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URBAN TRANSPORT IN ITALY: the sudden return of workers' autonomy

Too quickly buried, workers' autonomy still bites...

On Monday 1 December, Milan, the industrial, commercial and financial capital of Italy, and its suburbs (3.5 million inhabitants) were completely paralysed. A natural or an ecological catastrophe (new Seveso?), terrorist attacks? No, simply the autonomous struggle of the workers in Italy, in this precise case, those of the ATM (*Azienda dei Trasporti Milanesi*), the semipublic company which runs all the transport (apart from rail) of the conurbation.

Since that day, a spectre has been haunting Italy again: that of the return to the front of the social and political stage of the working class struggling against the state and the unions, the bosses and the left parties, for wage increases and without concerning themselves about the legal framework. On three occasions, on 1 and 15 December, during the trade union days of action and on 20 December during national negotiations between the "social partners", several groups of employees succeeded in disturbing the daily round of official haggling over the terms of the sale of labour power organised by the bosses and the unions. Those employees were from the urban transport systems of the biggest cities in Italy.

Wage agreements for transport companies, whether they are municipal, private or mixed, are regulated by the national quadrennial collective conventions¹ complemented by local agreements. The new convention (for the period 2004-2006) had to be signed before 31 December 2003. The right to strike is limited (since the law 146/90 was reinforced by the law 83/2000) so as to guarantee a minimum service during the morning (from 5 a.m. to 8.45) and the evening (from 15.00 to 18.00). The official strike can therefore only begin at 8.45 (while the beginning of the service takes place at 5 a.m., preceded by the arrival of the drivers at the depots towards 4 a.m.), stopping at 15.00 and recommencing at 18.00.

The three official union organisations, CGILCISLUIL², launched no less than eleven days of legal strike action³ in the course of 2003 (notably 02/04/03, 19/07/03, 13/10/03 from 18.00 to 22.00, 24/10/03, and finally 07/11/03). Until then nothing had happened to disturb the trade union calendar. In view of the approach of the due date for the renewal of the contract, the trade union organisations proposed a new day of legal strike action across the whole country on 1 December and another for 15 December. The contract concerned almost 120,000 workers from the transport sector (apart from the railways), grouped in around 200 enterprises.

In the votes, the results in favour of striking were: ATC of Bologna, 98 %; ANM of Naples, 99 %; in Rome, 94 %; in Venice, 97 %; in Pordenone and Gorizia, 90 %; in the whole of Calabria, close to 95 % and in Sicily, highs of 100 % in Messine, Catane and Palermo. If the tension seemed to be mounting, no one had foreseen the Milan thunderbolt, including the many "base" or "class struggle" unions⁴.

¹ With a biyearly adjustment to take into account difference between programmed inflation (in the contract) and actual one. Non respect of this clause from the bosses is one cause of the strike.

² CGIL : *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, close to the old or the new Stalinists (the PRS and the PDS), and numerically the most important with around 5 million members (but 55 % of them are retired) ; CISL : *Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Liberi*, close to the Christian Democrats, with around 3.8 million members (but 48 % of them are retired) ;

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

There is also the CISNAL, *Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Nazionali del Lavoro*, the fascist union and others like the CISAL and the CONFISAL, which are rightwing unions.

³ Strikes took place at regional level but these of 24/10/2003 came in national inter-category action and these of 7/11/2003 was against social welfare reform. Before 1 december, there were 32 hours of strike in transport.

⁴ Like the Cobas (*Comitati di Base*), CUB (*Comitati Unitari di Base*) and others such as RDB (*Rete Di Base*).

Some facts about the ATM

The first ATM was set up in January 1917, the municipality taking over the running of the private companies which suddenly withdrew from the tram lines. The present ATM was created in January 1999 when it changed from a social status to become a privileged contractor and to be transformed into a joint stock company. It belongs to the municipalities of the Milan conurbation.

The ATM runs 3 metro lines, 16 urban tram lines and 2 suburban lines, 3 urban trolleybus lines and 53 urban bus routes and 46 suburban ones.

All of the lines makes:

<i>Type of transport</i>	<i>Urban (km)</i>	<i>Suburban (km)</i>	<i>Total (km)</i>
Trams	176.7	24.7	201.4
Trolleybus	40.4	0	40.4
Bus	432.3	624.5	1056.8
Metro	69.3		69.3

This means in total around 1,370 km of routes serving Milan and its 85 suburban areas, respectively 1,305,000 inhabitants in 182 km² and 1,543,000 inhabitants in 870 km². The equipment comprises 495 trams, 148 trolleybuses, 1572 buses and 714 metro carriages. In 2001, the ATM transported 511,047,000 passengers in the urban zone 82,512,000 in the suburban zone, a total of 593,559,000 passengers. The trams and the buses have 9 depots and three maintenance workshops (Leoncavallo, Molise, etc.).

In 2001, the ATM employed 8503 people. The metro has three depots and a maintenance workshop. Many workers are employed under a precarious status. Some have worked two years as temps and then have done a year of training for a job which they knew all along would only pay 85 % of they previous salary. This framework is more or less the same in the other cities, the high cost of living (compared to that of Milan) being less for the big urban conglomerations of the south of Italy. The other transport companies for the suburbs are the state railway companies (*Ferrovie dello Stato*) and the private FNM network (*Ferrovie del Norte Milanese*).

1 December : "wildcat" strike on the ATM

The pin pulled from the workers' grenade

For the ATM the agreement signed by the company management and the three national union confederations (CGILCISLUIL) in December 2000 set out, in addition to various changes in working conditions, a uniform increase of 106 euros per month. This was to make up for the differential in purchasing power unfavourable to the workers which was established between the real inflation (for 2000 and 2001) and the predicted figure (for 2002 and 2003). During these three years the workers, of all categories, had not seen the slightest wage increase because of the refusal to apply the terms of the agreement of the companies (mostly exmunicipal) belonging to the ASSNAV (the other bosses' association being the ANAV). Worse, the proposals of the management for the new 20032006 contract only envisaged an increase of 12 euros per month, with 400 euros of back pay, in the name of customer satisfaction and the survival of the company.

Generally, the real wages of the workers stretched, apart from bonuses and overtime, from 800/900 euros for the least qualified and/or the workers on a training contract (of precarious status, present in large numbers in this sector) to 1200/1300 euros. When you know that Milan is the most expensive city in Italy, that the property market never ceases to soar, that many of the workers are young, often coming from the south of Italy with their wives mostly unemployed, you can easily understand the numerous survival difficulties encountered by these groups of workers, which are reminiscent of those of workers coming up from the south to Turin in the sixties.

This is the basis on which the workers revolt which broke out in Milan on 1 December 2000 appeared. From the beginning of work at 4 a.m., in all the big depots spontaneous assemblies formed and decided, most often unanimously, to start the strike without waiting and to prevent any service from taking place, effective from 5 a.m. The coordination between the depots was by means of an intelligent use of mobile phones. Only one bus went out that morning, nevertheless driven by a partisan of legal striking who returned to their depot at 8.45. The strike was complete: no metro, no buses, no trams. According to the Milan Chamber of Commerce, this strike prevented 150,000 people from going to work and cost 140 million euros. Compact and massive picket lines were placed in front of the gates of every depot so as to prevent

any police intervention or demonstrations by discontented users. The latter “expressed themselves” at the end of the morning with exchanges of insults, rocks and various projectiles.

