpose of the productive process that had generated it: the *capitalist* productive process. Capitalism, as it grows, appropriates technological progress and, by this means, increases its “authority,” that is, its domination of society. “Every new ‘technical stage’ achieved in production represents for capitalism a new opportunity to reinforce its power.”¹⁷⁴ If Marx’s analysis was taken to its logical

conclusion, argued Panzieri, the development of machinery would be seen as just another phase in the capitalist planning of the production process—whose ultimate aim was to control the entire working class.

The same article also attacked the unions' erroneous belief that the struggle for higher wages would undermine capitalism by allowing workers more free time. Panzieri asserted that, instead of claiming a wage rise, the labor movement should strike at the seemingly "objective" requirements of technology: the division of labor and the subordination of the working class at the point of production. These arguments pointed to the central contention of the workerists, namely that workers' struggles drive capitalism to even higher levels of planning, even though ultimately the conduct of the working class remains not "plannable" and is, therefore, the key disruptive force the system.

From Quaderni Rossi to Classe Operaia

Panzieri filled the editorial board with young intellectuals and activists such as Romano Alquati, Liliana e Dario Lanzardo, Vittorio Rieser, Giovanni Mottura, Emilio Soave, and Goffredo Fofi, among others. On the basis of individual or collective projects of investigation into the working-class condition, *Quaderni Rossi* described the emergence of a new (for Italy) industrial protagonist: the "mass-worker" in the increasingly automated factory. Where the old Left had assumed that Italian capitalism was intrinsically backward, Panzieri and the others saw the existence of such mass-workers as proof of a dynamic development compatible with the American Fordist model. These conclusions were heavily influenced by the research conducted upon the FIAT workforce—increasingly unskilled, of southern origins, and indifferent to the politics of the old Left.

The *Quaderni Rossi* group used the methods of social sciences to study the Italian working class: "Sociological inquiry allows us to dispel fictitious images of the working class. It always ensures scientific observation of the level of consciousness of the working class, and therefore it constitutes the means to raise this consciousness to a higher level."¹⁷⁵ In the "real," as opposed to the "fictitious" working class assumed to be in thrall to the forces of capitalism, young sociologists such as Romano Alquati found signs of disaffection that pointed to an imminent political struggle. In 1961, Romano Alquati pioneered a new kind of workers' research at FIAT.¹⁷⁶ In many

respects, the method and the analysis were reminiscent of Romano's American Worker, but Alquati had earlier perfected the method of *conricerca*—a “joint research” between intellectuals and workers—as a member of the Gruppo d'Unità Proletaria founded by Montaldi.¹⁷⁷ Two themes ran through Alquati's report, later published by *Quaderni Rossi*: First, the preeminence of a new working class at FIAT, disillusioned with the company, but also indifferent to left-wing unions and parties. Alquati controversially argued that even a large company such as FIAT failed to “integrate” workers into capitalism and to neutralize their rebelliousness: whatever beliefs these youngsters had held *before* entering the factory about the desirability of industrial work, they were quickly shed *after* only a few months' work at the point of production. Relatively high wages (for some) and, therefore, consumerism did not lessen the effects of alienation. Any resurgence of class struggle within the firm would be based upon these *forze nuove*, as Alquati called them. Even though the “new forces” lacked class-consciousness in a traditional sense, they spontaneously understood the need for “self-determination,” that is, self-organization of the factory.¹⁷⁸ Second, Alquati emphasized the inability of the traditional Left to identify and make use of these new trends. The report accused the union and PCI leadership of focusing on loftier political goals, such as law reform, that did not directly affect factory conditions. The politics of the traditional Left did not measure up to the politics of the new working class or, conversely, the new workers did not perceive their action to be “political” because they associated politics with partisan politics in Rome. The union bureaucratic structure “isolated the headquarters from the reality” on the shop floor. Union delegates in the factory, wrote Alquati, were stranded midway in between the distant and abstract politics of the union and the actual potential for workers' collective resistance. However, they were unable to bridge the difference between these two worlds and lead the struggle. The solution lay in a new “organizational praxis” through which the new workers would be led to analyze their situation.¹⁷⁹ Alquati did not question the need for a union, but what he left unsaid was that the new situation required a thorough overhaul of the traditional organizations—or the creation of new ones.

The wave of workers struggles in the Turinese factories in 1962 and the so called riot of Piazza Statuto (analyzed in chapter 2) vindicated *Quaderni Rossi's* insight that the working class organized itself in ways that transcended the trade union leadership. Notwithstanding Alquati's warning about the mounting frustration of the workers, the events of 1962 surprised the traditional

Left in Turin and in the country as a whole. The Communist Party's claim—that FIAT management had been able to incorporate the new levy of workers—became untenable. Even though there were several leftist militants in the crowd, the majority were Meridionali with precarious employment or hoodlums from the new building projects in the suburbs.¹⁸⁰

At this stage, the other major contribution to workerism came from Mario Tronti, the second prominent theorist to write for *Quaderni Rossi*. In *Workers and Capital*, a book published in 1966 that collected his writings of the previous five years, Tronti elaborated upon the insight that capitalist development follows, and does not precede, workers' insurgency, which itself echoed C. L. R. James's point that "The proletariat always breaks up the old organization by impulse, [and makes] a leap."¹⁸¹ Workers were not passive victims of capitalist change, indeed quite the reverse. The political party, argued Tronti, must not conduct the revolution outside the factory, in the realm of politics: the real political action occurs at the point of production. The dissolution of capitalist society and of the bourgeois state can only occur from within the productive process.¹⁸² Tronti eloquently made the case for the historical and political significance of "autonomous" political processes as opposed to old Left organizations and ideologies. The factory was to be the center of social protest. The centrality of industrial workers was the outcome of the ever-increasing propensity of capitalism to control the human factor in production, which gave it a centrality that only increased its power of disruption.

As a result Tronti was at odds both with those (the old Left) who looked to the Soviet Union as a revolutionary model and those who believed that the epicenter of change would have been the underdeveloped Third World countries. Furthermore, Tronti has written recently that, "not the workers in Manchester, but those in Detroit, we [workerists] felt like 'ours'... We were moved not by the ethical rebellion against exploitation, but the political admiration for the practices of insubordination that they invented. We never felt into the trap of Third-worldism, of the peasants seizing the cities."¹⁸³ Only industrial workers, wrote Tronti, had the potential to tear down the capitalist "plan." Tronti did not endorse full spontaneity—an idea that later gained ground among "autonomous" Marxists—and recognized instead that the party had a crucial tactical role in channeling workers' self-determination: "The working class has a spontaneous strategy of its own motions and development: the party needs only to detect it, express it, and organize it."¹⁸⁴ The refusal to abandon

the PCI as an instrument for revolution was an important difference between Tronti and the Correspondence group, and it showed how national peculiarities (the presence of an established Communist Party) could impart a different shape to an analysis that otherwise shared the same premises. However, Tronti never tired of emphasizing that the party could give the lead to revolutionaries only by having the factory as its focal point. The struggle, wrote Tronti, must not concern the upper echelons of the bourgeois state, but be located in the production process on the shop floor, or, in Tronti's inflammatory style, "the workings of the bourgeois state must be shattered today within the capitalist factory."¹⁸⁵

Like the autonomous Marxists in Detroit, the *Quaderni Rossi* group split because of personal, tactical, as well as theoretical differences. After the protest of 1962 at Piazza Statuto and a short wave of strikes throughout the industrial north, *Quaderni Rossi* had to decide which way to go: Should it directly sustain the working-class struggle itself, even outside the traditional form of union-supported strikes? Or should it remain a predominantly theoretical publication, giving ample space to "workers inquiries," and providing theoretical tools for a new kind of revolutionary leadership? Tronti (from Rome) supported the first position; Panzieri (from Turin) the second. Eventually Tronti and his followers founded a new journal, *Classe Operaia*, that further developed the workerist themes present in *Quaderni Rossi*. The latter lasted until 1965, but lost much of its political influence after the death of Panzieri in 1964.

Classe Operaia, whose first issue appeared in February 1964, sought to play an important role in the upcoming workers' struggles; its editors wanted to "intervene" in them. Ironically enough, it would chiefly serve to inspire a new generation of radical leaders (what *Quaderni Rossi* had hoped to do) rather than actually play a political role. The political impact of the group upon the actual factories was negligible, but, in its brief life, the journal elaborated on the central workerist tenet that deeply influenced the Italian radicalism of the late 1960s: the central place of the working class as a driving force of capitalism.¹⁸⁶ "Capitalist development," wrote Tronti in the first issue of the journal, "is subordinated to the workers' struggle; it comes afterwards, and [capitalism] must shape the political workings of its production accordingly."¹⁸⁷ Other contributors to the journal elaborated upon the practical political significance of this insight; the task of *Classe Operaia*, they argued, would be to induce the traditional Left to change its course, stop complaining about the alleged backwardness of Italian capitalism and about the hindering presence of

southern migrants in the factories, and see these factors as a strength to be exploited.

The relation of the working class to the traditional Left, and therefore *in primis* to the PCI, was, throughout the short life of the group, a cause of tensions and divisions. Notwithstanding his criticisms, Tronti remained a member of the Communist Party and hoped to move its mainstream toward his position and away from a social democratic approach. He did not wish to create a new party on the left of the Communists. Workerists, he argued, could be more effective as a fifth column inside the Communist Party, not outside (interestingly enough, the same consideration in the 1940s had persuaded, for a while, the Johnson-Forest Tendency to remain within the Socialist Workers Party). Tronti believed that only a deeply rooted organization such as the PCI stood any chance of leading a revolution, even if that required a profound change in its politics. However, most young people who had joined the group, whether in Rome, Padua, Florence or Turin—Toni Negri, Pierluigi Gasparotto, Claudio Groppi, Franco Piperno, Francesco Tolin, and many others—were of a different mind. For Negri, the leader of the dissidents, the PCI was an enemy, a behemoth organization out of touch with what was happening in the factories. The party was merely “institutionalizing” workers’ insurgency.¹⁸⁸

By 1967, *Classe Operaia* had imploded. It split into several workerist groups functioning as distinct local organizations, and soon adopting the name of Potere Operaio. However, there was something ironical about the dissolution of *Classe Operaia*, namely the fact of it occurring on the eve of the greatest workers’ mobilization of Italian history. Workerists missed the last opportunity to present themselves as a unified, even if not wholly coherent, group. The onset of the insurgency shifted the interest of the members to the way theory could be applied in action, and to how new events might shape theoretical analysis. There resulted an accumulation of diverse positions, tactics, and goals in constant flux and interaction with the spontaneous strikes occurring in the factories.

5

A Global Struggle in a Local Context

"There have only been two *world* revolutions. One took place in 1848. The second took place in 1968. Both were historic failures. Both transformed the world," remarked Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein in their short essay *Antisystemic Movements*.¹ Forty years later, historians continue to view the end of the 1960s as a moment of simultaneous upheaval in several Western countries as well as in Eastern Europe, Mexico, and Japan—a global explosion that few had anticipated. The student revolt of 1968 assumed a different guise in each national context: in all of them, protest against national power hierarchies figured prominently, but historians usually acknowledge that students' call for fundamental socioeconomic changes was transnational in scope. Student unrest has so far generated the largest collection of "global" or "transnational" studies. Indeed, a consensus is emerging that the 1968 youth revolts can hardly be understood without reference to each other.² However, transnational accounts have neglected contemporary workers' protests—themselves linked to other *soixante-huitard* social movements. Historians have tended to define workers' revolts in narrowly national terms, as if they had been unaffected by cultural influences and organizational links transcending state boundaries.³ Yet, autoworkers' who in the late 1960s went on strike in Turin, Detroit, Stuttgart, or Billancourt shared as much with their fellow strikers elsewhere as they did with the "global" New Left. Each episode was part of a transnational series of events that dealt a blow to the traditional old Left forms of activism, to the persistence of authoritarian practices within the factory, to alienating forms of work, and at the unequal redistribution. Working-class protesters in different locales also employed a similarly militant and revolutionary rhetoric, voiced much the same demands for participatory democracy, and resorted to equivalent forms of self-organization. The increased technical and financial interconnection of the various national economies, most blatant in the case of the automobile industry, added an international significance to car workers' struggles. Fordism, the labor

process and the system of economic and societal regulation that had so much affected Detroit and Turin, was itself transnational in scope. Furthermore, the radicalism that fueled workers' uprisings found inspiration in ideologies that circulated across geographical and cultural frontiers (see previous chapter). Each workers' revolt was distinctive, but we cannot hope to understand the conditions for their emergence without following events elsewhere in the world. Thus, a comparative and transnational perspective has much to add to the national focus of the existing literature on the workers' protest of the late 1960s.

In Detroit, workers' strikes in the Chrysler plants (the only ones, by that time, to be located within city boundaries) occurred in the wake of a deadly and devastating urban riot (according to the authorities) or rebellion (the view of radical activists), of the wide circulation of a "black power" version of civil rights activism, and of a steep rise in the number of black workers on the assembly line. Often in explicit opposition to the UAW's liberal politics of gradualist change, black radical activists called for sweeping transformations in hiring, workplace standards, and union practices, which they claimed had all been, up until that point, unfair to the black worker. They also called for an overhaul of the societal and economic system so as to emancipate the entire working-class. After black workers' participation started to gain momentum in the factories, radicals extended their sphere of action to include the neighborhoods and city politics. However, while rank and file—black and white—were mobilizing elsewhere in the United States, in a wave of "wildcat" strikes that lasted until 1974, the impact of local protest on national politics was undermined by the declining fortunes of political liberalism and by the onset of the economic recession, which shifted the terrain of the struggle from opposition to the organization of work and the system of authority to the protection of existing industrial jobs.⁴ In the process, however, some of the most notorious discriminatory practices of the unions and the car companies had been tackled with a view to defusing the radical challenge.

In Italy, the *autunno caldo*, or hot autumn, of 1969, which had its climax in the car factories of Turin, has long been recognized as the catalyst for a wave of workers' mobilization that profoundly altered Italian industrial relations and national politics. The key developments are well known. Starting in spring 1969 with the flagship plant Mirafiori, a veritable behemoth, FIAT factories became the center of a wave of wildcat strikes. Unskilled workers, backed by university students of the New Left, demanded wage increases across the board,

access to the same privileges as were granted to white collar employees, marked improvements in the appalling working conditions in the Fordist-style factories, and a more powerful voice in negotiations with management, in other words, the right to bargain over working conditions at shop-floor level. Initially reluctant to follow what they believed to be excessively radical and populist demands, the trade unions, of various political orientations (Communists, Catholics, and Socialists), gradually took on board many of the rank-and-file demands. The strike wave was meanwhile spreading beyond Turin and affecting the entire industrialized north. In the following years, it would also reach the public sector.

In the cases of both Detroit and Turin, the debate about the causes of the unrest has been interdisciplinary, with economists, sociologists, and historians emphasizing different points. Was the Italian *autunno caldo*, the structural outcome of a cyclical class mobilization in conditions of full employment, due to workers' frustrated expectations of a rise in real wages? This interpretation upholds the idea that recurrent strike waves characterize the history of capitalism, address the gap between real wages and productivity, and reestablish the balance.⁵ However, profoundly suggestive as this argument is, it remains an intrinsically reductive economic explanation, and one that fails to take account, in a more nuanced fashion, of social, cultural, and ideological factors. It assumes that workers are purely economic beings chiefly motivated by levels of remuneration. Contemporary documents and testimonies tell a different story. Or, conversely, was the *autunno caldo* a political response to the bitter disappointment at the failure of the center-Left government to enact democratic reform? This interpretation lays the blame on the center-Left government coalition that emerged in 1963 and sought to align Italy with the kind of Fordism-Keynesianism that informed more "advanced" Western countries. FIAT strongly endorsed political change in this direction to modernize the country and expand consumerism. In fact, the lack of social and institutional reforms contrasted strongly with the dynamism of the economy during the "economic miracle." But political change did not raise the living standards of ordinary people to any great extent; nor did it alter the distribution of power among classes. Thus, according to this interpretation, social movements arose to put change back on the political agenda.⁶ This explanation resonates with what the American literature says about the simultaneous springing up of social protests, in particular civil disturbances, in the United States. It was a case of "rising expectations." The civil rights movement and the Great Society

legislation, during the Johnson administration, had raised the hopes of African Americans that they might at last see some improvement of their economic and social conditions. However, Johnson's reforms did not undermine the key institutions that perpetuated the unequal distribution of power and wealth in American society. That the reality of the living conditions in the northern "ghettos" differed so much from the vision of an egalitarian society conveyed by politicians' rhetoric allegedly sparked urban riots and the radicalization of protest movements.⁷

For both Turin and Detroit, it is reasonable to depict the protest movements as stemming from dissatisfaction and impatience with social inequalities. However, in some respects this explanation is redundant: Why else would thousands of people be drawn to vocal, and sometimes violent, protest if not out of discontent with the existing system? And would workers have remained quiescent and nurtured no expectations of change? This assumption is, however, questionable: workers in Spain and Portugal—dictatorial regimes that did not foster such progressive expectations—nevertheless became insurgent in the course of the same decade.⁸ Furthermore, if one focuses in more detail on Detroit and Turin, this explanatory framework appears yet more reductive. It is hard to discern, in the demands of rank-and-file workers, a causative connection between the lack of reforms and the uprisings in the factories. For those struggles were primarily forged in the context of everyday life in the plants and in the city, and had their roots in the transformations occurring in the previous 20 years in the production technology, in the urban settings, and on the shop floor. In addition, the "rising expectations" interpretation, by dint of focusing on national politics disregards the extent to which the political economy of Fordism was a key precipitant of changes.

Sociologists Charles Sabel and Michael J. Piore have put forward an alternative interpretation. They focus on the changes in the composition of the industrial labor force. Industrial countries in the post-war decades had large reserves of workers to call upon: in the United States, rural blacks and poor white Appalachians and, in Italy, southerners. So long as these reserves viewed themselves as outsiders to industrial society, they would not be especially interested in gaining job security, acquiring factory skills, or fighting for better working conditions. However, once they had been drawn into full participation in the industry, their worldview changed. They came to consider their condition as marginal, unjust, and confining. In other words, they saw it as something worth fighting against.⁹ Philosopher

Axel Honneth offers another suggestive framework of interpretation with his concept of “struggle for recognition.” Following the work of E. P. Thompson, Honneth developed the idea that those involved in acts of protest were not motivated so much by positively formulated moral principles as by anger at the disrespect shown toward their intuitively held conception of justice. He argued that “violence to individual or collective claims to social recognition will be experienced as moral injustice.”¹⁰ As it departs in one important respect from E. P. Thompson’s “moral economy,” Honneth’s theory can be borrowed to interpret rank-and-file actions in Detroit and Turin. In fact, where Thompson suggests that moral outrage flares up in response to assaults on traditional ways of life, Honneth adds that it also surfaces in situations of exclusion and degradation that violate self-respect and self-confidence, no matter what the precise setting.¹¹

This book puts forward the argument that in the cases of Detroit and Turin, the experience of marginalization was a key stimulus to action, even when protesters interpreted their resistance in terms of interest categories such as race, class, or ethnicity. This broad characteristic of the autoworkers’ struggle can easily be overlooked in national or local monographic studies (as opposed to comparative) because actors are not necessarily aware of the moral motivation informing their action. African Americans’ and southern Italians’ struggle for recognition was embedded in an aspiration toward better and more just working conditions on the shop floor and living condition in their neighborhoods and communities. The notion of recognition, however, does not diminish the significance of race or class. For instance, the experience of racial or ethnic discrimination may be one of many different factors in motivating collective demands for the expanded recognition of a group.¹²

An analysis of this season of intense social mobilization that takes into account parallel developments in different local settings—an analysis, that is, which pursues similarities and connections beyond national borders—has the advantage of highlighting three significant themes that serve to enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. These themes will be expanded in the following pages. The first is the direct consequence of the processes described above. In Detroit and Turin, “marginal” workers, that is African Americans and Meridionali, who, for a number of reasons, had benefited least from the existing system of industrial relations, and whose path to social integration had been steep and strewn with obstacles, were prominent in the workers’ unrest. In a sense, this is hardly to be

wondered at for the historian, and yet it did take many representatives of the contemporary Left by surprise. These workers were bringing into the struggle motives, tactics, and political identities that clashed with the traditional approach of organized labor—their emergence as a class subject changed the working-class forever.

The second theme that resonates on both sides of the Atlantic was the challenge that workers' militancy posed to existing industrial relations, in particular to the link between wages and productivity—a central pillar of Fordism. This had been the result of hard bargaining and collective action, in the American case, and the outcome of FIAT's attempt to defuse mass unionization by means of heavy-handed paternalism, in the Italian case. Workers disrupted this nexus by turning the shop floor into the key site of industrial conflict. In the automobile plants of the late 1960s, workers not only took time off work by striking, but blocked production in a variety of ways without renouncing their wages. As Fordist industry relied on a highly integrated process, these actions disrupted not only the department directly implicated, but also all the other departments and plants connected to it. The demands that accompanied these tactics were equally disruptive of the old order, as they rarely focused on wage increases only, but tended rather to involve changes in the organization of work or in the balance of authority at the point of production, and safety issues raised by the production process. In both Detroit and Turin, when the workforce mobilized, decision-making shifted away from union and corporate boardrooms onto the shop floor. Finally, the third theme implicit in both cases studied here, and no doubt in others also, is the link between workers' struggles and a wider process of social mobilization that had antisystemic objectives (to revert to the term used by Arrighi, Wallerstein, and Hopkins). Workers hardly needed to be convinced by students of the desirability of resisting the exhausting demands of the assembly line, but the coalition with New Left activists magnified the effect of the revolt on the shop floor. This period saw the crystallization of various forms of collaboration between students and industrial workers. Sometimes it was spontaneous or unstructured, but it occurred more often within the radical groups that agitated against capitalism, discrimination, and oppression, both inside and outside the factory. Mention might here be made of groups such as The League of Revolutionary Workers, Lotta Continua, and Potere Operaio, which are the focus of this chapter. Workers and students, at any rate those on the left, shared a youth culture that extolled antiauthoritarianism, forms of participatory democracy, such as general assemblies where anyone

could take the stage and speak, and disruptive tactics such as unannounced sit-ins or occupations. These actions often riled labor activists from the old Left.

Radicals on both sides of the Atlantic found solace in the idea that a transformation of the relations of production elsewhere could abet change in their own locale. They engaged in a dialogue—sometimes in writing, at other times in person—to share tactics of rebellion, to elicit support for their particular groups, or to refine their analysis of the workings of capitalism. Simultaneous upheaval in Detroit and Turin, and elsewhere, seemed to suggest that the world was on the point of being fundamentally transformed by social movements at the turn of the 1970s. Fordism, it was clear, was crumbling under the pressure of protest and withdrawal from work. This story demands to be told in more detail.

Detroit: “The Leningrad of America”

“You know we had a riot? Did you see that in the papers you’ve been reading?” former auto worker Elaine (fictional name) asked me at the very beginning of our conversation in 2001. Like many African Americans of her generation living in Detroit when in their early twenties, Elaine’s personal story was thoroughly enmeshed with the urban unrest and radical politics of the late 1960s—the 1967 riot was very much alive in her memory 34 years later. She was just a teenager when the Motor city became, in the 1960s, a hub for militants advocating, within a wide spectrum of positions, the need for black liberation and, as the decade drew to a close, the overturning of the existing economic system. As we have seen, Detroit’s African American population increased steadily in the postwar period. By the 1960s, the city boasted of not only the largest NAACP branch, but also the most successful black-owned music label in the nation, Motown. Detroit was also the headquarters of the growing Nation of Islam from whose ranks Malcolm X (“Detroit Red”) emerged. The Shrine of the Black Madonna presented Jesus as a black revolutionary leader and offered Black Nationalists the Christian alternative to the Nation of Islam and, in the 1950s and 1960s, functioned as a meeting point for politically active blacks.¹³ In any case, in Detroit, the black clergy, however placed on the ideological spectrum, had played a central role in civil affairs throughout the twentieth-century.¹⁴

In the wake of successful civil rights campaigns in the South, in the Motor city as elsewhere many activists came to conceive of the African American freedom struggle in more militant terms.

Already, in 1962, the Detroit chapter of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) advocated “direct action in the North as well as in the South” and this premature gesture led to its being expelled en bloc from the national organization.¹⁵ In the same years, Max Stanford, a Black Nationalist from Philadelphia, moved to Detroit and formed a branch of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), a group that originated in Ohio. RAM combined the proselytism of Malcolm X with a revolutionary Marxism heavily influenced by Maoism. It upheld armed self-defense and endorsed black rebellion in the North, but saw the black revolution within the context of an international upheaval against capitalism. According to Stanford, RAM “advanced the theory that the black liberation movement in the US was part of a vanguard of the world socialist revolution.” RAM had a tiny membership and a short life, but schooled many black radicals in revolutionary nationalist, Marxist, and Maoist ideas.¹⁶

This was a moment of great political effervescence in the black community. African Americans were, however, increasingly divided into different, but interconnected, camps: liberal and radical. On both sides, a plethora of groups, coalitions, and individuals mounted an assault on the entrenched white establishment. Throughout this period, one rallying issue common to the two camps was police brutality—a perennial bone of contention between black Detroiters and the “white power structure” (to use the black radicals’ terms). Though by mid-1960s, the city was half black and governed by the liberal Cavanaugh administration, the police department stubbornly resisted all but token integration. White police officers, many of whom had been raised in the South, harbored entrenched prejudices against black offenders or presumed offenders. In the 1950s, the local NAACP had collected chilling testimonies and statistics about the level of police harassment and unwarranted violence. Complaints against the police, reported the NAACP in 1957, ranged from the common use of racial slurs to the practice of stopping black women on the streets to accuse them of prostitution, and from the search and destruction of personal property without a warrant to unmotivated physical assault.¹⁷ Relations between the black community and the Detroit Police Department were embittered by a sequence of lethal incidents, some blatantly unjustifiable, like the shooting of 15-year old Leon Mosley in 1948 (when a judge chastised the NAACP for conspiring to incriminate an innocent policeman), and the annual tally of hundreds of black citizens injured before or after arrest, some in a particularly vicious way, such as the case, recorded in 1964, of an African American woman, allegedly a prostitute, named Barbara

Jackson, who was savagely beaten while in custody and subsequently hospitalized.¹⁸

For the young, rebellious blacks of the 1960s, more irksome than the outrageous cases that caught the attention of the media was perhaps the unrelenting intimidation on the streets. The East Side, Detroit's traditional black area was the patrolmen's favorite target, but for African Americans, the police meant trouble anywhere in the city. "Police shot first and asked questions afterward," was how a civil rights activist summed up the situation.¹⁹ For young people, the most likely to spend their time on street corners, the symbol of police bigotry and harassment were the so-called "Big Four," stout policemen on the lookout for troublemakers on the streets of the ghetto. They rode squad cars and always came in four, hence the name. "I don't know what the formal name was, but we certainly recognized them riding in these big cars with four police officers coming out with rubber hoses and cracking kids across the back. Every police station had a "Big Four." They would stop people indiscriminately on the street corner as boys would be walking from school." "They always harassed, walking down the street they tried to provoke you. Wouldn't leave you alone. You know I guess these were the police tactics... Night and day. They developed a kind of reputation, but obviously mostly at night."²⁰

In the 1950s, the NAACP battled against these tactics through the collection of data, field investigations, reports, petitions, court challenges, and political lobbying. In the 1960s, young blacks took the protest to the streets. In the summer of 1963, one such demonstration saw about five thousand young African Americans picketing the police headquarters in protest at the murder of prostitute Cynthia Scott by a white officer. According to one of eyewitness, the crowd, while chanting "Stop Killer Cops!" was so enraged that it was on the point of storming the building—had it done so, there would have been a massacre.²¹ In these same years, on the city's Wayne State University campus, young radicals formed Uhuru (the Swahili word for freedom) and mounted a series of vocal demonstrations against the Detroit Police Department taking their inspiration more from Black Power than from the civil rights movement.

