

# **Trade Union Intervention**

**Motion on trade union work at the 8<sup>th</sup> National Congress**

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

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# Contents

<b>The international situation</b> . . . . .	3
<b>The national situation</b> . . . . .	3
<b>1. <i>Italian capitalism and the attack on the labour system</i></b> . . . . .	3
<b>2. <i>The attitude of the CGIL, CISL and UIL unions</i></b> . . . . .	5
<b>3. <i>The grassroots unions</i></b> . . . . .	5
<b>Anarchist Communist labour tactics</b> . . . . .	6
<b>Labour Platform</b> . . . . .	8

## **The international situation**

The capitalist system's structural crisis has dealt a severe blow to the economies of many countries.

A structural – not cyclical – economic crisis which in effect demonstrates the nett failure of the liberal system.

In Europe, where liberal parties continue to be successful, the various parties and governments define it as a cyclical crisis and often declare it to be over, merely because they cannot declare the very system they base themselves on to be a failure.

European governments of all political colours are taking anti-popular economic measures; they are supporting banks and businesses using the crisis as an alibi, and the bill for this “support” is being paid for by public and private-sector workers, pensioners and the weakest layers of society in the form of wage freezes, cuts, casualization, privatization and the sale of public services.

All over Europe, these governments are allied with the industrialist class, which is using the threat of outsourcing – and thus job losses – to blackmail the workers, reducing their bargaining power and union rights with the aim of making these measures irreversible.

Today more than ever, the outsourcing of entire companies or parts of the productive system is being used with the precise aim of obtaining the maximum profit, by outsourcing to countries where the cost of labour (in terms of wages and rights) is much lower.

The response of the workers to this cage being built for them has been difficult to organize, for a variety of reasons:

- it is strongly opposed by the leadership of various trade unions, who are anything but autonomous from the government and the political parties, and are systematic and systemic accomplices of the “labour reforms” that make up the bars of this cage;

- it is limited to the company or even single plant affected;

- workers from various countries are not organized internationally, united on a platform of demands with common objectives. Widening the social conflict is the only way we have to stand up to the attacks from the bosses who, with the complicity of local institutions and collaborationist trade unions, are using the crisis to force the workers down onto their knees.

On the international level, existing organizational forms are totally insufficient; too often we find workers from the same multinational in different countries in conflict with each other, conflicts stoked and often supported by the governments themselves. There are all too few cases of international coordination among workers (multinational companies).

## **The national situation**

### ***1. Italian capitalism and the attack on the labour system***

The crisis in the Italian economic system is bringing the various productive districts of several Italian regions to their knees.

The crisis first hit temporary workers, day workers, those on short-term contracts, in other words the whole army of casual workers, but has now reached even workers on permanent contracts, eliminating their safety nets.

There is massive and at times unjustified use of the Redundancy Fund<sup>1</sup>, serious delays in wage payments, staff reductions, factory closures, etc.

It is a crisis that is being offloaded onto the workers, because every means by which an attempt is sought to get over it involves reducing production costs – reducing wages and reducing rights.

It is a crisis that is useful as far as the government and the bosses are concerned, as they are using it to re-write the rules for bargaining and labour policy in general.

New rules which will be applied across the board and will be vague (so that they can be got around easily), that will lead to a planned reduction of wages and an end to collective bargaining agreements, and will be agreed on by obliging unions, who sign agreements in the name of development – in other words, profit.

With its last Budget, the government effected widespread cuts hitting workers, both as far as wages are concerned – by means of wage freezes (4 years for civil servants) – and with regard to the reduction and de-structurization of welfare coverage, with measures which hit women workers and changes for the worse to old-age and contributory pensions; but it is also destroying the quality of public services (schools, healthcare, universities, research, etc.), cutting jobs for short-term contract workers, blocking new contracts and externalizing, placing restrictions on the right to strike and suspending the renewal of worker representation bodies (RSUs).

It is the company that decides the work-pace for workers, creating a form of domination by capital over the supply of work. Working conditions are leading to the physical and mental exhaustion of workers, and there has been a sharp increase in workplace accidents and work-related illness. For the sake of profit, productive plants are at saturation point, and no collective bargaining is permitted on these points. Companies have an interest in monetizing the health of the workers by not respecting health and safety regulations either inside or outside the production premises, aided by legislation that has markedly reduced company responsibility.

In the private sector, the company which best toes the bosses' line is FIAT: increases to the working day, work shifts second to none for their intensity and dramatic force, restrictions in time off for illness, the elimination of collective bargaining agreements and the right to strike, and dismissal and repression for anyone who does not play by these rules.

Marchionne's<sup>2</sup> plan is thus nothing more than the latest example of the old line in FIAT which has never tolerated any form of opposition to restructuring plans or reductions in the workforce.