But the real political projectiles came from the common front of the minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Lunardi, the municipal authorities, the management of ATM, the union federations (who immediately denounced the illegal action of the strikers) and the various media. Even the moderate *Corriere della Sera*, a newspaper comparable to *Le Monde* in France, had a the headline for 2 December: “The cry of the city: sack them!” In chorus, they denounced, willynilly, the “thoughtlessness of the unions” which was proved by the strikers, the minority who made the strike “to defend their privileges”, the violation of the right of citizens to travel etc. The high point was achieved by Guglielmo Epifani, national secretary of the CGIL, declaring (in *Il Manifesto* on 2 December) that he “understands the resentment of the transport workers and supports their anger” while condemning the struggle “because it scorns the law and takes other workers hostage”.

The prefect then threatened to conscript the drivers according to the law ratified by the previous union agreements. The state put all its weight in the balance in using this measure to prevent the development of a strike taken to the extreme end of actually achieving its demands, as the intentions of numerous strikers seemed to indicate at the start of the conflict. Immediately the Milan public prosecutor’s office began preparing a case to determine individual responsibilities in the hypothetical situation of proceedings for the interruption of public service. The representatives of the government (the minister of Health and Social Protection, Maroni, of the Northern League, first of all) supported the introduction of legal sanctions better adapted for “wildcat” strikes. Consumers’ associations had talked about compensation. The Milan municipal councillors from the *Allianza Nazionale* (postfascist party) and some elected from the Democratic Left (old Stalinist party) went as far as putting forward the idea of calling out the army if similar situations happened again; others, following the example of the president of Marguerite (left Christian Democrats) Rutelli and the mayor of Milan, Albertini, shouted about subversive infiltration and terrorism.

As usual, the state unions and the representatives of the left distinguished themselves in the witch hunt, in perfect accord with their institutional role as guard dogs of the workers’ flock that the dominant classes reserve for them. Always ready to express their fake indignation in the face of the government’s insensitivity towards the demands of the workers, they no less stigmatised the lack of respect for the law of the strikers and denounced a behaviour which “hits the most vulnerable part of the population”.

If the official left did its traditional dirty job, the “oppositionists”, the boss of *Rifondazione Comunista*, Fausto Bertinotti, and the secretary of FIOM (the metalworkers’ federation of the CGIL), Giorgio Cremaschi, at the head, “defended” the struggle of the *autoferrotramvieri* in the worst possible way, by assimilating this purely class combat to the interclass protests of “no globalisation”, “alternatives”, pacifists etc. These tearful pleas relied most often on the arrogance (however real) of the bosses to explain the anger of the workers.

As for the “baseists”, they did not know how to explain the offensive political character of this confrontation. And with good cause, because, at best, the only outcome which they proposed to the workers was to join the immaculate base unions, not compromised by the long decades of comanagement. The road of workers’ political selfmanagement would not pass through them.

In the mean time, they did a bit more to clear the way for a contractual outcome put forward in the preceding months by the president of the Lombardy region, Formigoni (from the right of the Christian Democrats, a supporter of Berlusconi). This hypothetical agreement, which, of course, met the requirements of the official union organisations, proposed the putting in place of regional contracts, which would be inserted between the national and company contractual levels. The regions would propose integration into the two other levels of agreements, adding a new table for differentiated negotiations. The rich regions of the north in particular, Lombardy above all, already claimed to be prepared to “take an economically significant step”, with the aim of unblocking the situation. This step was made easier by the fact that the urban transport companies of the north of Italy are, in their great majority, profitable, unlike most of their counterparts in the south.

If this project were to become reality, it would represent an important first step towards the introduction of salary “cages” (zones). It would lead to conditions of work and remuneration more and more divergent between geographical regions and company sectors. The national contract, attacked from all sides and put to one side since 2000, would be definitively buried. An old dream of both the unions and the bosses from before the long wave of autonomous struggles began at Fiat, in Turin, in 1969, would finally become reality. Such a result must therefore be interpreted as a grave defeat, essentially paid for by the workers of southern Italy.

Some characteristics of the struggle

On that 1 December, the assemblies, in the same way as the mass pickets which they merged with, tended to become permanent in each depot and communication functioned perfectly on the level of the town. Without leaders, without official union banners, just workers on strike using their imagination to win. During the whole of that Monday the eyes of the Milan strikers were turned on their colleagues in Rome in the hope that they as well would start an illegal strike.

Unfortunately, on that day the signal from Milan was not taken up by the capital or any other town in the country. Nevertheless, at 15.00, the strikers decided to prolong the strike, from the peak hours of the evening until the night, so as to retreat in good order, the better to return. The workers of ATM then stopped the strike on 2 December.

The pack of journalists unleashed in the depots only obtained one response to their questions about the reasons for such anger: they were shown a meagre payslip. The tongues of the workers loosened without difficulty. Too many “pacified” union strikes were completely useless. They also mentioned the duration and the backwardness of the conditions of work in the urban transport sector in Italy, and their numerous extra hours. They denounced a life after work reduced to its simplest form because of the exhausting work schedules. The workers in struggle evoked the fight of their French colleagues during the movements of November/December 1995 ending in, amongst other things, the fall of the government, the resignation of the Prime Minister and the putting aside, for a time, of his project of abolishing the special retirement regimes for railway workers.

Highly unionised, a majority carrying the card of the CGIL which had always ferociously opposed this type of agitation, almost all of the rank and file union delegates of ATM participated actively in the strike. While a very active and combative base union (nothing like the French SUD...), the SlaiCobas, existed in the company, it was equally taken by surprise by the strength and massive character of the workers reaction. It was therefore rather an autonomous and general movement of the workers which was acting, sweeping aside everything in its path. Taking account of the unfavourable balance of forces, the retreat was well organised collectively. Unfortunately, this movement did not give birth to any formal interdepot organisation. At this stage this was probably its main limit.

Struggles not necessary isolated

By the very fact of its violent impact on the activity of the most industrialised town in the country, the strike immediately took on a national political dimension. But it was not the only one of that nature which had taken place in recent times in Italy. That 1 December was the second time in a few months that the workers had taken up the initiative of struggle, run in a manner independent of the unions. The first was that of the 1000 flight attendants of Alitalia (the national airline), in reaction to a plan for restructuring the company, with the aim of making at least half of them redundant. On that occasion, the workers had already decided completely independently to present sick notes by surprise on the day chosen for their protest. This form of struggle had been chosen to avoid observing the ten days legal warning and the required guarantee of a minimum number of attendees, without incurring the penalties prescribed by the law.

After the Milanese 1 December, movements multiplied. The sensation that the giant transalpine proletariat was beginning to wake up was certainly present in the spirit of the dominant classes but also in that of comrades still engaged in the political and theoretical fight for workers' autonomy.