In the wakes of Uhuru and other short-lived revolutionary or Black Nationalist organizations, there followed, from 1966 onwards, a growing cohort of black radicals in their twenties and thirties intent upon transforming the political scene, most notably through their later involvement in the League of Revolutionary Workers. If one could leaf through the FBI and Detroit Police Department surveillance files,

one would find the names, among many others, of General Baker, John Watson, Luke Tripp, Charles (Chuck) Johnson, John Williams, Gwendolyn Kemp, Marian Kramer, Mike Hamlin, Ernest Allen, and Charles Simmens. It cannot have escaped the notice of the FBI that, in 1964, some of their number travelled to Cuba, on one of the numerous unauthorized visits that American radicals were paying to the new socialist regime in those days. This exhilarating experience reinforced their revolutionary ardor and gave them a more profound awareness of how black liberation might be linked to the worldwide struggle against capitalism. As part of the Detroit delegation, General Baker stayed in Cuba for two-and-a-half months, during which time he became acquainted with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. For one participant of this delegation, Cuba was "a real awakening... Cuba really changed my outlook on a lot of things."²² For Baker, as for a number of black militants of his generation, visiting Cuba meant encountering a host of committed young intellectuals in the process of building a brand new society, and returning home with a more clearly defined political mission.²³

General Baker was one of the radical activists arrested (alongside Glanton Dowell and Rufus Griffin) in August 1966, on the charge of carrying concealed weapons intended for the use of rioters, during an incident on Detroit's lower East side at Kercheval avenue, dubbed "the riot that didn't happen." This episode, which could be considered a dress rehearsal of the events that occurred one year later, started as a reaction to the police's manhandling of seven African Americans "loitering" on street corners, in one of the poorest parts of the black ghetto. Not an unusual event, as we have seen, but the spirited resistance of those arrested inflamed the protest of the onlookers who gathered on the street corner to watch. It was the evening of August 9, 1966. The police deployed hundreds of officers to seal off the whole area, whereupon the crowd started to throw stones at shop windows and at white motorists shouting "this is the start of a riot" and "Black Power."²⁴ So serious a disturbance had the potential to involve the whole of black Detroit, but a heavy thunderstorm cooled things down. "That rebellion probably would have spread if it hadn't rained."—remembers one participant—"They arrested us on the way home and put us to the county jail and it rained so hard we wetted the county jail."²⁵ However, the Cavanagh administration and the police department, maintained that it was the swift police response that had forestalled the worst. They also believed that the city enjoyed rather good race relations, disturbed only by the disruptive activities of a handful of radicals. Cavanagh

even trumpeted the claims of Detroit to be regarded as a “model city” in race relations, comparing favorably with other northern cities. *Fortune* quoted a corporate manager who had worked in Atlanta, New York, Dallas, and Denver as saying, “Detroit is more sophisticated in race relations than any other city I know.”²⁶ Of course, the events of July 1967 proved these pronouncements inaccurate. The spark for what was fated to turn into the most damaging and deadly urban riot of the 1960s was another routine police operation: the raiding of a bar, a “blind pig,” where gambling and drinking went on illegally afterhours. The politics of the ghetto revolved around the contrasting claims of the residents and the forces of law and order to control the territory. Blind pigs were typically frequented by young ghetto residents, petty criminals, the unemployed and underemployed who were the principal victims of the restructuring of the Fordist economy in the city and who elicited the constant attention of the police. It was 2 am, on Twelfth street and notwithstanding the late hour, a large crowd assembled to watch a fight between the police and the “blind pig” customers who were vociferously resisting arrest. Encounters between police and residents in the densely populated black neighborhoods had a tendency to turn into a theatrical performance that allowed African Americans to turn individual resistance into a political statement.²⁷ As the prisoners were hauled away from the bar, the mood of the crowd soured. Bricks, bottles, and beer cans began to rain down, one of them smashing a police-van window. When the police finally managed to pull out of the neighborhood, the rage of the crowd exploded. This time, it did not rain.²⁸

The city administration and black middle-class leaders were wholly unprepared for what followed, namely, a three-day riot, a heavy toll of African American casualties, and scenes of neighborhood destruction and arson aired around the world, illustrating not a model polity but a lamentable failure to manage race relations in urban America. However, in retrospect, there was much more to the riot than racial animosity. To be sure, the majority of casualties were caused by lethal clashes between the mostly white police department and black ghetto residents. Unable to control a conflict that was raging across too large an urban territory, the police used the chaos of the riot to settle scores with many ghetto residents known to the department and, conversely, young blacks seized the opportunity to hit back at their long-time harassers. The police used this occasion to flood the only African American bookstore in Detroit, to gas the office of radical newspaper *Fifth Estate*, and to devastate independent

businesses in the black community.²⁹ At the same time, the proponents of the “racial hate” theory were surprised to learn that white as well as black residents had participated widely in the looting and mayhem that started on 12th street. “Not to say that racial tensions didn’t exist, but it wasn’t black against white. It was the propertied against the non-propertied,” commented a local resident who had witnessed the looting.³⁰

In contrast to what would happen in Turin, first-generation black southern migrants on the whole did not participate in the riot. Having been raised in the South, they were weary of such direct confrontations. Furthermore, race relations must have appeared milder to them than to African Americans born in the North. In any case, sociological surveys and, later on, historical investigations confirmed the point: those involved in the disturbances were venting their frustration and anger at the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities and not expressing an unalloyed racial hostility. A year later, sociologist Irving Ruben suggested that “the riots were an outburst over unmet demands for dignity and for economic and political power.” A study of the Detroit Urban League, based on hundreds of interviews with ghetto residents, conceded that there was “an undeniable racial overlay” to the riot, “but more than race, class was involved. The rioters form an under-class.” At the top of the list of black Detroiters’ grievances the interviewees had thus put not only endemic police brutality but also the problems to do with housing and unemployment. Finally, the most famous of these contemporary studies, the report of the Kerner Commission established by Lyndon Johnson, reiterated the idea that race mattered because it was enmeshed with socioeconomic disparities and frustrated expectations of change.³¹

In some respects, the riot was the explosive culmination of a long process of economic restructuring and urban transformation shaped by the policies of socially irresponsible car manufacturers policies. “The riot of 1943,”—observed historian Thomas Sugrue—“came at a time of increasing black and white competition for jobs and housing; by 1967, discrimination and deindustrialization ensured that blacks had lost the competition.”³² In other respects, the riot was a catalyst of further transformation as well as of political activism. It opened, as well as closed, political opportunities for black Detroiters of the 1970s and 1980s as the white population diminished.³³

The riot had little to do with the efforts of black radicals to foment unrest. “The fires and snipers seemed to be done by persons who had some training and planning long before the Riot started,” speculated

the *Dodge Main News*—the bulletin of the UAW local that was particularly distressed by the rise of black radicals within its ranks. But attempts to link the dynamics of the riot to a political scheme or plot proved fruitless. The riot was indeed the expression of the politics of the ghetto, but it had been sparked by the spontaneous outrage of local black residents at heavy-handed police methods, and it spread because of the long-term deprivation and manifold indignities suffered by the black working-class. In fact, the riot had caught many Detroit's radicals unawares: they were out of town attending a conference on Black Power in Newark. Even the FBI concluded that no Black Power group had "directed" the events.³⁴ But the unrest did nonetheless have a radical significance for all those who, in the previous years, had been advocating revolutionary change, even if it had, in the end, occurred by chance, not by design. The Black Nationalist clergyman Albert Cleage saw that it was a "unique opportunity to begin the difficult task of transferring meaningful power from the white power structure to the black community."³⁵ More precisely, as we will see, the riot gave a measure of leverage to black radicals because it belied the notion that Detroit was a city of golden opportunities for black Americans, and one where social problems were under control. Radicals underscored the riot's political significance by dubbing it a "rebellion," one which had allegedly marked a great leap forward in the struggle of Detroit's African Americans. They made the most of the wounds exposed by the uprising. The postriot mood swelled the ranks of the various revolutionary groups active in the city—RAM, Forum 66, the Malcolm X society, the Northern Student Movement, and the Inner City Organizing Committee, just to mention a few, as well as branches of the now more assertive civil rights groups SNCC and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality)—and it spawned new initiatives. Mayor Cavanagh's characterization of these groups—"the unchosen leaders of the potential rioters, the after-the-fact leaders in search of a constituency"—was scathing, but not inaccurate.³⁶ In the long term, however, many observers now viewed Detroit in the aftermath of the riot as the hotbed of an imminent revolution. A sympathizer summed up the mood when he said, "Once Detroit exploded the Left said: this is the Leningrad of America and all the left groups came to Detroit."³⁷

Turin: "Contro Il Padrone"

In 1967 alone, 164 riots took place across cities in the United States, most of which were ignited by a blend of relative poverty and open

discrimination. The Detroit riot resembled all the others—except for its magnitude—but it also had a distinct flavor because of the impact that the unrest would have upon the city’s car factories. In this respect, it may be compared to the civil disturbances in Turin, which were similarly fueled by a range of different urban problems and exacerbated by police intervention, but more closely linked to what happened in the car factories than it was the case in Detroit. In Turin too, the riot of 1962 and, in particular, that of 1969 were connected to the ever-increasing importance of radical politics in the city, exemplified, in 1968, by the extremist turn of the local student movement. However, these riots also occurred (here we return to one of the great differences identified above) in a context of rising job opportunities. Thus, in the Italian case, young southerners who flaunted their discontent on the street were, after all, much more likely to toil in the automotive factories than were their American counterparts.

One might add that the Italian militants were also more likely to conflate their workplace and social grievances. This mixture was exemplified by the 1962 riot of Piazza Statuto, in Turin, which was triggered by a labor issue, but then escalated into an urban commotion. In the annals of Italian labor history, 1962 is remembered as a year of partial resurgence of industrial conflict after the acquiescence of the 1950s—a decade in which the Cold War at home had stifled workers’ protest. It was in the hot summer months of that same year that the final stages of a long confrontation between metalworkers and their employers played out. For once, FIAT workers were prominent in the struggle. On June 23, 60 thousand of them honored the picket line at the Mirafiori complex. This episode occurred, however, at a time when the labor movement as a whole was politically fragmented. No fewer than four unions contended for the workers’ allegiance at FIAT and at the other metalworking industries. On that occasion, once the two less belligerent unions had, reneging upon their earlier position, signed the contract, the agreement covered the majority of the company workers, and thus, according to the Italian legislation, became legally binding for all the others.³⁸

More precisely, UILM (Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici, a social democratic union) broke the common front with the Catholic FIM (Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici) and the Communist FIOM, and sided with the SIDA (Sindacato italiano dell’auto, reputed to be a company-friendly union). Yet more outrage was caused by the fact of the Turinese UILM having reached this agreement against the advice of its own national headquarters (something that could have

hardly been possible in the UAW). The ensuing civil disturbances thus started in the course of an impromptu gathering of young workers in front of UILM's Turinese offices in Piazza Statuto, on July 7, 1962. They were soon joined by other local working-class residents who were not part of the original industrial dispute. Perhaps the protest would have amounted to little more than the ritual exchange of insults and smashing of a few windows had the police not turned up in full antiriot gears to restore "order." In the American case, the decision of law enforcement officers to engage with rioters had a key role to play in igniting the riots. The same is true of Turin. As the police charged and attempted to arrest the protesters, the unrest developed into a full scale riot that spread to the whole neighborhood. What followed in the next three days was as chaotic as any other civil disturbance, and similarly difficult to decipher. The press remarked that the "young hoodlums" (the term applied by both the mainstream and the Communist press) used "urban guerrilla" tactics. Protesters pulled up cobblestones from the traditional street paving, made makeshift clubs, and erected barricades against police vans in the narrow streets surrounding the Piazza. They confronted tear gas rounds with slings. They smashed shop windows and overturned cars and set them alight. Simultaneously, clashes broke out at factory gates, where protesters tried to stop strikebreakers from crossing the picket lines, and battled with the company security guards and the police. Even though the events of Piazza Statuto did not have the destructive result of many American urban riots, it was clear they amounted to far more than the simple labor dispute that had been at the origin of the *mêlée*. However, what did the riot mean, exactly? And who took part?

Of the approximately 7,000 participants, 1,149 were arrested and charges were pressed upon hundreds of their number. Many of the arrested were young workers, the majority southerners. Indeed at the trial, two-thirds of the defendants were Meridionali.³⁹ The regional provenance of the accused was perhaps the feature most emphasized by the press. Commentators ascribed southerners' violence to the psychological trauma of having moved from a rural to an industrial society and to their poverty and ignorance, which made them an easy target for political manipulation. In the "sordid" slums at the center of Turin might be found "the most desperate of the immigrants...the uprooted who live in cramped basements and cellars. Most of them are unemployed, looking for jobs and accommodation, driven by deprivation and anger, and, thus, all too vulnerable to the seductive appeal of the riot," commented a Socialist paper⁴⁰

Witnesses, however, recalled that there were also numerous young Turinese from the city's traditional working-class neighborhoods, such as the *Barriera di Milano*, who might well have belonged to the Communist Youth Organization (FGCI). In retrospect, the common denominator was perhaps age and social status, rather than regional provenance or political creed, but in the immediate aftermath of the riot, it was political motives that were held to blame, or, it was insinuated, the southerners' premodern attitudes. For FIAT and the city's conservative camp, the riot simply demonstrated that intensifying the industrial conflict brought social chaos. They accused the PCI of organizing the uprising to boost the position of its union in the labor dispute. Conversely, the PCI claimed that violence had been skillfully engendered by agent provocateurs, probably Neofascist groups who "bought off" unemployed Meridionali with "1500 liras and a packet of cigarettes." On closer scrutiny, neither interpretation is backed by evidence. Historian Dario Lanzardo has reconstructed the most plausible scenario: the seven thousand-strong crowd was a mixture of metalworkers, leftist militants of various persuasions, and southern migrants who were ready and eager to respond to the assault of the police.⁴¹ As in Detroit, the riot started and carried on without a set plan and without being steered by any established group, and, in Italy too, the political meaning of the clashes lay in the deeper political transformations affecting the Italian Motor city in the previous years.

The judge who passed sentence upon the 38 rioters finally indicted for the urban violence ruled that "the events of Piazza Statuto represents an ugly episode in the history of such an industrious and quiet city."⁴² But Turin was no more a model city than its American counterpart. The riot spoke volumes about the ethnic recomposition of the working class, the cultural cleavage between natives and immigrants, the indignities suffered by those working in the secondary sector, and about urban congestion, and the lack of services and housing for the newcomers, causes for grave discontent and liable to lead to unpredicted and unpredictable results. In retrospect, the riot also dramatized the fact that industrial conflict would, from then on, have as its protagonist a restructured working-class, altogether different from the one rooted in the traditions of the old Left that had dominated the Communist Party and loomed large its rhetoric. The riot showed that the struggle might take different, sometimes unpalatable forms and be articulated by means of political languages that were quite alien to organized labor. These developments, however, lay in the future.

The students' agitation that started in Turin in 1963 and escalated in 1967 and 1968 also occurred largely outside, and sometimes against, the established student organizations linked to the Communist Party. In May 1967, Turin's architecture students were agitating for student empowerment within the structures of university governance and liaised with other student groups that had met in Pisa in February to draft the first manifesto of the movement ("Le tesi della Sapienza").⁴³ These protests saw the first clashes between law enforcement authorities and students occupying university buildings, which resulted in indictments of students for disorderly conduct. On November 27, 1967, the principal's controversial proposal to open a new suburban campus (allegedly dictated by speculative interests), spurred several hundred Humanities students into occupying Palazzo Campana, the university administrative headquarters in Turin's city center. The protest was closely interconnected with similar events in Milan, Rome, and Venice and even in France, Germany, and the United States. What distinguished the Turin protest of 1967 from other similar events in Italy was the hesitant response of the university administration. The Senato Accademico—taken by surprise and internally divided—waited a whole month before asking for police intervention. Whereas the police had restored order in a dozen university campuses in other cities, students in Turin transformed the occupied space into a forum for political debate. They ran committees and assemblies that discussed tactics and strategies for the upcoming confrontation. Like their American counterparts, students distilled a critique of the university system and advocated the introduction of participatory democracy to academia. Italian students acknowledged the influence of America on their thinking by drawing on texts such as C. Wright Mills's *Power Elite* (translated in 1959), Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (published in Italy in 1967) or the Port Huron statement (widely circulated in a translation done by students).⁴⁴ Echoes of these seminal texts might be heard in "Contro L'Università" ("Against the University"), an article by Guido Viale, a charismatic leader of the Turin student movement, in which he maintained that the sole social function of higher education was to inculcate subordination. Only through the struggle, Viale argued, could students end the manipulation to which they were subject.⁴⁵ During the occupation, students underwent a process of politicization and radicalization. The protest shifted from specific issues, such as the controversial siting of the new campus and the inadequate representation of the student body, to more generic goals, such as the end of "academic authoritarianism." On

December 27, 1967, the principal finally asked the police to clear the campus of protesters.⁴⁶

In the course of 1968, students in Turin began to give a more specific form to the goal of communicating with and transforming other social strata. This was a common theme of student protest both in Italy (in particular at Trento, Pisa, and Rome) and internationally. Already in the 1967 *Tesi della Sapienza*, Pisan students (and prominent among them, Adriano Sofri who would later play an important role in Turin) had compared their condition to that of exploited workers. Students assessed their subordination “not only in relation to their future collocation in the labor market, but also in their present academic activity where a capitalistic division of labor assigns [to students] the mere execution of pre-determined mental operations.”⁴⁷ It required perhaps a leap of the imagination, but students, it was argued, were intellectual proletarians whose predicament could be likened to that of factory workers.⁴⁸ The influence of the May 1968 events in France, which saw the simultaneous, if short-lived, uprising of students and workers had a crucial part to play in reinforcing the turn toward the working class. News of what had occurred in Paris spread rapidly both through the media and from the firsthand account of those Italian students who had hitchhiked to the French capital to see the revolution in action. On their return, they took the protest beyond the campus, and resolved to do more than simply engage in protest marches now and then or smash the odd window. “After the French May we were ready for anything,” remarked former student activist Peppino Ortoleva.⁴⁹

In Turin, out of all Italian cities, the connection between the authoritarianism of society at large and the workings of the factory system was even more evident than elsewhere because the local car manufacturer was a symbol of political repression. Thus, Turin became a privileged terrain for students intent upon shifting their focus from the university to the factory in an effort to turn workers into revolutionaries.⁵⁰ Turinese students took the decision to broaden their sphere of practical action just when in Detroit student and car workers were collaborating in revolutionary groups that would strike a blow at the assembly line. Expectations of change within the university system were frustrated both by the imperviousness of the structure of higher education to sweeping alterations and by the growing awareness that the question of authoritarian power relations needed to be tackled from a different angle.

In the summer holidays of 1968, as students looked elsewhere, the movement lost its mass appeal in the university. The academic world

remained a site of political confrontation, but never again would the agitation reach the fever pitch that it attained in the spring of that year. Thereafter, activists were split on the strategy to follow. In Turin, signs of mounting dissatisfaction at FIAT suggested new avenues for intervention. New Left activists never agreed on a common strategy for transferring the revolt to the factory, but occasional strikes at Mirafiori convinced them to hasten the encounter with autoworkers, even without a plan. These strikes were of limited purview and were carried out by Piedmontese skilled workers, but, once the ice was broken, protest might prove contagious and become less conservative in forms it assumed and in its implicit goals. The contemporary strikes at Milan's Pirelli rubber factory during this period had shown that novel tactics (such as the *autoriduzione*, a coordinated reduction in work effort) and organizational forms (the CUB [Comitati Unitari di Base], or shop-floor committees) could succeed and were viable alternatives to traditional industrial and trade unionism. Students made contacts with workers outside the factory too, for instance, in the evening courses, which were usually attended by southern workers keen to obtain a secondary school certificate in their free time. These links, however, remained the work of a vanguard: only in the spring of 1969 did large number of students shift their attention markedly to Meridionali and to the factories.⁵¹

In the following year, the encounter between students and workers gave rise to a number of radical groups (the so called "extra-parliamentary" Left, labeled thus to differentiate it from the PCI, which held seats in Parliament) that figured prominently in the hot autumn. Groups such as *Avanguardia Operaia* (December 1968, Milan), *Il Manifesto* (June 1969), *Potere Operaio* (September 1969), and *Lotta Continua* (November 1969) all emerged in the 12 months following the withering of the student movement in the universities.⁵² Like Detroit, Turin was the ideal terrain for transferring a mobilizing strategy that had worked among students onto factory workers—in the Fordist era, the factory was the crucial node for social change. After the autumn of 1968, a small cohort of militants emerged who canvassed workers outside automobile plants and distributed leaflets inciting them to take action. Although very few in number, they organized joint assemblies with students and workers, adopting the model of mass participation, which had been used throughout Italian universities.⁵³ This method of bridging the gap between middle-class university students and the car workers was further developed in the spring of 1969 when politically active students travelled to Turin from all over Italy, attracted by rumors of

increasing militancy at Fiat. Adriano Sofri (from Pisa), Emilio Vesce (from Veneto), and Sergio Bologna (from Milan), were some of the leading political activists steeped in the workerist tradition who joined the Turinese students led by Luigi Bobbio, Guido Viale, and Laura Rossi. Dozens of activists now wrote, printed, and circulated a daily leaflet signed “workers and students” and managed to cover all the 32 gates and the three shifts of the giant Mirafiori complex, which employed some 50 thousand workers, and whose dimensions bore comparison with Ford’s River Rouge in Dearborn.

The antisystemic movements that hit Detroit’s and Turin’s car factories caught the management and the unions by surprise. In the American case, there existed a general accord between them on the proper way to negotiate on wage increases, shop-floor grievances, production standards, and management prerogatives. Labor and management were not on the same side, but the system engendered predictable industrial relations, which were thought to curb the excesses of both managerial despotism and disruptive unionism. In the American case, such accord was an inherently unstable; in the Italian case, it did not exist. In Turin, FIM and FIOM were, in the late 1960s, proud to have survived and overcome the harsh antilabor repression of the 1950s. With the death of the autocratic CEO Vittorio Valletta, prospects for organized labor looked brighter, but, notwithstanding occasional strikes and increased confidence, there seemed to be little chance, in the short term, of overturning the balance of power at FIAT. In retrospect, many left-wing union officers argued that the explosion of workers’ unrest during the hot autumn was linked to the long preparatory work by unions in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁴ However, militants’ historical memory of the many struggles fought, and often lost, at FIAT in the previous 20 years, constituted a hindrance, not an advantage for Italian unions. It was the newly hired workers, sometimes in collaboration with “external” students, who knew little of the subtleties of contract bargaining and labor relations, who were better positioned to achieve a radical change.

On the company side, none of the business indicators prefigured a significant role for industrial conflict at the end of the 1960s. FIAT looked like a profitable and growing company, comfortably in control of its workforce. After a three-year stagnation, automotive production had expanded at FIAT in 1967 and 1968. In 1968, FIAT’s output surpassed Germany’s Volkswagen; its annual report to the stockholders celebrated the attainment of 21 percent of the EEC market and offered “warm praise to the spirit of co-operation and sense of duty of our managers, employees, and workers.”⁵⁵ In

1967, the opening of a new plant at Rivalta, just outside Turin's city boundaries, had greatly contributed to this outcome. Mirafiori too had expanded. Both these developments necessitated the hire of a fresh wave of migrants from the south; at the height of its expansion Mirafiori employed 47,593 workers, 15,000 of whom were recently hired Meridionali.⁵⁶ On balance, it was this last wave of migrants, rather than the long-term work of union militants who had survived the repression of the 1950s, that ignited the explosion of rank-and-file militancy in 1969.

The climate of revived mobilization that had characterized Turin's car factories since the end of 1968 was further heightened by a number of events in Turin and elsewhere. On April 9, police started firing on strikers in the southern city of Battipaglia killing one worker. This distant event caused great agitation among southerners at Mirafiori. The following day, during the lunch break, worker Francesco Morini, leapt onto a table in the huge refectory hall that held 1,500 workers and incited his fellow workers to strike. The crux of his speech was the link between the police violence in Battipaglia and the repressive climate in the factory. From then on, impromptu assemblies in the refectory hall of the car factories would occur on regular basis, offering militants an ideal platform through which to reach hundreds, even thousands of workers at once. This act of indiscipline within the factory walls would have been all but unthinkable a few months before; yet, fearful of the new mood among workers, management responded mildly, opting simply to transfer Morini to another shop. The following day, FIAT workers participated with enthusiasm in a general strike organized by the unions, in protest at the brutal conduct. It was significant that, for the first time since 1953, the car factories witnessed an avowedly political strike, and one that served to introduce southern migrants as political actors.⁵⁷

The success of the general strike gave a glimpse of the new scenarios opened up by workers' mobilization. By the end of May, a series of departmental grievances had together brought about a considerable slowdown in overall production. "Every shop went on strike on its own, for its own goals. The paint room workers wanted larger booths; the assembly-line workers wanted more money, in the masking shop they wanted safety devices for the welders, and so on. Every strike was peculiar, but they ended up halting everything. If one stopped, the other did too. Then it was like a chain reaction and some goals were common: a higher wage category, Saturday off, more holidays."⁵⁸ In the space of a few months, the huge factory had turned from an example of integrated mass production into an

unmanageable behemoth. In addition, the disruption would only increase in the course of that year.

The propagation of the struggle coincided with the increased presence of students outside the factory gates. The “students-workers assembly” had become a place where participants regularly discussed the problems in the plant and produced leaflets, slogans, and placards for strikes. The encounter between the student movement and the working-class was instructive for both sides. Southern worker Giovanni Falcone recalled that “the leaflets were very important, at least for me. I was a commuter and had no time to stop after work outside the gates to discuss things. I could understand them because they were written in a simple language, though perhaps a little strained for those who wrote them, because I don’t think the students spoke like that at home.”⁵⁹

However, for the students, the assemblies were a chance to understand more about how life actually was at the point of production—a necessary basis for both the daily activity of writing leaflets as well as for higher theoretical ruminations. Beyond the transfer of practical knowledge, the assemblies were a place of socialization for, in the main, young people. Students who had lived through the exhilarating experience of university protest were now encountering workers, often southerners who—according to a protagonist—also “had a great longing for revolt as they were living, both in the factory and in the city, a very difficult situation, while trade unions basically looked the other way.”⁶⁰ Last, but not least, the assembly provided a modicum of coordination between the “spontaneous” strikes occurring in different parts of the giant factory. “Workers striking in a shop would look for the ‘externals’ [the students] in order to confer with them, to learn what had happened in other departments, and to grasp what they would have to do the following day. Through this organization, specific problems in one department would reverberate to workers in others.”⁶¹

Students and young Meridionali found common ground in the antiauthoritarianism with which they approached the institutions to which they belonged: the university and the factory. “They make us study so that we may serve the same master as you,”—said a leaflet inviting workers to the assembly—“[but] the majority of students are aware that their privileges are illusory because work is increasingly meaningless . . . and.”⁶² Students imbued with Marxism perhaps saw workers as the embodiment of their revolutionary ideals, but Meridionali in the factories viewed their encounter with students as an opportunity to enhance their political education outside the

union context. Worker Andrea Papaleo remarked that “[Students] gave me, a southerner who didn’t know anything about anything, the chance to open my eyes to a great many things, to meet a lot of people. This has changed my way of thinking and my way of being in the factory. Since then I have always been active without waiting for other people to set things going.”⁶³

The assembly of students-workers met until July 1969 in different locations (first a local bar, later a university lecture hall) while strikes at the FIAT shops became more frequent. In these assemblies, workers and students together devised simple but powerful slogans to stir up the protest in their departments: “What do we want? Everything” or “We don’t accept crumbs. We want to work less and earn more.”⁶⁴ These demands upset FIAT and embarrassed union officials, who maintained that radicals undermined negotiations for a fair contract the following autumn with populist requests and eventually played into the hands of FIAT. In retrospect, however, radicals were showing a sharper understanding of the political economy of Fordism: by demanding that workers should be paid more regardless of their work effort, skill, seniority, or output, Meridionali were contesting a basic tenet of Fordism, namely that more pay required increased productivity.⁶⁵

On July 3, 1969, the metalworkers’ unions called for a citywide strike to protest against the housing shortage and overpriced rents. It was a political strike, organized in the wake of the events of Battipaglia, and sensitive toward some of the more pressing problems of the southern workers. Radicals responded by organizing a rival procession from the Mirafiori plant to the city center. The parallel initiative reflected the deep gulf between the old and the New Left, but also the latter’s increasing confidence in the workers’ response—for the first time in Turin, radical groups had “challenged” the traditional Left in urban space, outside the factory.⁶⁶ It was an opportunity for the political radicals to test the extent of their influence. Late in the morning, on the appointed day, as workers and students started to gather outside the gates of Mirafiori, one and all were surprised by the success of the call to strike. Workers carried placards reading: “*Contro il padrone: blocco della produzione*” (Against the boss: stop production) or “*Sindacato e padrone: accordo bidone*” (Unions and company: swindle agreement).⁶⁷

The gathering pitted workers against law enforcement agents (many of whom were southerners themselves). As soon as the protest march started moving, the police force, under the command of the infamous superintendent Voria, charged the demonstrators. Panic

ensued when an ambulance “accidentally” drove into the crowd at full speed to disperse the crowd. The workers responded by hurling cobblestones at the armored vans stationed on the streets. When the march reached Corso Traiano, a wide boulevard near the factory, the sporadic clashes turned into a full scale riot. The police charged several times and manhandled the protesters, but the disturbance then spread in the adjacent working-class neighborhood. From their windows, residents threw flowerpots at the police, while unlocking the front doors of their apartment buildings to admit the fleeing demonstrators. The confrontation lasted all that evening and long into the night with more people joining as news of the riot spread into the suburban working-class enclaves. The police took advantage of the chaos to raid the Communist local near Mirafiori and assault its members.⁶⁸

The “riot of Corso Traiano,” as the papers called it, was significant for two reasons. It gave visibility to the grassroots struggle at Mirafiori, so far deliberately neglected by mainstream media, *La Stampa* in the first place, and it disseminated the ideas of the groups. The events of Corso Traiano, though they did not lead to any new developments in the plant, also represented a symbolic turning point for many of its participants. Indeed, the ruthless manner in which superintendent Voria charged a peaceful demonstration had unmasked the political dimension of the rebellion against FIAT. In the following months, radicals capitalized on the collective memory of that day, and could condense a whole political message within the few words “Remember Corso Traiano!”⁶⁹

The Turinese riot differed in important respects from the 1967 events in Detroit. In particular, it did not acquire a racial connotation and did not result in any deaths. It nonetheless dramatized the divisions between the different players—the radicals, the police, and the union. In contrast to Detroit, the riot of Corso Traiano was more explicitly linked to industrial conflict in the car factories, but as in the American case its deeper causes lay in social tensions originating in the process of urban change. One could argue that the barrel of dynamite had finally exploded in Corso Traiano.

