




THE CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN HISTORY PRIZE

Time, Deindustrialisation and the Receding Horizon of Working-Class Activism in Late Twentieth-Century Italy (Fiat, 1979–1980)

Matt Myers 

History Department, University of Oxford, 41–47 George St., Oxford OX1 2BE, United Kingdom
matthewjmyers@gmail.com

This article seeks to understand how experiences of time change after influential social groups and institutions are disempowered. By analysing the response of a wide range of actors to key disputes at car manufacturer Fiat between 1979 and 1980, it suggests that changing conceptions of time came to register Fiat workers' disempowerment within Italian society during the late twentieth century. A new present-centric sense of time came to predominate amongst laid-off Fiat worker activists, while a future-orientated sense grew amongst company managers. With a feeling of loosening connection with the immediate past and anxiety about the future, an indefinite present became the point of departure for workers' inquiries into the past. The history of the Italian workers' movement after 1980 shows the inextricable link between undermining collective organisation, delegitimising shared experiences of time, and the plausibility of transformative visions of the future.

Introduction

The thirty-five day strike against mass redundancies at Fiat in autumn 1980 was pivotal in ending the social and political tensions of Italy's so-called *anni di piombo* (years of lead). 'This is not a battle, this is a war . . . This is more than just losing a struggle over a contract', older car workers told their former colleagues on the picket line in Turin.¹ Paul Ginsborg described the strike's defeat as 'the most visible sign of the end of an epoch, the dramatic finale to a whole cycle of struggles'.² Italy's largest industrial employer transformed its production process, disempowered the factory trade unions and delegate system, and opened the way for similar redundancy programmes by other employers.³ A new phase of development in modern Italian history followed the late 1980 watershed: organised terrorism was successfully countered, workplace and social tensions lessened, new automotive machinery revitalised medium and large Italian employers, a relatively stable governing coalition froze the Italian Communist Party (PCI) out of power, and a global cycle of economic expansion after 1983 brought macro-economic stability.⁴ Industrial struggle in Italy had peaked between the late 1960s and

¹ Marco Revelli, 'Gli operai di Torino e "gli altri"', *Primo Maggio* (Winter, 1980–81), 5–11.

² Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980–2001* (London: Penguin, 2001), x. See also Marco Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat* (Milan: Garzanti, 1989), 66–83.

³ Giuseppe Berta, 'Industry and the Firm', in Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 478–90; Giuseppe Bonazzi, *Sociologia della Fiat* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000); Maud Anne Bracke, 'Labour, Gender and Deindustrialisation: Women Workers at Fiat (Italy, 1970s–1980s)', *Contemporary European History*, 28, 4 (2019), 484–99; Gilda Zazzara, eds., *Veneto agro: operai e sindacato alla prova del leghismo, 1980–2010* (Treviso: ISTRESCO, 2010).

⁴ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 575–6; Pietro Scoppola, *La Repubblica dei partiti. Evoluzione e crisi di un sistema politico 1945–1996* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana. Dalla fine della guerra agli anni novanta* (Venice: Marsilio, 1994); Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato: dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005); Göran Therborn, *European Modernity and Beyond. The Trajectory of European Societies 1945–2000* (London: Sage, 1995).

mid-1970s, after the return of unrest between 1958 and 1963.⁵ By the mid-1970s, Italian trade unions had reached the peak of their institutional power and the PCI had achieved its highest ever vote.⁶ Yet after 1980 the idea that the Italian workers' movement represented a powerful class abruptly ceased to feel credible.⁷

One of the major casualties of this process of transformation was the Italian workers' movement's belief that it embodied the direction of history. The narratives on which this article is based suggest that a new present-centric sense of time came to predominate amongst laid-off Fiat worker activists and trade unionists, while a future-orientated sense grew amongst company managers, trade union leaders and politicians. The latter recovered an optimistic vision of the future in a relatively concentrated historical moment and saw themselves, rather than the manufacturing workers, as representatives of history's new direction. An interplay of agents and structures made possible a sense of historical time where an eternal present lacking a horizon of expectation became the starting point for the workers' movement's examination of its past. The hopes and expectations characteristic of what Eric Hobsbawm termed the 'short twentieth century' became foreign to the new temporal horizon well before 1989. Existing historical accounts may have underestimated both the suddenness of this turn-around and its significance.