In nonMilanese urban transport the strike of 1 December did not spread, but only three days later, on 4 December, in Rome, the bus drivers gathered in a permanent assembly. In Naples, also on 4 December, the “hill” metro stopped for a whole day. On 11 December, the employees of Alitalia from Fiumicino (Rome) spontaneously came out on strike against the threat of 4100 redundancies and the management's lack of respect for the agreements on salary increases (although their level was ridiculously low). While they were about it, they blocked the Fiumicino/Rome motorway for two hours. Some skirmishes with the forces of repression followed.

It is therefore rather a question of a whole period of agitation and class confrontation. Most often, they follow from serious delays in application of work contracts negotiated and signed by the state unions (air traffic controllers, Alitalia pilots, train drivers, firefighters, *autoferrotramvieri*). Sometimes, as in the case of the metal workers, struggles – this particular time organised by the FIOM (category federation of the CGIL) – opposed themselves to separate agreements, signed only by the FIM and the UILM (category federations of the CISL and the UIL).

15 December, putting the lid back on

The union preparation against the illegal strike

For all the antistrike forces there was no question that 15 December in Milan would be a rerun of 1 December. The unions, with the CGIL at their head, came to the depots every day from 4 December to convince the workers not to repeat the attempt. Depot by depot the CGIL called together its base delegates and told them to respect to the letter their federation's orders against the illegal strike. Faced with the reluctance of the delegates to accept such a step, the CGIL quite simply ordered them, on pain of being expelled from the union and so losing all legal protection in the face of probable redundancy, to leave the depots at 5.00. On 15 December at 4 a.m., all the depots of ATM were taken over by heavy squads of union officials, mobilised to guarantee that work took place.

On the bosses' side, the management held out the prospect of significant increases complementing the national arrangement which was in the process of negotiation. To these tempting promises were added police threats of conscription of the undisciplined strikers. This tactic finally paid off in Milan. On that day there were no excesses. But the workers in the country's other urban transport companies interpreted these management promises and an incitement to struggle. What had worked well in Milan, not respecting legality, had to succeed elsewhere, they thought.

Milan rubs off on the whole country

Once again, to the great surprise of the bosses and the unions, the workers brought back their bad memories. The "wildcat strike disease", as the newspapers defined it, hit hard in Brescia, Genoa and Turin but also in Perugia and Florence. All together, highs of 90 % of illegal strikers were seen in Naples, 80 % in Bari, Castrovillari, Cosenza, Foggia, Genoa, Turin and 60 % in Brescia. Once more, the employees had shown all their determination to get what they wanted without burdening themselves with respect for the antistrike legal system and against their allied adversaries: the companies, the state and the unions.

But this time this reactionary social and political bloc reacted rapidly: conscription orders signed in flurries by the prefects; the relaunching of discussions between the social partners and the sending of police into the hottest places. It's interesting to note that in Turin, the prefect in his turn used mobile phones to communicate the conscription order to the strikers, by means of SMS. Attempts by the police to disperse the pickets were nevertheless hit by a few violent reactions from the strikers. Even in the absence of pickets, many workers refused to leave the depots. When the strikers were forced to leave at the wheel of their bus, the majority of them chose to apply the driving rules to the letter, going at a very slow speed. Finally, the weapon of sick leave was abundantly employed, as in Apulia and in some towns in Calabria, where almost half the workers made use of it.

All the spotlights turn on Milan

The antistrike union setup functioned perfectly. Bus, metro and trams ran during the peak hours. The SlaiCobas and the management of ATM gave the same figures for participation in the strike : 40 % of surface transport had functioned during the strike with around 50 % of strikers, this being the lowest rate in the whole of Italy for that day. The SainteTrinité union branch had claimed, for its part, 90 % participation in the legal movement. For the SlaiCobas, which, for all that, had never called for a wildcat strike despite the active participation of many of its members in the one on 1 December, it was a question of showing that the three unions CGILCISLUIL didn't represent the staff. On his part, Nino Cortorillo, secretary of the FiltCGIL of Milan, declared that "*behind this war of figures, there still stood out an attempt to smash the national agreement and substitute it with local agreements*". For Maria Grazia Fabrizio, secretary of the Milan CISL, the strike "*has confirmed the full representativeness of the unions and the irrepressible alliance between the urban transport workers and the service users*".

Beyond these sorry quarrels in the union market place, it is certain that the victory won in Milan by the front of order was not obtained without difficulty. In many depots, stormy assemblies took place where many employees showed their firm determination to oppose an eventual conscription. Once again, you could hear numerous critiques of the unions, responsible for having publicly denounced the deeds of 1 December. The workers also insistently accused the unions of having isolated the strikers of Milan, the day after their most determined action, by organising a fake day of action for the day before the reopening of the national negotiations.

In the depot of Viale Sarca, a hundred or do drivers met in front of the gates around braziers supported by the students of the state university (la *Statale*) and some precarious youth in struggle from a neighbourhood social centre. A central delegate from the CISL was welcomed with hostile shouts: "the

union is us!”), “our one day strike did more than all your fake days of action!” In the assembly this representative of the CISL conceded that the day of 1 December had been important, while exhorting the workers to stay calm because “*the unions are subject to an enormous pressure on the part of the municipality and the ATM*”. For this union representative, the essential thing was to make sure that the fire of the Milanese workers was under control, that the autonomous thrusts had been crushed. Despite these efforts and the relative setback of 15 December, in Milan, the fire still smouldered.

1 December revisited in Turin

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

But beyond these disagreements, there was, on all sides, between the unions, the firm and the municipality, the desire to rapidly come to an agreement so as to prevent the continuation of the illegal strike. This was summed up very well by Pezzotta, general secretary of the CISL: “*Everyone has an interest in making efforts to find a rapid agreement, if not it could be one error too many*”. Clearly, “*we must hurry up, because we might not be able to contain the strikers for too long*”. At the same time, the minister for Social Protection, Roberto Maroni, leader of the extremely racist Northern League, and the undersecretary of state for Work and Social Policy, Maurizio Sacconi, threatened to suspend the negotiations in the case of continuation of the strike.

Thunderbolt in Brescia

From 4 a.m., after voting for the strike, the workers of the only depot on S. Donino street occupied the garages *en masse* from the effective start of the service at 5 a.m.. The 170 buses on the urban lines of the Brescia Trasporti company didn’t leave for the town. It was the first complete stoppage of the minimum service in the whole history of urban transport in Brescia. However, the suburban lines, run by the private companies SAIA and SIA, functioned during the minimum service. The picket, composed of 300 to 320 strikers, warmed itself with shots of warm wine and *grappa*. From 11 a.m. the forces of repression turned up in numbers and in a threatening manner in front of the gates. Their provocations brutally escalated the tension which ended up in an open clash. The strikers gave a good account of themselves and the occupation carried on without any other problems. Some service users, some rank and file delegates from other firms and some members of social centres came to express their solidarity. Morale returned to a high level, reinforced once again by wildcat strikes in other towns. From 9 a.m., the management, although somewhat at a loss, called, by the mouth of their leader Giorgio Schiffer, for the application of conscription orders by the chief of police. The Urban Transport Company of Brescia also sent its representatives to discuss things with the strikers, threatening them with disciplinary measures and inciting the union reps to make them respect the agreement guaranteeing the minimum service.