Detroit: The Revolutionary Moment

In both Turin and Detroit, civil disturbances changed the political landscape, in the factories, in the universities, and in the city at large almost overnight. This was particularly true of Detroit where

the number of casualties and the sheer extent of damage to property spurred Detroiters of different political orientations to action to exploit, or counteract, the legacy of the riot. Wrongly suspected of having masterminded the riot, political radicals were now gaining more attention from mainstream public opinion and more leverage among sections of the black lower classes. Activists such as John Watson, General Baker, Mike Hamlin, and others, aspired to take advantage of the revolutionary mood now evident in the factories and the black neighborhoods. In September 1967, they sponsored a talk by controversial civil rights leaders Floyd McKissick and H. Rap Brown; the latter urged his Detroit audience to "stop looting... start shooting." According to the press coverage, these words encouraged members of the crowd to smash cars outside the venue.⁷⁰ The following month, Watson, Baker, and Hamlin began the publication of the *Inner City Voice*, which carried the ambitious masthead: "The voice of revolution." The paper gained popularity as a radical alternative to the mainstream *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*. It featured stories from the run-down black neighborhoods and juxtaposed them to the appalling working conditions in the car factories, thereby suggesting a possible link between the rebellion in the neighborhoods (which had just occurred) and that on the shop floor (which had yet to happen).⁷¹

Elaine, then in her early twenties, entered Chrysler Dodge Main in 1968 as part of the postriot black recruitment. Liberals, both in Detroit and in Washington, urged the Big Three to hire the "hard-core" young, unemployed blacks Detroiters, which a number of reports had held responsible for the riot.⁷² Chrysler, the last to run plants in Detroit itself, hired four thousand African Americans in a two-year period, under a federal-funded training program. When Chrysler employed Elaine, the racial climate in the city and in the plants was tense. The murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 revived fears of another riot. Chrysler managers shut the Detroit plants for a few days as a precautionary measure, but nothing happened in Detroit.

Notwithstanding the massive employment of African Americans, in the production department as well as in the traditional menial jobs, both the company and the UAW had not directly addressed perennial practices of discrimination, which now, in the postriot climate, contrasted markedly with the mainstream liberal agenda of racial fairness. Clayton (fictional name) the son of an immigrant from Georgia, was one of the "inner city" young blacks also hired as part of the postriot program, an experience that, ironically enough,

ended up radicalizing him. At the hiring gate, Clayton discovered that his school degree in electronics only earned him a job on the assembly line in the nocturnal, “graveyard” shift. By contrast, a white man of exactly the same age, who had not even completed school was given a comfortable job as an inspector. “I had all the schooling, had a certificate and a degree and everything. It didn’t mean nothing,” commented Clayton. At Chrysler, the dual labor market had long shaped its recruitment policy, and persisted long after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act and the Great Society legislation. On the line Clayton toiled with fellow black workers “under a lot of pressure.”⁷³ Many of his coworkers doped themselves with alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine. In particular, on the night shift recourse to drugs and alcohol were a common remedy to the frenetic pace of work. The increased use of narcotics and drink within the plants had been noted by both management and the union, and was the topic of a dense exchange of letters between the two—most of them management warnings of disciplinary action toward union members. For young workers, intoxication constituted an alternative form of resistance, one that did not entail any political engagement. However, this kind of resistance did itself have economic and political consequences, as it lowered workers’ productivity, the cornerstone of the Fordist factory. Individual workers’ choices were implicitly political, even if they were not organized in a self-conscious manner.⁷⁴ Thus, the radicalization of workers such as Elaine and Clayton, who had not previously taken part in political activities, occurred at the point of intersection between larger, national political events (the urban riots, the murder of Martin Luther King) and the micropolitics of the automobile plant shop floor. (It is significant in this respect that Clayton recalled the Detroit riot as happening on the day of the death of Martin Luther King, nine months later, thereby conflating the two events that had radicalized him into a single one).⁷⁵

As in the case of Turin, where successive waves of southerners had manifested distinct political behaviors, so too in Detroit the last wave of ‘inner city’ young blacks recruited by Chrysler in a bid to pacify the black community, became the protagonists in a new bout of militancy. Like the young, unskilled Meridionali at FIAT, these workers were at the forefront of the auto strikes and shop-floor activism of the following two years. They knew little of the UAW, the union of which they were nominally members, except for the fact that they had to pay a sizeable initial membership fee and then regular dues. The failure or reluctance of the UAW to negotiate contracts that addressed the most pressing issues in the ageing Chrysler plants,

such as unsafe working conditions, unsupervised speed-ups, and the blatant racism of many of the supervisor meant that these African Americans did not regard the union as the solution to their problems. On the contrary, to many of them, the UAW was part of the problem.

Notwithstanding the earlier campaign of caucuses such as TULC, union rules governing seniority and entry into the skilled trades continued to hinder the promotion of African Americans to better jobs. In Detroit, Polish and other "ethnic" whites monopolized the jobs off the line, those less affected by the exhausting speed of production. As these whites had a higher seniority, they also controlled the governing bodies of the UAW locals, even in factories such as Dodge Main where, by 1968, the majority of production workers were black. These and other practices showed that for the UAW leadership, an intractable problem was trying to balance the democratic union rules that the union had drafted in the 1930s with the now different social composition of the workforce. In time, the dilemma exposing the inconsistency of the UAW became glaringly obvious, for though it was a progressive union supportive of civil rights legislation and always cultivated a liberal image where race was concerned, it proved reluctant to advance blacks within its own ranks or to seriously challenge racist company policies.⁷⁶

Any assessment of the UAW's racial politics should consider the overall historical record. Elliot Rudwick and August Meier, in their study of the relationship between the UAW and black workers, praised the union leadership for breaking new ground in the 1940s by building bridges between labor and the black community. They contended that the UAW facilitated a political alliance between black and white workers and thereby defused racial strife on the shop floor. However, by the end of the 1960s, the fragmentation of the workforce along racial and generational lines, in a context of deteriorating working conditions, meant that by then, black workers' differences with the liberal union leadership were causing more disruption on the shop floor than was racial antagonism.⁷⁷

For those in the lower ranks of the union hierarchy, this new source of tension was easy to detect. In September 1967, Charlie Brooks, the African American vice president of Local 3 at Dodge Main, reported to UAW president Walter Reuther that:

There are many youngsters coming into our ranks today... these people have many problems that bother Local officers. We are trying to find out what they want and how to cope with it. Among

these youngsters are all kind of extremists...and we think, Black Nationalists. They are meeting together on a weekly basis and talking about Chrysler not making their promotions on any basis other than race and *they are not going to stand still for it*. Now, the thing that disturbs me most is that they don't care who gets hurt...they are in for trouble within the plants.⁷⁸

Working its way through the bureaucracy at Solidarity House, the letter was brought to the attention of Douglas Fraser, the UAW official responsible for Chrysler, with a note attached to it: "Sounds ominous." But the international headquarters would not directly address the problem until the revolt finally exploded one year later. Young black workers particularly resented the \$20 initiation fee for a union that, by contract, would not protect them during their first three months of employment and that placed their needs low on the bargaining agenda. "These are the rules," as Local 3 president explained to a black autoworker laid off after nine days who was "ready to go to jail" to get his money back.⁷⁹ But the distress of a single worker who had to pay his dues without receiving support against adverse managerial decisions should not have been summarily dismissed, for it resonated with a large cross-section of the workforce, black and white.

International UAW executives knew of the sorry state of workplace relations at Chrysler and of the poor reputation of the union among some sections of the workforce, but did not seriously address either problem. Earlier in the same year, the Quayle report, an internal union survey on the rank and file, disclosed that, considering the nation as a whole, Detroit's workers expressed the highest degree of disaffection from the UAW in the nation. Of the workers, 51 percent rated the work done by their Locals as unsatisfactory, and 44 percent thought the same of the International. The highest single complaint—11 percent—was that grievances were handled too slowly. The researchers warned that a "program must be developed and launched to strengthen the International at Chrysler, for support there is currently flagging." But the call fell on deaf ears.⁸⁰

In Detroit, workers' dissent was also linked to the postriot context. A turning point for the history of the city as whole, the 1967 riot also affected labor relations at Dodge Main and other Chrysler plants in what was quite confusingly dubbed "inner city" (in contrast to plants located in the suburbs). For one participant, "People had such a crude awakening at the naked power of the police that they were just angry. They were not the same people that came out of the riot... What we are talking about you could never separate from

that."⁸¹ Workers were also sporting afros and necklaces made of the 50 caliber bullets that littered the city streets after the riot. "It was a sight to see," remembers General Baker, "They weren't taking any more shit."⁸² Yet rebellion in the plants did not occur in any kind of "automatic" way. Historian Steven Jefferys observed that the significance of the rebellion for most of the plant's black workers "was not that they participated but that they *sympathized*."⁸³

Between 1967 and 1968, the tense political situation in the city interacted with the deteriorating working conditions for the rank and file at Chrysler Dodge Main. Since 1963, following a managerial reorganization of the firm, Chrysler had augmented its productivity, tightened the room for shop-floor bargaining, and hired thousands of new workers. In the old Detroit plants, productivity was augmented less by technological investment than by human effort. In the inventive and provocative language that characterized them, radicals would call this alternative to automation, "Niggermation," as they claimed that the managerial drive to more production was achieved by the sheer increase in exertion of African Americans on the line.⁸⁴ However, notwithstanding their hyperbolic language, radicals were well aware that white workers did not fare much better on the shop floor. The instances of wildcat strikes, contract rejections, and rank-and-file protests within the UAW grew in number in the latter half of 1960.⁸⁵ At Dodge Main, the two most significant wildcat strikes had occurred in 1967 when the autoworkers' contract was up for renewal; the protagonists were workers in the trim department, mostly women, led by union steward Edith Fox (a former Trotskyist and a veteran of the turbulent industrial relations of the 1950s). That white women first broke ranks should have given pause for thought to those union leaders who believed that it was the radicals, in the grip of an extremist ideology, who had fomented discontent.⁸⁶

On May 2, 1968, an interracial picket line, formed by white women and a few black workers, assembled at the gates of Dodge Main to protest against the speed up of their understaffed line, and evolved into a plant-wide strike when more than four thousand workers honored the picket.⁸⁷ As in Turin, spontaneous actions were being initiated by single departments without an overall leadership or a strategic plan. On this occasion, personnel manager Leonard Nawrocki, also obtained the cooperation of the Local 3 president Domanski to curb the "illegal walkouts," but without much success.⁸⁸

In gauging how to respond to this strike, which to the company was an ominous reminder of the shop-floor militancy of the 1950s, the plant management played the race card. It would have been an

unpopular move to retaliate against respected senior workers who enjoyed widespread support in the ranks of the UAW local, and management therefore took issue, not with all but only with two black workers, Bennie Tate and General Baker—the latter being a known radical who had also participated in the city hall boycott and paid an illegal visit to Castro's Cuba. Shortly after their layoff, in an open letter to Chrysler Corporation, Baker lyrically explained, "In discharging me you have falsely placed the banner of leadership upon my shoulder." A banner, he continued, that he accepted gladly, pledging to carry on the struggle.⁸⁹ Glaberman, who was following events closely, narrated the story of the strike as follows: "The [white] women were pissed off and stood at the gate to keep people out. These black dudes came by and said, 'Yeah, that's cool,' and they joined them and shut down the plant."⁹⁰ This episode, at the very least, confirmed management's conjecture that, if not divided among themselves, rank-and-file unrest could well escalate. For Steve Jefferys, "The interaction of the old tradition of sectional problem solving with the new combativity had brought strike action back into the vocabulary of the Dodge Main shop floor."⁹¹

In retrospect, it is not surprising that Chrysler's blatantly racist response to the May 4 strike increased the appeal of Black Nationalist groups. The company underestimated the vast discontent within the plant, the organizational capacities of the radical elements, and the way in which race could act as a catalyst for protests at long-standing workers grievances. This episode was the first in a series of successful wildcat strikes organized under the banner of DRUM, the creature of Baker, Watson, Wooten, Tripp, Hamlin, and others who had known each other for years in radical circles—despite the problem of Baker now being barred from company premises. These young militants knew nothing of the earlier episodes of rank-and-file unrest during the 1950s; they owed their formation rather to activism in the African American freedom struggle and to exposure to the autonomist ideas of workers' self-organization spread by Glaberman, the Boggs, as well as the Detroit Trotskyists, with whom they had attended formal and informal political education classes.⁹² In the black radicals' version, however, autonomist ideas boiled down to a single powerful argument: because black workers were at the core of basic industries such as automobile and steel, they could, and would, play a strategic role in the struggle against capitalism, even, or preferably, outside organized labor.

What distinguished the new group was in fact the combining of class politics with identity politics—Marxism and Black Nationalism.

For instance, DRUM likened black factory workers to slaves on the antebellum cotton plantations (which generated the pun plantation); it was a daring comparison, but one meaningful for their constituency—black northerners for whom economic exploitation was tinged with race. Like the slaves in the old South, black workers were located at the most vulnerable link in the productive chain: the assembly line.⁹³

In the spring of 1968, General Baker had organized meetings between the *Inner City Voice* group and autoworkers. His firing merely reinforced his determination to persevere with such activities. He used DRUM as an alternative workers' organization *outside* the UAW, rather than as a traditional opposition caucus abiding by union rules. In an early draft of its program, DRUM aimed "to establish an all black union" and "to give black workers a more active voice in policy-making in the plants."⁹⁴ The document contained a pledge "to maintain black unity at all costs" but it also contained divisive and controversial expressions such as "Uncle Toms" or "House Negroes" to characterize those who had chosen to accept posts within the UAW.

This proved to be a crucial political issue for black radical groups. Was it legitimate for blacks to serve a union that de facto discriminated against them? To this question, of course, radicals and black union officials supplied different answers—the former wanted to demolish the union from the outside, the latter to reform it from the inside—but it was a question that became central to the contest over black workers' allegiance at Dodge Main and of decisive importance in determining the ultimate fate of the radical struggle in the plant. The number of African Americans holding positions of responsibility with the UAW was in any case small. In 1962, the UAW's International Executive Board had elected Nelson Jack Edwards, its only black member up to that time (another was added in 1969). Otherwise the bureaucracy of Local 3, as DRUM repeatedly pointed out in its literature, was predominantly Polish and did not reflect the changes in the Dodge Main workforce. The African American with highest responsibility was a vice president, Charles Brooks, but the leadership (in that year Domanski, succeeded by Liska) was Polish. For instance, it was ironic that in 1965, a year when half of Dodge Main workers were black, the UAW Local 3 Executive Board deliberated over buying \$50 worth of tickets for the anniversary of the *Polish Daily News*, \$50 for the Hamtramck (predominantly Polish) Police Field Day, \$25 for the Hamtramck Fire Fighters (Polish, again), \$10 for a picnic honoring Mayor Joseph J. Grzecki, and by the same token,

it opted to donate \$50 for the American Relief for Poland, \$25 to the Metropolitan Club of Hamtramck, and \$25 to the Annual General Casimir Pulaski banquet. Admittedly, the Board also dispatched a black member to the NAACP convention in Denver, but without financial contribution.⁹⁵ In this context, DRUM's call to arms was overdue. It was not radicals who had lured black workers away from the UAW; the union had alienated them on its own.

The radicals' next action—or, rather, first, as the previous one actually had a mixed origin—occurred in June 1968, when they staged a successful boycott of two bars located near the plant that served Dodge Main workers but would not hire black staff. The boycott was a traditional civil rights tactic that had long been used in Detroit, but, as it occurred next to industrial premises, cast a bad light on Chrysler racial ethos, to which the UAW had acquiesced. A month later, in July, DRUM organized three days of agitation at Dodge Main that caused corporation and company still more disquiet. On the first day, DRUM led some three hundred workers directly from the plant to Local 3 offices, a few blocks away, to confront the Local Executive Board on the issues of discrimination and working conditions. The next day, they formed a picket line that kept three thousand workers out of the plant and seriously disrupted production. The effectiveness of the action relied also on the deployment of conga players in colorful African robes, whose choreographed movements made passersby stop and take notice. Even after the police had dispersed the crowd, the sound of the drums reminded people that the protest was to continue, in what one witness describes as an eerie atmosphere, as “twenty bongo players [filled] the air with the curious, alien, and slightly frightening noises.”⁹⁶

In three days, DRUM had mobilized thousands of workers and caused Chrysler a production loss of 1,900 cars. The novelty lay in using a double idiom of protest: workers' rights and civil rights. Kowalski, director at Chrysler Labor Relations and Douglas Fraser, the UAW official responsible for Chrysler, had not initially grasped DRUM's potential popularity. A day before the agitation, Kowalski still maintained that “the majority of participants will be outsiders. Plant employees do not seem to be in support of this movement,” but was soon proven wrong.⁹⁷

Throughout the summer, DRUM maintained a presence in the plant, distributing a weekly newsletter and attempting to mobilize workers for the reinstatement of the May strikers, Bennie Tate and General Baker. The issue was at the center of a heated confrontation, a “stormy meeting,” between membership and leadership and UAW

Local 3 on August 19, 1968. Since Chrysler could not reinstate the strikers without further swelling the ranks of the protesters, only a general plant strike could have achieved a result, but Liska maintained that the justification for a strike was “very weak.”⁹⁸ Edith Fox, who represented a small opposition caucus that was working within the rules, mediated by proposing to put the two workers on the union payroll, but Liska refused to allow a vote on it.⁹⁹

By the late summer, even unsympathetic accounts acknowledged the potential of the new movement. One report noted, “no one laughs at the drum-beating or the African garb nor do observers inside the union, all of them skilled in race relations—skilled and troubled—mock DRUM’s demands at the Hamtramck plant, where there are some 3,500 black workers. Just to list a few of this ‘revolution’s’ 14 demands is enough to turn a sociologist into a pathologist.”¹⁰⁰ DRUM’s 14 demands—their latest manifesto—were, in fact, intentionally provocative. They demanded an African American at the head of the Chrysler board of directors, a 50 percent black representation on the UAW International Executive Board, and a black president for the UAW, and urged blacks not to pay while urging blacks to withhold payment of their union dues.¹⁰¹

As in Turin, this period was characterized by frequent interactions between students and workers. In the autumn of 1968, the impact of both the French May and of national events had heightened political ferment at Detroit’s Wayne State University (WSU), where working-class students were in the majority and there was the highest percentage of black students in any state campus in the United States.¹⁰² A former WSU student remembers that it was “so incredibly fertile. There were the cultural nationalists, the nationalists who embraced socialism, the Marxist-Leninists, the Communists. It was just an incredible time.”¹⁰³ The fact that students, black and white, were helping to distribute literature and man the picket lines, accounted for the assumption that the strikes were only organized by externals, but this accusation was frequently made in Turin too and often amounted to nothing more than a thinly disguised excuse for belittling the protest. In this political climate, and thanks to the sympathy of the local SDS (Students for Democratic Society) chapter for DRUM, John Watson was appointed editor of the campus newspaper. Watson was a young radical who had been in contact with left-wing activists since high school and had briefly militated in mainstream civil rights groups before deciding that they were ineffectual.¹⁰⁴ Watson’s appointment reflected an increasing radicalization in the WSU student committee responsible for the paper. Indeed, the committee

had already changed the paper's name the previous year from the anodyne *The Collegian* to *South End*—an appellation that referred to the southern end of the Cass corridor, the working-class area south of the campus where historically most new arrivals to Detroit had settled.¹⁰⁵

From September 1968, Watson steered the focus of the paper in a direction that caused considerable apprehension to the city's establishment, in particular among manufacturers and union officials. The WSU president, a liberal, found himself under increasing pressure to remove the paper's editor, a step that, in the postriot city and campus, could not easily be taken without further inflaming the protest. The *South End* was testimony to the working alliance that black and white radicals were trying to build on campus. For instance, the daily organization of the paper was carried out by Nick Melvecky, a white student.¹⁰⁶ Students would also often stand on DRUM picket lines when workers ran the risk of retaliation from the corporation. However, internal disagreements within the editorial board and the student committee, due to not the political line of the paper but to the editor's style of management, eventually terminated Watson's appointment at the end of the academic year. The way DRUM lost control of the paper epitomized one of its main weaknesses, namely the inability to consolidate its victories and build enduring relationships with white allies.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, the backlash against radical protest grew stronger. From the summer of 1968, the company and the union each tried to regain control of their own territories. At both international and local level, the UAW tried to erode support amongst the bulk of moderate and "non-politicized" blacks for DRUM. In August 1968, Local 3 sent a three-page letter to its nine thousand members. It reminded them that "the UAW has been at the forefront of every fight for equality for all the workers," while the aim of DRUM aimed "to pit white worker against black workers and even black against black" in an attempt to "make the union ineffective and weak." *DRUM* and its sister publication *Inner City Voice* were "not so much the voice of the inner city as...the voice of a worldwide [Communist] propaganda network" calling for bloody and violent revolution.¹⁰⁸ This was a scathing attack on DRUM—and at the same time an acknowledgement of its popularity—which conveniently glossed over its practical achievements, but the UAW saw how urgent it was to boost the Local 3 leadership, now under pressure and uncertain as to how to address the issue.

The International Executive Board, so far only incidentally challenged by the new movement, was slow to follow suit, and this only

after the protest had spread still further. During these conflict-ridden months, Local 3 president Ed Liska often lamented this situation in his personal diary, "It is unfair for such a large organization such as the UAW to sit by idle while one local is combating a dangerous cancer by itself...Phone calls to the Chrysler department are useless. Their attitude seems to be that they are busy with pension problems."¹⁰⁹ Liska's sense of disquiet was compounded by a clash of political languages. In contrast to the Turinese radicals, who tried to appeal to southern migrants by finding a lowest common denominator, DRUM vaunted its capacity to mobilize the most militant workers, thereby sidelining or overshadowing more sensible demands of better working conditions and fair treatment, which might have won a larger audience, even among UAW liberals. DRUM's (and even more, later, ELRUM's[Eldon Revolutionary Union Movement]) newsletters often dubbed whites as "honkies" or "pigs" and aggressively dismissed moderate blacks as "Uncle Toms" or "House Niggers."¹¹⁰ DRUM language, freighted with a Black Nationalist lexicon, ended up obscuring the fundamental issue of the organization of production and alienated many potentially sympathetic white and moderate workers.¹¹¹

UAW Dodge Main Local 3 president Ed Liska represented the older generation of Polish ethnic workers who were hostile to the counter-culture, the student movement, and to the Black Power turn of the northern civil rights movement, particularly evident in Detroit. As black militancy grew at Dodge Main, so did Liska's aversion toward the dissident groups. It was an antagonism that also derived from a cultural and generational divide, not only a political one. In opposition to trade unions, radical groups in Detroit, as in Turin, did not see an ethical or educational value in work and they threatened to upset social (as well as racial, in the case of Detroit) hierarchies. Their strategy alarmed union bureaucrats. Union officials who were accustomed to resolving problems through negotiation could not countenance the raw, spontaneous type of industrial action that radicals preached. Many episodes indicate a sheer lack of communication. In February 1969, Liska recorded, in his diary, an account of a stormy meeting with DRUM militants:

About 50 persons were in the Executive Board room. Chuck Walters tried to explain what happened at the meeting. They would not listen. Edith Fox tried to explain about the problems. They shouted her down...Joe Gordon attempted to talk. He was shouted down and called names. The group was totally unreachable. Few did not

know the rules... Swearing, dirty talk and just plain arrogance prevailed at the meeting... The meeting ended up with shouts, yells, confusion.¹¹²

Too young to remember the organizing days of the 1930s, or even the postwar strikes, radicals at Dodge Main saw the local and international officers as being part of the same club as company management. They did not believe in the possibility of an independent black leadership in the UAW since, in their view, the Reuther political machine could easily coopt blacks driven by the ambition to improve their own circumstances.¹¹³ However, UAW officials had also failed to recognize that many of the issues raised by the radicals were not markedly dissimilar to those that had spurred into action thousands of activists in the organizing days of the mid-1930s.

At the end of 1968, the radicals were gaining momentum. Thanks to its remarkable organizational successes at Dodge Main, DRUM had recruited a large number of black workers who, in turn, extended the struggle to other Chrysler plants in the Detroit metropolitan area with similar racial and generational divides within the workforce. It was often a spontaneous process, with groupings in other factories and workplaces, even beyond Chrysler, eager to start their own groups and to associate with DRUM. Its largest offshoot, ELRUM, emerged in November 1968 at Chrysler Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle factory, a plant employing four thousand black workers. Working conditions at Eldon were, if possible, even more appalling than those at Dodge Main. The plant had a record of several deaths on the job caused by defective equipment or disregard of safety procedures. Furthermore, its medical team was notorious for refusing leave to injured workers and sending them back on the line after accidents.¹¹⁴ In these conditions, ELRUM was, unsurprisingly, an immediate, although short-lived, success.

Through the circulation of newsletters and leaflets, ELRUM attracted even more members and support than DRUM. Soon after its establishment, it confronted the union (UAW Local 961) with a large demonstration in its hall, during which some of the three hundred workers participating missed the afternoon shift and were suspended, either for days or weeks, by the company. Once again, it was a concerted effort by Chrysler and UAW to stop a burgeoning radical movement in its tracks. In January 1969, ELRUM called a strike to protest against punishments that kept the majority of the workforce out for two days being met with heavy retaliation from the company. Eldon was the only plant that produced axles for the whole range of

Chrysler cars; it was a crucial node in the flow of production as other plants would grind to a halt if Eldon stood still. This was a powerful example of the way in which industrial workers, deprived of skill and autonomy, could still assert control over the Fordist production process. But the workers' enthusiastic response could not protect the new group from savage retaliation. All its key activists were fired, and many other participants suspended. To its organizers, the strike must have seemed the logical next step in the escalation of discontent, but it was tactically premature in retrospect.¹¹⁵

The January 1969 retaliation had deeply affected ELRUM's standing in the plant. But dissent was not silenced. Other organizations, such as the more inclusive Eldon Workers Safety Committee, remained active on the shop floor. Their focus was on improving safety procedures, which were supposed to be protected by the contract, a fact that put protesters on safer ground. In May 1970, poor safety on the shop floor led to the death of black worker Gary Thompson—the third fatal accident within a matter of months—horribly crushed by tons of scrap metal. This episode combined, in an exemplary way, the issues of racial discrimination and unsafe working conditions—generally, it was black workers who held down the most hazardous jobs. In the wake of the uproar caused by the death (or “murder” in the revolutionary literature) ELRUM again gathered a strong support, albeit briefly. Revolutionary militants attended the funeral in large numbers, and in their finest Black Power outfits, while company and union expression of solidarity were no more than perfunctory. In the following days, ELRUM picketed the plant and commanded enough support to shut it down for a day. However, to the majority of Eldon workers, black (“uncle toms”) and white (“stupid honkies”), ELRUM remained a group of angry, shouting blacks, and its lack of permanent support and inability to build alliances meant that when, once again, the company retaliated by firing key militants, the group could no longer organize effectively.¹¹⁶

Despite their waning influence in the plants themselves, the radicals enjoyed their most spectacular success when a jury acquitted Eldon black worker James Johnson, a migrant from Mississippi, who had shot and killed two foremen and a white coworker in July 1970 after being suspended. Johnson's legal defence team—led by Kenneth Cockrel, a radical lawyer increasingly prominent within the League—successfully argued that Johnson was, in fact, the victim of discrimination and of the appalling working conditions in the plant. Chrysler was indirectly responsible for what had occurred, since it had driven Johnson, who was simply an average assembly

worker, to breaking point. Radicals had turned a murder case into a political indictment of Chrysler!¹¹⁷

These developments, however, lay in the future. In early 1969, radicals were in their strongest position yet. Revolutionary movements cropped up in numerous workplaces across the metropolitan area—FRUM at Ford's River Rouge, JARUM at Chrysler Jefferson Avenue, CADRUM at Cadillac's Fleetwood factory, and others. DRUM and ELRUM continued to command enough support to shut down plants. In other cities too, black industrial workers saw the League as a model of black working-class revolutionary organization. The most notable example is the relationship developed with the United Black Workers of the Ford Mahwah plant, in New Jersey, who organized at about the same time for similar motives, but independently.¹¹⁸ Apart from leaflets and newsletters, radicals still controlled *The South End*, the campus publication that came close to rivaling the circulation of an ordinary newspaper. At this time the leadership put forward the idea of creating an umbrella organization, a range of different groups, which became the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in June 1969.