This article seeks to understand how temporal horizons of once influential social groups and institutions change after they are disempowered and how changes in collective memory shape which section of society appears to embody the future. It makes the case for understanding time anxieties in the late twentieth century as an outcome of concentrated periods of social and economic conflict. The importance of changing representations of time in contemporary Italy, and its effects for both individual and collective experiences, is increasingly well established, though this focus has not yet been linked to the history of social movements.⁸ Time anxiety after the 1980s has been associated instead with accelerated social rhythms, generational uncertainty, and the devaluing of time's monetary value and immaterial character.⁹ The decade has been understood as an 'age of fracture' where shared social values in the capitalist world disintegrated; in Italy the 'triumph of the private', perceptible even in 1980, saw the personal come to predominate over the collective.¹⁰ A new generation of historians outside Italy have begun to revisit how temporality is often central to collective practices, self-perceptions, and group identities and can help to fully contextualise attitudes and responses to the subsequent unfolding of events.¹¹

The work of Reinhart Koselleck has been a major influence on all these histories. Koselleck argued that rapid social, political and economic changes, occasioned primarily by the experiences of the French and Industrial revolutions, had precipitated a sense of alienation from a distant, irretrievable past and an acceleration towards an uncertain future. He located modernity's new historical subjectivity in the widening gap between the 'space of experience' (*Erfahrungsraum*) and the 'horizon of

⁵ Ilaria Favretto, 'Rough Music and Factory Protest in Post-1945 Italy', *Past & Present*, 228, 1 (2015), 207–47.

⁶ Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, eds., *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968, ii. Comparative Analyses* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Martin Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age: 1945–1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 6.

⁷ By the mid-1980s researchers close to the workers' movement could perceive the crisis of class as a coherent identity and community of fate. See either Aris Accornero and Nino Magna, 'Il lavoro dopo la classe', *Stato e mercato* 17 (1986), 253–70 or Sandro Antoniazzi, 'Lettera alla classe operaia', *Prospettiva sindacale*, 51 (1984), 80–134.

⁸ Franco Crespi and Franca Bonichi, *Tempo vola: l'esperienza del tempo nella società contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

⁹ Carmen Leccardi, *Sociologie del tempo: soggetti e tempo nella società dell'accelerazione* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2009).

¹⁰ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ernesto Galli della Loggia, ed., *Il trionfo del privato* (Bari: Laterza, 1980).

¹¹ For an overview of the recent literature see Matthew S. Champion, 'A Fuller History of Temporalities', *Past & Present*, 243, 1 (2019), 255–66. See also the wider discussion on temporalities hosted in the same issue, 247–327. For another survey, see also Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Lars Deile, eds., *Historical Understanding: Past, Present, and Future* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002).

expectation' (*Erwartungshorizont*).¹² The late 1970s and early 1980s also seem to represent a threshold for the Italian workers' movement. Fiat workers, trade unionists and communist leaders in Italy before 1980 felt an enduring connection to a living and comprehensible past. However, after 1980 there was increasingly little consensus or accepted familiarity about the relevance of this past for future action. Koselleck's conception of 'modern' time suddenly ceased to feel credible after 1980 for particular groups of workers. The collective interest in future plans, prognoses, and utopias – essential features of Koselleck's vision of modernity – were by the mid-1980s replaced by stasis, immutability, and a limitless present amongst once powerful subaltern groups. The factory, representing a particular space of industrial modernity, no longer provided guidance for a programme of social transformation won through collective action. Koselleck also argued that a number of competing temporalities could co-exist at various moments of 'sedimentary time'.¹³ The Fiat case appears to suggest, however, that multiple competing temporalities can be observed during concentrated periods of historical change. Rather than Koselleck's metaphor of long-term geological shifts, this research indicates the short-term contestation between different social forces, groups and interests are significant in contextualising experiences of time. Previous scholarly attention to the longer-term pressure of globalisation, the intensification of global communication and social fragmentation in post-industrial societies only tells part of the story.¹⁴ However, it is a concentrated moment of social and economic conflict that was able to disestablish the Italian industrial working class as a great historical actor within the country's national life and render its horizon of expectation obsolete.

This article suggests that historians of time and temporality can benefit from greater attention to the social contexts of class composition, institutional memory, and political economy. E. P. Thompson's article 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism' established the centrality of time for understanding the logic of capitalism.¹⁵ Thompson showed the role of technologies in altering behaviour and conceptions of time. This article does not dispute this reading in the Fiat case, particularly as the 1980s was a decade of rapid technological development within Fordist industry.¹⁶ Others have shown the consequences for perceptions of time after the declining status of manual work, the expansion of free time, and the declining figure of the traditional wage labourer.¹⁷ This article focuses instead on experiences of time as a central component of collective resistance to, or legitimisation of, capitalism. Movements which have aimed to radically reorder or replace the capitalist system have had their own self-avowedly modern, revolutionary, and teleological conceptions of time. E. P. Thompson contested deterministic and mechanical conceptions of historical materialism which privileged technological development by arguing that movements of working people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were both agents and harbingers of a class in formation. 'The working class', Thompson wrote in the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, 'did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.'¹⁸ In Italy, the contrast of modern and pre-modern senses of time and their determination by social and cultural contexts was articulated most notably by Carlo Levi in *Christ Stopped at Eboli* – his account of his exile by Mussolini's regime from the northern, imperial, bourgeois, and industrial city of Turin to the country's impoverished, agricultural, undeveloped south.¹⁹

¹² Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹³ Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, ed. and trans. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

¹⁴ Donatella Pacelli and Maria Cristina Marchetti, *Tempo, spazio e società: la ridefinizione dell'esperienza collettiva* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007).

¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38, 1 (1967), 56–97.

¹⁶ For more on these changes see Stefano Musso, *Tra fabbrica e società: mondi operai nell'Italia del Novecento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999).

¹⁷ Roger Sue, *Temps et ordre social: Sociologie des temps sociaux* (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1994).

¹⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 9.

¹⁹ Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (New York: Time, 1964), 215.

This article reconstructs for the first time the changing sense of time amongst workplace activists, Fiat managers, trade union leaders, intellectuals, and politicians during a journey from industrial to post-industrial society. It attempts to show how present-centric senses of time can register the outcome of social and political conflicts by analysing the memoirs, articles, and collectively edited volumes produced by those invested in the outcome of the Fiat strikes between 1979–80. The abrupt undermining of the belief of the Italian workers' movement in its own future and the supercharged expectations of a range of institutional powerholders who benefitted from their defeat can be traced in the competing forms of memorialisation. The transition from a future-orientated to a present-orientated conception of working-class history after the late 1970s was an uneven process involving a complex array of social and political interests linked to, but not subsumable within, long or short-term changes in economic and intellectual spheres. François Hartog has argued that modern, future-orientated experiences of time after the collapse of the Soviet Union are best defined as 'presentism', which constitutes a new 'regime of historicity'.²⁰ Casting doubt on the plausibility of the notion of a unified and discrete 'regime' and Hartog's location of the break at the turn of the 1990s, the findings of this research suggest that 'presentist' senses of time are associated with the associational, structural, and technological disempowerment of particular social groups.²¹ Furthermore, the future-orientated conception of time exhibited by Fiat managers, executives, and even modernising left-wing trade union leaders indicates that the era of the 'end of history' could still incubate optimistic visions. Forward-orientated senses of time were developed antagonistically to the old model of collective working-class protagonism tied to factory time. For younger workers in particular, the possibility of individual and personal transformation was believed incommensurable with conceptions of freedom and progress that took the work group as a primary reference. Changing senses of time in late twentieth-century Italy were a crucial register of the changing balance of power within society between classes and institutional interests.

Analysing the relationship between European labour's late twentieth-century decline and the changing sense of time amongst its activists, representatives, and antagonists offers a new perspective on histories of deindustrialisation.²² Before the early twenty-first century, the literature on deindustrialisation had been predominantly focused on its economic causes and outcomes as well as its social and cultural effects. Early deindustrialising countries such as Britain and the United States were understandably some of the first to develop a sizable literature (often through dialogues between communities affected by industrial closures and sympathetic researchers).²³ The focus of scholars of deindustrialisation then turned from the sequencing of closure and the traumatic personal and emotional consequences of unemployment to its longer-term effects.²⁴ The impact of ex-industrial environments on health and well-being of former workers and residents became an important focus.²⁵

²⁰ François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

²¹ For further discussion of these various forms of power see Erik Olin Wright, 'Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise', *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 4 (2000), 957–1002.

²² For an influential framework for the study of de-industrialisation which argued for a more expansive temporal, geographic and thematic research agenda see Bert Altena and Marcel Van der Linden, eds., *De-Industrialization: Social, Cultural and Political Aspects* (International Review of Social History Supplements, 10) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–33.

²³ Roberta Garruccio, 'Chiedi alla ruggine. Studi e storiografia della deindustrializzazione', *Meridiana*, 85 (2016), 35–60; Marion Fontaine and Xavier Vigna, 'Introduction: La désindustrialisation, une histoire en cours', *20 & 21: Revue d'histoire*, 144 (2019), 3–18. For a general overview of the literature on deindustrialisation in North America and Britain see Christopher Lawson, 'Making Sense of the Ruins: The Historiography of Deindustrialisation and Its Continued Relevance in Neoliberal Times', *History Compass*, 18, 8 (2020), online only. For an example of the earlier form of literature see, for example, Hugh Beynon, Raymond Hudson and David Sadler, *A Place Called Teesside: A Locality in a Global Economy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²⁵ For the important case of the industrial site of Marghera, outside Venice, see Gilda Zazzara, 'Memoria operaia di Porto Marghera. Una ricerca in corso', *Venetica*, 1 (2008), 63–91. For the urban decay and dereliction in the port city of Liverpool see Aaron Andrews, 'Dereliction, Decay and the Problem of De-industrialization in Britain, c. 1968–1977',

The more recent interest in the study of heritage, memory and public history of deindustrialisation has converged on the ‘struggle over meaning and collective memory’ embodied in contemporary debates over plaques, statues and memorials.²⁶ Where temporal horizons are discussed in the new wave of literature it has tended to privilege the resonances of heritage and memory of past European industrial cultures in the present.²⁷ In Britain, deindustrialisation’s relationship to a supposed national ‘decline’ has been the subject of a new wave of debate.²⁸ The divergence of Anglosphere and European literatures still remains. Analyses of the ‘selective memories’ of the British miners’ strike of 1984/5 and their residual expressions in society have not been applied to similar instances of labour conflict in Italy.²⁹ Establishing the relationship between temporal horizons and the disempowerment of the Italian workers’ movement during 1979–80 offers an alternative framework for writing the history of Italian de-industrialisation and European social movements more generally.