On the part of the strikers, the desire to fight remained strong and the will not to give in over the 106 euro rise persisted. The press presented Maurizio Murari as the leader of the strike. He was a member of *Rifondazione Comunista* and of the *Magazzino 47* social centre, who particularly distinguished himself by openly challenging the legality of the first conscription list drawn up by the chief of police. Some technicalities had slipped in, which were rapidly corrected after 2 p.m. with the delivery of a new list of conscriptions. But this time the forces of repression drew a blank because the strikers from the first shift couldn’t be found, having gone home. At 14.30, at the start of the second time period of the minimum service, the strikers barely wavered. At the beginning of the afternoon, the mayor, Paolo Corsini, leader of the Democratic Left, condemned the wildcat strike. The three unions CGIL, CISL and UIL organised a demonstration for one hour and blocked the bus station. The unions accused some nonunionised people of being led and influenced by the *Magazzino 47* social centre, which in fact restricted itself to broadcasting the general assembly discussions on its radio and sending a handful of its members to the depot.

To understand the forces at work it is useful to look again at the various reactions and political interpretations of the struggle in the third largest industrial town in Italy. Dino Greco, CGIL secretary of the trade union centre of Brescia, defined the agitation as “*a useless initiative on the eve of the opening of national negotiations*”, an initiative which, according to him, “*pushes the bosses and the government on to the defensive*”. More subtly, Claudio Lonati, secretary of FitCISL, stated that “*taking account of the exper-*

ience of 1 December in Milan, from now on we no longer need to resort to such stunning actions to make ourselves heard. We must only make the service users hear us". For this unionist, 1 December is an accident, certainly not deliberate, but which can prove useful in discussions with the state and the bosses to obtain the 106 euros. For all that, it is necessary to make sure that it doesn't happen a second time, concluded this union representative.

Finally, Maurizio Murari, while claiming "to understand the problems of the service users and the students", set out the relevance of the strike as the "only weapon available to the workers". But his remark does not go any further and does not explain the offensive and autonomous political significance of the movement. He judged in effect that "if the unions take into account our demand for 106 euros, they are listening to the base". More, he added an improbable defence of the public boss against the private boss: "the example of Brescia shows that when public transport is privatised to 49 %, the conditions of work and the quality of service are degraded". If such ideas were subversive....

In Naples, the unions let the things go

In Naples, from the start of the working day, the depots of ANM fell into the hands of the workers, like those of via Nazionale delle Puglie, via Cavalleggeri d'Aosta or Capodimonte. The ambiance was rather good natured. The number of strikers reached 90 %, including all statuses and qualifications. The wage demands and demands for improvement in working conditions were the same as those of the *autoferro-tramvieri* in the rest of Italy. To these were added the demand by the metro drivers to be incorporated into the collective agreement of the urban transport workers in Naples. For the moment they remained linked to that of the rail workers⁵. The unions had been informed that pickets were in place and they did not interfere. Workers' assemblies were held in front of the depots and, amongst others, numerous militants from antiglobalisation formations came to express their solidarity. At 17.00, the beginning of the evening peak service, the forces of repression intervened at the via Nazionale delle Puglie depot to disperse the *antiglobalisers* and prevent them from joining the pickets. After a short runaround in the roads surrounding the depot, the demonstrators got back into their stride and were involved in a blockade for around half an hour.

Illegality spreads

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

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

If in Rome the strikers respected the legal strike hours, in Sicily the participation was 100 %, in Catane, 95 %, in Palermo, where not a single bus ran, 90 %, as in Messine, Trapani and Syracuse and 80 % in Agrigente. In the companies serving the countryside participation in the strike reached 70 %. In Calabria as well, one is struck by the exceptional levels of participation in the movements, with a mean of 97 %. In Cosenza and in Crotona, the strike continued all day. This list is far from exhaustive.

Time for a first balance sheet

If *Rifondazione Comunista* "supported" the strikes in Brescia and Turin and warned the government that "the transport workers and everyone in work have gone beyond the limits of exasperation", the secretary general of the CGIL, Guglielmo Epifani, once again distinguished himself by refusing to support the unofficial strike. "The workers have shown proof of their maturity by not pushing (their actions) too far and by proving their traditional responsibility", he rejoiced. On the strength of that analysis, he invited "government, regions and companies to avoid shutting the door on negotiations". For the minister Maroni, who had refused to make any comments on the restarting of negotiations, the important thing was get it over before Christmas.

For the workers, despite the setback of Milan, the balance sheet is positive over all, whether in quantitative terms or, above all, qualitative ones. The illegal actions of Brescia, Turin, Naples and elsewhere showed that the determination of the strikers was not just confined to the big town in Lombardy which had launched the movement, but that it had spread a little all over the country. The concessions promised by the

⁵ Naples has two metro lines: the first connects the various suburban networks of the national railway and is used by them; the second, nearing completion, in a continuous loop and connecting the centre with the northern areas, known as the "metro of the hills", is used by ANM.

management of ATM reinforced the determination to engage in illegal strikes, a mode of struggle perceived as effective, despite the flurry of conscription orders and the determined opposition of the unions. The audacity of the workers of ATM taught a lesson. And not only in urban transport. On Wednesday 17 December, following a long list of agitations since the summer against the reorganisation of the enterprise, the ground staff of Alitalia in Fiumicino (Rome airport) stopped work and demonstrated *en masse* on the airport's access roads. Some 80 flights were cancelled.

In the limits of the movement we must include the inability to coordinate the local struggles into a common front. What's more, the union representatives, while being sharply opposed in the assemblies, were not removed from the depots, which gave them free reign to denounce the "illegality" of the mass. Finally, the forces ranged on the side of the strikers only acted in a framework which was strictly supportive and defensive, confining themselves to justifying the radicality of workplace actions on the basis of the bosses' arrogance. Unfortunately, no one took hold of, and made their own, the offensive political importance of the struggle of the *autoferrotramvieri*, nor the permanent task of its organisation in the workplaces, up until the day before the depots were taken over by the movement. The base unions used the situation, without a great success, to strengthen themselves to the detriment of the big official confederations but they refused to encourage the independent organisation of the struggle.

The days of 19 et 20 December and the national negotiations

The crucial stake of an agreement before Christmas

It is clear that for all the parties involved government, transport enterprises and unions – that it was necessary to rapidly finalise an agreement. In effect, since the strike of 1 December, the social climate had become rather unhealthy from their point of view. The strike of 15 December had shown that illegality had grown and that the conscription orders put out by the prefects remained, for most of the time, a dead letter. It had to be done quickly and before Christmas. The objective was so pressing that, from the evening of 19 December, strikes to accelerate the negotiations had already started. All the social partners authorised to negotiate, and the government, divided up the calendar. The CGIL, in perfect accord with its opposite numbers at the negotiating table, added a touch of pressure to recover a little of the credibility lost in the preceding days.

