

Genova - Sept. 1959

I Substantiated it 9/11/59 Ed Robinson

Buona sera. It's a great privilege to be able to talk to Italian workers. I hope it will not be a one-way conversation. But, like a two-way road, go from me to you, and from you to me. I come to tell you about American workers, their conditions of work and their thoughts, and I wish to hear from you yours. Too many intellectuals are out to lead -- few to listen. But NEWS & LETTERS, which I represent, is a workers paper published in the land of the auto, Detroit. It is a workers paper not because it is edited "for" workers. It is a workers paper because the editor is himself a production worker, because the stories from the factories are written by the men and women on the production line. It is a workers' paper because it contains the workers' thoughts as well as those of the intellectuals who have aligned themselves with the working class.

We--American workers and intellectuals--we have much to learn from you both because of your rich civilization and because of the great traditions of your mass movements. A people that gave birth to a Dante and the Renaissance when other countries were still in the darkness of the Middle Ages; a working people that occupied the factories in 1920 when America had not yet had its CIO, has much to teach American workers.

The Partigiani exposed the slander that the Italian working people, and especially its youth, had been "brainwashed" by fascism. But it wasn't the Americans who fought a civil war in Italy; it was you. American imperialism was ready to accept Badoglio, but it was you who would not permit the military form of fascism, and strung up Mussolini. It wasn't the American army that saved the factories in the North from the vandalism of the Nazis; it was you.

The Com's Mass Movement
At the same time, there is a second, a working class America, opposing the official one known to most. While American private capitalism and Russian state capitalism are fighting for world power, the really decisive battles will be the ones of the workers against the capitalists in each country. That division within each country is the unity of the world working class. The point is to make this the starting point for really taking destiny into our own hands, refusing to give it to a set of Planners like the Communists who masquerade under the banner of Marxist liberation. One can see how, at the end of WWII, they may have appeared as liberators since they opposed the capitalists of your country. For no other reason could it have gained the allegiance of 2½ million Italians, over a million Frenchmen, etc. *

When I was in Europe in 1947, the popular saying of the CP in Western Europe was: the CP can take power at any time it wants to; it just has to get the right telephone call. But that telephone call never came from the Kremlin because it had no intention of letting you decide your fate yourselves; it opposed your rulers only because it favored its own domination over you.

During the war, it led the Warsaw Soviet bleed to death at the hands of the Nazi butchers -- while its armies stood outside. By 1956 it itself directly crushed the the Hungarian Workers Councils. In between these historic

counter-revolutionary feats, its politics in Italy included the compromise with the Vatican and the bourgeois parties in parliament, while its actions in France led to DeGaulle.

But the Italian workers who have suffered under fascism for ~~a~~ ^{over} a century will not tolerate such treacherous hypocrites for very much longer. If the Italian workers mistook Communist totalitarianism for Marxist Humanism, for the theory and practice of liberation, it is because the CP is not in power in Italy and therefore the Italians do not know this party as the workers in Russia and the satellites know it-- as their exploiter and oppressor.

The Marxist theoreticians who did know that Marxism and Communism were opposites failed--we must openly admit ~~that~~ ^{the} failed to create a polarizing force against Communism and for genuine Marxist Humanism. To ~~raise~~ ^{raise} this banner high one must be deep down in the working class and have the ears open to the new movement from it. ~~The~~ ^{The} theoretic unity with this movement from practice, I do not doubt, will save humanity from the threat of destruction that hangs over it--released by both capitalist giants--America and Russia--in their struggle for world domination.

Italy's granting of missile bases to America has placed it within orb of these 2 nuclear titans holding civilization's fate in their hands.

But let us not forget that Khrushchev isn't coming to the US because all is well at home, but because all is not well at home. If the Russian workers (who are deprived of the strike weapon) would not have been ingenious with their slow-downs and labor productivity was higher; if the Russian peasant, (deprived of his human-ness) would not take its time and thus produce a great deal less than the American farmer; if the Russian youth (deprived of what the workers' state should have brought them--a new society) were not in continuous revolt, Khrushchev wouldn't come to barter with the American capitalists.

And while these two are trying to divide the world up until the moment when their ICEMS are "operational" and only one rules--if one is left alive--we are supposed to close our eyes and think that peace has come to a ~~crisis-~~ ^{crisis-} ridden world. ~~and~~ In America, (unless Eisenhower invokes the T-H Slave Law) he cannot even show the superior American steel industry for the workers have closed that down tight--

I see that the Russians--that is the rocket, the man-made machine but just a machine--have reached the moon. But none know better than Khrushchev that this spectacular feat cannot solve the problems of this earth. And his troubles come not up from there, but from live Russian workers down on this planet. In respect to people, as against machines, nothing--not even science plus Khrushchev's power--can shift the center of gravity from the point of production where relations of human beings decide everything else in society. That is

why, while talking peace to the other Big Guy (Eisenhower) Khrushchev bellowed at ~~the~~ little Italy that if they dared go through with this missile granting, they better know that he'll put them up in Albania and Italy can be blown off the face of the earth ~~than~~ they can learn to pronounce the word, Sputnik. No doubt ~~the~~ American imperialism told Italy the same thing from its viewpoint, for now there are 500 Italian soldiers in America learning the use of these weapons.