The background to the strikes in 1979 and 1980 will be explored in sections two and three. The fourth section analyses the forward-oriented sense of time amongst senior trade union leaders and Fiat managers and executives, and the competing temporalities within the PCI. The fifth part of the article examines the present-centric temporal horizons amongst older, class conscious laid-off workers and contrasts this to the sense of time amongst other categories of ex-worker.

Svolta nelle relazioni industriali: The First Fiat Offensive, 1979

Fiat in Turin offers a particularly advantageous vantage point on an epochal shift in temporal perspectives amongst some of the key protagonists of the social and political conflicts associated with Italy’s 1970s. Fiat’s changing strategies shaped Italy’s geographically uneven model of capitalist development, and the status of labour relations at Fiat had major consequences for the whole country and could shape how a range of actors perceived opportunities. Fiat produced nearly all the cars made in Italy and most of these were manufactured in Turin.³⁰ Fiat’s factories played host to major speeches by Mussolini, anti-fascist worker strikes of 1943–4, anti-communist and anti-union purges during the 1950s (including the defeat of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) in the Internal Commission elections in 1955), the massive recruitment of southern immigrant workers from Italy’s *meridione* during the so-called ‘economic miracle’, and the wildcat strikes for egalitarian demands between 1969 and the early 1970s.³¹ The company symbolised Italy’s ‘industrial era’, despite

Urban History, 47 (2019), online, 1–21. For health and the bodily effects of deindustrialisation see Arthur McIvor, ‘Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century’, in Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon and Andrew Perchard, eds., *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Post-Industrial Places* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017), 25–45. For the gendered dimension see Marion Fontaine and Xavier Vigna, ‘La désindustrialisation, une histoire en cours’, 20 & 21. *Revue d’histoire*, 144, 4 (2019), 2–17.

²⁶ Steven High, ‘Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization’, *International Labour and Working Class History*, 84 (2013), 140–53; Andy Clark and Ewan Gibbs, ‘Voices of Social Dislocation, Lost Work and Economic Restructuring: Narratives from Marginalised Localities in the “New Scotland”’, *Memory Studies*, 13 (2017), 39–59.

²⁷ For a comparative overview of European industrial heritage see Stefan Berger, ed., *Constructing Industrial Pasts: Heritage, Historical Culture and Identity in Regions Undergoing Structural Economic Transformation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019) and a summary of the literature in G. Zazzara (2021) ‘Making Sense of the Industrial Past: Deindustrialisation and Industrial Heritage in Italy’, *Italia Contemporanea Yearbook 2000* (July 2021), 155–81.

²⁸ For two influential contributions to this debate in Britain see Jim Tomlinson, ‘De-industrialization, Not Decline: A New Meta-Narrative for Post-War British History’, *Twentieth-Century British History*, 27 (2016), 76–99; David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History* (London: Penguin, 2018).

²⁹ Arnold, Jörg, ‘“Like Being on Death Row”: Britain and the End of Coal, c.1970 to the Present’, *Contemporary British History*, 32, 1 (2018), 1–17.

³⁰ Stefano Musso, ‘Production Methods at Fiat (1930–90)’, in Harushito Shiomi and Kazuo Wada, eds., *Fordism Transformed: The Development of Production Methods in the Automobile Industry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 243–68.

³¹ Stefano Musso, ‘Il lungo miracolo economico. Industria, economia e società (1950–1970)’, in Nicola Tranfaglia, ed., *Storia di Torino. IX Gli anni della Repubblica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 49–100; Archivio Storico Fiat, ed., *Fiat: le fasi della crescita, a cura dell’Archivio Storico Fiat* (Turin: Paravia, 1996).

its historic concentration in the northern region of Piedmont.³² The management styles of Fiat's managing directors – Vittorio Valletta, Cesare Romiti and Sergio Marchionne – map wider shifts in Italian political economy.³³ The centrality of the company to Italian capitalism makes it particularly conducive for understanding the Italian workers' movement in the late twentieth century.