The negotiations resumed in Rome from 19 December at 17.00. It was a signal that the assemblies of workers immediately translated into strikes. While the service functioned normally in Rome and Milan, the assemblies held there were very tense. This time the fuse would be lit by the *autoferrotramvieri* of Genoa. From the start of the service in the Staglieno depot it was occupied by a massive and compact picket of 300 workers. Buses were placed in front of the exit. Nothing moved any more. "*You can't live on 880 euros a month, there's nothing more to say*", said the angry strikers. "*The municipality, the region, the business, AMT, are all to blame*", fulminated the employees in struggle. At 11.00, the mayor Giuseppe Pericu, accompanied by the president of AMT⁶, Enrico Zanelli, entered the lions' den of the Staglieno (via Montaldo) depot assembly reinforced by hundreds of workers from other depots in the town. After listening to them, the workers decisively rejected their hypocritical understanding, their façade of support and, above all, their appeal to the responsibility of the employees of the business, an appeal intended to obtain the suspension of the strike. The discussion was lively, the workers stood firm and finally refused to give in and accept the application of the minimum service requirements. The strike continued.

The workers' assault of 20 December

At 5 a.m., after twelve hours of negotiations, the unions left the table claiming a lack of proposals from the government: 80 euros monthly increase (the bosses proposed 41 euros and the unions demanded 106) and a premium of 500 euros as compensation for the nonrespect of the agreement of 2000. The government tried to force it through by raising the retroactive adjustment premium to 600 euros, take it or leave it. The Under Secretary for Transport, Paolo Mammola, declared that "*the CGIL has blocked the negotiations*". Guglielmo Epifani replied that "*the regions, the companies and the government have complicated a very explosive situation*", but that the unions "*remain ready to negotiate*".

On the announcement of the breakdown in negotiations, during the start of the morning service, the workers of Genoa reacted. The strike was unanimous. No bus left the depots. The fear of the workers' anger returned. Dario Balotta, secretary general of the FitCISL of Lombardy, said that "*if the inadequate government proposal was signed, it would be out of my hands*". We can understand it like this: in Lombardy

⁶ The financial situation of AMT is not good. The Genoese business posted a deficit of 45 million euros and its revenues don't match its expenses by 35 %.

the unofficial strike had never been stronger. Milan, Brescia, Bergamo, Como were paralysed to various degrees.

In Milan, the strike took off again. Only 20 buses out of 1200 ran and the 3 metro lines remained at a halt. At 11.00, the prefect, Bruno Ferrante, called together the union representatives to try to reach a compromise. The union centre delegates of ATM came escorted by a demonstration of 500 angry workers. In these conditions no agreement could be found. With an outrageous cheek, the head of the Trade Union Centre in Milan, Giorgio Roilo, concluded that "*the three unions the CGIL, CISL and UIL have made the spontaneous strike of the workers their own*". ATM called everybody, employees and unions, irresponsible.

In Brescia, the strike only really happened at noon. No bus from the Brescia Trasporti company left the depots, but, on that 20 December, the strike wasn't accompanied by a significant participation of strikers at the gates of the depots.

In Bergamo also, the buses didn't leave their garages. However, we can bemoan the insufficient presence of workers from ATB on the picket lines. Around half the drivers preferred to stay at home. The town was paralysed all morning. The prefect, Federico Cono, called together the union representatives and then decided to resort to conscription of the workers remaining at home. It was the first conscription decided in that town for 13 years. Despite this the service remained weak in the afternoon and was only reestablished the next day.

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

In Rome, the strike began at 17.30. The two metro lines and the suburban trains (RomeViterbe, RomePantano and RomeLido), run for the municipality by the ATAC company, didn't run a single train. The stoppage of the bus service began at the rail station Tiburtina, and then extended to the whole town.

In Naples, the buses returned to their depots when the signing of the accord was announced. That Saturday, thousands of passengers coming to do their Christmas shopping found themselves without means of transport. Some users of the CTP (the company serving the northern suburbs) tried to organise a protest, at Piazza Garibaldi, near the central station in Naples. The demonstration, with a passably violent tone, was dispersed by the forces of repression. The strike carried on.

In Venice, it was the turn of the employees of the ACTV to go on strike. No buses or boats ran.

In La Spezia, the workers of ATC organised a permanent assembly. No buses ran. The mayor, Giorgio Pagano, met a delegation of workers to try to sketch out a compromise, without success. The traffic in the town wasn't too much affected by the agitation because of a school holiday. Strike movements were also seen in Savone and Imperia in Liguria, Massa Carrara, Pisa, Livorno and Pistoia in Tuscany as well as Ancona, in the Marche region.

An agreement made to measure

The social temperature rose once again, the head of the government, Silvio Berlusconi, used his end of year press conference to issue a solemn warning. While "*recognising that it is necessary to make a substantial award to the transport workers to rectify the existing situation*", he declared: "*wildcat strikes are a great danger.*" This intervention was addressed at the same time to the unions and to the companies so that they would rapidly find common ground, particularly around the retroactive bonus. Thus, the government raised its offer of 600 euros proposed in the morning to 970 euros, certainly a significant increase but still far from the demands of the strikers (2900 euros) and even from the union proposal of 1200 euros.

Finally found under the aegis of the government and immediately signed, at 17.30 on 20 December, by the three principal union confederations (CISL, CGIL et UIL) and the representatives of the employers, the agreement granted to the 120,000 employees of the sector a monthly wage rise of 81 euros. This increase was in addition to a bonus of 970 euros, by way of a retroactive payment for the two past years (2002 2003) in which the branch wage agreement had not been renewed. The strikers demanded 2900 euros, particularly in Milan, where the cost of living is very high and where the workers demanded a local addition to the terms of the national agreement between the social partners. The union signatories commented on the event. For Angeletti (CISL) "*the workers are going to like it*". For Epifani (CGIL) it opened up "*new perspectives for reform*" because "*the national contract has been saved*". For Sacconi (UIL), "*the agreement is wellbalanced*". The reaction of the workers was rather different. From the announcement of the signing, the strike intensified, particularly in Rome, which had remained fairly calm until then.

21 December: the workers' furious reaction against the Rome agreement

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

Most of the buses and trams of Milan didn't budge in 7 depots out of 9. Only one tram and two bus lines functioned. *"It is not possible to foresee if, in the course of the day, the service will resume completely or partly"*, said ATM in a communiqué denouncing the *"irresponsible"* and *"illegitimate"* character of the strike as well as the *"the complete contempt for the wishes of the citizens"*. Here, the workers also fought for a local wage addition, necessary to deal with a cost of living amongst the highest in Europe. A few hundred of them joined a demonstration in front of the head office of ATM, in Foro Buonaparte.

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

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

The government hardens its tone

Faced with this new flareup of multiform strikes, the Italian government announced on Sunday that it would have recourse to generalised conscription against the insubordinate workers who persisted in blocking the urban transport of many large towns, despite the signing on Saturday of an agreement between social partners. *"Faced with repeated wildcat strikes from a minority of workers, even after the signing of a new (wage) convention, the Minister of the Interior has instructed all the prefects"*, you can read in a threatening communiqué from the Italian executive. The Minister of the Interior, Giuseppe Pisanu, specifies in the same communiqué that he has taken precise measures such that each violation of the legislation in force will be recorded by the judiciary. The minister states that he will thus make himself the *"spokesman of the serious concern of the government faced with grave disruptions inflicted on the citizens"*. The government brutally hardened the terms of the conflict and applied to the letter, for the first time in ten years, the legislation guarantying a minimum service and the notification of strike action. How were the workers going to respond?