The widening appeal of radicals finally created alarm at UAW headquarters. Detroit's black radicals were even receiving nationwide coverage (though not a flattering one) in the *New York Times*.¹¹⁹ The International responded with a letter of its own, this time to the entire membership, in a print run of 350 thousand. The letter reasserted the union's past liberal record in promoting racial equality and called DRUM and ELRUM "extremists and racial separatists [who] sought to spread terror in the plants among both black and white workers and to undermine the unity and solidarity among all the workers." It also denounced them as practitioners of violence and intimidation against "local union leaders who have been democratically elected to serve all the workers."¹²⁰

The International also started to undermine those UAW officials who were sympathetic to the new developments. One of them was Sheldon Tappes, an African American who had long worked for the UAW's Fair Practices department and who, after meeting with the Eldon strikers, had publicly declared that "communication between the union and DRUM might well be the key to an alliance...to recognize a common foe—the company."¹²¹ International officers concerned about this overture were not slow to rebuke Tappes and no UAW official would subsequently issue such statements to the press. All the same, Tappes had a point when, in his internal rejoinder to the International Executive Board, remarked that "by ignoring the

existence of these organizations...we are forfeiting an important segment of our membership."¹²²

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers' leadership cadre was still constituted by DRUM people—such as General Baker, John Watson, Ken Cockrel, Mike Hamlin, Luke Tripp, Chuck Wooten, and others—who were mostly men. Marian Kramer was the only woman in a prominent position.¹²³ The League's program too followed the DRUM blueprint, even though it now provided more details about its ideology. The League was committed "to waging a relentless struggle against racism, capitalism, and imperialism" and defined itself as a "black Marxist-Leninist party designed to liberate black people [and] dedicated to leading the workers' struggle in this country."¹²⁴ As an organization created in the aftermath of the Detroit riot, Black Nationalism pervaded all elements within the League. However, its general program also represented a compromise between different political orientations in the leadership. Cockrel, Hamlin, and Watson called themselves "proletarian revolutionaries," and saw the League as a means of political education for the black masses.¹²⁵ Most of the group's experiments with the media originated from the initiative of this trio, such as the papers, the establishment of the Black Star publishing and bookshop, and, most notably, the production of *Finally Got the News*, a 16mm film about the League. Cockrel, Hamlin, and Watson, aimed at using culture to reach the widest possible black audience and urged cooperation with white radicals. They also openly encouraged the creation of League branches in other cities.¹²⁶

The other faction in the leadership was represented by General Baker and Chuck Wooten who espoused an ideology more markedly Black Nationalist than Marxist, but who were also more committed to the in-plant organizing of black workers. They distrusted activities that diverted funds and energy away from the factory. According to Liska, Baker was "a huge strong built guy with a very ugly face," but also "the king pin of the DRUM movement."¹²⁷ It was Baker's resolve after his discharge in May 1968 that fuelled most of the protest at Dodge Main and drew in core League supporters. Whereas on a city level Ken Cockrel, through his activity as a radical lawyer, became the most visible representative of the League, assisting high-profile black defendants involved in controversial cases, Baker was the most familiar face in the factories, often distributing leaflets and canvassing workers near the gates.¹²⁸

It is useful to draw a distinction between the League's leadership and its membership. The latter consisted mainly of young workers

and students, as well as others with no steady occupation (what one member nicknamed the “free-floating” elements or the “hanger-ons”). The League’s actual paid-up membership was less significant than the numbers it was able to mobilize.¹²⁹ The membership’s ideological creed was, to say the least, variegated. It ranged “from nationalist distrust of all whites, to Christianity, astrology, pro-socialist sentiment, and even anti-Marxist sentiment.”¹³⁰ From the rank and file’s perspective, the League did not look like the “Marxist-Leninist party” it proclaimed itself to be. Cockrel and his colleagues lamented the lack of self-discipline and the aversion toward political education as well as the “infantile militarism and adventurism” of the various plots such as blowing up the Statue of Liberty that were “secrets to everyone except the police.”¹³¹ However, the leadership relied heavily on such members when organizing its irreverent and provocative actions. It was this politically “immature” element that could be counted upon when marching to the UAW headquarters with the placards declaring “UAW means U ain’t White” or when the League planned to organize a boycott of Chrysler cars boasting “that [it] will be enforced in the streets of ghettos all across this racist dog country,” implying that it would have been unsafe for Chrysler auto owners to drive into a black area.¹³²

All in all, the lack of a clear organizational structure did not favor the political education and self-discipline of the membership. The leadership cadre took the main decisions without an internal democratic debate, which did nothing to bridge the distance between an intellectually sophisticated leadership and the more narrow-minded and capricious grassroots supporters. The League’s leadership set up a number of goals and a detailed division of tasks, but did not develop mechanisms promoting internal discussion between itself and the rank and file. “At no time,”—said Mike Hamlin in a later interview—“do I recall a situation where people wanted to have a battle of ideas in front of the membership and let the membership decide.”¹³³ However, this was not a predicament confined to Detroit. In Italy, the same original key group of people (again mostly men) led Lotta Continua throughout its entire existence, there being no specific mechanism for internal elections.¹³⁴ For Ernie Allen, another League member, “perhaps the best illustration of this particular state of affairs can be found in the fact that the LRBW’s first general meeting did not take place until almost a year and half after its founding.”¹³⁵ It was ironic that the League replicated in miniature the same faults for which it reproached the UAW: a lack of participatory democracy and of communication between leadership and rank and file.

It was in the sphere of institutional democracy that the League posed its most significant challenge to the UAW and to the existing system of industrial relations. In September 1969, the election for the Local 3 executive office, one of the democratic procedures extolled by the union leaders, became the occasion for a rowdy confrontation between radical militants and union liberals. The bitterness of the contest was further intensified by the fact that the League overestimated its grip on Chrysler's rank and file, and so did UAW officials, who ascribed the sudden outbreaks of rebellion more to the influence of outside radicals than to genuine workers' grievances.

Ed Liska, the incumbent president, did not command a clear majority and, therefore, could not guarantee his reelection. This was due to the numerical decline of Polish and other ethnic workers—his power base—in the plant. Instead, he hoped that the attendance of Polish retirees would turn the vote his way. That retirees could have such an important voice at all in union affairs was the product of yet another of those apparently color-blind UAW bylaws that were in fact detrimental to African Americans. Liska and his cohort fully exploited this opportunity by organizing the transportation of former Polish workers to and from the local on the day of the election. The League's candidate, Ron March, commanded a substantial following in the plant, as Chrysler plant management testified. Dodge Main's general foreman reported that in internal disputes, even workers outside March's department would say, "I don't want my steward to represent me. I want Ronnie March to represent me."¹³⁶ In fact, in some cases, the plant's management dealt directly with March rather than with the appointed union steward. Liska recounts that when money was stolen from a plastic charity box management "immediately got hold of March and the money was returned the next day." This sort of episode was irritating for local UAW officials and made Liska furious. "DRUM leaders and labor relations are too close and it is no secret of certain labor relations [personnel] cuddling them," he complained in his diary.¹³⁷ It was also true, however, that the League won support from workers who, though nominal UAW members, had seldom participated in union affairs. Their votes were needed too.

Local 3 was one of the largest union branches in the nation and represented a plant with a long history, so both local and international UAW officials had a lot at stake in this election. Chrysler too, of course, could not afford to see a Local taken over by radicals, a circumstance that, in their view, would have plunged industrial relations into chaos. Apart from bringing the retirees to the polls, some of whom allegedly voted twice, the UAW solicited the assistance

of the company, which laid off a number of militants, and of the Hamtramck police, also overwhelmingly Polish, which harassed and intimidated workers outside the polls. This charge came from the ranks of the League, but is detailed enough to be plausible. The League always tried to make a larger point when criticizing such tactics: for Chuck Wooten, this treatment provided “an idea of the kind of repression black workers seeking to make a revolutionary organization would face.”¹³⁸

In *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence*, B. J. Widick maintained that the League’s “failure to win recruits in the auto plants doomed its attempt to win local union offices.”¹³⁹ However, the League’s grip on black union members must have been less precarious than Widick supposes: Ron March received 563 votes and managed to gain a place in the run-off election to be held in March 1970. This occurred 18 months after the first DRUM-led wildcats. The fact that the first election had not been decisive made UAW officials still more apprehensive. The League claimed that even more irregularities occurred during the run-off election than in the original one. On that occasion, for two whole days, the premises of the UAW Local 3 became a contested terrain between young black militants, the UAW “flying squadron” (the union’s security officers), white SDS, Hamtramck Police, conservative white workers, and radical leaders.¹⁴⁰

The League was well organized. This is the only point on which Liska’s and the League’s accounts of the elections concur. The League’s “contingent of supporters far outnumbered the other two slates. Flags and banners [raised] the enthusiasm of black workers to the point of frenzy.” Liska, ever prone to see conspiracies, concluded that “the DRUM organization is sponsored by somebody other than DRUM workers in the plants... the 3 by 4 feet size posters throughout the plant cost a lot of money.” The League had clearly thrown all its resources into the campaign and so had UAW Local 3 leadership. After the events of the first election, the League’s members assumed a more aggressive stance and, on many occasions, they physically clashed with the UAW flying squadron. The controversy concerned, in particular, broken voting machines, which substantially penalized DRUM voters, and the fact that the DRUM challengers had been forced to leave on the second day before the machines had been sealed. Liska maintained, however, that DRUM challengers had watched the machines being sealed before being escorted away.¹⁴¹

Was the election a fraud? Liska’s margin of victory—2732 to 969 votes—seems too wide to be based only on a cheat. Historian Steve Jefferys argued that “DRUM’s defeat was real.”¹⁴² The chaos

surrounding the election at Local 3 in March 1970 far surpassed the actual threat of the League. Overall, its weight had been rapidly declining at Dodge Main. The League had, in fact, multiplied its activities in the community and gained more visibility, but, because of the combination of this diversion of energy and of company repression, the in-plant organizing had almost completely ceased by that time. Furthermore, the lost election represented a major setback for the radicals. The League advocated change through revolution, but, as its leaders knew well, to gain electoral control of UAW Local 3 would have been crucial to their gaining leverage at the point of production. Leading of the union apparatus would have given the League the resources and the legitimacy to again mobilize a substantial number of workers in the plant, would have checked its decline, and would have raised the struggle with the UAW bureaucracy to another level (no doubt a strong repressive response would have followed from the headquarters). None of this was possible in the aftermath of the election. Notwithstanding the charges of fraud filed by DRUM workers, the UAW credentials committee upheld the elections. Chrysler subsequently fired Ron March and other activists.¹⁴³

In this highly charged situation, the tensions inside the leadership imploded. Ken Cockrel, John Watson, and Mike Hamlin, concentrated on a parallel project, the Black Workers Congress, meant to provide a national leadership for the burgeoning black revolutionary movements across the nation that, for a brief period, appeared to be the next development in the black liberation struggle.¹⁴⁴ When James Forman, who had risen to national prominence as the executive secretary of SNCC and who had demanded \$500 million in reparations to Christian churches, joined the trio, the animosity between the different components of the leadership increased.¹⁴⁵ General Baker rejected what, in his view, were self-aggrandizing projects involving civil rights movement celebrities such as Forman. The others retorted that it was they who gathered most of the League resources and that the nationalistic faction (in their view represented by Baker) had “attached itself to the League as so many barnacles to a ship.”¹⁴⁶

In March 1971, the League once again made headlines when the *Detroit News* disclosed that, according to the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, the Communist Party had a working relationship with the radicals and that it was “devoting [its] time to organizing within the plants.”¹⁴⁷ But the League at this point was only nominally present at Chrysler with a handful of militants meeting clandestinely (and

the Communist Party did not fare much better either). Like many radical groups in the United States, Italy, and elsewhere, the League's ability to attract support and to act was not matched by competent organization-building. A combination of factors account for its demise: First, both Chrysler and the UAW increased the number of black supervisors and union officers, defusing an important motive of rank-and-file mobilization, the double standard in promotion. Second, by 1970, the uproar of the 1967 riot had subsided amongst the mainstream black working-class; the issues were still there, but the legacy of the disturbances was less toxic. Third, repression and surveillance both in the factory and outside had isolated key League activists such as General Baker and Ron March and prevented them from organizing on the shop floor or on company premises. Fourth, the vitriolic political vocabulary that the League chose to adopt in the wake of the riot obscured at times the wider compass of its political ideology and blunted its capacity to appeal to the totality of black workers, let alone to white workers, or to construct working alliances with other groups, such as Fox's UAW opposition caucus. Finally, the internal weaknesses: the League had generated too much attention before having consolidated its structure. It spread itself too thinly, too early—Baker was right—and collapsed with the combined repression of Chrysler and UAW. It had not succeeded in addressing important organizational issues and internal factional divisions. In June 1971, the dissenting leaders left the organization. The remaining members soon decided to disband.

Turin's Hot Autumn

Between 1968 and 1971, while events in Detroit were unfolding, the rift between Labor and the new workers in Turin became similarly wide. As in the American case, radicalism found adepts among workers formerly marginal to industrial society, in this case southern Italians. By courting this section of the working class, radical groups posed a political challenge for trade unions: they undermined their image as sole workers' representative. In Italy, the law allowed more than one union to bargain for workers in the same factory, this system meant that workers were not compelled to become members of any of the unions that operated in their plant, but, at the same time, contracts signed by the unions and the company applied to all workers, whether union members or not. Even accounting for these substantial differences in labor law, in both cases, divergent goals, tactics, and political language, between the old Left and the New

Left heightened their antagonism in a pattern not dissimilar from that on the other side of the Atlantic.

Animosity toward radical groups was higher among the staunchest representatives of the old Left: FIOM and PCI officers. The Communists understood that the radicals aimed at divesting them of their historical leadership of the working-class. In September 1969, *L'Unità*, the Communist Party paper, defined the participants of the workers-students assembly as "sordid individuals" who distributed "shoddy leaflets" and "whose arguments resembled those used in neo-fascist propaganda."¹⁴⁸ In the monthly *Rinascita*, the president of the PCI local at Mirafiori remarked, "they are anti-union groups, you feel like beating them up."¹⁴⁹

In the Italian case, unions were apprehensive of the egalitarian demands that upset skill and seniority hierarchies dear to their core constituency and political culture, but as in Detroit the new workers measured justice in terms of equal pay and better working conditions, not in terms of defense of preexisting rights. In addition, it was not only about goals; tactical considerations also differed: unions used strikes as a deterrent or as means of applying pressure in negotiations. They considered strikes to be useful if predictable in length and participation and if they did not cause unwarranted damages that allowed the company to claim compensation or that would upset mainstream public opinion. Union officials believed that conflict proved useful so long as it strengthened organized labor at the bargaining table, but could become counterproductive if it involved manufacturers and workers in a prolonged clash, since workers always held the weaker hand. UAW representatives would have subscribed to the opinion of the Italian Communist trade unionist who stated, "We lead workers to a contract. Whoever damages machinery and starts unauthorized strikes will end up pitting worker against worker."¹⁵⁰ Insofar as radicals obstructed a stable organization and squandered workers' resources in strike after strike, union officials argued, they were acting for the benefit of the company. *L'Unità*, the official paper of the PCI, accused radicals "of dividing the workers to the advantage of the master—FIAT."¹⁵¹ As in Detroit, union officials were surprised by the resources that radical groups were able to muster and even suspected that they were on the payroll of the company. "Unions"—stated a unanimous FIOM-FIM-UILM leaflet—"feel it is their duty to inform workers that corporations and certain political groups are maneuvering to stage acts that are merely provocative in order to dodge workers' real demands and, at the same time, prepare the ground for reactionary forces."¹⁵²

To what extent could radical groups, whose effective membership only ran into the hundreds, offset the leverage of the well-established old Left? Overall, one should not overestimate the influence of political radicals upon the rank and files. At FIAT, it would be a mistake to equate the agency of the radical groups with the extraordinary impact of rank-and-file action. In comparison to the size of the FIAT workforce, Lotta Continua and the others remained minority groups outside the plant and could instigate shop-floor activism only by relying upon sympathizers in the various departments. This cannot account for the many occasions upon which the workers themselves initiated the wildcats. It is more precise and accurate, therefore, to consider radical politics outside FIAT and the rank-and-file action inside as two phenomena sharing some goals, influencing one another and overlapping to a limited extent, but separate nonetheless.

In Turin, FIAT workers' disaffection from the old Left was hardly the making of New Left students. In retrospect, Luigi Bobbio maintained, "It was not the student movement that taught workers to refuse union's representation: it was the workers themselves who claimed that unions were their antagonists... The claim 'we are all delegates (*delegati*)', which many though had derived from the ideology of participatory democracy of the student movement, was actually the workers' watchword. At that time we wouldn't have gone so far. It was workers who were out and out radicals."¹⁵³ New Left leaders such as Bobbio perhaps invoked workers' radicalism a little too often, but there is no lack of evidence that workers did agitate both outside and against organized labor. The production workers' own political voice was often heard within the factory walls, unmediated by that of the union. "Today we can make it with our own means."—declared a worker from Mirafiori's body shop—We don't need any union representation anymore, nor anybody else's. This means that we now decide not only the form of the struggle, but also its goals, the style of its leadership, the way of organizing it and spreading it. This is what manufacturers and union bureaucrats fear the most."¹⁵⁴ When union officials attended the students-workers assemblies, they often found a frosty, if not hostile, reception. They did not belong there. On those occasions, union officials would gain firsthand experience of workers' distrust toward organized labor. For instance, when the assembly debated on issues such as wage increases across the board, which ran counter to the unions' traditional approach of negotiating different pay scales according to skills and seniority, unionists found themselves at odds with what was supposed to be their basic constituency. Italian unions had lost touch with the shop floor. In

an assembly of June 1969, an unskilled worker summed up the mood when he boldly took the stage to state that it was “useless to talk about unions anymore. We have completely lost trust in unions. We workers have no more illusions. Union officers boast about the glorious 1948, but we are now in 1969. After 21 years the Italian worker has come of age and has no need for unions.”¹⁵⁵ Since June 1969, walkouts and shop bargaining activity had become more intense and eluded unions’ control. The Mirafiori Commissione Interna (Workers’ Internal Committee), the obsolete body composed of 18 elected union officials who were supposed to represent the whole 55 thousand-strong plant, and whose majority the Communists had recently recaptured, was totally unable to command the new situation of widespread agitation.

After the revolt of Corso Traiano, July 1969 saw no significant action at FIAT, but observers knew that this was not pacification. It only meant that workers did not want to lose any pay before the holidays in August, when the whole FIAT shut down for retooling. In August, the financial paper *Il Sole 24 Ore* foretold that negotiations would be difficult and aptly dubbed the forthcoming months “*Autunno Caldo*”¹⁵⁶

In autumn, in fact, radical agitation changed the character of industrial relations as rank and files continued, and increasingly so, to engage in militant actions against both FIAT and organized labor. It is noteworthy that this happened during a phase of contract renewal, that is, when unions too had established a plan of industrial action to secure a better bargaining position as well as to respond to the new mood on the shop floor. It was a peculiar feature of the hot autumn, however, that workers kept the initiative, while the unions followed. In Detroit, the UAW had secured the capillary presence of shop stewards; in Turin, unions at this point lacked any actual representation on the shop floor. Workers, therefore, experimented with their own ways of organizing protest in their unit. Worker Gerolamo Chinzer has given a vivid account of how this happened in September 1969:

I remember we had established with my team—we were a reference point for the others—that we would stop at ten sharp. Already at ten to ten everybody stared at my team. And everybody in my team stared at me. I was continuing to work unperturbed. I worked until ten sharp, then turned off the [welding] blowpipe and went to the alley. It was impressive: as soon as I went to the alley I heard a whistle. The presses halted completely, then the lathes, finally

the blast furnaces. Gradually everything halted. In a few minutes the whole shop was silent. And everybody sat at his place. Further down they didn't even know why they stopped. They did so because they assumed that if we had stopped there had to be a reason. Then we waited. After a couple of hours the *Commissione Interna* came. They wanted us to go back to work. We organised an assembly in the refectory. There were two tables. On one I was standing alone. On the other one the members of the *commissione* spoke, one after the other. We had a confrontation lasting for many hours. They talked about the contract. I argued for the 100 lire pay rise and the 36-hour week. What inflamed the shop was the passion and militancy with which I confronted the counterpart.¹⁵⁷

Gerolamo Chinzer's account of this embattled day contains many of the features of the *autunno caldo* at FIAT. One can recognize the workers' autonomous planning of the industrial action before the beginning of the shift; the instant solidarity among them (as the workers on the next line stopped without knowing the exact reason); and the belated intervention of the union officials to quell the unrest and one can also recognize the radical demand for more pay and less work—an impossible request to bargain, from the point of view of the union. Unions, it seemed, could endorse anything contributed to *negotiations*; rank and files acted from a perspective of *liberation* from the existing system of labor relations. Furthermore, the episode of two haranguers addressing a mass of workers from the refectory tables, arguing their respective, antagonistic positions, graphically conveys the extent of workers' opposition to the unions.¹⁵⁸

That the agitation at FIAT had entered a new phase after the walk-out in shop 32 did not escape the management or the unions. FIAT opted for confrontation. Firing those responsible for the wildcat strike would have ignited more actions; therefore, management suspended all the workers in the shops affected by the stoppage in shop 32 (about 40 thousand workers). The company argued that these workers would have remained idle, because the strike created a bottleneck in the flow of production, but the decision was probably designed to divide the common front by also withholding pay from workers who had not directly participated in the strike. However, the suspension did not produce this effect. Quite the contrary, it was regarded as an unfair reprisal and echoed even in Parliament, where left-wing members demanded an official enquiry into its motivation.¹⁵⁹

Unions faced the dilemma of how to keep pace with increasing radicalization in the plants and, at the same time, conduct negotiations

and deliver a reasonable contract. They decided to anticipate the opening of negotiations with a number of strikes for the whole metalworkers sector—FIAT workers included. Contrary to the usual practice, FIOM-FIM-UILM this time decided that strikes could take place even during negotiations. Their bargaining agenda introduced most of the demands that Meridionali had put forward in the spring: an across-the-board wage increase; a reduction of the working week to 40 hours; equality of benefits for clerical workers as regards sick leave; and the right to hold internal assemblies. Unions announced strikes for the whole sector on September 11, 19, and 25. Yet once again, radicals questioned both the bargaining agenda and the tactics of struggle. Lotta Continua argued that the unions' requests were now inadequate, that the goal could not be the contract, but workers' power, and that workers should economize on strike hours and opt for a more effective way of putting pressure on the company. For Lotta Continua, the internal strike, as practiced on and off during the spring, was a far more successful tactic than the traditional strike. By striking at different hours of the day, workers could halt production without losing their entire pay. Conversely, an "external" strike deprived workers of a whole day's pay and might eventually become too onerous to continue.¹⁶⁰

At the end of September, while union strikes had attained rates of participation of up to 95 percent, the company still resisted the kind of large concession that the unions demanded, and was, of course, completely hostile to more radical demands. Workers were not longer amenable to expensive external strikes. They, therefore, reverted to the spontaneous disruption of work that had characterized the spring and that had put unions on the alert.¹⁶¹ Without representatives on the shop floor, union officials found these forms of struggle difficult to control. From the unions' point of view, another risk was that spontaneous actions could have ended up damaging machinery or injuring staff, which would have undermined their positions at the bargaining table. However, only by shifting to more radical forms of protest were FIAT workers able to continue the struggle, and eventually achieve substantial benefits.

The literature on the *autunno caldo* has often emphasized that new demands were accompanied by new tactics of industrial action. The procession through the several departments of the immense Mirafiori complex became the most characteristic expression of workers' militancy during the *autunno caldo*. This form of action plunged FIAT's repressive system of surveillance into crisis. Internal processions implied an immediate, face-to-face confrontation between the

strikers and the hierarchical structure. Foremen could fine and fire individual workers who abandoned their posts, but could themselves become the target of abuse if workers joined in a large procession. The procession was, therefore, a risky form of action that proved successful if many in the department took part.

The procession went through the departments picking up the workers along the way, and the foremen as well. We would go behind all of them unfolding long ropes and suck them in, foremen included, although the latter would disentangle themselves and run away. But workers remained and typically the last to be drawn in would then use the ropes to incorporate other workers in the next department.¹⁶²

The internal procession served to win over reluctant and fearful workmates, a tactical necessity if one sought to avoid company's retaliation against the ringleaders. The visual impact of a long train of workers advancing as frightened foremen fled before them, ridiculed managerial authority. A foreman recalled that when the procession approached, drums loudly beating, "it gave the impression of a bellicose army."¹⁶³ As well as symbolically expressing workers' need for liberation from the oppressive factory system, the internal procession also represented the most effective tactics against an obdurate company. This was also recognized by Fiom-Fim-Uilm when they progressively endorsed strikes that paralyzed different departments at different times—thereby maximizing the damage to the company, but departing from the conventions of traditional industrial conflict.¹⁶⁴

The procession was often a self-organized workers' action, but it was supported by radicals who held that only stepping up conflict beyond the bargaining table would lead to incremental gains on the shop floor and, eventually, to the collapse of a system based on workers' exploitation. Strikes should assume novel forms and be unpredictable, so as to upset capitalist planning (in the workerist sense of a system of societal regulation based upon increasing factory production). Workers should not shy away from "extreme" or "illegal" forms of action. Damage to company machinery or the occasional violence directed at an uncooperative supervisor or white-collar workers was the specular opposite of the everyday violence endured by the production workers. To transfer conflict from the picket line to the bargaining table meant to compromise, to play by capitalist rules, and eventually to provide advantage to the company.

The most radical workers believed that the degree of violence necessary to stage these internal actions had its own rationale when viewed as a response to the capitalist violence of the employer imposing brutal working conditions. A FIAT worker called it “counter-violence.” One common practice during the *autunno caldo* consisted, in fact, in forcing foremen and sometimes white-collar staff to run the gantlet between two long lines of workers. The unfortunate victims were drenched in spit, kicked in the back, and subjected to obscenities. At other times, they were simply beaten up. In a few instances, workers yielded to acts of Luddism by overturning cars on the line and raiding the refectory. The same worker concluded that “in a plant you both inflict and suffer violence.”¹⁶⁵ Radical groups too sanctioned a certain degree of violence. “Smashing the dirty food-warmers in the refectory and toppling the assembly lines was our first timely reply to the boss’s reprisals,” wrote *Potere Operaio* in the hot November. “A number of workers have vented their rage by chasing strikebreakers. Since these are increasingly difficult to find, they hit out at the more passive workers or at smashed machinery and tools. This is an important point: when workers see the machine as their enemy they are right,” commented *Lotta Continua* in the same vein. However, radical groups insisted—sometimes against factual evidence—that this was no ordinary violence; it was class violence, a “conscious revolt” of class-conscious workers.¹⁶⁶

This type of protest had no precedents at FIAT. It was evidence for the ultimate failure of the hegemonic project of the company to disarm class struggle within its plants. It was also an indication that FIAT’s recruitment policy had gone awry. In 1967, Chrysler had opened the assembly line to “inner city” blacks; in the same year, FIAT managers (under the new leadership of Giovanni Agnelli after the death of Valletta) abandoned the traditional policy of carefully screening job applicants. Left-wing militancy seemed to have withered away and it was a moment when consumer demand for Italian automobiles was rapidly increasing. In the course of 1969, FIAT hired no less than 15 thousand migrants directly from the south, most of them without any previous industrial experience. These workers joined the thousands of *Meridionali* hired during the 1950s and 1960s.