The sacking of sixty-one worker activists at Fiat's Mirafiori, Rivalta and Chivasso plants in October 1979 was the first major setback for the Italian trade unions after a decade-long advance. The sackings were spurred by the assassination of Carlo Ghiglieno, one of Fiat's leading managers responsible for planning of production, by an armed cell of the communist Prima Linea group on 21 September.³⁴ Two other Fiat officials had already been assassinated and over twenty others had been assaulted or injured. Cesare Varetto, head of industrial relations at Fiat's flagship assembly plant in Turin, Mirafiori, was injured in an attack on 4 October. Fiat sent redundancy notices to sixty-one workers five days later on account of their lack of 'diligence' (*diligenza*), 'honesty' (*correttezza*) and 'good faith' (*buona fede*). However, the company portrayed the sackings at a press conference as a response to terrorist threats.³⁵ Amongst the sixty-one were prominent union officials, members of the extra-parliamentary left, and sympathisers of autonomous 'workers' collectives (*collettivi operai*), who had been active in the seven-month struggle over the renewed metalworkers contract earlier that year. A company press release spoke of the need to rebuild stocks and raise productivity after the strike and argued that its factories were riven by a climate of violent insecurity. The allegations cast aspersions on the sixty-one of potential sympathy (or even collusion) with the terrorists who had recently assassinated Ghiglieno. Company spokespeople linked widespread union tactics inside Fiat's plants and the armed attacks committed by left-wing terrorists outside:

Injuries and assassinations are only the most painful and shocking aspect of a terrorist campaign that has grown out of the sabotage of production, intimidating phone calls, and acts of violence against managers.³⁶

An unsuccessful official three-hour stoppage against the sackings was supported only partially by the unions and the PCI before being stopped entirely. The PCI's national campaign against left-wing and right-wing terrorism had placed the party in a strategic bind, particularly after communist trade unionist Guido Rossa was assassinated in Genoa by an armed cell of the Red Brigades group on 24 January 1979.³⁷ A journalist for the independent communist daily *Il Manifesto* explained the reticence of the union to 'dirty their hands' with the sackings due to a desire to denounce all forms of violence in the factory.³⁸ The PCI felt ill at ease with the Metalworkers Federation (FLM) – representing Fiat workers of multiple unions after its foundation in 1972 – because of its confrontational approach to workplace leverage. The FLM had taken on many of the tactics and the language of the radical workers' struggles after 1969 in a process termed '*cavalcare la tigre*' (riding the tiger).

³² David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880–1980: Cultural Industries, Politics, and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

³³ Giuseppe Bonazzi, *Sociologia della Fiat* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000).

³⁴ One of the sixty-one swiftly found another job and played no part in the following disputes and only one was subsequently found to belong to such a group. *Controinformazione* (Nov. 1979), 6–16; *Controinformazione* (Jan. 1979), 13–24. For more on Prima Linea see Virgile Cirefice, Grégoire Le Quang and Charles Riondet, eds., *La part de l'ombre. Histoire de la clandestinité politique au XXe siècle* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2019).

³⁵ 'La Fiat sospende 61 operai accusandoli di aver procurato "danni morali e materiali"', *Corriere della Sera* (10 Oct. 1979), 1; 'Terrorismo? La Fiat licenzia', *Il Messaggero* (10 Oct. 1979); 'Linea dura alla Fiat. Sospesi 61 operai. Sono terroristi?', *Il Mattino* (10 Oct. 1979); 'La Fiat e il terrorismo. Con i 61 se ne andrà la paura?', *La Gazzetta del Popolo* (10 Oct. 1979). For coverage in the anglophone press see 'Fiat Dismisses "Labour Agitators"', *Financial Times* (11 Oct. 1979), 46.

³⁶ Giorgio Ghezzi, *Processo al Sindacato: Una Svolta Nelle Relazioni Industriali, I 61 Licenziamenti FIAT* (Bari: De Donato, 1981), 9.

³⁷ Simeone Neri Serneri, ed., *Verso la lotta armata. La politica della violenza nella sinistra radicale degli anni Settanta* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012).

³⁸ *Il Manifesto* (16 Oct.).

Demonstrations within and outside the factory (*cortei interni ed esterni*), workers' control of the gates and exits, and blocking goods transports were controversial amongst many in the PCI and national union leaderships.³⁹ Legal defence by trade union lawyers was the PCI's preferred response. Luciano Lama – head of the communist-aligned CGIL union (1970–86) – announced his intention to wait for Fiat to produce evidence before taking any further action. On 8 November 1979 magistrates ruled that the sixty-one should be re-employed on account of insufficient evidence.⁴⁰ Fiat temporarily accepted the court ruling, though continued with the sackings almost immediately. By November 1980 there had been five successful cases of re-employment and two failures. The 1979 sackings were a public test of the FLM's relationship with its changing working-class base. The union was confronted with a difficult choice: defend its members – and itself – from the real or pretextual allegations of terrorist sympathies amongst its workforce or remain silent as some of their most active organisers were unilaterally dismissed.

The sackings signalled a more combative employer approach to industrial relations.⁴¹ Fiat chief executive Cesare Romiti remarked in an interview that the '61 could as well have been 601'.⁴² Collaboration between the union leadership and management had been strengthened since 1969 by employer and state commitments to expanding employment. In a further blow to this principle, Fiat suspended all new hiring the day after the sackings. This move was justified as a temporary response to the 'ungovernability' (*ingovernabilità*) of its factories.⁴³ Fiat had been prepared to concede higher wages in return for high productivity after 1969; the unions in turn had approved labour-substituting automative technologies it hoped would reduce worker alienation, stress and boredom. The unveiling of the automated 'Digitron' production line at Fiat's state-of-the-art Rivalta plant in 1976 had radically reduced the potential for human-engineered bottlenecks by transporting car body shells and parts to the workers via magnetic strips.⁴⁴ Yet union participation in these changes had also encouraged many in the workers' movement to optimistically imagine further expansion of workers' control over production.