22 December: apart from a few important exceptions, the struggle against the agreement and the turn of the governmental screw becomes that of a minority

The prefects' conscription orders, signed from the morning of 22 December onwards, did not have an effect in Genoa, Venice, Siena, Varese and Trente, where the strikes did not weaken.

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

In Bologna, on the whole of the urban network, a mere dozen out of 500 buses ran. The three depots (via Battindarno, via Ferrarese, via Due Madonne) were in the hands of the workers and were surrounded with massive pickets. Buses had been put across the entrances from 4.30 a.m. Delegations from base unions and *No globalisation* militants had participated in the assemblies which had voted massively against the Rome agreement.

In Venice, at ATCV, it is the Cobas which successfully called for an illegal strike. No buses ran in the city centre but, on the other hand, some boats served the Lagoon.

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

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

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

In Milan, in the morning, only two bus depots were completely paralysed. Assemblies were held there. Although metro lines 1 and 2 functioned normally, on line 3 the service was seriously disrupted. At 7 a.m., the workers voted for a return to work. In the Viale Sarca depot, some light confrontation took place between employees returning to work and some young squatters from a nearby house.

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

First balance sheet of December

The day of the 22nd had therefore been that of a battle which over all was lost by the *autoferrotramvieri*. The proof of this is that the “*Christmas truce*” was respected. After twenty two days of agitation punctuated by three high points, the workers licked their wounds and gathered their strength (and their wages⁷). Their adversary could from now on play on several tables.

First of all, local negotiations would closely follow the national agreement. In several towns, including Milan, the opening of talks on renewing enterprise agreements was brought forward. Where the movement was most deeply rooted, local government and the urban transport firms would concede extra payments to recreate “*a climate of confidence*” with their employees.

Secondly, the union signatories of the Rome agreement would carry on their work of demoralisation and recuperation. Finally, the executive would wield the stick of pecuniary sanctions up to almost 1000 euros against the workers guilty of illegal strike action. The authorities also envisaged layoffs. Given the long time periods of judicial proceedings, the threat would hang over the strikers sufficiently long to dissuade them from taking any further risks.

Consequently, this complex antiworker cocktail had a chance of succeeding in definitively reducing the struggle to the outcome drawn up by the social partners whose patrons were the government and the left opposition, despite the massive opposition of the workers.

This is why the hour of the balance sheet rapidly approaches for the most conscious and determined part of the movement.

The first gain on this necessary balance sheet: the capacity of the workers to rid themselves at a stroke of the straightjacket of restrictive strike laws and at the same time of the union sales pitch.

Second important feature: the sudden emergence of workers’ autonomy, capable of bringing about a demarcation on a clear class basis from the whole of civil society and its political and union formations which structure it in the service of the dominant mode of production.

From December to January

For the unions, with the CGIL at their head, it is now a question of attempting to take their troops in hand and to try to guarantee the national agreement. It is for this reason that, since 22 December, the CGIL has proposed the calling together of assemblies, town by town, depot by depot, starting on 7 January⁸. In the meantime, sporadic agitations and assorted demonstrations took place on 29 December and 4 January in Venice⁹, Padua, Genoa and even Cagliari to protest against the first of the bosses’ repressive measures.

As for the base unions (Sult, SinCobas, FltCub, SlaiCobas and RdbCub), they hoped to benefit from the illegal strikes so as to develop their influence. So they organised a legal strike day of 24 hours for 9 January. On 3 January there was a national conference in Florence which a hundred or so urban transport workers from several towns in Italy participated in. There were members of the base unions promoting the event, but also members of the official confederations and nonunionised people. The proceedings led to the constitution of a national coordination of struggle, open to employees who were not cardcarrying members of the base unions. A minority more or less everywhere (apart from Venice and Florence notably), the latter

⁷ In Italy, the payment for strike days has never been part of the negotiations during the return to work.

⁸ In effect, in Italy, the Christmas holidays last until the 6 January inclusive.

⁹ 400 workers demonstrated at the regional government office in response to the call of the COBAS.

tried to invite themselves to the table of national negotiations by means of a day of action. Their objective was to renew the official talks with urban transport companies and the state with the aim of obtaining the objectives fixed by the workers: 106 euros increase per month and 2900 euros back pay on the contract signed in 2000. In the same way, the base unions counted on enlarging their audience and competing advantageously with the three state unions of the country (CGIL, CISL et UIL).

For them, at the start of this year, the game is far from won. In Venice, for example, one worker in three did not return to work because they were off sick. The dissatisfaction continues but it is difficult to know at this stage if it will transform itself into collective action. While the CGIL calls for assemblies on 7 and 8 January, the base unions fix on the strike of Friday 9 January as the only important date. This day of struggle would have to be punctuated by demonstrations at the regional administration building which had decided to conscript striking employees. A positive outcome from the day of the ninth was not guaranteed. This is why the Coordination decided to respect the periods of obligatory work *“with the aim of encouraging the largest possible participation in the strike, including workers who don’t belong to base unions, and to prevent the malicious use of the difficulties provoked by the agitation in regard to the service users”* (communiqué from the Coordination, 7 January 2004). This admission of weakness upset quite a few people.

In Milan, in some depots, the drivers didn’t hide their disappointment. *“It’s better to take them by surprise”*, a bus driver from the ATM depot of Via Giambellino in Milan said to Paolo Foschini, a journalist on *Corriere della Sera*, on 8 January. *“Our union representatives, including the Cobas, have chucked away the opportunity which was created in December. When we had the famous black Monday of 1 December, we had to conduct the struggle without worrying about anybody. The whole of the category was ready to move and we could have won what we wanted. In fact, we were taken in”*, he added. Things then moved towards a new “normal” day of trade union action, even if it contested a national agreement signed by the three official unions. Everything seemed to be in place for an *“uneventful”* strike.

But the situation in Milan, once more, modified the deal. Backed up by its positive financial position, the management of the ATM had announced itself ready to make additional money available in return for an increase in productivity, in the form of an extension of work time slots and the reduction from 20 to 15 minutes of the breaks at the end of a journey. On 7 January, they proposed a oneoff bonus of 250 euros for the year 2003 payable immediately plus 300 euros for 2004 payable from 1 February 2004. ATM also promised to make this annual bonus of 300 euros permanent from 2005. After 20 hours of negotiations, on 8 January at 5.30 a.m., the three official unions left the negotiating table despite the latest conciliation attempts of the prefect, Bruno Ferrante.

Nino Cortorillo, general secretary of the FILTCGIL of Milan, dismissed the exchange of money for an increase in the intensity and duration of work and stated that *“It is the management of ATM which bears all the responsibility if the strike of 9 January is successful”*. Knowing the blazing mood of the depots very well, the official unions had made the choice of not cutting themselves off from their own base. More than this, on the national level the signing of a separate agreement in Milan had unleashed one agitation after another in the other towns, definitively wrecking the framework of the national agreement of 20 December. Let’s not forget that the principal *raison d’être* of these unions is to protect their exclusive prerogative of negotiation with the companies and institutions. And so the curtain rises on 9 January.