It is the market and its fluctuations that everyone must now bow to: the businesses are in charge!

Less time for rest, more overtime, maximum flexibility, no strikes, and getting ill is a luxury that only the unemployed can afford.

The decades may pass, but the FIAT company has never lost its historical vocation as the inflexible interpreter of that strategy that equates the factory with the barracks that has left such a scar on the minds and bodies of generations of workers in its (vain) attempt to drown their

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassa integrazione*. A system whereby workers are laid off temporarily but continue to receive 50% of their pay from the State for a limited period, relieving companies of the cost of their unused workforce.

<sup>2</sup> Sergio Marchionne, FIAT CEO.

fighting spirit and their ability to organize their struggle and their resistance from below, factory by factory.

## **2. The attitude of the CGIL, CISL and UIL unions**

The government's measures have in effect given lie to the conclusions imposed by the majority at the CGIL's recent 16<sup>th</sup> Congress, both as regards the current situation and the foreseeable future.

The CGIL's current leadership, strengthened by the latest nominations to the National Secretariat and by the restrictive changes to its Statute, which centralizes decision-making in favour of the National Executive, has once again shown its inability – and to some extent its badly-concealed unwillingness to return to the collaborationist fold – to face up to this vital phase in which the very existence of the union itself is under threat.

The dynamics of this Congress also laid bare the real state of the confederation, now showing the effects of "Balkanization": the majority's refusal to discuss the union's line with the minority<sup>3</sup>, and the contrast between the FIOM<sup>4</sup> and the rest of the confederation.

The harshness of the current economic phase and the current and future state of society allow no room for resting on laurels: the workers need to respond to this attack on the conditions of their lives.

Today, the CGIL must re-think its policy: will it support the FIOM by acting in a more confrontational way (as the minority in *La CGIL che vogliamo* believes) in order to give a greater voice to the workers, or will it think about going back to a phase of agreement with the CISL and UIL on bargaining rules, in the continuing search for unity between the unions? Choosing the latter would condemn the CGIL to a minor role, ignored both by the other two unions and by the employers' federation, Confindustria.

For quite some time now, the CISL and UIL, with the UGL<sup>5</sup> alongside them, have clearly understood how trade union relations will be reformed – with changes that will turn the role of Italian unions completely on its head.

The reforms proposed by the government over the last two years or those presented by Confindustria and FIAT have found support and agreement from these unions, without too many problems. And partnership is no longer spoken about: the unions will no longer be external partners, they will be part and parcel of the whole thing.

## **3. The grassroots unions**

The birth of the *Unione Sindacale di Base*<sup>6</sup> (USB) on 22 May in Rome could have been an opportunity to simplify the scenario of grassroots syndicalism in Italy, but it does not seem to be above to contribute to resolving the old problems that afflict the Italian grassroots syndicalist galaxy since its very origins almost 25 years ago.

The road to the USB is littered with the remains of the previous "grassroots pact" signed by the RdB/CUB, Confederazione COBAS and the SdL, not to mention the hairs which flew during

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<sup>3</sup> The minority grouped around a programmatic document they supported during the last Congress entitled *La CGIL che vogliamo* ("The CGIL we want"). See [www.lacgilchevogliamo.it](http://www.lacgilchevogliamo.it)

<sup>4</sup> The *Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*, the largest constituent federation of the CGIL.

<sup>5</sup> The *Unione Generale Del Lavoro*, right-wing union traditionally associated with the neo-fascist parties.

<sup>6</sup> "Grassroots Syndical Union", founded in May 2010 from a merger of the RdB, part of the CUB and the SdL (itself formed in 2007 from a merger of SinCobas, SALC and SULT).

the split between the previously-federated RdB and the CUB, accounting for approximately 80% of all grassroots union members.

Despite the pernicious, top-down mechanism of decomposition and re-composition which has afflicted grassroots syndicalism for decades, the birth of the USB does bring with it some new aspects, such as a division of the union into two macro-areas – private sector and public sector – managed by collective executives, not single-sector coordinators, and is in general an encouraging signal, above all in those areas where the class war is at its harshest.

But, for a new union, there remain many divisions and problems, such as:

- the problem of the continuing error of calling separate strikes, all too often on the decision of the national leaderships;
- the problem of competition between the various grassroots unions.

The price of these divisions and problems is also paid for by libertarian-inspired syndicalism, traditionally a supporter of workers' unity over and above the interests of any single union.

But libertarian syndicalists know that they can provide continuity to the workers' struggle, even in this phase of neo-partnership unionism, and that they can help to guarantee democracy in the workplace.