O la Fiat molla o molla la Fiat: Marx Outside Mirafiori's Gates

The Italian workers' movement was experiencing a period of profound change even before October 1980. Fiat alluded to upcoming redundancies of nearly 20,000 workers in the summer of 1980; in early September the company announced the sacking of 14,469 workers. The PCI acknowledged a major shift had taken place in the company's attitudes.⁴⁵ The factory council and the FLM called for an immediate and indefinite strike in all of Fiat's Italian plants, as well as one-day sympathy strikes in the Piedmont region. The PCI and the trade union federations sought to mediate between the FLM and Fiat as the strike developed in size and radicalism. The magazine *Pace e Guerra* hosted a climactic roundtable discussion in Turin on the day of the general strike. Fausto Bertinotti (then secretary of the Turin *Camera del lavoro* and of the Piedmont CGIL) argued that mass action by the working class and the trade unions would be a success if 'it makes clear that social pacts are no longer possible and that the demand for workforce flexibility is an essential element not only of a new form of industrial

³⁹ Nico Pizzolato, *Challenging Global Capitalism: Labor Migration, Radical Struggle, and Urban Change in Detroit and Turin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁴⁰ Luigi Mariucci, 'Licenziamento disciplinare di massa e pratiche sleali contro il sindacato: note sul caso Fiat', *Rivista giuridica del lavoro*, 2 (1980), 421–43.

⁴¹ Nicola Tranfaglia and Bruno Mantelli, 'Apogeo e collasso della 'citta'-fabbrica': Torino dall'autunno caldo alla sconfitta operaia del 1980', in Tranfaglia, ed., *Storia di Torino, Vol. IX: Gli anni della Repubblica*, 827–59. For a personal perspective see the memoir written largely in the mid-1980s by one of the sixty-one: Piero Baral, *Niente di nuovo sotto il sole* (Turin: PonSinMor, 2003).

⁴² *La Repubblica* (17 Jan. 1985).

⁴³ 'La Fiat sospende tutte le assunzioni', *Corriere della Sera* (11 Oct. 1979).

⁴⁴ Claudio Ciborra, Sergio Salvini and Umberto Violano, *Il robot industriale* (Milan: Angeli, 1976).

⁴⁵ 'Cassa integrazione per 22 mila operai della FIAT', *l'Unità* (6 Sept. 1980); 'La FIAT sceglie la linea dura', *l'Unità* (11 Sept. 1980); 'Partono 14 mila licenziamenti', *l'Unità* (12 Sept. 1980).

relations, but also of an neo-authoritarian order'.⁴⁶ Adriano Serafino, from Turin's provincial Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (CISL) secretariat, also saw the epochal nature of the struggle:

We are at war, under bombardment. Victory is too big a word to describe even the best possible outcome of the struggle. There will be a decimation, whatever happens. And after that, both Fiat and the union will emerge transformed . . . the effects of the struggle will only appear in the long term.⁴⁷

Giorgio Benvenuto, General Secretary of the Italian Labour Union (UIL), was even more effusive during the general strike on 10 October: '*O la Fiat molla, o molla la Fiat*' ('Either Fiat gives up, or Fiat will go down').⁴⁸ The FLM could also still speak in the name of an imagined national interest despite reacting 'intransigently' and with a '(predictably) radical position' to Fiat's attempt to shift to a more pro-management equilibrium.⁴⁹ Union leaflets aimed at the Torinese population warned of national decline and forced migration back to the south of Italy:

The working class is defending an internationally significant part of our national industrial heritage because it feels it is 'theirs': the boss has invested his capital but the workers have also invested their effort.⁵⁰

The strikers received solidarity messages from across the world: a leaflet by Brazilian Fiat workers drew parallels between their experience of repression and the struggle of their Italian co-workers.⁵¹ The PCI General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer, having earlier compared the strike to *Solidarnosc* in Poland, unexpectedly supported a call for a factory occupation at the gates of Mirafiori on 26 September.⁵² This marked the peak of the strike's influence and power. On the morning of Saturday, 27 September, the Lingotto Factory Council met to discuss the occupation of the factory; the Cossiga government fell at 3pm. Two hours later Fiat announced it was suspending the sackings for three months and replacing them with a programme of '*mobilità esterna*'; the trade unions then rescinded the planned general strike the same day.⁵³ This would be a pyrrhic victory for the Italian workers' movement. On 30 September Fiat management sent letters to a further 22,884 workers – including a disproportionate number of key union activists, women, young people and disabled workers – offering them the promise of work in another part of the Fiat conglomerate at an unspecified later date or a small redundancy package. Over 90 per cent were manual workers (*operai*); those aged between thirty and fifty made up 67.4 per cent of those employed by Fiat but only 53.9 per cent of those laid-off; women constituted only 15 per cent of the workforce but 30 per cent of those on furlough (and 20 per cent of those sacked).⁵⁴