9 January, the strike is legal

An overview

With the exception of an abortive attempt in three depots in Genoa, there was scarcely an illegal strike. Two important features of the day of the ninth were: the establishment of an important split between most of the towns of the north, where the legal strike had a massive level of participation, and the south of Italy where the strikers were few in number. Even in Naples, where you could count some 60% on strike, no decisive action was produced. In Rome, there were around 75% on strike. The A and B lines of the metro were closed from 9 a.m.. In Florence, between 80 and 90 % were strikers. Here, you could see an attempt at solidarity on the part of the “users” by means of a ticket payment strike.

Traditionally a strong place for base unions, Venice had almost 100% on strike. We can also note that there were 95% strikers in Trieste, 80% in Udine, 70% in Gorizia and 80% on average in the whole region of Venetia.

However, in Turin, there were only 40% on strike, no depots were blocked, and no demonstration was reported. The drivers had been massively conscripted by the prefect, Achille Catalani.

In Bologna, almost all the employees of the urban transport companies participated in the legal strike. No depot was blocked. A demonstration of around 250 people took place in front of the regional administration building calling, amongst other things, for the lifting of sanctions following the illegal strike of 22 December. The march went to the central station to express its support for the three rail workers layed off for denouncing the working conditions.

In Genoa the strike is made illegal

This time once again, the workers of Genoa put themselves at the head of the movement. While the legal strike reached 80 to 90% participation, from 4 a.m., the Mangini della Foce depot was on total strike with buses blocking the exit from the depot. A bit later, the situation was the same in the depots of Sampierdarena and Boccadasse. But even this beautiful initial attempt at an illegal strike went off halfcocked. Paradoxically, the Staglieno depot which had been the spearhead of the movement in December, recorded a very small number of strikers. The metro line and the funicular railway didn't run. The western part of the town didn't have a bus service, while some were running in the east.

In Milan, the fire always smoulders under the ashes of union mobilisation

The legal strike succeeded in paralysing the metro lines. Only Line 1 functioned with fewer routes and a reduced frequency. Bus traffic was erratic. In total, there were around 60 to 70% on strike. The representative of the SLAI COBAS, Giacomo Capettini, stated that *"the workers didn't want to hurt the users"*. This strike took place against a background of quarrels over representativity between SLAICOBAS and the three big national unions¹⁰. After the failure of local negotiations with ATM, the Milan category organisations of the CGIL, CISL and UIL had stopped openly opposing the strike by making the responsibility for the success of the mobilisation fall on each company. The CGIL, for its part, reiterated its demand for a referendum on the national agreement of 20 December. This proposition was finally taken up by all the forces involved, including the Coordination. In summary, if, on 9 January, in Milan, there wasn't a ground swell comparable to that of 1 December, it is strongly probable that the old mole continued to dig. Many workers' voices were raised in a call for a new wave of surprise strikes from Monday 12 January.

In Brescia, the manoeuvres to rearrange the union landscape go very well

While being perfectly legal, the strike was a clear success: 80 to 90% of the employees of Brescia Trasporti participated. Yet, at 4.15 a.m. in the town bus depot, barely 20 workers (including some from outside the company) tried to organise a picket on the gate. Without success. The periods of public service were respected apart from an incomplete service from 5 to 6 in the morning when only 3 buses out of 25 ran. The two suburban bus companies, SIA and SAIA, were not touched by the strike. A demonstration at the regional administration building organised by the COBAS was escorted by 20 buses on strike. On 9 January, a strong polarisation occurred between a small minority of employees who wanted to go further and another minority of workers who aligned themselves with the legal orders of the official unions. These latter did not however spare their efforts to try to reduce the hiatus to their own advantage.

In this sense, the secretary of the CGIL trade union centre, Dino Greco, stated that *"the unions are not against the strike which expresses the legitimate anger of the workers"*. He added that *"we mustn't have a Manichean interpretation of this day"* and that it *"is not a question of exchanging increases in salary for increases in productivity"*. In a gesture of appeasement, Maurizio Murari, leading light of the 15 December Drivers' Coordination joined the National Coordination, stating that *"the strike is not directed against the three confederations"* but only *"against the 20 December agreement"*. The grand manoeuvres for the recomposition of the union landscape began... Even the extremely reactionary Northern League claimed to be in favour of the opening of *"regional negotiations"*, only too happy to be able to dismantle part of the national collective agreement. On the other hand, deaf to any attempt at appeasement, the management of Brescia Trasporti, through their administrator, Giorgio Schiffer, opposed the national agreement, judging it too generous for the workers.

Meanwhile, in Varese, Lombardy, the number of strikers reached 90% of workers and 77% in Lecco.

¹⁰ The SLAI COBAS is credited with 600 members, the FIT CISL with 1600, the FILT CGIL with 1600 and the UIL with less than 400.

The government plays for time and wants to turn the page

The executive remained very subdued during the January strike day. Obviously, they preferred to leave the field free to the official unions so they could try to reduce the anger of the *autoferrotramvieri*. For them it was all over on 20 December with the signing of the national agreement. Nevertheless, the ineffable Under Secretary of State for Work and Social Policy, Maurizio Sacconi, old leader of the CGIL and today an eminent member of *Forza Italia*, did not restrain himself from making his habitual provocative comments. While talking about “*the failed strike of the Cobas with the exception of a few big towns*”, he did not miss the opportunity to bring up the question of sanctions against the “*minority of strikers*” once more. “*Particularly in the metro small minorities can inconvenience the greatest number. This is not fair*”, he declared. He therefore prompted the big union confederations to “*assume their responsibilities in participating in the success of the modernisation of a sector in profound crisis*”. Indicating to the social partners the path to follow for the next two years, Maurizio Sacconi ended by stating that “*taking account of the fact that the national collective convention is from now on behind us, the primary objective is to rectify the financial situation of the companies of a sector which is hit almost everywhere by serious deficits and debts through negotiations between central, local and union institutions*”.

It's up to conscious proletarians to learn lessons from this episode in the life of the class

The battle of 22 December – lost over all by the *autoferrotramvieri* – was the turning point of this wave of struggle of the category. The “*Christmas truce*” of the long festive period at the end of the year was respected. During this period, after twenty two days of agitation punctuated by three high points, the workers licked their wounds and gathered their strength (and part of their financial reserves). The calling of a new national day of action, on 9 January, did not deeply modify this order of things. If this day was comparable to those of December in the level of participation in numerous town in the northern centre of Italy, on the level of its intensity it was a step backward. The illegal strike was only attempted in three depots in Genoa, without much of a result. A large part of its numeric success was due to the Milan negotiations of 8 December being called off.

The base unions played their role as a safety valve for the anger of the employees. They reinforced their position in relation to the unions legally authorised to negotiate by gaining an additional representativity while giving a pledge of absolute control over the eventual excesses of the workers. After this strike, the proposal by the government for local negotiations based on the principle of supplementary payments in return for productivity was not closed. It remained very much in the news. In many towns they spoke of bringing forward the start of the talks for renewing company agreements. It was not always ruled out that in the big towns of the north, where the movement had its deepest roots, local government and urban transport companies could concede additional sums to recreate a “*climate of confidence*” with their employees. Contrary to the situation in the great majority of towns in the south of Italy, the state of local finances allowed such arrangements. Even if something of this nature could be foreseen, the very framework of the national collective agreement was blown apart, giving a reason to the trade union birds of ill omen who had justified signing the agreement on the basis of the defence of centralised negotiation.

