

### Introduction

It is clear that we are unable to make a correct assessment of Lotta Continua (LC) within BF because our approach is unhistorical; by this I mean we are constantly putting together statements LC made in 69 with those of 73 with those of 75 and not surprisingly we are coming out with a lot of non-sense. I have not got the time nor documents needed to present a critical history of LC which would be necessary to understand the text I have translated by Sofri - what follows is a rough guide to help locate the text.

1. Pre 69. existence of theoretical ~~xxx~~ journal 'Red Note-Books'. In the Hot Autumn, intellectuals of 'Red Note-Books' split into three tendencies;
  - a) Panzieri, Sofri close to Lotta Continua
  - b) Others become gurus of 'Workers Power' (Potere Operaio). This tendency splits (by 71) into revisionists close to or in the Communist Party (e.g. Tronti) and Ultra-Leftists who inspire the urban guerrillas 'Red Brigades' (e.g. Negri).
2. 69 Lotta founded with a spontaneist rhetoric - its main strategy being the pushing forward of the Hot Autumn which by 1970 is dying down and being institutionalised into wage settlements (which is what the French Communist Party did much quicker after May 68) by the unions and the Italian Communist Party. At this point, LC which has developed deep roots amongst immigrant workers from the South and the 'sub proletariat' of the Northern cities launches the campaign 'Take Over the City'.
3. 70-71 This social struggle centered around housing is especially strong in Turin, Milan and Rome. The confrontations are violent (see the pamphlet 'take Over the City') end in permanent victories for a few proletarians but in general do not establish a way of struggle that can be generalized throughout the class and throughout the country. The revolutionary groups involved in the campaign (mainly LC and to a lesser degree Avanguardia Operaio) have not got the muscle (implantation in the class) to force the CP and the unions to join, these forces are able to keep the 'extremists' in a ghetto within the class and geographically.
4. LC publishes the important document 'Who are We?' (the translation of which seems unfortunately lost) in which they make an important criticism of their past including 'Take Over the City' - (quote)

'The way T.O.C. was interpreted led to a whole range of activities that got further and further from its center and weakened its link with the factories - not only with the struggles, but with the subjective and objective changes that were going on. Good things were done, but they were isolated episodes rather than steps in the growth of a political programme'. This is the point at which LC begins to 'act like a party' which involves a broadening of their political perspective to relate to the needs of their growing number of members and sympathizers (eg. strategic relation to Italian CP, more subtle approach to factory delegates (similar to but not same as shop-stewards), development of theses on internationalism etc). This document is a reflection of a period in which LC is forced to realise that the Hot Autumn has long since ended and that a much tighter form of organisation is needed to form cadres, to offer an alternative political pole to the revisionists - to wage a Long March through the institutions of Italian society. 1972-3
5. 1974-5. Another 'recession' in the Italian economy leads to a ferocious ruling-class attack on the working-class - unemployment, cut-backs in social services and fast rising prices. Once again the struggle at the point of production is blocked and the left-wing groups push for a spreading of the struggle to the social front. But this time, (unlike in 70-71) the balance of forces inside the working-class as a whole is in their favour and the unions and even the CP (locally) are ~~xxxxx~~ forced to follow. The unions in the Turin region take up the self-rebate (auto-reduction) campaigns over gas, electricity and bus prices; these were mass movements that involved 250,000 families in the Turin region alone. In the Naples area the self-rebate fight\*  
\*This information comes from 'Temps Modernes' (June 75) and an article in 'Quaderni Piacentini' which BBF are translating.

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was much more 'autonomous' (did not involve the unions) and was also a mass movement. In Naples, the nucleus (class vanguard) that remains after the self-rebate fight ends is the nucleus around which the Unemployed Workers' Committee has been built; in four years, under the guidance of LC, the proletariat and sub-proletariat of Naples has gone from being a potential recruiting ground of fascism to being a red engine in the train of class-struggle. The struggles around self-rebates mark a turning-point in the relationship of forces between the revisionists and the revolutionary left in Italy. At a time when the CP is engaged in a 'historic compromise' with Christian-Democracy, there exist political forces with insufficient roots and ideological presence to make it possible for them to present themselves as a political alternative to the CP - it is for this reason that the CP cannot decide to take the plunge, to enter a coalition government.