The furloughed workers would be placed on a system of zero-hour short-time work subsidies termed *Cassa Integrazione Guadagni* (CIG). This furlough scheme had been used by employers since the late 1960s to pacify workers' unrest by preventing re-entry into the workplace and dividing

⁴⁶ *Pace e Guerra*, 7 (Oct 1980).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat*, 112.

⁴⁹ Stephen Hellman, *Italian Communism in Transition: The Rise and Fall of the Historic Compromise in Turin, 1975–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107.

⁵⁰ 'Dépliant', Polo del '900 [Polo900], Turin, Giovanni Gili, inv. 3530.

⁵¹ 'Volantini', Polo900, Turin, Giovanni Gili, inv. 3530.

⁵² 'Berlinguer fra gli operai Fiat', *l'Unità*, 27 Sept. 1980; Valerio Castronovo, *FIAT. 1899–1999: un secolo di storia italiana* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999), 1515.

⁵³ 'Sospesi i licenziamenti Fiat. È un primo grande successo', *l'Unità* (28 Sept. 1980).

⁵⁴ *Cooperativa Matraia: Caratteristiche e comportamenti degli operai FIAT in mobilità* (Quaderni di Formazione ISFOL, no 3, May–June 1983), 41, 233. See also Bracke, 'Labour, Gender and Deindustrialisation', 484–99.

the workforce.⁵⁵ Meanwhile the struggle intensified and a workers' radio station ('Radio Lotta') was established in a bus stationed at Gate 5 of the Mirafiori factory.⁵⁶ Huts, tents, kitchens and sleeping quarters had been constructed around the eleven-kilometre factory perimeter. Turin was covered in red flags and banners, blue workers' overalls, the amber glow of fires at night and harsh yellow tarpaulins and windbreakers. An immense red, white and black portrait of Marx, painted by Fiat workers, hung outside one of the factory's thirty-five gates.

On 14 October a major anti-strike march of Fiat middle managers and technicians, white-collar office workers and supportive townspeople shocked the trade union leadership and brought the dispute to a close. The thirty-fifth day of the strike saw a crowd of white collar supervisors, technicians and managers (*capi*) walking through Turin to demand a return to work. Wearing grey suits rather than the workers' blue, their placards were unadorned with organisational affiliation. Two themes united their demands: an end to violence and the necessity of reopening the factory. Estimates of their numbers widely differed: 12–15,000 according to the police headquarters, 15,000 according to the television news, 30,000 according to *La Stampa* and *Il manifesto*.⁵⁷ The number that was to stick in popular consciousness – 40,000 – was popularised by *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*.⁵⁸ This event encouraged the trade union delegation to call off the strike during negotiations later that evening.⁵⁹ The organisational core of the Turin workers' movement would soon experience its final reckoning the next day.⁶⁰ From 2pm on 15 October all of Italy's major trade-union leaders gathered alongside the Fiat works' council (*Consigli di fabbrica della Fiat*) in the Cinema Smeraldo on Turin's outskirts. A large poster outside advertised an upcoming projection of *Apocalypse Now*.⁶¹ Lama portrayed the proposed accord – which accepted Fiat's plans for 'managed mobility' with little to no concessions – as a good deal that would ensure union participation in the secure modernisation of the company. Bruno Trentin stressed that the deal matched the current 'balance of forces': continuing the conflict 'would lead to an even worse agreement in a few days'.⁶² The meeting descended into booing and whistling as the leaders were drowned out by the noise made by the amassed factory delegates. A journalist present at the meeting wrote that 'inside the cinema, where the union leadership speaks to their own movement, that is with the rank-and-file union delegates (*i delegate della base*), there is no longer any possible dialogue'.⁶³ At the end of the meeting the proposed deal was defeated by a large majority, though only after the session had been abruptly closed by General Secretary of the CISL, Pierre Carniti.

And So Began an Era of Freedom: Forward-Orientated Senses of Time

The epochal significance of the dispute's outcome was perceived even in its immediate aftermath. One PCI leader described the 1980 strike as 'the most difficult and bitter workers' struggle of the entire

⁵⁵ For discussion of the *Cassa Integrazione* system see N. Serri, 'The Cassa Integrazione Guadagni: Unemployment, Welfare and Industrial Conflict in Post-War Italy, 1941–1987', PhD, University of Cambridge, 2018; Niccolò Serri, 'The Factory and the Welfare State: Redundancy, Benefits and Workers' Organization at Alfa Romeo Arese, 1963–1986', *Labor History*, 61 (2020), 12–23.