The unions who signed the Rome agreement would pursue their work of demoralisation and recuperation. The proposition from the CGIL, from then on accepted by all the unions in the category (including the Coordination), to organise a referendum, on the national level, of the workers of the sector to validate the national agreement of 20 December was part of that. In effect, the strike against the agreement on 9 January only received the participation of from 25% (according to the bosses' association) to 40/45% (from a more complete tally) of all the urban transport workers in the country.

Finally, the executive wielded the stick of pecuniary sanctions of up to 1000 euros against the workers guilty of illegal strike action. Layoffs were also envisaged by the authorities. On account of the long time periods of judicial procedures, the threat would hang over the workers for sufficiently long time to dissuade them from taking any additional risks.

This antiworker cocktail was able to succeed very well, definitively channelling the struggle into the limits established by the social partners under the patronage of the government and the left opposition. And this despite the massive opposition of the workers.

It is however possible to put forward a contrary hypothesis. Some reactions from the strikers in Milan and elsewhere during the 9 January day of struggle seem to indicate this. In the Milan depots of Palmanova and Viale Sarca many employees could see the serious limits of the legal strike. “*You make a legal strike and what do you get? We were considered good, courageous, respectful, but we got nothing*”. “*It was a fake strike as well; the only way to succeed was to make an illegal strike*”. “*Nothing was won, we'll see next week*”, they said repeatedly. “*The depots are powder kegs; the bosses have changed nothing*,”

it's going to explode", said the more moderate ones. "*The problem is not to obtain a new agreement but to apply the old one*", they all said in summary.

Consequently, if the situation is still fluid, if everything is not definitively lost for the workers, it is vitally necessary to draw up a balance sheet of the struggle. The first item on this balance sheet is the capacity of the workers to rid themselves immediately of the straitjacket of restrictive strike laws and union sales patter. The second important element is the sudden emergence of workers' autonomy, capable of bringing about a demarcation on a clear class basis from the whole of civil society and its political and union formations which structure it in the service of the dominant mode of production.

For the first time in a very long time, the institutional left (the Democratic Left and the CGIL primarily) have had to openly line up on the side of the bosses and the government of Silvio Berlusconi in the active condemnation of workers' illegality. This fact must be interpreted as a positive political factor because it allows the political boundaries, normally expected to remain very vague, to be precisely redefined by the exercise of the class struggle.

The third thing to note is that geographically and sociologically new components of the class have made their appearance in the class war¹¹. The majority of participants in the movement are young and poorly qualified. The myth of the "*labour aristocracy*" of the *autoferrotramvieri* has gone. The comments of the strikers describing their lives, their meagre wage slips, their working conditions, are more than sufficient to bury any interpretation of the movement based on a supposed corporatism, or a "*struggle against proletarianisation*" of privileged sectors of the class.

A milanese epilogue under the sign of division among struggling workers

Workers of ATM opened the ball on 1 december and ended it on 14january. As we quoted, tension was high in depots since the 9 january strike. In the morning of Monday 12 all the depots of the ATM voted for illegal strike: no transport operates precipating again the city in turmoil. But the action in Milan found very few echo. Nevertheles the movement was pursued on Tuesday 13. Company/city/unions take care it was necessary to sign an greement. On Tuesday morning the strike was going on with only a weak point : metro line 3 partially returns to operataion. The prefectire offices anounced pecuniary sanctions from 250 to 516 euro for each day of illegal strike. In Genoa penalty was already there: 1,000 drivers received a sanction of 250 euro.

Hope reappeared when autoferrotranvieri of Bergamo, Monza and Brescia, joined the milanese strike. But the attempt to generalize the strike failed. In Brescia the workers front crumbled. After conscription order from prefect, half of the workers returned to work and the the strike ended. Same thing happened in Bergamo and Monza. In Brescia also no bus run before conscription order at half past nine. At the beginning the most determinated proletarians won approval from other colleagues during a general assembly. But the non confessed tendency was in favor of returning to work. Without any actual perspective for enlargement of struggle front, returning to work won.

Other workers look with sympathy the struggle in Milan but nothing happened. Negociation worked smoothly and everything converged for a strike stop. For all that, at 23.40, workers from via Messina depot voted at 60% for pursuing the movement. But only 300 workers participated to the ballot.

The weakness o the night assembly conclusions won't be long to be drawn. On Wednesday morning strike ended and, like in a fairy tale, the agreement was signed at 9.15. A bonus of 250 euro will be given on january wages, in exchange of productivity gains realized during 2003. Another bonus of 300 euro will follow in february. Spread on 12 months, it will become definitive on 1 january 2005. Unions called for returning to work in the afternoon. Metro runned again and bus went out from the depots. COBAS called without any success to pursue agitation for reopening national agreement with its own participation ; its voice remained isolated..

¹¹ Here is a non-exhaustive table of the balance of forces in the principal towns during the December strikes.

TownCompanyStaff01/12/0315/12/0319/12/0320/12/0321/12/0322/12/03Legal

strikeIllegal strikeLegal

strikeIllegal strikeIllegal strikeIllegal strikeIllegal strikeMilanATM9 00006 0004 500006 0004 0001 500RomeATAC

bus+tram8 8008 00002 000006 0004 0000ATAC

Metro+2 6002 40001 000002 00000TurinGTT5 2404 800003 00002 5002 5000NaplesANM4 3004 250003 50003 50000GenoaAMT3 2002 700001

9001 9002 9001 5002 000FlorenceATAF3 0002 50002 500300001 0000VeniceACTV2 8802 70000002 7002 5002 200PalermoAMAT2 2002 1500

2 10000000BolognaATC1 8801 80001 7000001 0001 500CataneAMT1 2001 15001 15000000BariAMTAB1 00070000800040000ModenaATCM8

0060006000006000400CômeSPT58050005000050000PerugiaAPM56345000450028000MessineATM500480045000000La

SpeziaATCLS45040004000040000BresciaBrescia

Trasporti4153500032003202500BergameATB40035003500024000VareseAVT3002800280000140140TOTAL49 30836 5606 00017 53010 2701

90027 74017 4907 740

In Bologna workers of ATC took again for their own aim indications from Milan. Urban transport of the city are paralyzed. But as in Brescia, conscription from the prefect, Vincenzo Grimaldi, arrived quickly. Only the depot of Due Madonne resisted up to the afternoon.

With no doubt the ultimate battle of ATM workers has partially paid regarding the aim of a local bonus in wages above the national agreement made on 20 december. In exchange, the perspective of a generalization of the autonomous movement is postponed for long. In the same way, defence of work conditions and wages of the whole category has made a step backward with milanese agreement.

The assembly of official actors has made their best to put out the new fire from thousand workers in Lombardy and Bologna area. Excesses hve been finally contained.. Henceforth a new difficult phase of settling of accounts is opening: in depots between workers for or against, struggle continuation and on bosses and State side, determined to impose a hard penalty for those workers in favor of illegal strike. In consequence the game is suspended but it is a good reason to hope : tranvieri have not been completely defeated in open countryside. To be followed.....

Brussels Paris, 10 January 2004.

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