It was this group of marginalized workers who fuelled the unrest in 1969. For Turinese autoworker Vincenzo Damiano, “when FIAT saw fit it made no distinctions. The company hired a whole bunch of hoodlums without any previous information. When I was hired they asked everywhere who I was.”¹⁶⁷ “It was a totally different working

class,”—remembers a former New Left militant—“which came from another planet, which was alienated and which rejected [industrial] work and the organization of it and which therefore did not experience the factory as a place in which to employ its talent...but as a place of despondency and domination.”¹⁶⁸ To the astonishment of fellow Piedmontese workers, young Meridionali brazened it out: “Listen, Mr. Supervisor...I’m not afraid of you.”—threatened a migrant who had been reproached for slowing down his pace of work—“I’m 23, even if I spend the next 20 year in jail, I will still be young when I’m released, but you won’t be there when I’m released.”¹⁶⁹ Traditions of southern resistance, involving “standing up to the big man” were imported into the new setting. A puzzled northern FIAT manager once remarked to a group of southern strikers: “What do you expect from us? Yesterday you were at the hoe and today you raise your head.”¹⁷⁰ But the idea of southern acquiescence was a myth and the situation on the shop floor was, in some respects, analogous to the southern experience of working as a farmhand in that bosses had the same arbitrary disciplinary power. One worker remarked: “It was *Meridionali* with their impoliteness (*maleducazione*) who started to break up the [factory] discipline.”¹⁷¹

Responding to working conditions inside the plant and to living conditions in the neighborhoods, these migrants were as likely to transform their social identity through labor struggles and participation in radical politics as through vocational training and integration to the “thrifty” northern society.¹⁷² Andrea Papaleo, a southerner hired in 1969 at Mirafiori, told an interviewer:

So far, I’ve never had a chance to listen to them (the radicals of *Lotta Continua*) in person. I agreed with their aims and I liked their language. This was simple, direct, not like the language of the unions, who hardly ever distributed leaflets and the few times they did they were incomprehensible. My encounter with politics began in this way. I started to attend meetings regularly with other workers. I attended gladly because I could always learn something new and free of charge!¹⁷³

In the meetings with fellow migrant workers and northern students, southerners such as Papaleo became familiar with the revolutionary ideology that inspired the militant organizations.

For the migrant, the struggle represented a first stage on the path to integrating into the new industrial society.¹⁷⁴ Commitment to radical or union politics was often secondary to the individual goal

of obtaining social "recognition." In addition, it was an opportunity to fashion a new self. That is why it is difficult to establish to what extent, in both Turin and Detroit, migrants were a part of radical politics. The story of Domenico Norcia is a case in point. He left Apulia for Stuttgart, Germany where, even without speaking German, he led a wildcat in an auto plant. This experience radicalized him. In the late 1960s, in the last wave of recruitment to the automobile industry, Norcia moved to Turin and entered FIAT Mirafiori where he looked immediately for a union, but no one on his line belonged to one. By chance he ran into a FIM-CISL activist outside the plant and joined. Undaunted by pressure from the foreman he was on the first line when the situation in the shop heated up. He had joined groups that were highly critical of the unions. "I attempted," he recalls, "to introduce into the union the ideas we discussed in those meetings, but I was always 'put on trial' for doing so."¹⁷⁵ Evidently, Norcia's theoretical inconsistency and aggressive militancy embarrassed Catholic FIM officials, and yet they did not expel him, since at this time unions competed for activists with the New Left groups. Norcia became one of the leading militants in his department, organizing processions inside the plant to encourage workers to strike, and distressing the FIM leadership by enthusiastically beating up strike-breakers. He was eventually elected as a union shop steward.¹⁷⁶

The political ambiguity of many workers derived from their own complex personal motivations for joining a union or a radical group. For migrants, the boundaries between New and old Left were not as defined as they were for the northern skilled workers who were aware of the traditions of left-wing working class politics. Migrants looked at political participation primarily as a means to win recognition of their status as citizens and as participants in the industrial relations.

October 1969 marked a change of direction in the trade unions' strategy toward the spontaneous industrial conflict that had surged through FIAT since September. On October 3, union representatives from numerous Turinese factories gathered at the Camera del Lavoro and, after a lengthy debate, resolved to adopt some of the "unorthodox" methods of struggle of the radical groups such as the staggered strike, short stoppages to hit different shops at different times.¹⁷⁷ It was a measure of the radicalization of the workforce that the four unions at FIAT (FIM, FIOM, UILM, and SIDA), though of different political orientations, united in calling such a strike for October 8. Participants assembled without leaving the plant during four hours in each shift. They elected representatives and organized internal

processions in those shops where support was weaker.¹⁷⁸ In reality, the thrust of the action still originated with the rank and file, but it mattered that unions were now buttressing it: it was an important step toward gaining ascendancy over the unskilled workforce—the southern migrants included—and it undermined the leverage of the radical groups. As in the previous weeks, violence against industrial equipment and white collars occurred during these actions, putting the unions in the embarrassing predicament of supporting the strikes but condemning the violence. Even though endorsing more militant tactics, unions still saw their role as that of mediating between the most extremist tendencies, in their view self-defeating, and workers' aspirations for improvement. In mid-October, the unions endorsed a new round of strikes, but cooperated with the police to prevent the workers' occupation of a part of Mirafiori. Communist unionists also sought to deflect a mass workers' protest disrupting the Turin Auto Salon, the annual high-profile auto show that celebrated the industry's technological achievement and drew business visitors from all over the world.¹⁷⁹

To all interested observers, what was unfolding seemed to be of historic proportions: on October 15, 1969, 33 thousand out of 42 thousand FIAT workers were on strike. Lancia, the smaller Turin car manufacturer acquired by FIAT at that time, also saw its workforce go on strike in a pattern that replicated the events in the flagship plant.¹⁸⁰ Most of them did not stay at home; they instead gathered in assemblies or initiated internal processions so as to open up the workplace to forms of participatory democracy. In doing so, they went much further than their counterparts in Detroit, where Chrysler dealt effectively with such conduct by adopting repressive measures. It was not that American employers were exceptional in their authoritarianism, but rather that they had perfected a system of industrial relations in which unions had a stake in punishing such breaches of contract. In Italy, however, unions saw rank-and-file unrest as a political opportunity. At the end of October 1969, the staggered strike, the assemblies, and the processions were all weapons in the unions' arsenal. Organized labor had borrowed the radicals' tactics, though not their revolutionary goals.

Throughout October the initiative came from the embattled shop floor, whether spontaneously from the workers or facilitated by the radical groups. But in November, unions showed on a number of occasions that they commanded the largest following among the industrial workforce. On November 15, unions condemned the disciplinary lay-off of 30 workers who had protested in the latest processions (151 more

workers had been disciplined since the beginning of June). This was a controversial position as these workers had allegedly participated in the violent acts against equipment, supervisors, and white-collar employees that unions had always vehemently denounced. However, FIM, FIOM and UILM called off the national contract negotiations until management had reinstated the workers. They aimed to put FIAT on the spot and under pressure from Confindustria to solve the matter. After a few days, the company backed off by reducing most of the penalties to a face-saving three-day suspension from work. It was not the full retreat that radicals called for, but it did nonetheless show that, much to their dismay, union influence had steeply increased in the course of just a few months.¹⁸¹

On November 18, in the thick of the controversy about the laid-off strikers, the unions (now often referred to as *il sindacato*, the union, without political divisions) assembled thousands of car workers at the city's indoor arena to "put FIAT on trial." Participation was not restricted to union members but open to all workers and, even though union officers dominated the line up, non-card holding southerners and even one radical made it onto the stage. The latter had to fight his way to the microphone, while his supporters were manhandled by the security guards and escorted out of the venue.¹⁸² Attendance was overwhelming. It was the manifestation of a core of strident militants active within the most important Italian industrial complex—one that until recently had managed to allay discontent with a mix of repression and paternalism. It also showed that, since the beginning of the uprising in the previous spring, unions had become less like institutions and more like movements that competed in political mobilization with the radicals. Though there was no overarching consensus about political strategy, the participants revelled in the vision of a more united working-class. In retrospect, for those workers who gathered in the same place ten years later to mark the anniversary of the event (in a wholly changed industrial relations context), it was the defining moment for a generation of working-class activists in Turin.¹⁸³

On November 19, unions called a national strike against high rents and for housing-law reform that saw a massive turnout in industrial cities such as Turin and Milan where the shortage or low quality of housing had been a social problem in the previous decades. As on other occasions, unions and radicals opted for two different marches, but it was now the unions who commanded the largest support. In Milan, 21-year old law enforcement officer Antonio Annarumma (himself a southern migrant), who died in unclear circumstances

during the clashes between police and protesters, became a symbol for the conservative public opinion. This episode further exacerbated the cleavage between the protesters and what, in Italy too, would be construed as the "silent majority."¹⁸⁴ In Turin, thousands of industrial workers attended the march, which terminated in a union rally in central Piazza Solferino. The divisions in the piazza reflected the political divisions in the factories. A large cohort of radicals contested the union-sponsored gathering and invited workers to continue the march at the same time as the policemen in full antiriot gear were ready to intervene and disperse the crowd. The unions had also deployed their own security staff to form a buffer zone between the radicals and the workers.¹⁸⁵ Lotta Continua argued that strikes were, of course, welcome, but thought it was mistaken to shoot at too many targets at once: rents, salaries, health, and housing, should be all part of the same campaign, and working-class struggles should be unified, not fragmented. It was a somewhat nebulous argument, and not very consistent since, at around this time, radicals also started their own campaigns in the neighborhoods, but these incongruities simply showed how difficult it was to maintain momentum when unions were advocating the prosecution of social change by means of reform.

Since September, the two levels of the industrial conflict, the local and the national, had interacted: At national level, the metalworking unions negotiated a national metalworkers contract; at local level, the Turinese branches fought for the specific shape that the contract would have taken at FIAT. Due to their significance, FIAT workers influenced both processes. Negotiations had started in September, but both FIAT and Confindustria, the association of manufacturers, were reluctant to accept the new balance of power between shop floor and management. As unions had wielded so little power in the workplace in the previous 15 years, and because bargaining had for so long been conducted centrally, not on the shop floor, employers probably assumed that the wave of strikes would gradually subside and that industrial relations would revert to the status quo. At national level, negotiations between unions and employers had frequently broken off because of the intransigence of both actors: metalworking unions had proposed far-reaching reforms of industrial and workplace relations, but industrialists were not convinced of the need to yield too much ground. On November 28, following another round of stalled negotiations, unions showed manufacturers, the government, and radicals alike, just how great a consensus they commanded among their base. On that day, in Piazza del Popolo in Rome, more than

100 thousand metalworkers from all over Italy, but mainly from industrial centers such as Turin and Milan, gathered to listen to the speeches of the three national metalworking union leaders, Macario (UILM), Trentin (FIOM), and Benvenuto (FIM)—representing three unions previously at loggerheads but who had been supporting the same platform since July. A film documentary titled “Contratto,” an account of the 1969 metalworking negotiations, commissioned by the FIOM and directed by Ugo Gregoretti, captured a cheery and noisy crowd, predominantly young, parading en masse through the streets of Rome, beating out rhythms on tin objects and chanting union slogans to reclaim the public space and, through the medium of the television, to gain a national audience.¹⁸⁶

The public demonstration at Rome ushered in the last stage of the collective bargaining, under the constant pressure of strikes across Italy. On December 8, the unions sealed the deal with the state-owned steel mills (whose metalworkers were under the protection of the same unions as automobile workers). Unions and Confindustria, to which FIAT belonged, signed the metalworkers collective agreement on December 21, 1969, almost three months after the start of negotiations. The PCI and the unions considered the Italian labor movement’s achievements the most important of all. FIOM’s Trentin declared that the contract “laid the basis for having a new and more advanced weight in society and in the workplace.”¹⁸⁷ At the opposite end of the spectrum, Angelo Costa, the president of Confindustria, declared that the agreement had been the outcome of political pressure and violent actions in the workplace.¹⁸⁸ For their part, radicals maintained that the contract introduced negligible improvements for the workers, but significant gains for the unions. They expressed the concern that it might curb rank-and-file militancy and channeled it into a bureaucratized unionism. In the lights of events in Detroit, this was more than a legitimate preoccupation: it was precisely what happened after the militant CIO’s organizing drive in the late 1930s (this analogy was familiar to contemporaries as Detroit’s labor history was often revisited by workerist thinkers).¹⁸⁹ At the same time, argued Lotta Continua, “The struggles have been useful. We are now stronger. We have taken the fight into our own hands at a crucial moment and we have imposed the internal strikes... we have set up the assemblies... we, body-assembly workers, by disrupting production eight days in a row, have enforced the signing of the contract.”¹⁹⁰

The contract introduced a substantial across-the-board wage increase, equalization of benefits for blue- and white-collar staff, the reduction of the workweek to 40 hours (it had previously been

44), and limits to overtime. It sanctioned the end of the 1950s-style discrimination against organized labor by recognizing a number of union rights such as the right to hold assemblies during working hours and in the workplace and the establishment of *delegates* or shop stewards spearheaded at FIAT. It was a direct outcome of the kind of participatory democracy forged during the *autunno caldo* that not only were the shop stewards to be elected by a majority of workers in each particular shop, but they did not have to be actual union members (this would change later). In other words, unions extended their protection to the delegates, without exercising political pressure. On the whole, the 1969 contract made the Italian industrial workplace one of the more democratic in the Western world and laid the basis for a labor legislation that was more progressive in comparative terms than the New Deal's Wagner Act in the United States had been.

Transnational Radicalism in the Motor Cities

The radical groups that had captured the spontaneous discontent breeding in the factories and in the working-class neighborhoods of Detroit and Turin in the late 1960s had incorporated into their programs many of the insights gleaned in the previous 15 years by the Johnson-Forest Tendency, Correspondence, *Quaderni Rossi*, and *Classe Operaia*. DRUM, then League of Revolutionary Workers in Detroit, and Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio in Turin represented a—sometimes uneasy—synthesis of this older tradition of radicalism with the activism of the New Left students.

The leaders of DRUM—General Baker, John Watson, Mike Hamlin, Chuck Wooten, among others derived a crucial part of their political education from the radical groups of the early 1960s. The leading members of DRUM came of age just as Communists, Trotskyists, and their splinter groups were tentatively rebuilding their organizations after McCarthyism and were actively looking for coverts. Of these, the most influential were Correspondence and Facing Reality, where Martin Glaberman, James Boggs, and Grace Lee Boggs acted as charismatic mentors and made a strong impression on the rising generation.¹⁹¹ Another important locus of discussion was the Socialist Workers Party's Friday Night Forum held at Debs Hall. According to the memoirs of those who attended it, this event attracted from 50 to 200 people at a time, a considerable number for the milieu of radical politics. Many participants, like the young African American workers and students, were onlookers attracted by the lively debates, discussions, and presentations. The weekly appointment fostered many

personal and political friendships that probably account for the generally good relations between black and white radicals in Detroit. A crucial factor in attracting African Americans was the fact that the branch of the Socialist Workers' Party housed hundreds of books not available elsewhere, including the literature on Malcolm X, who, at the time, mainstream media considered to be a dangerous extremist. Two years after the Cuban revolution, the Socialist Workers Party organized a trip to Cuba, in spite of the official ban on traveling there. For some of those who would later go on to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the visit to Cuba, where they met Fidel Castro and "Che" Guevara, was a crucial experience in raising their awareness of the task at home. One activist summed up what they had learnt when he said, "We came back with some level of responsibility."¹⁹²

The parallels to the situation unfolding in Turin were as striking to contemporaries as they are to historians now. In the Italian Motor city, Lotta Continua (the organization with the largest following) and Potere Operaio had also refined their political line by adapting the basic principles of the workerist tradition to the mounting unrest in the automobile plants. As in Detroit, so too in Turin the younger leaders, such as Adriano Sofri, Luigi Bobbio, Mario Dalmaviva, Franco Piperno, Emilio Vesce, and Sergio Bologna, had honed their political skills with more seasoned thinkers such as Renato Panzieri and Mario Tronti; other participants in the Turinese movement came from the ranks of the student movement. In the spring and summer of 1969, Lotta Continua, whose core leadership initially consisted only of students, reached out to the production workers in FIAT factories (mostly southern migrants) by advocating "liberation" from union control. They claimed that unions were "official" institutions which could no longer genuinely represent the workers. They held that the union-negotiated contract could not or should not become a "cage" imprisoning the insurrectionary impulses of the workers. In addition, more explicitly than in Detroit, Turinese radicals demanded "less work and more money."¹⁹³ In both cases the high level of unauthorized industrial conflict—often in the shape of innovative protest actions, such as demonstrating within the plants, partial and temporary stoppages on the line—seemed to confirm the radicals' key insight of a growing gap between the institutions of the traditional Left and the workers; workers, they claimed, were organizing themselves and bypassing the checks and restraints of the union procedural rules.

It was in this context that intellectual and personal contacts between Detroit and Turin radicals dating back to the late 1950s were rekindled by the almost simultaneous workers' struggles in the car factories. Italian militants avidly followed the development of black workers' struggles in the United States through publications such as *Quaderni Piacentini* and *Collettivo CR*, which featured pieces (often in translation) about the black liberation movement, the anti-war movement, as well as specifically about Detroit. At a time when circulation of international news was limited to the circuit of mainstream media, many individuals dedicated themselves to the task of bringing the latest news of protest groups from across the Atlantic. Sandro Sarti, the first translator of Mills's *White Collars* into Italian, had lived and worked in the United States for four years in the 1960s and on his return to Turin, kept in contact with New Left supporters. The latter would send Sarti updates about the social movements that, in turn, he archived, translated and published in the widely circulating *Bulletin of the Collettivo CR*.¹⁹⁴

Ferruccio Gambino, a young activist close to *Classe Operaia*, and later a member of *Potere Operaio*, joined the Facing Reality group when he visited Detroit for a few months in 1967. On that occasion, Gambino formed a long-standing friendship with Martin Glaberman. The two established a sort of bridge between Detroit and a host of Italian cities, thus enabling political activists on both sides of the Atlantic to travel, exchange literature, and discuss analogies and differences between their respective national contexts.¹⁹⁵ The following year, George Rawick was Gambino's guest in Padua where the latter was a junior member of the faculty in the Department of Sociology. Rawick—a long-time associate of James and Glaberman, a radical historian and the author of *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, a pioneering study of the slave's experience—lectured local militants of *Potere Operaio* on the African American struggle. In 1968, James Boggs, the charismatic black radical who had broken with C. L. R. James, toured Italian universities during the campus occupations talking to students about Black Power and the revolutionary groups in Detroit.¹⁹⁶

Two other radical intellectuals played a crucial role in establishing links between Italian and American radicals. One was Roberto Giammanco, a professor of Philosophy at Wayne State University who had long since left his native Pisa, but who had not severed all ties with the left-wing academic world in Italy. Giammanco had published the earliest book-length analysis of Black Power available in Italian, *Black Power—Potere negro*, and was the first to translate into Italian

the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, whom he knew personally.¹⁹⁷ It was Giammanco who facilitated Boggs's lecture tour in 1968 and arranged for the translation and publication of his *The American Revolution in Italy*. Although not much is known about him, Giammanco emerged as a crucial node in the circulation of ideas and people between Detroit and Italy.¹⁹⁸

The other key figure was Dan Georgakas, an intellectual and militant of Greek origin who had lived all his life in Detroit and who closely observed the parallel developments in Detroit and Turin. Georgakas had studied with Giammanco at Wayne State University and first travelled to Italy in 1964 on a social science exchange program organized by Giammanco's wife.¹⁹⁹ In the following ten years, Georgakas travelled back and forth between Detroit and Italy, writing in Italian New Left journals about the movement in the United States and in American radical magazines about the Italian workers' protests; he later cowrote the first full-length historical treatment of the League of Revolutionary Black workers. Georgakas facilitated the first trip of John Watson to Italy in December 1968, when the leader of the League addressed a New Left conference on the theme of anti-imperialism. When Watson visited Turin, the student movement was at its peak and several departments of the local university had seen drawn-out occupations. The Italians wanted to know about Black Power and the automobile workers' strikes in Detroit; Watson, in turn, learnt about the new Italian radicalism. His trip, thus, served to perpetuate and extend the circulation of ideas, tactics, and projects that had characterized the exchanges between Italian and American radicals since the late 1950s. However, at this point, after the riot of July 1967 and the DRUM-led strikes of 1968, workers' radicalism was more widespread in Detroit than in Turin. "Watson," according to Georgakas "was amazed at what he considered the tactical and ideological timidity of the Italian Marxists, especially given their enormous working-class base."²⁰⁰ However, as we have seen the situation soon reversed itself.

Parallel Developments

It is difficult to assess the degree to which these reciprocal contacts were influencing the evolving movements in Turin and Detroit; they nevertheless attest that for the protagonists, the international dimension was an important motor of local struggles—an aspect that is generally neglected by historians. This awareness further increased

when industrial conflict intensified in Turin's FIAT factories in the spring and autumn of 1969. By October 1969, occasional strikes at FIAT's flagship plant Mirafiori had developed into almost daily agitations. The departments most affected were the core production units of bodywork, chassis, and paint, where southern migrants comprised the overwhelming majority of the workforce. Southerners, to be sure, figured among both the most militant agitators and the most stubborn "scabs" who tried to cross the picket lines. But, in 1969, the former carried the day and, as we have seen, their struggle assumed startlingly original forms.²⁰¹

In 1970, in the wake of the hot autumn, John Watson, on his second trip to Italy, toured several cities, Turin among them, to promote his self-produced documentary about the League, the film *Finally Got the News*. Apart from short reports in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, no full-length account of the Italian workers' struggle was available in Detroit from the mainstream media. Watson and other members of the League were informed about the Italian workers' struggle thanks to the network of contacts established by Glaberman, Giammanco, Georgakas, Gambino, and others, who also provided logistical help for Watson's Italian trips. From an American perspective, Detroit radicals were impressed both by the intensity of the struggle and its resilience; indeed, notwithstanding substantial improvements in working conditions and in real wages, FIAT workers continued to engage in spontaneous strikes until 1973, though by then the unions had succeeded in outflanking even the most radical groups, while the government had enacted a progressive Statuto dei Lavoratori. Italians were also keen to learn about Detroit since little leaked out in the Italian press on labor unrest in the American cities. "Everybody is asking information about the auto strikes in the States," wrote Gambino to Glaberman in that year.²⁰² Visiting Italy at a time when the factories seemed to be on the point of exploding, Watson observed how the political landscape had been profoundly and quickly altered by the hot autumn. During this second visit, he found many more similarities with what was occurring in Detroit, in at a time when the League's impact was at its height. He came back to the United States, "insisting that the [American] situation was not substantially different from the Italian, even with its own peculiarities." For their part, the Italians saw, in Watson, the embodiment of the insurgent spirit of black Americans, noticing that he "looked like the son of Malcolm X."²⁰³ However, Italian radicals also discerned marked parallels with what was occurring in Detroit and saw the need to establish a communication channel between two waves of

struggle, which, though very far apart, were almost synchronized. Bruno Cartosio, a supporter of Potere Operaio, later recalled, "It was interesting for us to disseminate our analysis of the American reality, with the aim or the hope of using that analysis to understand also the Italian reality."²⁰⁴ Paolo Virno, another militant in the same group, observed that "fighting at FIAT of Turin, we were thinking of Detroit, not Cuba or Algiers," meaning that, in their view, the revolution was destined to break out among the industrial workers who figured so prominently in the Motor cities, not in the Third World.²⁰⁵ One could even say, not without irony, that "events in the Michigan plants were probably followed more avidly in Turin and other industrial centers than anywhere in the United States."²⁰⁶ In Italy, Watson sold many copies of the League's documentary, *Finally Got the News*, which even made it to the prestigious independent film festival at Pesaro.²⁰⁷

There are striking similarities, as well as important differences, in the way industrial relations broke down in the automobile factories and social protest flared up in Detroit and Turin after 1968. In both cases, a massive wave of migration had recomposed the working class and drastically changed the demographics of the two cities. Tensions over competition for housing and resources between newcomers and natives were compounded by ethnic (and in Detroit, racial) prejudices. Racial discrimination took a heavier toll on African Americans, since they were victims of a racially segmented labor and housing market, of police brutality, and of none too subtle forms of social segregation. In Turin, Italian southern migrants likewise encountered housing discrimination and were concentrated in run-down sections of the city center or in building projects in degraded suburbs poorly connected to the rest of the metropolitan area. Even though their problems were not exacerbated by "race," southern migrants were at the mercy of a dual labor market, typical of Fordism, that allotted high-paid steady jobs to natives, and precarious low wage occupations to newcomers. As Turin and Detroit were industrial cities, the experience and the standing of southern migrants and blacks within the factories mattered a lot to their overall positions in the community, in terms of income, political influence, and symbolic status. The parallel trajectories of the two cities were determined by the structural configuration and urban concentration of the Fordist industry par excellence: the automobile industry.

Working-class unrest in Turin and Detroit shared an important feature in that they both featured the activism of social groups occupying a marginal position in the political economy of the city. In the

American Motor city, many militants saw the actions in the factories as a continuation of the black liberation movement: it was difficult to disentangle the struggle against capitalism and the one against racism when corporate and union practices seemed to work mostly to the detriment of the black workers. Others, however, in the radical camp, saw a link between working-class unrest in Detroit and the global struggle of the marginal and downtrodden against the hegemony of capitalism and the ruling classes everywhere. In both cases, the distinct cultural background of the “new workers” shaped the tactics, political language, and goals of the movement. They subverted the traditional class narrative of insubordination against capital by elevating cultural, regional, or racial “difference” to political importance. Americans had long associated European immigration with radicalism, but this argument did not usually apply to internal migration, the kind that brought tens of thousands of southern blacks to Detroit in the 1940s, 1950s, and also, but to a lesser extent, in the 1960s.²⁰⁸ Similarly, in Italy, few would have imagined after the war that southerners were destined to become a major force of political change. On the contrary, industrialists and unionists; conservatives and Communists all expected southern migrants to sap working-class consciousness.

Did the uprising of African Americans and southern migrants in the factories vindicate the idea of the autonomy of the working-class? Yes, but only to a limited extent. All the surveys and reports on this period indicated that protesters lived *outside* organized labor and (in Italy) the Marxist tradition, but not necessarily *against* them. Protesters brought their own agenda for change to the workplace. This agenda was influenced by the recomposition of the industrial working class and contemplated the achievement of dignity and justice, as well as better working conditions or more pay, issues that were de facto ignored by the organizations deemed to represent their class until the outbreak of the protest. However, organized labor, at the same time as it battled against autonomy, reformed itself to reflect the new class composition and undermined radicalism by taking on board (to a different extent in the two cities) the newcomers’ claims to “recognition.”

In some respects Detroit’s and Turin’s radical groups spoke a different political language from each other. Even though the leaders of the League described themselves as Marxist-Leninists, their ideology included elements of Black Nationalism—as indicated by their racially virulent language. This political language allowed members of the League to establish extensive contacts with competing

revolutionary organizations, such as the Republic of New Africa and the Black Panthers, and, in general, to benefit from the set of ideas about “liberation” that first the civil rights movement and then Black Power had formulated. Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio, however, explicitly rejected the Leninist label, so as to underscore their breach with the hegemonic tradition of the Italian Communist Party. In both cases, however, ideological dogmas were secondary to the pragmatic issues of factory and community organizing for revolutionary change. The fact that these groups emerged and were consolidated in two cities shaped by similar social phenomena set their agenda in a comparable way.