This qualitative leap forward in political influence of LC (as well as AO and to a lesser degree 'Manifesto-PDIUP) has gone together with LC calling itself a party. In the WLB translations of the documents from the Jan 75 LC conference, it is made quite clear that LC is a centralized Marxist-Leninist party -

'NECESSITY OF THE PARTY . - In the party, the most conscious and disciplined members of the revolutionary class unite their forces; they bring together, on the basis of correct theory, the strategic lessons of class autonomy and the autonomy of its mass vanguards; and on the basis of these, they orientate the fundamental process of the formation of proletarian, unity, building on these mass vanguards.

In the party, the most conscious and disciplined members of the revolutionary class build the general form of a tactics - in other words, they create a body of general principles, derived from practice and capable of orientating the proletariat in the long march that leads finally to the seizure of power and the destruction of the bourgeois state.'

It is essential that members of BF criticise LC to prevent us mechanically repeating their mistakes (hopefully we won't avoid their triumphs) but it is also essential that BF members are clear about the LC they are criticizing. In 8 years, LC has gone from being a small 'extremist' group to being a political organisation with a considerable influence in the Italian working-class. If we want to understand this process we must be historically accurate in our criticisms. The translation is of the end of a text by Sofri that was in the paper in March 73 - it was called 'On the question of delegates and of organisation'. (the factory delegates were elected on to a factory council.)

..... We do not say 'All power of decision making to the factory council'; nor do we say 'All power of decision making to autonomous workers committees'. It has happened that we have 'delegated' our mass intervention - led by our militants, with our slogans and signature- to 'mass organisms' that did or did not exist, but which should not have limited our presence.

By the end of 70, and even more in 71, the slogan 'mass organisation' repeats itself constantly in our political texts. But we are lacking a clear definition of this slogan. By a zig-zag process, we run the risk of going from blind opposition to mass organisation to blind love of it.

The expression 'mass organisation' changes its meaning inside the working-class movement. We also use it in different ways.

A first meaning of the expression is the organisation that the masses spontaneously give themselves in struggle, as a direct instrument of their militancy, which enables them to impose their influence on the struggle. The highest manifestations of this co-incidence of the class with its own organisation - the councils of workers, peasants and soldiers in the Russian revo, the workers councils in Germany, the factory councils in Turin in 1919 (quite different from each other in their form and importance) are the historical experiences most often referred to - are situated in the final periods of revolutionary struggle, when the proletariat is demanding for itself power over society. However, even when the maturity of the struggle is much less, the spontaneous expression of the masses expresses itself each time, gives life to a form of organisation that corresponds to the strength and character of the

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struggle and co-incides with it; the demo, the strike picket, the workers' assembly, the worker-student assembly, the struggle committee etc are forms of organisation. Born in struggle, these forms (and others) which are the product of the creativity of the masses, disappear when the struggle is over. What survives the struggle is what the masses have won from the point of view of consciousness, unity and self-confidence; but the mass organisation does not survive. So when a form of organisation continues to exist, it is transformed into something radically different - either in its deformed and bureaucratic version, in an empty shell or as a meeting place when some of those who have led the struggle attempt to consolidate their victories and to establish themselves at a higher level than before the struggle. In all cases, the direct and spontaneous initiative of the masses and the institutionalisation, after the struggle, of the organisation which articulated the struggle represent two radically different situations. To forget this obvious truth leads to confusions and uncorrectable errors.

A second meaning of the expression 'mass organisation, on the other hand refers to a variety of permanent organisations that have a mass composition and a mass base that is homogenous (defined by reference to a workplace, a social condition - and it is this, more than the number of members that defines a mass organisation). An organisation of this kind .. can have been formed either spontaneously or by specific organisational activity. In all cases, it has a continuity that is independent of struggle, stable and (more or less) formal. In this way, ~~the trade union is a mass organisation; the~~ movement of delegates is another; a stable tenants group can be one. Precisely because it gives priority to the social homogeneity of its members (the fact that they all work at the same factory, go to the same school, live in the same working-class district) and sees in this social situation the contradiction with bourgeois rule, this type of organisation tends to represent as many proletarians as possible who are in this social situation. Participation to this type of organisation does not depend so much on a personal choice - as is the case with being a militant in a party - as on sharing a common social situation.