IV. The Italian American Worker

The Italian masses, on the other hand, can have a decisive voice--play a pivotal role in setting in motion the workers of the world to stop this mad rush to self-destruction. The door to freedom has many keys, and no one ever knows in advance, which workingclass will open it first. The American workers ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ have much to contribute.

Despite the slander about their "backwardness" because they have not a labor party of their own, the American workers not only are among the most militant in the world, but have raised philosophic questions of the most profound importance that bring Marxism up to date for they deal with ~~the~~ most fundamental fact of life: labor and production.

The question they have raised ever since Automation came to the mines in 1949 is WHAT KIND OF LABOR. What kind of labor should man perform? What kind of labor should man perform when the scientists can send a man up to the moon but cannot give man employment? What kind of labor should man perform, although the machine demands his complete subjection to it, although it has no brain and he has?

Recently I read an article by an Italian bourgeois economist ~~xxxxxx~~. The point of it seems to be that Italy, for competitive purposes, needs Automation, while unions ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ resist it. There should be no resistance to this "progress", says the intellectual, for automation makes work easier, a matter of pushing buttons. DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT.

The speed of the production line becomes hell itself. It is the consummation of all Marx talked against for Marx knew better than any man before or since that so long as machine is master of man, not man of machine, that is how long you will have capitalist exploitation, no matter what you name it.

Automation means the elimination, not of labor, but of the laborer.

While unemployment becomes a permanent feature of capitalism, the burden of labor has not lightened. On the contrary, the speed of the line exhausts you so that--they hope--you have no time to think and plan when you come home.

What they don't know is that you think, have your own thoughts while on the line. You oppose it. You plan to reconstitute the wholeness of yourself as human, with a body and a brain and a heart. Your own thoughts are as different from the capitalist and the labor bureaucrat and the scientific bureaucrat, as is the place you occupy in production from their place.

And so it happened, before the word, Automation, was yet invented, but the machine called continuous miner, was introduced into the American mines in 1949, that the American workers, faced with their working ranks cut in half, were not satisfied, with labor, any kind of labor, but, began fighting that monster machine with the greatest general strike lasting 9 months, which began, under John L. Lewis' leadership, but developed against it, began raising the question: WHAT KIND OF LABOR? WHY SHOULD THE DIVISION BETWEEN MENTAL AND MANUAL LABOR NOT BE ABOLISHED? WHY SHOULD THIS MONSTER machine rule us, instead of we it? And they called this invention of science and engineering put at the disposal of the capitalist class "a man killer." Since then Automation has been introduced also into auto, steel, electric works, and the death rate from industrial accident has indeed gone way up. Wildcats are a daily occurrence. What other forms of struggle they will use the future will show.

Y. D. ... Humanism Today

Now it is precisely on this mentality that Marx built his theory of liberation. Or, as Lenin put it when the masses were already in action, "masses not only as action, but as reason." Having since gone through a great revolution--the Russian--~~and~~ ~~workers~~ seen it too transformed into opposite, the workers have a right to ask: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER? Are we always to be confronted with a new bureaucracy, a labor bureaucracy, a governing bureaucracy, an intellectual bureaucracy, in a word, AN ELITE? Why must the division between mental and manual labor continue into the new, the workers' state? Shouldn't we begin its abolition TODAY, not tomorrow, TODAY?

Just as the American workers have illuminated a path along which the production battles to be fought, so it is within the power of the Italian workers to illuminate a political path, for both production and politics are but different aspects of a philosophy, a total outlook, a different way of life.

It is no longer possible to separate theory from life. Action by itself, as the Italian workers know better than any, does not lead to a totally new, truly human society. Without a philosophic direction, it can very well lead only to a DeGaulle with an Italian name. The best ~~place~~ ^{place} to learn from are the Russian workers and those in the satellites who fought for a NEW HUMANISM. Even as the working class does in life, so the humanism of Marxism does in theory--threaten the life of the ruling class. That is why the ruling class trembles and at the alleged mysticism of "negation of the negation" for it knows it by another name--the reality of the revolution against it. ~~The Hungarian Workers' Council opened a new road, and~~

The Italian working people have in their hands the key to reconstruction of Western civilization along the Marxist principle of "the freedom of the individual as the basis of the freedom of all."

Don't you believe the talk that philosophy is the province of intellectuals. Unless philosophy comes out of you, your impulses, aspirations and thoughts, it will not be Marxist Humanism. It will not be an entirely new social order. If the intellectuals go to meet that movement from practice, then together we will finally construct a class-less society.

The Hungarian Workers' Councils paved a new path in ...