When DRUM appeared in the Chrysler plants in May 1968 as an organizational force to be reckoned with, it had not previously developed a coherent set of demands. In many respects, its 14 (later 16) points program reflected the workers’ grievances voiced during the unauthorized strikes. DRUM’s 14 demands were outrageous and racially subversive. However, observers were mistaken in the assumption that the black workers’ agitation could be framed exclusively in terms of “race.” DRUM differed from contemporary Black Power-style groups, inasmuch as it aimed to organize African Americans as *workers*, exploiting their leverage at the point of production. In the self-produced movie *Finally Got the News* John Watson explained, “You get a lot of arguments that black people are not numerous enough in America to revolt, that they will be wiped out. This neglects our economic position... There are groups that can make the whole system cease functioning. These are autoworkers, bus drivers, postal workers, steel workers and other who play a crucial role in the money flow, the flow of materials, the creation of production. By and large black people are overwhelmingly in those kind of jobs.”²⁰⁹ The 14 demands spoke a political language redolent of the civil rights movement and of the increasingly prominent Black Nationalism, but it also reflected the legacy of Detroit’s tradition of autonomous Marxism—a tradition that, as we have seen, had much in common with the theoretical speculations of the Italian workerists. Their demands also included the call to work fewer hours, in a safer environment, and at higher rates of pay, a rejection of the constraining union grievances’ procedure (“The grievance procedure is used to prevent workers from using their strike power to fight abuses from management”²¹⁰), the refusal of union dues, and, in general, of the union’s bureaucracy. In a comparative perspective, Detroit radicals were short-sighted in opting for a Black Nationalist framework to their multifaceted demands. In Turin, where southern Italians were

considered to be of a different ethnicity, radicals adhered to a more inclusive class language.

Radical struggle, though it failed in its own terms (it did not bring radical change), heralded important improvements for the rank and file. In effect, in both Turin and Detroit, the small groups formed by a mix of vanguard workers, students, and political dissidents championed a vast array of working-class “rights.” Although the UAW and Chrysler made no concessions to DRUM (or the League), within two years of its appearance Local 3 elected a black president, though not a person radicals would have approved of. Elaine, whose story opened this chapter, became a shop steward and, interestingly, saw no incongruity between her time as a radical sympathizer and her move into the union hierarchy.²¹¹ Chrysler appointed black supervisory staff in the plant to deflect accusations of discrimination, and even some radical supporters moved into the supervisory ranks.²¹² By 1973, during a subsequent wave of wildcats at Chrysler’s Detroit plants, protest was markedly interracial—conditions on the shop floor being equally bad for both black and white workers.

6

Conclusion: Two Different Paths

In 1971, two different issues of *Radical America*, the New Left magazine launched by members of the SDS and read nationally by white radicals, covered the almost simultaneous stories of shop-floor dissent and urban protest from Detroit and Turin. In the United States, the League was still barely known outside Detroit, even though some national papers had briefly reported the news of the wildcat strikes. *Radical America* wanted “the reader to know about this organization and its crucial importance in the development of a revolutionary movement in America.”¹

The introduction, however, portrayed the League in a rather misleading fashion. In the first place, it described the League as a Black Nationalist group in the tradition of Marcus Garvey, but with an interest in class struggle; most League statements clearly indicated that it was just the opposite: it was a class organization that sometimes spoke with Black Nationalist overtones. The editors of *Radical America* failed to grasp that the League’s novelty consisted in fusing the legacy of dissident Marxism with the insurgent language of Black Power. Second, these same editors placed the League in the international context of the anticolonial struggle (“It is now more a struggle of the rich nations versus the poor nations... and the latter are predominantly non-white countries”), thus ignoring its significance in the international workers’ struggle against Fordism that was occurring in Europe, rather than in the Third World.² Finally, *Radical America* heralded the League as the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle in American and as a group of “extremely wide and successful impact” at a time when its commitment to industrial conflict was actually in decline and when internal fissures were weakening its organizational structure.³ Indeed, for the reasons that we have already discussed, the League dissolved in June 1971, a few months after the publication of this particular issue of *Radical America*, even though many of its leaders continued to be involved in radical activism.

Radical America likewise told the story of the hot autumn in Turin, two years after the events, though Detroit's radicals had known about it long before. The editor of the translated Italian documents was Dan Georgakas, who had often visited Italy, and the account given was, therefore, essentially accurate. The Italian situation, wrote Georgakas, had "obvious parallels in the US." Contrary to the common American perception of a united European working class, workers in Turin and other industrial centers were divided along regional lines—a division that for Georgakas mistakenly went so far as to compare to the one existing in America between blacks and whites. In both cases, marginal workers lived in slums, suffered from heavy-handed policing, and were assigned the worst jobs, while unions were "primarily sensitive to the demands of better established, more skilled workers." Whereas some aspects of the hot autumn were specific to Italy, others, Georgakas observed, related to the American experience: "What can be valuable for American revolutionaries studying the developments in Italy is not so much the circumstances of struggle, but the tactics employed and some of the new ideological positions being formed." The valuable lessons taught by the Italian radical groups ranged from the extreme demands they had formulated such as "NO WORK"—the overall rejection of work and the call for a guaranteed basic salary for all—to the practices of short stoppages, which had a far more disruptive effect on production (as opposed to the American-style prolonged strike). "Americans seeking to re-establish a militant working class movement in the United States"—concluded Georgakas—"can learn much from the struggles of our Italian comrades."⁴

Were Italian and American radicals right in thinking that the social and industrial conflict was heading in similar directions in the two Motor Cities? They were certainly not blind to the differences. Italian southern migrants encountered social prejudice, suffered discriminatory practices, and were often depicted as a separate ethnic group, but in the United States, entrenched notion of race and *institutional* racism made the predicament of black Detroiters very different. While American radicals could legitimately, if mistakenly, argue that African Americans were comparable to colonial subjects, the same could not be said of southern migrants, whose citizenship rights were never in question. American historians and social scientists have demonstrated how the policies of the federal government inculcated a bias that reinforced the inequality, poverty, and unemployment that affected African Americans disproportionately.⁵ Conversely, the policies of the Italian state tended not to discriminate

on the basis of regional origins. However, radicals were right in claiming that, in both cases, the inclusion of marginal groups in the Fordist system had “back-fired,” because these previously unorganized workers were prepared to contest the rules of their subordination as worked out by the companies and the union bureaucracies. It mattered that, notwithstanding the different degree of discrimination, African Americans and southern Italians were prepared to contest a system that similarly deprived them of a tolerable working environment, political recognition, and dignity.

From the vantage point of 1971, three American developments seemed to prefigure what might have happened subsequently in Italy, thereby turning Turin into another Detroit. They concerned the transformation of shop-floor bargaining and protest; the diffusion of organized radical protest throughout the urban fabric; and the impact of industrial relocation on the Motor cities.

Turin and Detroit entered the 1970s with markedly different profiles. In either case, violence, absenteeism, and wildcat strikes remained frequent between 1970 and 1973, though working conditions and shop-floor bargaining rights had now diverged sharply. In Detroit, despite the hopes of the UAW, the demise of the League did not pacify the Chrysler plants. At first, the paucity of organized action left space for purely individual gestures. In 1971, according to a local reporter Dodge Main was “a barrel of dynamite [where] one in every five assembly workers is on narcotics and one in three carries guns at work. This situation is almost out of hand, with management afraid to supervise workers for fear of physical attack.”⁶ Similar tensions existed in the other plants. In 1970, at Jefferson Avenue plant, autoworker James Johnson killed two foremen and a job-setter, and, in 1973, autoworker Tilden Engle shot and killed the plant general foreman.⁷ The company had mitigated its most blatant racist policies by employing more black supervisory staff, but the relations between foremen and production workers remained tense, racially or otherwise. Furthermore, the UAW itself also promoted moderate local black union leaders such as President Andy Hardy at Local 3 Dodge Main and President Elroy Richardson at Local 961 Eldon Avenue to appease the African American constituency that now dominated these locals.⁸

None of these developments improved working and safety conditions on the shop floor, and new rank-and-file movements emerged to protest these failings, though in a climate that DRUM had done much to shape. Historian Heather Thompson has observed that “the politics and the platform of the RUM groups had circumscribed the

UAW's tolerance for any and all rank-and-file militancy after 1971."⁹ In marked contrast to the politics of Italian metalworking unions during the hot autumn, UAW officials failed to channel rank-and-file activism toward desirable political goals and, mindful of the recent challenge of the League, they did all they could to stifle internal dissent. In May 1971, the election for Eldon Avenue's Local 961 presidency was fiercely contested when the United National Caucus (UNC), an opposition caucus that had affiliated groups in many locals, ran a popular candidate, Jordan Sims, a black shop steward, against Frank McKinnon, a staunch old school "Reutherite." Even though he enjoyed the support of former ELRUM sympathizers, Sims was a reformer rather than a revolutionary. The issues that he and the UNC contested were mostly linked to health and safety, and to the conduct of despotic foremen, not to overthrowing capitalism. The Eldon Avenue plant had witnessed major job accidents in previous years, which, in the face of UAW inertia, had spurred the workforce into unauthorized industrial actions. The two most important episodes were a wildcat strike over the firing of black worker John Scott, who physically confronted his foreman after the latter repeatedly abused him with racist language. Another was the tragic death of black worker Gary Thompson, killed by a defective forklift that had overturned burying him under tons of steel. In the early 1970s, these safety incidents were even covered by the mainstream city press, though the UAW continued to pay little heed to them.¹⁰ Sims, in what was clearly an understatement, argued that the workforce received "inadequate representation and untimely union presence when the trouble develops."¹¹ For the UAW, it was radicals and outsiders who stirred up the rank and file, otherwise content with their lot. Jordan Sims disapproved of much of the radicals' tactics and language, but the UAW officials disregarded these significant differences. In their opinion, extremists were once again trying to "take over the union."¹² As at Local 3 two years earlier, the police and the UAW security flying squadron guarded the Local 961 election site "to prevent extremists and outsiders from disrupting the election process."¹³ In the heavily policed elections, McKinnon defeated Sims by a handful of votes. In 1973, Sims, still genuinely popular in the plant, finally captured the presidency.¹⁴

On the shop floor, Chrysler production strategy exacerbated race relations between white foremen and black workers. The company aimed to increase the pace of production, but had denied the Detroit plants any investment in new machinery, so it fell to the workers, in outdated and poorly maintained plants, to keep up with

target productivity gains. According to labor activists, Chrysler had “speeded up” its assembly lines by 7 percent between 1972 and 1973.¹⁵ In that year, black workers at the Jefferson Avenue plant circulated a petition for the removal of Tom Woosley, a foreman notorious for his racist remarks and disrespectful approach to subordinates. In July, two exasperated black workers, Larry Carter and Isaac Shorter, locked themselves in the power cage of the metal body shop thereby cutting off all the energy to the line. They demanded that Woosley be sacked. The UAW accused the two workers of hijacking the whole department, but when Chrysler sent its personnel to forcibly open the cage and restart the line, more than 150 workers protected Shorter and Carter. A UNC leaflet commented: “These workers, black and white, young and old, male and female, demonstrated the kind of militancy and solidarity necessary to defend us from corporate abuse... Where is our leadership when we need them?”¹⁶

Chrysler gave in after 13 hours, discharged the foreman, and took no reprisals against those who had participated in the action. The company responded pragmatically, because the strike did not directly address questions related to production, and, after the League’s challenge, the company opted to defuse racially loaded situations on the shop floor. For the UAW, however, the success of the wildcat exposed a major flaw in the grievance procedure and, ultimately, in the union’s ability to govern the workforce. Would the union become a marginal interlocutor in labor relations? The *Detroit News* expressed the sentiment of top union officials when it asked: “The big question today is whether Chrysler Corp.—in capitulating to the demand of the two workers—has set the pattern for work stoppages of the future.”¹⁷

It was the last hot summer of workers rebellion in Detroit. “Speed up” triggered another wildcat at Chrysler Forge plant a few weeks later. This plant had operated for the previous six months on a compulsory seven-day week on all three shifts for the majority of the workers.¹⁸ As usual, fatigue and insufficient maintenance led to frequent safety accidents. At Forge, the old League’s affiliate FORUM had virtually disappeared, but the issues of racism and safety still existed. When, on August 7, workers refused to return to the plant until these issues had been settled, the UAW Local president urged them to go back to work because “we [have] a contract and we [have] to go by the contract.”¹⁹ However, workers carried on the strike until UAW vice president Douglas Fraser, after a dramatic tour of the plant, announced that their complaints were legitimate and that he was ready to authorize a strike if the company did not improve conditions, but would not do so until everybody went back to work. These

assurances appeared to constitute an endorsement of the grassroots struggle, but, in fact, Fraser aimed to lull workers back into the plant with long-term promises. At the same time, the company issued an ultimatum: workers who would not return would be fired. Under pressure, workers eventually returned to their post except for 18 leaders of the strike who were fired. The International Executive Board never authorized the strike.²⁰

One important characteristic of this new wave of strikes was that it saw workers unite across racial boundaries. The motives underlying the protest were genuinely linked to working conditions. But the UAW saw the accelerated succession of wildcats as the product of pernicious external influence, Fraser claimed the protesters had "been reading Marx and Engels," or simply used this argument in the attempt to defuse challenges to the union's leadership.²¹ The day after Forge workers returned to their posts, another strike erupted at Mack Plant. The multiracial United Justice Caucus, an offshoot of the UNC, had regularly denounced the appalling working conditions in a newsletter entitled the *Mack Safety Watchdog*.²² This publication had helped create a common awareness of the situation in the plant among workers from different departments. Two workers (one white, the other black) belonging to a small Marxist group, the Workers Action Movement (WAM), returned to work even though they had been fired and refused to abandon the line. As in the case of Shorter and Carter, hundreds of fellow workers soon gathered to protect them from the plant security and the police. Several clashes occurred leaving two guards injured. To the UAW, this episode confirmed the argument that "reds" had masterminded the action. They defined WAM as "a Communist splinter group that wants to disrupt so that they can take over the union and the companies."²³ In the light of the precedent at Jefferson Avenue, Fraser urged the company "not to put a premium on lawlessness."²⁴ Chrysler locked the bulk of the workforce out of the plant and allowed 60 policemen in full riot gear to evict the internal strikers. Even after the eviction, however, the UAW local members voted to continue the strike until the fired workers had been reinstated. WAM, a minuscule group, could hardly have commanded such support: class solidarity was here based on real grievances.²⁵ Anxious not to create another precedent, the UAW mastered thousand of officers and stewards to break the strike. UAW Emil Mazey, a senior figure, allegedly told the crowd that "[the strikers] are a bunch of punks, [and] we are not going to let them destroy everything we have built."²⁶ Union officers brandished baseball bats, pipes, and other weapons and assaulted their own protesting

members. The *Detroit Free Press* captured the irony with the title: "UAW Men Help Police Open Plant." In a similar tone, a TV reporter commented that for the first time in history, "the UAW mobilized to keep a plant open."²⁷ In retrospect, this episode illustrated the trajectory that American industrial unionism had followed since the heroic organizing days of the 1930s. No longer able to harness rank-and-file activism, American industrial unionism now viewed it as a threat. The UAW aimed to prove that it was a responsible business partner to car manufacturers, but to no avail; it could not ward off managerial onslaughts on the prerogatives of organized labor in the following decade.²⁸

In the same year, 1973, after four years of workers' unrest, shop-floor labor relations in the automobile industry looked remarkably different in Detroit and Turin. In the Italian city, rank-and-file struggle, initiated by unskilled Meridionali, had brought about a lasting change in the character of industrial relations and the extent of the state's responsibility toward workers for a durable period. Historian Robert Lumley has commented that the *autunno caldo* "was one of the exceptional moments when popular protest erupted into national politics."²⁹ Something similar, as Charles Sabel has noted, happened, in American terms, only with the rise of CIO and the second New Deal.³⁰ As the protest spread from the manufacturing to the service sector, and from the north to the south of the peninsula, the unions reaped the benefits. The CGIL membership, for example, rose from 2,461,000 members in 1968 to 4,313,000 in 1976. Since then, unions have played an important institutional role and have lobbied for the passage of progressive pieces of legislation.³¹ Thus, the revolt in the automobile factory had inaugurated a dynamic period in Italian trade union history, while in the United States, it had sealed the fate of the type of liberal unionism that Reuther represented.

Furthermore, the *autunno caldo* served as a catalyst for the enactment, in May 1970, of the above mentioned *Statuto dei Lavoratori*. This piece of legislation had been strongly supported by Italian minister of labor Carlo Donat Cattin who, according to historian Giovanni Contini, "restrained the full force of employer reaction and helped to extend the range of concessions." Magistrate courts adjusted to the political climate by adopting an interpretation of the labor law consistently favorable to workers.³² (In the United States, it would have been exceptional for a cabinet member to take sides in a labor dispute, and courts usually honored manufacturers' requests to issue injunctions to picketers protesting on company premises). The *Statuto* had a twofold impact on the shop floor at FIAT. First of

all, it served to undermine managerial assaults on organized labor. Second, it eroded the influence of the radical groups over the rank and file, so much so that the former finally collapsed. Potere Operaio disbanded quietly in 1973. Lotta Continua folded in 1976, but by 1973 it was, in the words of one of its leaders, “a rigid organization impenetrable from the outside; in the past year it had attracted no new members; its greater internal cohesion [was] indeed a sign of its political weakness towards the outside world.”³³ In the summer of 1970, a fortnight-long strike in the style of the hot autumn-style at FIAT Mirafiori did not lead to the general uprising that radicals anticipated.³⁴ In 1971 and 1972, radical groups still had many followers in the factories, but were not able to command the bargaining agenda they had done in 1969. Trade unions now had a structure that enabled workers to voice their claims through their own channel. The *delegati*, or shop stewards, were so effective in this regard, that even Lotta Continua, which was opposed to any form of permanent representation, accepted that its members be candidates. The delegati formed the Consiglio di Fabbrica (factory council). After 1969, the usual pattern was for unions to recognize the legitimacy of wildcat strikes *after* they happened, since now many of these occurred under the leadership of delegati who were working within the framework of the union. Therefore, in the process of making the movement more institutional, unions themselves became more democratic.³⁵ The year 1969 had brought back bargaining to the shop floors, and to such an extent that foremen even micro-bargained the speed of the line with the delegati and the workers at the start of every shift. In effect, productive targets at FIAT had to accommodate the reality of relationships of production. As shop-floor bargaining became the norm, managers complained that “since 1969, not a single day has passed without conflict.”³⁶

Once the unions had adopted much of the agenda of 1969, radicals tended to shift to more extreme positions, which did not win the support of the majority of the workforce. Radicals often condoned acts of violence against machinery, foremen, or white collars occurring in the course of internal marches and occupations. They eventually advocated the armed struggle of the working class, even though they did very little to organize it. Since the bombing of Piazza Fontana in Milan on December 12, 1969, which killed had 16 people, radicals had feared a possible violent repression from the state and from clandestine right-wing groups (such as those responsible for the bomb).³⁷ In April 1972, the third national congress of Lotta Continua endorsed Adriano Sofri’s proposal that the group

brace itself for “revolutionary mass and vanguard violence.”³⁸ This position was later retracted when the leftist terrorist Red Brigades claimed to act as the vanguard of the working class. Potere Operaio for its part was less reluctant to embrace violence. In September 1971, its militants gathered in Rome and agreed that “the question of violence is strictly linked to our political program. Militarization must become a strategic element in the building of the organization.”³⁹ At the end of this same conference, they declared their support for “the insurrection to achieve Communism.”⁴⁰ A 1972 leaflet proclaimed that “the path that every day thousands of workers choose, both in the factory and in the neighborhoods, to confront the bosses’ terrorism and state violence is the armed struggle. This is the road to victory.”⁴¹ The theme of violence also featured in many songs against industrialists and the government that radicals used on their marches. One sung by Potere Operaio went, “off the line we’ll embrace the rifle/come on comrades it’s civil war/Agnelli, Pirelli, Restivo, Colombo/ we’re done with words, it’s now the bullets.”⁴² In the national political milieu now so tense that many feared a right-wing coup d’état, some radicals wanted to go underground and start an armed struggle while others, in the end the majority, opted for the mobilization of social forces. Lotta Continua’s Luigi Manconi later explained that they had in mind a wholesale radicalization of the struggle whose ultimate outcome would have been mass armed revolt. This was different from the clandestine terrorist actions that plagued Italy up until the 1980s, but it was nonetheless a strategic goal that did not appeal to the mainstream working-class, which the radicals hoped to mobilize.⁴³

In 1973, after two years of diminishing support in the automobile plants, where they had formerly enjoyed their greatest success, radicals were once again on the barricades in the last significant episode of this cycle of industrial conflict. From November 1972 to March 1973, FIAT autoworkers fought for the most progressive contract up to that point, the last significant gain before the company restructuring that would permanently alter the balance of power. Negotiations were supported by a mix of authorized and unauthorized, unplanned stoppages, which were often not dictated by the metalworkers’ unions, but met with their approval. The unions’ platform included an integrated salary scheme (“*inquadramento unico*”) that favored the equalization of salary and benefits for blue- and white-collar workers at similar levels of seniority; a 39-hour workweek; longer paid holidays, and the right to paid leave for 150 hours of study or training. It was a very ambitious set of goals when taking

into account the shop-floor bargaining rights already won in the previous contract. While unions oversaw the complex negotiations with the car manufacturers, radicals warned of backdoor deals to dilute the gains. In four months, workers went on strike for more than two hundred hours, with most vocal shop floor organizers suspended or dismissed by the company. The contract was signed when mobilization was at its peak, but once again it was workers, not the unions, who took the lead. On March 29, ten thousand workers took part in an internal march at FIAT Mirafiori, halted the entire production process, and eventually took control of all 12 gates. During the three-day occupation, workers ensured that no strike-breakers or foremen enter the complex, that meals were cooked and served in the canteen, and that production was at a standstill. This vast mobilization had succeeded thanks to grassroots democratic participation in the election of delegati, who then coordinated the three-day occupation. Workers demanded, and eventually obtained, not only the acceptance of all the request, but also the reinstatement of the dismissed workers.⁴⁴

Throughout the occupation, Lotta Continua's flags (a clenched fist against a red background), waved on the gates of Mirafiori, much to the consternation of PCI officers who tried to convince workers to take them down⁴⁵ But, once again, it was the union that had dictated the agenda. Adriano Sofri wrote in September 1969: "We expect a widening gap between proletarian struggles and the political control of the labour movement over them," but just the opposite had happened: unions had managed to embrace the new migrant working class they had initially not comprehended and to channel workers militancy into reformist rather than revolutionary goals.⁴⁶ Conversely, radicals, who had hoped to transform society, had lost control of the movement when they passed from the micro-conflict of the shop floor or the neighborhood to more ambitious goals. Their insistence on escalating demands and on protracting the struggle was at odds with the political outlook of the working class.⁴⁷ In 1975, in the following round of negotiations, radicals launched the idea of a 35-hour workweek—by no means an unreasonable proposition, given the technological reorganization that was taking place—but neither the unions, nor the bulk of autoworkers took much notice of it.⁴⁸

In both Detroit and Turin, multiple reasons led to the waning influence of radicalism in the car factories in the early 1970s. In either cases, radicals eventually lost touch with the mass of workers they wished to inspire. Autoworkers mobilized to demand recognition

and dignity, as well as to protest appalling working conditions, but the attempt to construe their rebellion as an endorsement of revolutionary changes, often dressed up in a virulent political language, was misplaced. The radicals' demise occurred far more quickly in Detroit where the League's hastily conceived strategy left it vulnerable to the company's layoffs and where radicalism had won fewer identifiable gains on the shop floor. Furthermore, radicals underestimated the resilience of the unions when faced with the rise of the much-vaunted workers' self-organization. Unions were able to recover the ground that they had lost in the late 1960s and, after a few years, to neutralize further challenges to their leadership.

In both Turin and Detroit, when radical protest, for different reasons, reached a ceiling in the factories, it spread into the communities. Radicals argued that workers' identity encompassed their day-to-day experience in the community and that there was an inextricable link between the factory mode of production and the society that supported it. According to the League's Ken Cockrel, his organization "had simply recognized, you know, a broader political definition of what persons characteristically regard as being workers. And it was also an objective understanding of the fact that workers leave the plant to go somewhere."⁴⁹ In Italy too workerists had argued that the Fordist factory had finally embraced the whole society and that its protagonist, "the socialized worker," was not, strictly speaking, a factory worker.⁵⁰ Toward the end of 1969, some leaders of the League believed that it was just as important to act within the black community as it was to engage with the factories. Chrysler had successfully identified and dismissed key members and obtained injunctions to prevent them from organizing on the premises; the "community," however, remained a field open to organization, where the League might be able to tap into the currents of support for Black Nationalism and to exploit its own reputation built up within the plant.⁵¹ Even though this choice reflected a division among the key leaders of the League up to which priorities to follow, it meant that in the early 1970s, intervention in high school and community college education, housing and welfare, and police-community relations became part of a broader strategy for promoting political change in the city.⁵²

Arguably the issue around which the radicals mobilized most successfully in the community was the state of black education in Detroit public schools. Since 1966, black teachers and students (who reached 64 percent of the student population in 1970) had mobilized to demand action on the relative lack of educational resources for

high schools located in predominantly black areas and on the paucity of material on black history and culture in the books and curricula.⁵³ When, in late 1969, Detroit's School Board, headed by the liberal Abe Zwerdling, suggested redrawing school boundaries to favor integration, the radicals stepped in an already embattled arena by advocating, on the contrary, more black control of schools.⁵⁴ The radicals found common ground with the Black Nationalist Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr., who, in previous years had argued that notwithstanding token integration, Detroit's black schoolchildren suffered from the ingrained racism of the system, and therefore had demanded black staff in predominantly black schools and more Afro-centered textbooks and curricula.⁵⁵ For the radicals, however, there was more at stake than a preference for racial liberalism or for Black Nationalism; in their view, activity in the schools was meant to build a "revolutionary consciousness," which would have complemented the struggle in the factories and helped to bring down capitalism.⁵⁶ The League never articulated the precise link between the two spheres, but transposed the agenda and the tactics tested in the automobile factories to the school setting. Indeed, in many respect the opposition between liberals and radicals in the schools echoed the one between labor and radicals in the plants. To counteract the liberals' integration plan, the Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC), staffed by a number of League members as well as black clergy, endorsed the so-called Black Plan, which demanded decentralization of administrative authority and the redrawing of district boundaries to give black communities more control over their schools. In effect, for a large number of black Detroiters, decentralization meant separation, and liberals therefore condemned it as just another form of segregation. The year 1970 saw a score of incidents across the city's high schools. Students campaigned in favor of more control, while many of these episodes involved riots, assaults on teachers, and vandalism of school offices. Liberals accused radicals and Black Nationalists of masterminding many of these incidents in which pupils were the protagonists. The League's members themselves claimed to be heavily involved, having established the Black Student United Front, a sort of youth section of the League, and published the *Black Student Voice*, a newsletter akin to those distributed in the factories.⁵⁷ All the League's publications were, by now, produced in their own printing shop and also available in their own bookstore. In the longer term, the battle between the supporters of integration and the champions of decentralization ceased to count for much, faced with the financial and urban crisis afflicting the city and doing terrible damage

to the public school system, but the League had reiterated the point that change in society passed through social conflict and saw the schools as an embattled arena where to bring its vision and recruit new members. At the same time, the League's weakness was to identify itself with a non-inclusive political language and project that, notwithstanding the best intentions, was not felt to transcend the boundaries of Black Nationalism.