In this crucial phase, therefore, grassroots syndicalism needs to overcome its long-standing inability and find a solution in a stable coordination – if not a federation – if it is to seriously represent a point of reference, both for the workers, casual workers and immigrants, and for the CGIL's internal minority.

## **Anarchist Communist labour tactics**

In this phase which sees a strong attack coming from the bosses, collusion by some unions (CISL, UIL), and a wait-and-see attitude from others (the CGIL majority), the FdCA believes that the only labour strategy that can be effective in defending the interests of the class is one of conflict and libertarian practices. It must be autonomous from the logic of parties, it must aim to unite the workers whatever their union, it must have united objectives and methods of struggle, and it must be organized horizontally.

The intervention of anarchist communists cannot but begin in the workplace, where it is necessary to rebuild the unity of workers' interests, for:

- the defence of jobs, against redundancies and the unjustified use of certain forms of unemployment benefits;
- the defence of the Workers' Statute and the right to strike;
- the defence of the national collective bargaining system and the conquest of company agreements that improve the workers' wages and working conditions, while removing the link to productivity;
- the protection of workers' health and the struggle to allow workers to manage their own working hours in order that they may better manage their lives and their work;

- casual workers (temps, those on short-term contracts, etc.) to be represented on worker representation bodies and in bargaining agreements. All too often, given how easily they can be blackmailed, they are unable to assure themselves any form of protection;
- the stabilization of all casual workers and those on short-term contracts.

In the areas where they live and work, it is the task of anarchist communists to encourage and influence:

- coordination networks of workers, migrants, casual workers, single-category or inter-category, but autonomous from political parties and trade unions;
- form of cooperation and struggle where the various experiences can enrich and enable more effective defence of class interests;
- coordination networks where class solidarity, direct democracy and participation can be fostered, with the aim of creating a more egalitarian, libertarian society.

It is important for FdCA members and sympathizers who are members of the CGIL to take an active role in the organized minority *La CGIL che vogliamo*, having supported its creation from the very beginning, since it represents an excellent opportunity to influence the CGIL and increase our visibility.

It is equally important for members and sympathizers in grassroots unions to facilitate coordination and unity between the various unions so that a strong point of reference can be created for workers, casual workers and the unemployed; it is also necessary to begin to talk about representation of private-sector workers and an active role in bargaining.

The coming months will be vital for the class struggle and a renewal of social conflict, both in Italy and abroad where mobilizations and strikes are on the increase.

Today, workers in struggle need solidarity from all categories, both in the public and private sectors; union activists who have been hit by dismissal and repression need the solidarity and support of all trade union organizations who believe that class conflict and grassroots participation in the struggles are fundamental strategic objectives.

The FIAT struggle, both in Italy and abroad, can be a demonstration of the possibility for mobilization and workers' opposition to company plans which, be it in Italy, Poland or Serbia, use the crisis as a way to blackmail the workers and force them to submit to the logic of profit.

The FdCA will support all initiatives of struggle from below in defence of the conditions of workers in their workplaces and where they live.

Our members will seek to foster the creation of coordination networks of combative, grassroots syndicalism, but also of political initiatives to support the grassroots struggle by anarchists and libertarians, which can lead to more concerted mobilizations.

Coordination with an international dimension which – apart from improving the flow of information – can lead to opportunities for solid international struggles on the basis of shared platforms of demands, against uncontrolled offshore outsourcing, to defend the right to strike, workers' statutes and wage conditions in countries where they are under threat and extend them to countries where they do not exist.

## **Labour Platform**

1. Solid international conflict against uncontrolled offshore outsourcing by multinationals on the constant search for the maximum profit.
2. Struggle in solidarity with dismissed workers and the creation of resistance funds.
3. Safeguard jobs by blocking factory closures and/or reductions and fighting job cuts for casual workers in the public services.
4. Struggle for the dignity of labour.
5. Against the annihilation of workers' rights and freedoms, in defence of the right to strike, the right to be represented and the Workers' Statute.
6. For the right to representation of all casual workers.
7. For the right of workers to decide every platform and every agreement through a binding vote.
8. Against the reduction of workers expelled from the production process to servitude and marketization.
9. Against the uncontrolled use of casual workers who live under constant blackmail from the bosses, despite often fulfilling highly professional roles. For the stabilization of all casual and short-term contract workers.
10. Against the outsourcing of work, often contracted to cooperatives and individuals pledged to self-exploitation and increasingly exposed to injury and death at the workplace.
11. For the defence of national collective bargaining and the extension of company agreements released from the link to productivity.
12. For the protection of workers' health and the management of their own working times.
13. For a large-scale wage battle with FIAT, for metal-mechanics and all categories.
14. For a European minimum wage across all categories.

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