The communist vanguard can devote itself to building an organisation of this type; it can also, when there exists a mass organisation that has roots in the proletariat fight against a hegemony that is inter-classist and corporative and try to develop a revolutionary hegemony. This battle is not possible without a political leadership organised in an autonomous way (the party or the organisation that is building the party). This leadership to avoid falling into opportunism must always give priority to a direct relationship with the masses instead of giving it a low priority or channeling it through existing mass organisations.

A mass organisation of the proletariat, which brings together a part of the proletariat is no revolutionary as such. Still, it owes its existence to the contradiction that opposes the interests of the proletarian class to bourgeois society; a contradiction that grows more full of potential as the economic and political gap between what the proletariat wants and what the bourgeoisie can give grows and the hold of the revisionist leadership over the mass organisation declines.

This is very true of that form of mass organisation which are the factory delegates \*\*. In the beginning they were not, in their institutional form a product of the spontaneity, but a bureaucratic perversion of the spontaneous organisation of the masses, which are the vanguards of the struggle. In a phase of the struggle when the spontaneous organisation of the masses is opposed to its trade-union deformation - the union delegates\* - which attempts to contain and deflect the struggle using the margin of concessions that are still available to it,; in this situation, one must openly oppose the union delegates - this is a logical step for whoever identifies himself with workers autonomy. But in the phase where the strength of the autonomous struggle has been able to blunt the trade-union strategy and is able to greatly influence

\*which are not the same as the factory delegates

\*\* Similar but not the same to shop-stewards. They are a recent development and can be seen as an attempt of the Italian ruling-class to institutionalize the Hot Autumn in the factories.

both the open struggle and the composition of the institutional mass organisation that is dominant at the time - the factory councils -\*; it is mistaken and sectarian to propose a mass organisation that in the way it was set up would be entirely autonomous from and from the beginning opposed to the councils of delegates. IT IS THIS MISTAKE THAT WE MADE IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1970.

This mistake is still current amongst the vanguards of the left.\* Often when there is talk of a choice having been made in favour of the 'mass organisation' what this reflects is the correct desire to build a place of meeting, of exchanging information and of hammering out a common policy between the worker vanguards either from different parts of the same factory or from different factories. This is a correct and healthy project as long as it is not confused with the 'mass organisation'.

In other cases, it reflects a tendency to construct separate mini-parliaments\*\*, sectarian towards the mass of workers as well as the outside, arrogantly wanting to behave like a self-sufficient 'party' and hiding behind the cover of the 'mass organisation',. What is being looked for is handy short-cuts to the long way, the only way possible; - that of a political intervention whose primary aim is to use all the tools of organisation and especially the skills of the worker cadres, to strengthen the unity, raise the consciousness of the masses, in the high points and low points of the struggle and to form new cadres. All this to be able to intervene, with these assets in the contradictions of a mass organisation that, because it is an institution, does not express the highest level of consciousness of the masses but, its level which is high or low depending on the situations and the moments of the class-struggle.

A. Sofri (March 73) (end only)

Urgent translation (from French and Italian) is required of Sofri's important long writings on the Councils of Delegates. These begin with the Turin Councils of 1920 through the Workers' Control councils of the war time (45-50) to end with the present Delegate Councils. They are a model for how we should approach the subject.

The point I want to make is that a strategy for this country on this subject must be historically rooted. The forms of organisation shop-floor militancy developed in this country reflects the path industrialisation took in England. Things specific to the UK experience include; -being the first country to industrialize, - the skill intensive nature of our industrialisation, - the comparatively small size of the units of production, - the effects at the level of consciousness of Britain being an imperialist power etc.

Sources for this subject which a Political Economy group could do if it existed include Allen Hutt 'British Trade Unionism', Fribicevic 'the Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers Control, Kendall's 'The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1920' and for the mid-19th century Foster's 'Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution'.

\*Which the factory delegates were elected to serve on

\*\* This is a reference to the CUBs of Avanguardia Operaio and the 'Autonomous Assemblies' which were more or less a Potere Operaio front. In this country it would apply to 'Rank and File' an IS front and the similar fronts of the CP and the WRP.