In 1971–1972, members of the League were also part of a coalition that protested against the police program named STRESS (Stop the Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets), which targeted crime in black neighborhoods.⁵⁸ Born out of the political need to combat rising rates of crime in the inner city, STRESS (formed by a selected volunteer group consisting mainly of whites) used armed “decoy” or “target” officers to uncover criminals. Not surprisingly, these tactics often resulted in gunfights in which the police killed the alleged criminals—22 out of 23 STRESS victims were blacks. After a string of cases emerged in which the victims had been wholly innocent of any crime, the black community concluded that STRESS officers were as dangerous as the muggers they meant to target.⁵⁹ To African Americans, it seemed to be simply the latest manifestation of police brutality, a problem that had plagued race relations in the city since at least the 1940s. On that occasion, the League joined forces with other radicals as well as with liberal organizations (such as NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) in the first anti-STRESS rally held on September 23, 1971, which saw the interracial participation of five thousand people and put the question of scrapping the police program on the city's political agenda.⁶⁰ Their case was strengthened when, in March 1972, STRESS officers burst into the apartment of fellow police officers whom they had mistaken for criminals and killed two of them. The League's Ken and Sheila Cockrel were particularly active in the campaign, organizing a well-attended petition drive and drafting a pamphlet entitled “Detroit under STRESS,” which was widely circulated.⁶¹ Making good use of his training as a lawyer, Ken Cockrel filed a civil suit against Major Gribbs, Police Commissioner Nichols, and Wayne County prosecutor Cahalan with a view to winning a court order to disband the program. The suit was also supported by the NAACP and the UAW local 600. However, even as they joined forces with the liberals, the radicals conflated the struggle against police brutality with the one against capitalism, which they had advocated in the factory context. “The growth and profit of the auto empire of the world depends greatly on its control of Detroit's urban and suburban labor force,” the pamphlet claimed. Police

repression, the radicals argued, was interlinked with class oppression, and its elimination would require nothing short of the total overhaul of society.⁶² This statement about the significance of class in explaining police operations is all the more significant in the light of the fact that opposition to or support of STRESS seemed to be mainly about race, not class. Indeed the campaign had further polarized the black and white public opinion, with survey results suggesting that the latter was overwhelmingly behind the controversial police program. It would be liberals, however, who would eventually reap the political gains of the anti-STRESS campaign. Democratic state senator Coleman Young won the 1973 election becoming the first Detroit African American mayor, his victory being largely due to his opposition to STRESS, which Police Commissioner John Nichols, his opponent, had introduced. Two days after Young's election STRESS was abolished, with the new mayor scoring a victory not only against the conservatives who supported it but also against the radicals, whose political ambitions quickly collapsed.⁶³

In 1971, in the same vein, Lotta Continua launched a program in Turin, Milan, and Bologna called "*Prendiamoci la città*," "Let's take over the city," with the aim of introducing into the neighborhoods the same tactics of mass action that had proved successful in the factories. Radicals called for the picketing of food stores that refused to lower their prices, for the withholding of fares on public transport, for the occupation—rent-free—of empty apartments and houses. It seemed a political strategy also suited to cities such as Rome, Naples, or Palermo, which lacked an industrial base, but had an urban proletariat. The idea originated with Guido Viale and reminded many of the community activities of the Black Panthers and the League, which were well-known among Italian radicals through the account published in *La Lotta Continua* (the newspaper of the group with a print-run of six thousand) and *Quaderni Piacentini*. "In 1970," recalled Guido Viale, "we argued that the turning point would have arrived once countervailing power had emerged: in the structure of society as a whole the movement had to be in command, not the official hierarchy."⁶⁴ For Lotta Continua too, as for the League, the workers' struggle had to evolve into a "general struggle."⁶⁵

Between 1971 and 1975, Italian radicals organized prison inmates, hospital nurses, mental health patients, tenants, and even army recruits. They also organized self-reduction committees that coordinated the self-reduction of utility bills and protected those taking part from either the collection of the bill or the disconnection of the service. Workers refused increases in transport fares by collectively

refusing to pay (when challenged, workers were supposed to tell the conductor to “charge it to Agnelli”) winning in many cases the suspension of the new fares.⁶⁶ Consumption was necessary for social reproduction of labor, and, therefore, part and parcel of the capitalist plan that the radicals sought to undermine. Lotta Continua made the point that “rent strikes” and “self-reduction” struck at the ability of the capitalist to pass the higher wages won by the workers to the consumers, who were, after all, workers themselves. For understandable reasons, many of the participants were nonetheless motivated by the need to retain a higher part of their salary in times of rising inflation and did live out their lives in the lofty spheres of theoretical reflection. In Turin, these struggles were so popular that some FIM locals lent their support by “certifying” that the worker had paid a self-reduced 50 percent of the electricity bill.⁶⁷

As in Detroit, so too in Turin, the radicals succeeded in gaining a foothold among high school students (in the autumn of 1969, the latter had also engaged in their own protest march to Mirafiori plant and had occupied the school buildings).⁶⁸ The radicals also organized afterschool clubs for children as well as “red clinics” staffed by leftist medical students in the areas most densely inhabited by Meridionali (and therefore by industrial workers).⁶⁹

One successful aspect of this program was the organized occupation of inner city and suburban buildings in the slums of Turin and Milan and the resistance against police efforts to evict the illegal tenants.⁷⁰ In towns such as Nichelino, on the outskirts of Turin, and in “ghetto” districts such as Falchera and Vallette, the condition of the housing stock and related services continued to be controversial throughout the early 1970s. “At the end of the 1960s,” former activist Giovanni Contini recalled, “Nichelino was unimaginable. There was nothing in it. It was just a dormitory. You couldn’t do any shopping. Wives would go mad, they didn’t know how to bring their children to school.”⁷¹ The lack of facilities and public transportation underscored the sense one had of these areas being separate from the rest of the city. The shortage of accommodation was such that when in 1974, a public housing project of 1,300 flats was initiated in Falchera, 600 families occupied the blocks weeks before completion. This was perhaps the best-known episode of the housing struggle in Turin, in which the radicals supported the families, mostly of southern origin, in their bid to keep the apartments despite police intervention and also to arrange for basic services such as electricity and gas to be installed. At the same time, Lotta Continua tried to mediate between the occupiers and those to whom the flats had originally

been granted. This was a field in which women rather than men took the lead. Housewives created a self-organized nursery as well as a gynecological clinic. The occupation took a tragic turn when, in 1975, Lotta Continua militant, the Sicilian Tonino Micciché, nicknamed the “Mayor of Falchera” for his leadership role in the neighborhood, was murdered by a right-wing tenant who believed his rights had been infringed by the illegal tenants whom Micciché supported.⁷² Thousands of people attended Micciché’s funeral, thereby demonstrating the capacity of radicals to build a political alternative to the Communist Party. The latter, in fact, had always approached the housing question from a legislative and reformist point of view, but without building a grassroots movement.

In both Detroit and Turin, radicals, when outside the plants, had adopted the tactic of parachuting themselves into situations that bred discontent, and of then offering their leadership and organizational skills. Intervention was rationalized as a stage in the achievement of a broader societal change. But the radicals’ mindset was at odds with the grassroots movements themselves, which crystallized in response to contingent circumstances and then dissolved. Eventually, though often beneficial in practical terms to the participants, the urban protests fostered by the radicals failed to counteract the diminishing prospects in the factories or to bring about the general struggle against capitalism that they hoped for.

Another aspect of the Detroit story did not bode well for Italian radicals. It concerned the impact of plant relocation and deindustrialization on the prospects for working-class militancy. In Detroit and other cities of the Midwest, the restructuring of the industrial economy started slowly, but gathered pace in the postwar period, when manufacturers sought to counteract the leverage organized labor had gained during the New Deal by moving to states where the unions were not entrenched. Advances in automation also persuaded manufacturers to abandon outdated multistorey facilities in favor of newly constructed linear plants. As historian Thomas Sugrue has shown, Detroit’s share of American automobile production began to decline irreversibly in the 1950s as car manufacturers relocated to other regions of the country, and eventually abroad, to find cheaper workers and thus weaken the bargaining power of the UAW. Decentralization of car production had, by the early 1970s, left Detroit in the grip of a diminishing tax base and rising unemployment.⁷³

The loss of manufacturing jobs not only had devastating consequences for the city, but also diminished the importance of radical politics, inside and outside the factories. When, in 1969, Chrysler

managers met Local 3 officers to discuss the increasing radicalization at Dodge Main, the latter were told that the frequent stoppages and lack of discipline of the workforce were jeopardizing the very existence of the plant. Since its machinery and automated production flow were outdated, the rationale for the existence of the plant was the fact that workers maintained productivity. Dodge Main was, in fact, a multistorey plant built in 1910, in which automated technology could only be partially employed. Moving materials vertically made it more costly than in postwar plants, which had a horizontal layout. It also made the production process slower. Chrysler workers rightly objected that the company's production targets could only be met through extra human effort. If production were to be disrupted for too long, Chrysler would consider the operation of this plant nonprofitable. The union officials understood that this was no exaggeration or idle threat and saw the fight against the radicals as a struggle to save the plant, and with it their own political prestige.⁷⁴ Chrysler finally shut Dodge Main in 1980 after its production had gradually shifted to other sites. In its heyday in 1929, the Dodge Main complex employed about 30 thousand workers, when it closed there were only five thousand left.⁷⁵ Conversely, FIAT Mirafiori, the theater of the most significant class conflict in 1969, was of more recent construction, allowed linear assemblage, and contained up-to-date transfer machines. It continues to produce cars today (though a fraction of the output of the 1960s).⁷⁶ From 1974, the possibility that Chrysler—the only automaker that remained active in the city—would leave Detroit prompted waves of concessions on wages, benefits, and working hours at every round of contract negotiations. With the real possibility of plants closing, the UAW quickly brushed off radicals as operating against the interests of the majority of workers. The union saw safeguarding production, at whatever political cost, as an attempt to protect Detroit's industrial standing, and, therefore, jobs. However, car manufacturers had initiated decentralization and deindustrialization decades earlier in response to mass unionization, a process that was only hastened by the radical mobilization of the late 1960s. In the 1970s, the rapid disintegration of the city's industrial base left black workers with diminishing political clout: gone were the days when, as radicals once observed, they were positioned at the strategic core of the capitalist production process. By the end of the decade, workers were again in militant mood, but this time to make one last, unsuccessful, bid to save the plant from shutting down, not to overthrow the system.

On the other side of the Atlantic, FIAT's management reversed its traditional policy of concentration in the metropolitan area of Turin, where in 1972 three out of four employees still worked. From 1970, and in particular from 1973, FIAT established new plants in the lower part of the peninsula in small rural towns such as Cassino, Termoli, Sulmona and later, Melfi and Termini Imerese in Sicily.⁷⁷ The state heavily subsidized these investments through a central fund for the development of southern Italy (*Cassa del Mezzogiorno*). Both the unions and the Communist party looked favorably on the process of decentralization, as they believed that FIAT's plants would spearhead a belated industrialization of the south of Italy. Radicals criticized the project; for them, workers' struggle ought to have been designed to win more power at the point of production and in the overall society, not to direct capitalist investments to one place or another.⁷⁸ In 1974, Giovanni Agnelli, nephew of the founder and CEO, candidly admitted that the protests in the factory had taught management that the time was over for great concentrations of workers; they were too "dangerous." The favored option now was small or medium plants as independent from one another as possible. In another interview, he added that the only "safe" pools of workers in Europe after the events of the 1960s were southern Italy and Spain. These were investments requiring manpower that had to be governed.⁷⁹ The political gains of these investments were meager for the Left, the southern plants required relatively few workers as they were equipped with up-to-date, automated machines that often assembled pieces made elsewhere; they did not become generators of income nor did they stimulate a subcontracting network of firms. FIAT used both decentralization and automation, in the form of robotization, to hit plants such as Mirafiori where radical elements and militant unionism still survived. Commenting on the introduction of robotized press shop at Mirafiori in 1974, Lotta Continua militants commented that "these workers never go on strike." No doubt management had dwelled on the same consideration.⁸⁰

In 1980, the company announced the layoff (but with a *cassa integrazione* salary paid by the state for two years) of 23 thousand workers in the metropolitan area of Turin. A prolonged protest followed, in which workers occupied the factory for 35 days but failed to achieve any change: FIAT had made sure that autumn in Turin would never again be "hot."⁸¹ On both sides of the Atlantic, the prospect of workers' self-organization and control on the shop floor could obviously only be practiced for so long as these cities retained their industrial core. In the late 1960s, while claiming more rights, dignity, safety,

and (sometimes) money, workers had exposed the shortcomings of the Fordist model of industrialization based on urban concentration. Eventually, however, notwithstanding the demise of radicalism and workers' self-organization, the relocation of automobile plants vindicated the workerists' insight that capital would react to workers insurgency—a central tenet of the ideology espoused by radicals in Detroit and Turin.

Toward the end of 1981, prominent Italian and American economists, sociologists, city administrators, and auto-executives gathered for a high-profile conference sponsored by the Center for European Studies at Harvard. The explicit purpose of the meeting was to compare two cities experiencing seemingly irreversible economic dislocation and decline: Turin and Detroit. Once the core of the Fordist system founded on the automobile industry, by 1980, the two Motor Cities had become emblematic of the decay of that paradigm of production. The panelists gave an alarming account of capital flight, rapid deindustrialization, deficient public infrastructures, high unemployment rates, and uneven urban growth. No longer did residents of Turin and Detroit enjoy some of the highest standards of living available to the Western working-class; no longer did the automobile market stimulate thriving economies and high levels of capital investment: automation, outdated facilities, a prolonged season of labor unrest, and, finally, the economic recession, had dealt a heavy blow to the chances for industrial and commercial development of these formerly affluent cities. During the conference, city administrators discussed plans to revitalize the waning Fordist cities; the core of their proposals involved the modernization of the infrastructures, incentives to attract finance and hi-tech investment, and the diversification of the productive base away from the industrial model that had dominated their past. However, these plans clashed with the problematic state of local finances, the difficulty of attracting private investment, and doubts surrounding government funding.⁸² What would be the fate of Turin and Detroit?

It was fitting that Italian and American scholars and policy makers should meet at the height of the economic and urban crisis to outline and debate a range of different models of crisis management for the Fordist cities. Even though no one present alluded to the fact, there was a history of connections between Detroit and Turin, and one that long predated the adverse consequences of the postindustrial era. From the time when FIAT manager Vittorio Valletta negotiated the purchase of automated machinery and American policymakers arranged the allocation of substantial ERP funds to the Turinese

automaker, to the time when essays, interviews, and newsletters produced by radical movements were translated and reprinted in leftist publications on both sides of the Atlantic, Detroit and Turin were linked by a range of different channels of communication that made possible the transnational transfer of people, ideas, and technology. Even though the actors that facilitated this circulation and transmission were as different as could be—ranging from automotive engineers to union representatives, and from firm managers to radical thinkers—they were all inspired by the conviction that what applied to Detroit could, to a certain extent, apply to Turin, and vice versa. Valletta's remark about the desirability of the Detroit model ("for us too, as for the Americans, production must be the basis of everything")⁸³ was similar in this respect to the radicals' wild dreams of a global uprising when, according to one witness, they "would speculate on the impact of a joint strike in which autoworkers in Turin and autoworkers in Detroit wildcatted against their unions and their companies at the same time."⁸⁴ At the intersection between modernity and postmodernity workers' radicalization and autonomy in the Motor cities illustrated the limits and the contradictions of the regime of accumulation known to scholars as Fordism-Keynesianism. The militancy of marginal workers challenged its labor process, its racial and ethnic order, its societal policies, and its distribution of resources, both material and immaterial. In other words, they questioned the validity of those fundamental social and economic institutions of which the automobile was the symbol. In doing so, they precipitated the transformation of mass production into another stage.

Even though the premise of a strict analogy between the development of Detroit and that of Turin has to be qualified by a myriad of variables, these transnational connections were the logical consequence of the shared assumption that the two cities were exemplary offshoots of a global Fordist process. If Turinese automakers, laborites, and intellectuals were particularly prone to looking at Detroit as if it were a magic mirror that would make clearer the opportunities and complexities of the future, Detroiters too believed that solutions tried and tested in their city could function in their European counterpart and that the two cities could be molded in a similar fashion.

It is not coincidental that, out of all the many radical groups that emerged in the United States in the 1960s, it was the League of Revolutionary Black Workers that was most determined to build bridges with international groups. Through its links with Turin, Detroit's foremost insurgent organization developed an awareness of

the global significance of their struggle, which they understood to extend beyond the factory floor to the whole capitalist system. As the successors of an earlier generation of intellectuals who had critically analyzed the expansion of the Fordist system and gauged the opportunities for resistance by considering parallel developments in the two cities, radicals of the late 1960s interpreted the cogent similarities in the industrial and urban conflicts as evidence of an ongoing global revolutionary process. At the same time, this transnational circulation, though it might offer inspiration, could provide no overarching solutions. Though international in scope, the fate of any one struggle was always inextricably linked to local circumstances and to the specific national framework.

In the early 1980s, when social scientists, city officials, and auto-executives gathered for the conference sponsored by Harvard, deindustrialization had ravaged the social and economic fabric of the two cities, with particularly pernicious effects in Detroit. The phenomenon of economic dislocation was itself transnational in its workings. Once again Detroit and Turin automakers had shared strategies of international decentralization to cope with the evolving economic and social environment to which the 1970s had wrought such drastic changes—to move their factories to the South of the United States, and of Italy, and to developing countries. However, as automakers were losing their former centrality, the prospects of the two cities looked increasingly different. The inner city poverty, neighborhood decay, and violent street crime of Detroit seemed problems of a different scale and complexity to those of Turin's degraded periphery, even though they shared the same roots. In Turin, the exodus of corporate capital investment was mitigated by the resistance of a number of medium- and small-sized firms, workers' unemployment was cushioned to a certain extent by government welfare, and overall the real-estate market did not suffer competition from the hinterland. In Detroit, however, the inner city seemed to be pitted against the suburbs in a pattern of uneven development, at a time when cut-backs in federal funds did not allow the municipality to balance the loss of a significant portion of its tax base. In 1981, these differences prompted observers to draw drastic conclusions. The international audience at the Harvard conference thus heard Turin's city administrators argue that Detroit could no longer provide a model for Turin. As Fordism entered a phase of irreversible change, the two former Motor Cities were destined to follow wholly different paths.

Notes

Preface

1. I would like to thank Daniel Little at the University of Michigan-Dearborn for permission to use some of his words on this topic in the preface.

1 Introduction

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7. Key works on African American migration are: Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 224; Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Knopfs, 1991); Daniel M. Johnson and Rex R. Campbell, *Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981); *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, ed. Fred Harris and Tom Wicker (New York: Bantam Book, 1968); on the first black migration occurred between 1916 and 1919 spurred by wartime shortage of labor, see Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Richard Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building a Black Community in Detroit, 1915–1945*

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8. See, for instance, Sean Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement," *International Labor and Working Class History* 26 (Fall 1984): 1–24; Eric Foner, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?" in Jean Heffer and Jeanine Rovet, eds., *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (Paris: Press of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1983); Ira Katznelson and A. R. Zolberg, eds., *Working Class Formations: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); James E. Cronin, "Neither Exceptional Nor Peculiar: Towards the Comparative Study of Labor in Advanced Societies," *International Review of Social History* 38, no. 1 (1993): 59–75; Rick Halpern and Jonathan Morris, eds., *American Exceptionalism? US Working-Class Formation in an International Context* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997).
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 10. "Intervista con John Watson," in *Quaderni Piacentini*, 9, no. 42 (November 1970): 186.
 11. Thomas Bender, ed., "La Pietra Report: Project on Internationalizing American History" (New York: OAH, 2000); For an early overview of the Transnational turn, see "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History," special issue of the *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999); and more recently Bernhard Struck, Jacques Revel, and Kate Ferris, eds., "Size Matters: Scales and Spaces in Transnational and Comparative History," special issue of the *International History Review*, 33, no. 4 (2011).
 12. The draft report of these meetings, "Historians, Hyderabad, and the Global Economy" can be found at <http://www.newcollege.utoronto.ca/Assets/NC/programs/global+labour/meetingdraft.pdf> (May 15, 2009); For an overview of the contributions in this field, see Michael P. Hanagan, "An Agenda for Transnational Labor History," *International Review of Social History* 49, no. 3 (December 2004): 455–474.

13. Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review* no. 91 (2005): 62–90, 65. For a similar criticism, see Frederick Cooper, "Race, Ideology, and the Perils of Comparative History," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (October 1996): 1122–1138.
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21. Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.
22. Raya Dunayevskaya, "Communism, Marxism, and Liberty—The American Humanist Tradition," Archive of Labor and Urban Affairs (ALUA), Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, microfilm no. 12514.
23. A point made by Philippe Gottraux, *Socialisme ou Barbarie. Un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France de l'après-guerre* (Lausanne: Editions Payot Lausanne, 1997), 9–10.
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28. Enrico Deaglio, *La FIAT com'è: La ristrutturazione davanti l'autonomia operaia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1975).
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6. *Ibid.*, 285, 5–6.
7. *Ibid.*, 219.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 66.
10. Duccio Bigazzi, "Strutture della produzione: il Lingotto, l'America, l'Europa," in Carlo Olmo, ed., *Il Lingotto, 1915–1939. L'architettura, l'immagine, il lavoro* (Torino: Umberto Allemandi, 1994), 281–336.
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13. Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, 285.
14. David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800–1932* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 267.
15. David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (London: Routledge, 1994); Arthur J. Kuhn, *GM Passes Ford, 1918–1938: Designing the General Motors Performance-Control System* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1986).
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19. Wayne Lewchuk, “Fordism and the Moving Assembly Line: The British and American Experience, 1895–1930,” in Nelson Lichtenstein and Stephen Meyer, *On the Line. Essays in the History of Auto Work* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989). See also Wayne Lewchuk, *American Technology and the British Vehicle Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 152–184. However, Ford’s operations, as opposed to “Fordism,” expanded with different degrees of success in several countries; see Mira Wilkins and Frank Ernest Hill, *American Business Abroad. Ford on Six Continents* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964).
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21. Steven Tolliday, “Transplanting the American Model? US Automobile Companies and the Transfer of Technology and Management to Britain, France, and Germany, 1928–1962,” in Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel, eds., *Americanization and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76–121.
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31. Blad Plumer, "Was the decline of American Unions Inevitable? Not if you ask Canada", *Washington Post*, September 4, 2012.
32. David Brody has argued that the rank-and-file themselves favored the rigid system of work rules and seniority rights embedded in liberal-style collective bargaining; see David Brody, "Workplace Contractualism in Comparative Perspective," in Nelson Lichtenstein and Howell John Harris, eds., *Industrial Democracy in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 176–205.
33. Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves. RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
34. Nelson Lichtenstein, "Introduction to the New Edition," in Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, xiii. Also published as "Class Politics and the State during World War Two," *International Labor and Working-Class Journal*, no. 58 (Fall 2000): 261–274.
35. James Gross, *The Making of the National Labor Relations Board: A Study in Economics, Politics, and Law* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974); Howell Harris, "The Snares of Liberalism? Politicians, Bureaucrats, and the Shaping of Federal Labour Relations Policy in the United States, ca. 1915–1947," in Steven Tolliday, and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *Shop Floor Bargaining and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 148–91; Tomlins, *The State and the Unions*.

36. For the changing meaning of corporatism in the American context see Ellis W. Hawley, "The Discovery and Study of a 'Corporate Liberalism,'" *Business History Review* 52, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 309–320; for a synthesis of the idea of "consensus capitalism," see Patrick Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935–1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991).
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38. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Knopf, 1995).
39. Walter P. Reuther, "Our Fear of Abundance," *New York Times Magazine*, September 16, 1945, reprinted in Henry P. Christmand, ed., *Walter P. Reuther. Selected Papers* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 13–21; see also UAW pamphlet *Purchasing Power for Prosperity: The Case of the General Motors Workers for Maintaining Take-Home Pay* (Detroit: International Union, UAW-CIO, GM Department, October 1945).
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41. Liliana Lanzardo, *Classe operaia e Partito Comunista alla Fiat. La strategia della collaborazione 1945–1949* (Torino: Einaudi, 1971).
42. For an overview see Andrew Glyn, Alan Hughes, Alain Lipietz, and Ajit Singh, "The Rise and Fall of the Golden Age," in Stephen A. Marglin and Juliet B. Schor, eds., *The Golden Age of Capitalism. Reinterpreting the Postwar Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 39–125.
43. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), 72–77.
44. Tiziano Treu, "La contrattazione collettiva," in Gian Primo Cella and Tiziano Treu, eds., *Relazioni Industriali. Manuale per l'analisi della esperienza italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), 165; Charles Maier, "Preconditions for Corporatism," in John H. Goldthorpe, ed., *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 39–59.
45. For the European context see Judt, *Postwar*, 536; Max Koch, *Roads to Post-Fordism: Labour Markets and Social Structures in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
46. This is the key premise of the founding work of the school Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US experience* (London: Verso, 1979).
47. See Goldthorpe, *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, 1–5.
48. Robert Boyer, "Technical change and the theory of 'Regulation'", Paris, CEPREMAP, papers no. 8707, 1987, 80–82.
49. For a critique of this point see Robert Brenner and Mark Glick, "The Regulation Approach: Theory and History," *New Left Review* Series I, no. 188 (July–August 1991): 45–119.
50. A good overview on this is contained in Alan Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles. The Crisis of Global Fordism*. (London: Verso, 1992), 23–45; Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard, eds., *Régulation Theory. The State of Art*.

- (London: Routledge, 2002), 36. See also: De Vroey M., "A Regulation Approach Interpretation of the Contemporary Crisis," in *Capital and Class*, no. 23; Alan Lipietz, "Reflection on a Tale: the Marxist Foundations of the Concepts of Regulation and Accumulation," *Studies in Political Economy* no. 26 (Summer 1988): 7–117; I shall not dwell here on the limits and critique to this theory. I refer to the reader to Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Bob Jessop, "Regulation Theories in Retrospect and Prospect," *Economy and Society*, 19, no. 2 (1990): 153–216; Adam Tickell and Jamie Peck, "Accumulation, Regulation and the Geographies of Post-Fordism; Missing Links in Regulationist Research," *Progress in Human Geography* 16, no. 2 (1992): 190–218. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (London: Blackwell, 1990), 121–189; Harvey sees a world of "flexible specialization" rather than of "post-fordism." For an alternative account of the cycles of growth and transformation of capitalism, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century. Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994).
51. Boyer and Saillard, eds., *Régulation Theory. The State of Art*, 78.
 52. Satoshi Ikeoa, "World Production," in I. Wallerstein and T. Hopkins, eds., *The Age of Transition: Trajectory of the World System, 1945–2025* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 38–86.
 53. Annemieke J. M. Roobeek, "The Crisis in Fordism and the Rise of a New Technological Paradigm," *Futures*, 19, no. 2 (1987): 129–154.
 54. Thomas Reifer and Jamie Sudler, "The Interstate System," *Futures*, 19, no. 2 (1987): 16–20.
 55. Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1989). He defined the 23-year period inaugurated by the Korean War and concluded by the Paris Peace Accords in early 1973, which virtually ended the Vietnam War, as "the most sustained and profitable period of economic growth in the history of world capitalism" (99); I draw this account also from Stephen Marglin and Juliet Schor, eds., *The Golden Age of Capitalism. Reinterpreting the Postwar Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Gabriel Kolko, "The Structure of Political Capitalism," in Gabriel Kolko, *Main Currents in Modern American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
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 57. Andrew Sayer, "Postfordism in Question," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13, no. 4, 1989, 666–695; Bob Jessop, "Fordism and Post-Fordism: A Critical Reformulation," in Bob Jessop, *Regulationist Perspectives on Fordism and Post-Fordism* (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2001), 32–62.
 58. For the case of the automobile industry see Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See again Cowie,

- Capital Moves*, for industrial relocation. See also Michael Rustin, "The Politics of Post-Fordism: Or, The Trouble with 'New Times,'" *New Left Review*, I/175, (May–June 1989): 54–57.
59. Jessop, "Fordism and Post-Fordism. A Critical Reformulation," *Regulationist Perspectives on Fordism and Post-Fordism*, 32–62. For the Third Italy, see M. J. Piore and C. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Larry Hirschhorn, "The Post-Industrial Labor Process," *New Political Science* 2 no. 3 (1981): 11–32.
 60. A systematic criticism of the regulationists is outside the scope of this study; see Brenner and Glick, "The Regulation Approach," 45–119; Simon Clarke, "Overaccumulation, Class Struggle, and the Regulation Approach," *Capital and Class*, 36 (Winter 1988): 59–92.
 61. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, 41–46.
 62. Annemieke J. M. Roobeek, "The Crisis in Fordism and the Rise of a New Technological Paradigm," 129–154. For a critique of the idea of decline of productivity, see Andrew Glyn, "Productivity and the Crisis of Fordism," in Jessop, *Regulationists Perspectives on Fordism and Post-Fordism*, 193–209.
 63. Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, 163.
 64. Glyn, "Productivity and the Crisis of Fordism," 207.
 65. For Marxist criticism of the Regulation theory, see Werner Bonefeld, "Reformulation of State Theory," *Capital and Class* 33 (1987): 96–127; Stephen Clarke, "Overaccumulation, Class Struggle, and the Regulation Approach," *Capital and Class*, 38 (1988): 59–92; John Holloway, "The Great Bear, Post-Fordism and Class Struggle: A Comment of Bonefeld and Jessop," *Capital and Class*, 36 (1988): 93–104; Ferruccio Gambino, "Critica del Fordismo della scuola regolazionista," in Eugenia Parise, ed., *Stato Nazionale, lavoro e moneta* (Napoli: Liguori, 1997), 215–240. For an overview of variants and criticisms, see Jessop, "Regulation Theory: Retrospects and Prospects," 153–216. It is to be noted, however, that the regulationists assigned a far greater role to working-class struggle in the rise of Fordism as collective bargaining is established by the strengthening of industrial unions through mass action.
 66. See Antonio Negri's Sergio Bologna (eds.) reading of Marx in "John M. Keynes e la teoria capitalista dello stato nel '29," in *Operai e Stato: Lotte operaie e riforma dello stato capitalistico tra rivoluzione d'Ottobre e New Deal* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1972).
 67. I borrow these terms from James R. O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973).
 68. Faruk Tabak, "The World Labor Force," in Wallerstein and Hopkins, *The Age of Transition*, 87–116.

3 The "American Model" in Turin

1. Valerio Castronovo, *Giovanni Agnelli* (Torino: UTET, 1971), 528.
2. *Ibid.*, 157.

3. Archivio Storico FIAT, FIAT "Relazione Tecnica" by engineer Maraini (April 1919), Fondo DAI, 4.
4. Castronovo, *Giovanni Agnelli*, 220; Duccio Bigazzi has written a great deal about FIAT's organization of work in the interwar period and about the application of scientific management at FIAT. See, for instance, his "Management Strategies in the Italian Car Industry 1906–1945: Fiat and Alfa Romeo," in Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *The Automobile Industry and Its Workers. Between Fordism and Flexibility* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 76–95.
5. Carlo Olmo, ed., *Il Lingotto, 1915–1939: architettura, l'immagine, il lavoro* (Torino: Allemandi, 1994).
6. Duccio Bigazzi, "Modelli e pratiche organizzative dell'industrializzazione Italiana," in *Storia D'Italia. L'industria* (Torino: Einaudi, 1999); parts of this essay have been incorporated in "Mass Production or 'Organized Craftsmanship'? The Post-War Italian Automobile Industry," in Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel, eds. *Americanisation and Its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Postwar Europe and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999); for the Fascist period: P. Cioccae and G. Toniolo, eds. *L'economia italiana nel periodo fascista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976).
7. Stefano Musso, "Production Methods and Industrial Relations at FIAT (1930–90)" in *Fordism Transformed. The Development of Production Methods in the Automobile Industry*, Haruhito Shiomi and Kazuo Wada, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 245–248.
8. Piero Bairati, *Vittorio Valletta* (Turin: Utet, 1983) 158–163; see also Bigazzi, "Modelli e pratiche," 973.
9. Gianfranco Zunini, "Struttura industriale, sviluppo tecnologico e movimento operaio a Torino nel secondo dopoguerra," in Ettore Passerin, ed., *Movimento operaio e sviluppo economico in Piemonte negli ultimi cinquant'anni* (Torino: Cassa di Risparmio, 1978), 61–128.
10. Bairati, *Vittorio Valletta*, 214–218; Archivio Storico FIAT, Fondo DAI, busta 108/2, Ing. Bruschi "Relazione" (1949); for details of ERP funds on the automotive industry, see Comitato Interministeriale per la Ricostruzione (CIR), *Lo sviluppo dell'economia Italiana nel quadro della ricostruzione e della cooperazione europea* (Roma, 1952).
11. It was FIAT worker Paolo Bonello who was "astounded" at the sight of the new machinery; see Archivio Storico FIAT, interview no. 2.03. Concerning the Marshall Plan historiography that minimizes the importance of the American post war programs, see Charles Maier and Gunther Bischof, eds. *The Marshall Plan and Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 1991); a different position is taken by Zeitlin and Herrigel, *Americanization and Its Limits*.
12. Quoted in Bigazzi, "Mirafiori e il modello americano," in Carlo Olmo ed., *Mirafiori*, (Torino: Allemandi, 1987) 259; Bairati, *Vittorio Valletta*, 151–152 and 177–183.
13. A. Fiorelli, "Relazione di viaggio in America ottobre-novembre 1947," Archivio Storico FIAT, fondo DAI, busta 107/2; Lawrence J. White, *The Automobile Industry since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) 213–215.

14. Jonathan Zeitlin, Introduction to *Americanization and Its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan*, Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–50.
15. Bigazzi, “Mirafiori e il Modello Americano,” 259–262.
16. Jeffrey W. Cody, *Exporting American Architecture, 1870–2000* (London: Routledge, 2003), 133.
17. Bigazzi, “Mirafiori e il Modello Americano,” 265–266.
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115. Paolo Cinanni, *Emigrazione e unità operaia. Un problema rivoluzionario* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974), 31–32.
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123. Interview with Peppino Muscarà, by Renata Jodice, *Memorie FIOM*, 109.
124. Castrovilli and Seminara, *Mirafiori, la città oltre il Lingotto*, oral history of “Nicola,” 83.
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74. See correspondence between Dodge Main Labor Relations supervisor Kowalsky and UAW Local 3 president Pasica in ALUA, UAW local 3 collection, box 11, folder 16–18; a Chrysler executive reported to the media that “one of every five assembly workers is on narcotics and one in three carry guns to work” Reported by Liska in his *Diary*, entry 24 June, 1971, ALUA, Liska Collection.
75. Interview to CB, 2001.
76. David M. Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 72–89; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 95–105.
77. Elliot Rudwick and August Maier, *Black Detroit and the Rise of UAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
78. ALUA, UAW President Office, Walter Reuther Collection, box 229, folder 6, Charlie Brooks to W. Reuther, 22 September 1967 [my emphasis].
79. ALUA, Ed Liska’s diary, entry 7 July, 1969.
80. ALUA, UAW President Office, Walter Reuther Collection, box 147, folder 14, Quayle report, vol. 1a, May 1967.
81. GGB, interview by author, May 2002.
82. General Baker, interview by Kieran Walsh Taylor, quoted in his “Turn to the Working Class: The New Left, Black Liberation, and the U.S. Labor Movement (1967–1981)” (PhD diss., Chapel Hill, 2007), 31.
83. Steve Jefferys, *Management and Managed: Fifty Years of Crisis at Chrysler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 169.

84. This is a word that repeatedly appears in the radical literature of that period. See ALUA, DRM Collection, box 1, folder 1.
85. Stan Weir, "USA: The Labor Revolt," *International Socialist Journal* 4, no. 20 (1967): 279–296; Jack Barbash, "The Causes of Rank-and-File Unrest," in Joel Seidmand, ed., *Trade Union Government and Collective Bargaining, Some Critical Issues* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File* (London: Verso, 2010).
86. ALUA, UAW Local 3 collection, box 32, folder 10, Charlie Brooks to Kowalsky, July 7, 1967; ALUA, UAW local 3 collection, box 23, folder 3, leaflet: Trim Department, September 26, 1967.
87. Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 171.
88. Ed Liska's, Daily Dispute Diary, May 14, 1968, quoted in Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 173.
89. "Open Letter to Chrysler Corporation," *Inner City Voice* (June 1968).
90. Martin Glaberman in Staughton and Alice Lynd, eds., *The New Rank and File* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 206.
91. Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 170.
92. Dan Georgakas, "Young Detroit Radicals, 1955–1965," in Paul Buhle, ed., *C.L.R. James: His Work and Life* (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), 185–194.
93. B. J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 193.
94. ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 1.
95. ALUA, UAW Local 3 Collection, box 30, folder 107, "Report and Recommendations from the Executive Board," September 25, 1965.
96. Georgakas and Surkin *Detroit: I Do Mind*, 38; ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 1, DRUM's Program Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Streets*, 4; Edward Lee, "Whoever Heard of Bong Drums on the Picket Line?" James and Grace Lee Boggs Papers, box 5, folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University
97. ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 1, folder 47, clipping Detroit Free Press August 1968; the loss is of three thousand cars according to the newsletter SPEAK OUT in ALUA, Lampinen collection, box 1, folder 20, January 1969; ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 1, folder 47, Art Hughes to Douglas Fraser, July 10, 1968.
98. "Negroes Stalk Out of Union Meeting," *Detroit Free Press*, August 19, 1968.
99. ALUA, Art Hughes Collection, box 47, folder 1, clipping.
100. ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 1, Victor Riesel. "Inside Labor. Black Drums," press report, August 14, 1968.
101. *Drum* vol. 1, no. 9.
102. ALUA, Vertical Files, Office of the President, Wayne State University Brochures, Reports 1965–69, booklet, "Wayne and the Inner City: The Survey of Urban Concern," October 1968.
103. Ron Lockett interview in Robert Mast, *Detroit Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 92.
104. Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class," 31.

105. Glaberman, *The New Rank and File*, 206.
106. I take this information from my interview with DG, April 2002.
107. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 43–68.
108. ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 1, “Common Sense—or Chaos?”
109. ALUA, “Report,” Liska collection, box 1, Ed Liska Diary.
110. ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 16.
111. ALUA, DRM collection, box 3, folder 9, “History of DRUM. Its principles and Program” 1969; “Our thing is DRUM,” manifesto republished in *Leviathan*, n. 6 (1970).
112. ALUA, Ed Liska, *Diary*, entry 25 February, 1969. Quoted in Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 179.
113. Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); ALUA, DRM collection, folder 5, box 4, DRUM newsletter n. 3, May 1968.
114. *ELRUM* vol.1, n.9, in ALUA, UAW Region I collection, box 45; *South End* 14 May 1969 in ALUA, Arthur Hughes collection, series 9, part 2, box 47, folder 3.
115. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 85–106. Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 113–114; James A. Geschwender, “The League of Revolutionary Black Workers,” *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 3 (1974): 6.
116. *ELRUM*, vol. 1, no. 2, Detroit Revolutionary Movements Collection, ALUA; Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 113–114.
117. Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 125–127, 136–144.
118. “Wilbur Haddock on the United Black Workers,” *Souls* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 27–33.
119. “Negro Militants Scored by UAW,” *New York Times*, March 13, 1969.
120. ALUA, UAW Local 3 collection, box 47, folder 17, March 10, 1969.
121. “International Rep Urges DRUM to join UAW,” *Michigan Chronicle*, March 1, 1969; See also Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker’s Journal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 262.
122. ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 1, Shelton Tappes to William Oliver, March 28, 1969.
123. Kieran Taylor, “American Petrograd: Detroit and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers” in Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File*, 314. But see also the stories of Sheila Murphy Cockrel and Edna Ewell Watson in Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 211–216, 221–227.
124. *General Policy Statement and Labor Program* (Highland Park, MI: League of Revolutionary Black Workers, 1970).
125. See the document produced by Cockrel, Watson, and Hamlin after their departure from the LRBW, in ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 19.
126. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 72–74.
127. ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, Ed Liska’s diary, entry March 18, 1970.
128. Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 128–158.
129. I found no record of the actual membership of the League except a document dated 1968 which contains the list of 251 DRUM members, ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 5, “DRUM members.” This number has to

- be compared with the three thousand workers that followed DRUM's call to strike in the summer of that year.
130. Ernest Allen Mkalimoto in review of *Detroit: I Do mind Dying* in *Radical America* 8, no. 4 (1974): 72; according to my interviewees a safe estimate of the League's paying members is 200 (interviews quoted), for Ernest Allen the "active" members were 60 (in Ernie Allen, "Dying from the Inside," in Dick Cluster, ed., *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 81).
 131. Allen, "Dying from the Inside," 87.
 132. Demonstration at the UAW convention held at the Cobo Hall Detroit 8–9 November 1969 see Dan Georgakas in R. Mast, *Detroit Lives*, x; ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 1, folder 47 "Chrysler boycott called by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," *South End*, March 4, 1969 (clipping).
 133. Mast, *Detroit Lives*, 87.
 134. Aldo Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione* (Milano: Sperling & Kupfer, 1999), 12.
 135. Allen, "Dying From the Inside," 88.
 136. ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, Liska's Diary, entry: "Management Cuddling DRUM organization and Its leaders in plant," September 1969.
 137. ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, Liska's Diary, entry: "DRUM representation in the Plant," September 1969.
 138. Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 163–166; Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 40–41; Chuck Wooten in the film *Finally Got The News* (1970).
 139. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race*, 196–197.
 140. ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, Liska's diary, March 18, 1970.
 141. ALUA, DRM newspaper collection, "Racist Steal Election at Dodge Main," *Inner City Voice*, March 1970; Ibid. "Pigs at the Polls," *Inner City Voice*, March 1970, DRM newspaper collection Liska collection, box 1, Liska's diary, 18 March 1970.
 142. Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 180.
 143. Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 163–166.
 144. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 131–150.
 145. Probably the most famous, if ill-fated, single contribution of Forman to the black liberation struggle is the Black Manifesto, see James Forman, *Black Manifesto: To the White Christian Churches and Jewish Synagogues in the United States of America and All the Other Racist Institutions*, National Black Economic Development Conference, 1969.
 146. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 132–133; ALUA, DRM collection, box 1, folder 19, "The Split in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers" by Cockrel, Watson, and Hamlin; J. Geschwender, *Class Race, and Workers Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
 147. "State Reds are tied to militant blacks," *The Detroit News*, March 25, 1971.
 148. "Lotta Continua (contro i lavoratori)" *L'Unità* September 11, 1969.

149. "Un grande rilancio in fabbrica," *Rinascita*, November 21, 1969.
150. "FIAT: rafforzando l'unità hanno costruito la lotta in officina," *L'Unità*, June 6, 1969.
151. "La Fiat ricatta minacciando sospensioni," *L'Unità*, June 2, 1969.
152. Quote from Centro Studi Gobetti, FMV, Carte Bobbio, box E1, folder V, leaflet dated July 16, 1969. See also interview with Mario Gheddo in "Le Responsabilità del sindacato tra padronato e contestazione," in *Sette Giorni in Italia e nel Mondo*, no. 127 (November 16, 1969).
153. Luigi Bobbio, "Tra movimento studentesco e classe operaia," in Giachetti, *Per il Sessantotto. Studi e Ricerche*, 81–82.
154. Diego Giachetti and Marco Scavino, *La Fiat in mano agli operai* (Pisa: BFS edizioni, 1999), 38.
155. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 39.
156. "I sindacati concordano le richieste per il contratto dei metalmeccanici," *La Stampa*, July 26, 1969. In the light of the famous distinction that Valletta had made between "constructive" unionized workers and "destructive" union members, that *La Stampa* now would characterize unions as constructive was paradoxical; *Sole 24 Ore*, August 10, 1969.
157. Interview with Gerolamo Chinzer in Marco Revelli, *Lavorare in FIAT*, 46.
158. This episode inspired a famous scene in the film *La classe operaia va in paradiso* by Elio Petri (1972).
159. Centro Gobetti, FMV, Carte Luigi Bobbio, box E4, folder 3, minutes of the students-workers general assembly in Turin 6 September, 1969; Giachetti and Scavino, *La Fiat in mano agli operai*, 60.
160. "La piattaforma dei sindacati diventerà contratto?" *L'Espresso*, September 15, 1969; Centro Gobetti, FMV, Carte Mario Dalmaviva, box 3, folder 2, leaflet October 25, 1969.
161. For details on these struggles, see F. M. Rocchi, "Chi si fa pecora Agnelli se lo mangia," *Conquiste del lavoro* (September 14, 1969); R. Gambino, "La nuova ondata alla FIAT: le lezioni da ricavare," *Bandiera Rossa*, 15–30 September, 1969; Centro Gobetti, FMV, Carte Luigi Bobbio, box E4, folder 3, "Verbale dell'assemblea generale studenti e operai di Torino del 6-9-1969," mimeographed.
162. Interview with Dino Antonioni, in Polo, *I tamburi di Mirafiori*, 83.
163. Luigi Arisio, *Vita da Capi. L'altra faccia di una granda fabbrica*. (Milano: Etas Libri, 1990), 150.
164. For these instances of checkerboard strike see "I Sindacati tentano di far sospendere lo sciopero ad oltranza degli estremisti," *La Stampa*, December 5, 1969; "FIAT: nessuno ti fermerà," *Lotta Continua*, December 6, 1969.
165. Domenico Norcia, *Io garantito. Frammenti di vita e di pensieri di un operaio Fiat*, F. Torora, ed. (Roma: Edizioni del lavoro, 1981), 51–54.
166. See "FIAT: la violenza operaia come strumento di lotta," *Potere Operaio*, Novembre 13, 1969 and "Torino: la legge del padrone," in *Lotta Continua*, Novembre 7, 1969.
167. A point made by Giuseppe Berta, *Conflitto Industriale e Struttura d'Impresa alla Fiat 1919–1979* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 87; Archivio Storico FIAT, interview with Vincenzo Damiano, n. 2.10; S. Bruno, "The Industrial Reserve Army. Segmentation and the Italian Labour Market," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 3, no. 2 (1979): 131–151.

168. Lanfranco Pace in Aldo Grandi, *La generazione degli anni perduti* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 62.
169. Archivio Storico Fiat, interview with Pietro Borretto, n. 2.04.
170. This an episode cited in *La Classe* no. 8, June 21–28, 1969, 8; For Alessandro Portelli, “narrators everywhere relish narratives of ‘standing up to the big man’, theatrical anecdotes of personal confrontation in which workers stand up to bosses... in complex representations of personal courage, professional pride, or political resistance,” in *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1997), 7.
171. Luciano Parlanti in Polo, *I tamburi di Mirafiori*, 53.
172. “FIAT is our university” read one of their placards in a picket line. In Lotta Continua leaflet June 18, 1969; This last wave of migrant had in fact reopened the still unsolved problem of lack of adequate services and housing; Mario Dalmaviva in Diego Giachetti, ed., *Oltre il Sessantotto: prima, durante e dopo il movimento* (Pisa: BFS, 1998).
173. Interview with Andrea Papaleo, in Polo, *I tamburi di Mirafiori*, 212.
174. In this sense it was equally important the social aspect of the interaction between students and migrants. Commented a migrant: “there were a lot of students who used to come outside the gates at Mirafiori. It was full of university students and we, ill-mannered (*cafoni*) *Meridionali*, miserable wretched who never went to school, had the opportunity to meet such girls with furs” Quoted in Guido Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore*, interview with Giovanni Contini, 3; see also the interview to worker Cesare Così in G. Polo, *I tamburi di Mirafiori*, 152.
175. Domenico Norcia, *Io garantito*.
176. *Ibid.*
177. Giachetti and Scavino, *La Fiat in mano agli operai*, 79.
178. *Ibid.*, 80.
179. Archivio Centrale di Stato, collection MI-GAB, 1967–70, b. 163, f. 13347–81 quoted in Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato: dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005), 354.
180. Crainz, *Il paese mancato*, 355.
181. Giannotti, *Gli operai della Fiat hanno cento anni* (Lorenzo, Roma editori Riuniti 1999), 186.
182. Giachetti and Scavino, *La Fiat in mano agli operai*, 121; Aldo Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006), 180.
183. See the preface by Diego Giachetti to Piero Baral, *Niente di nuovo sotto il sole* (Torino: edizioni PonSinMor, 2003), 14.
184. For the way the death of Annarumma influenced contract negotiations see Trentin, *Autunno caldo. Il secondo biennio rosso*. Intervista di Guido Liguori (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 104–105.
185. Giachetti and Scavino, *La Fiat in mano agli operai*, 114.
186. Trentin, *Autunno caldo*, 105–106; Sandro Bianchi (a cura di), *Pio Galli. Da una parte sola. Autobiografia di un metalmeccanico* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1997), 147–148; “Contratto,” documentary, directed by Ugo Gregoretti (1970).
187. As reported in a number of newspaper, such the *Avvenire*, December 23, 1969.

188. In an open letter to the government published in all the main newspapers see for instance *Il Sole 24 Ore*, December 27, 1969.
189. The most famous example is the essay "Marx in Detroit," in Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966).
190. Centro Gobetti, FMV, Carte Luigi Bobbio, box E2, folder 3, leaflet of Lotta Continua, December 22, 1969.
191. Georgakas, "Young Detroit Radicals," 185–194.
192. I take most of this information about the Friday Night Forum from my interview with DG, April 2002 and GB, May 2002. See also Dan Georgakas, "Frank Lovell: the Detroit Years" and Michael Steven Smith, "The Branch That Frank Built: Detroit in the Fifties and Sixties," in Paul le Blanc and Thomas Barret, eds., *Revolutionary Labor Socialist: The Life, Ideas, and Comrades of Frank Lovell* (Union City, NJ: Smyrnia Press, 2000).
193. Luigi Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), 45–46.
194. *Collettivo CR* newsletters are kept in faldone 4, fascicolo G, Fondo Vittorio Rieser, FVN; See also interview to Brunello Mantelli in Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore* (attached CD).
195. Lee Boggs, *Living for a Change*, 149. Interview with Ferruccio Gambino in Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore* (attached CD).
196. Lee Boggs, *Living for a Change.*, 140.
197. Roberto Giammanco, *Black Power: Potere negro* (Bari: Laterza, 1967); Roberto Giammanco, *Autobiografia di Malcolm X* (Torino: Einaudi, 1967). He would later translate Carmichael's and Hamilton's *Black Power*.
198. Interview with DG, April 2002.
199. Personal email correspondence with Dan Georgakas, June 2008.
200. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 50.
201. Anecdotes of Meridionali who broke strikes are related in the documentary *Tutto era Fiat* (1999) directed by Mimmo Calopresti; in Interview with Angelo Greco, in possession of the author, April 2004. Reference to those Meridionali reluctant to join internal procession are in Luciano Parlanti, in Polo, *I tamburi di Mirafiori*, 69.
202. Ferruccio Gambino to Martin Glaberman, October 2, 1970, Glaberman Collection, Box 9, folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.
203. Interview with Ferruccio Gambino, in possession of the author, September 2008.
204. Bruno Cartosio, Interview in Borio, Pozzi, and Roggero, *Futuro Anteriore*, 6.
205. Branden W. Joseph, "Interview with Paolo Virno," *Grey Room* (Fall 2005): 21, 27.
206. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 51.
207. *Ibid.*, 120.
208. For the association immigrants–radicals see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955); see also C. Guerin-Gonzales and C. Strikwerda eds., *The Politics of Immigrant Workers: Labor Activism and Migration in the World Economy Since 1830* (New York, London: Holmes & Meier, 1993).
209. See also Dan Georgakas, "Successes and Failures of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement," *Souls* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 21.

210. "DRUM's program," *Inner City Voice* 2, no. 3 (March–April 1970).
211. EP, interview with the author, June 2001.
212. EP, interview with the author, June 2011.

6 Conclusion: Two Different Paths

1. Eric Perkins, "The League of the Revolutionary Black Workers and the Coming of Revolution," *Radical America* 5, no. 2 (March–April 1971): 53.
2. *Ibid.*, 56.
3. *Ibid.*, 53.
4. Dan Georgakas, 'Italy: New Tactics and Organization', *Radical America* 5, no. 5 (September–October 1971): 1, 4, and 9.
5. Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Philip A. Klinker and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Paul Frymer, "Race, Labor, and the Twentieth-Century American State," *Politics and Society* 32 (2004): 475–509.
6. ALUA, Liska collection, box 1, newspaper article reported in Ed Liska, *Diary*, entry 24, June 1971.
7. The James Johnson episode is key to the narrative structure of Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). For an account of the Engle case see *Engle v. Koehler*, 707 F.2d 241 (1983), United States Courts of Appeal, Sixth Circuit, Argued March 8, 1983.
8. Heather Thompson, "New Auto Workers, Dissent, and the UAW," in R. Asher and R. Edsforth, eds., *Autowork* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 191.
9. *Ibid.*, 191, 201.
10. *Detroit Free Press*, August 15, 1973.
11. "An Election Message from Jordan U. Sims," leaflet in ALUA, DRM collection, box 4, folder 1.
12. ALUA, DRM, Collection, box 3, folder 12, Leadership Local 961 to Local 961 members.
13. *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 1971.
14. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Boston: South End, 1975), 103.
15. Pamphlet "Workers' Power Special: Auto Revolt in 1973," in ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 10, 11.
16. Interview with I. Shorter and L. Carter in *Black Voice* 3 (September 1973); see also transcript interview with Shorter and Carter, *The Lou Gordon Show*, ALUA, UAW Region 1B Collection, box 73, folder 12; for the quote see leaflet, United Justice Caucus (February 1973) ALUA, UAW Region 1B Collection, box 73, folder 5. cited in Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 269.

17. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*. 189–190; Pamphlet “Workers’ Power Special: Auto Revolt in 1973,” in ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 10, 9.
18. *Detroit News*, August 8, 1973.
19. Thompson, “New Auto Workers,” 194.
20. “Workers’ Power Special: Auto Revolt in 1973,” ALUA, 26.
21. Reported on the *Detroit News*, August 8, 1973.
22. James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 92.
23. “Mack Plant Working! Who Gave 10 People the Right to Tell 5,400 Workers—‘No Bread, Baby?’” leaflet in ALUA, Art Hughes collection, box 47, folder 14.
24. *Detroit News*, August 15, 1973.
25. Thompson “New Auto Workers,” 198–199.
26. Quoted in Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 202.
27. *Detroit Free Press*, August 16, 1973.
28. Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987);
29. Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 257.
30. Charles Sabel, *Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982).
31. Data cited in Ida Regalia and Marino Regini, “Italy: The Dual Character of Industrial Relations,” in Anthony Ferner and Richard Hyman (eds), *Changing Industrial Relations in Europe* (New York: Wiley, 1988), 472.
32. Giovanni Contini, “Politics, Law, and Shop Floor Bargaining in Postwar Italy,” in S. Tolliday and J. Zeitlin, eds., *Shop floor Bargaining and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 206–208.
33. Luigi Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), 118.
34. Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua*, 69, 79.
35. Aris Accornero, *La Parabola del Sindacato* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 30.
36. Quoted in Marie-France Pochna, *Agnelli l’irresistibile. La storia di un uomo, di una famiglia, di un impero* (Milano: Sperling and Kupfer, 1990), 303.
37. This thesis is summarized by Giorgio Boatti, *Piazza Fontana: 12 dicembre 1969: il giorno dell’innocenza perduta* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993).
38. Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua*, 101.
39. Aldo Grandi, *La generazione degli anni perduti. Storie di Potere Operaio* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 196.
40. “Che cos’è Potere Operaio,” *Potere Operaio* 3, no. 45 (December, 1971).
41. Ibid. A leaflet, among many others, also stated that “the militarization of the movement is on the agenda, as sole political defense against the state’s aggression” in “La rivoluzione non è un pranzo di gala: organizzazione e violenza,” in Centro Gobetti, FMV, Fondo Dalmaviva, box 1, folder IV.

42. "Via dalle linee prendiamo il fucile/ Forza compagni é la Guerra civile/ Agnelli Pirelli Restivo Colombo/ Non più parole ma pioggia di piombo," in undated document of *Potere Operaio* found in a folder with 1971–1972 documents. Centro Gobetti, FMV, Fondo Dalmaviva, box 1, folder IV;
43. Aldo Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione* (Milano: Sperling & Kupfer, 1999).
44. Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni, *L'orda d'oro, 1968–1977* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003), 434–437. Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione*, 225–227; Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua*, 120.
45. Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione*, 225.
46. Luigi Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988), 55; Leaflet LC "Proposte dei comitati di base di Pisa e Torino per un giornale nazionale," September 1969.
47. See here the comment of Pino Ferraris, "Strategie a confronto," *Il Manifesto*, September 4, 1969.
48. Raffaello Renzacci, "Lottare alla FIAT," in Antonio Moscato and Diego Giachetti, eds., *Cento... e uno anni di Fiat: da Agnelli alla General Motors* (Roma: Massari, 2000), 54.
49. Ken Cockrel in "Fight on to Victory. An interview," *Leviathan* (June 1970): 9.
50. Workerist theorists such as Tronti and Negri went much further in exploring the link between workers and the Fordist society see Mario Tronti, "La fabbrica e la società," in Mario Tronti, ed., *Operai e capitale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1971), 53; Toni Negri, *Dall'operaio massa all'operaio sociale* (Milano: Multipla, 1979).
51. A critical perspective on this can be found in a Motor City Labor League typescript, DRM Collection, box 8, folder, 1, ALUA. Mike Hamlin also admitted that "The reason we first got involved with students and the lumpen proletariat, the brothers from the streets, was because the workers themselves could not go out to the plant and pass out literature," in "Fight on to Victory. An Interview," *Leviathan* (June 1970): 10.
52. *Leviathan*, June 1970, 6.
53. Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 297.
54. See Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 85–88.
55. Mirel, *The Rise and Fall*, 309–313.
56. Mike Hamlin in "Fight on to Victory. An Interview," *Leviathan* (June 1970): 10.
57. Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall*, 338–345. Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 87–88; Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 66–67.
58. Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 167–173.
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69. Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione*, 120. Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua*, 132.
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