⁵⁶ For transcription of transmissions of Radiolotta see Polo900, Turin, Giovanni Gili, inv. 3530. For further examples of worker radio stations in France during strikes against the closure of the steel industry see Ingrid Hayes, *Radio Lorraine coeur d'acier: 1979–1980: les voix de la crise* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2018).

⁵⁷ Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat*, 96; 'In trentamila contro i picchetti Fiat', *La Stampa* (14 Oct. 1980).

⁵⁸ *La Repubblica* (14 Oct. 1980); '40.000 dipendenti della Fiat chiedono in corteo di tornare al lavoro', *Il Corriere della Sera* (14 Oct. 1980).

⁵⁹ Fabrizio Carmignani, 'Il sindacato di classe nella lotta dei 35 giorni alla Fiat', *Politica ed Economia*, 15, 11 (1984), 43–8.

⁶⁰ Pietro Marcenaro and Marco Revelli, 'La Fiat, la memoria, il futuro', *Ombre rosse* (Mar. 1981).

⁶¹ Franco Giustolisi, 'Quei quarantamila: da dove vengono e dove vanno', *L'Espresso* (26 Oct. 1980).

⁶² A sound recording taken during this meeting is collected and transcribed in excerpts in the collection of primary documents compiled in Piero Perotti and Marco Revelli, *Fiat autunno 80. Per non dimenticare. Immagini e documenti di una lotta operaia* (Turin: Centro di ricerca e iniziativa comunista, 1986).

⁶³ Franco Giustolisi, 'Quei quarantamila: da dove vengono e dove vanno', *L'Espresso* (26 Oct. 1980).

post-war period'.⁶⁴ Yet the strike was also the point of departure for a protracted transition to a new sense of time amongst its key protagonists. New temporal horizons developed unevenly amongst PCI and trade union leaders, Fiat managers and worker activists as the consequences of the strike's defeat on labour relations became apparent. The PCI at first attempted to downplay the historical break between its past, present and future strategies at Fiat. In Turin, the political imperatives of the party delayed reckoning with the feeling of stasis amongst its industrial worker base. The PCI leadership had been obliged to respond to Fiat's strategy between 1979 and 1980 as a party with decisive administrative responsibility at the level of regional and local government.⁶⁵ The Turin party was caught between the PCI leader's new openness to direct communist support for industrial struggles after the exhaustion of the 'Historic Compromise' strategy (where the PCI had sought to govern as part of a grand coalition with the ruling Christian Democrats), and the political challenge of Bettino Craxi's increasingly moderate Italian Socialist Party (PSI). On the one hand the Turin PCI federation were obliged to participate in the '35 days' alongside the unions in defence of Fiat's 'industrial heritage'.⁶⁶ However, they were also reticent of a costly and politicised industrial struggle guided by those outside its governmental sphere of authority. The PCI leadership in Turin had sought at all costs to avoid a confrontation within its electoral bloc between striking manual workers and middling strata. It saw the battle to win such weathervane social layers as a fundamental political necessity for any future left electoral strategy, despite the risk to the party's roots amongst manual workers and the identity of its industrial working-class cadre. The Turin PCI's Federal Committee attempted to explain how a deal it defined as '*difficile, ma positivo*' (difficult, but positive) had 'ended with such contrasting judgements within the same trade union and workers' movement, with some even arguing that it was a defeat'.⁶⁷ The march of the *capi* was argued to be a 'serious political operation' organised by Fiat which highlighted the 'incapacity' of the workers' movement to engage with 'decisive categories of white collar employees . . . decisive . . . for a dynamic industrial strategy' – or indeed any future national government alongside Christian Democracy (DC). In the immediate aftermath of the dispute the PCI still defended the accord as an instrument of progress and development which workers could use to their advantage.

The Turin PCI's attitude on the Fiat deal also exhibited a hybrid sense of both future and present-centric time. With little understanding of the consequences of the accord for the movement's sense of place within a historical continuum, the Turin organisation argued that processes of restructuring, including the liquidation of a number of posts, were necessary despite the criticisms of 'politically immature' workers. Five major reasons were given by the Turin PCI for the dissent it saw concentrated amongst the 'most politically conscious' workplace activists: poor information about the exact nature of the accord; the scale of the long and difficult struggle not matching the result; an underestimation by the workers most impacted by the lay-offs of the attrition that had occurred in strike participation after the first week; the suspicion that, given the timing of the deal just hours after the '*manifestazione dei capi*', the views of their managers mattered more than their thirty-five days on strike; and the reduced credibility of the trade union leadership since the sackings in autumn 1979. The Turin PCI produced a leaflet for the 23,000 workers placed on *cassa integrazione*, advocating the 'full implementation of the agreement' to help 'manage' the company progressively back to competitiveness.⁶⁸ An event later remembered as one of the Italian working class's worst defeats of the twentieth century 'should be judged positively', the PCI leaflet continued, given that the 14,000 immediate lay-offs had

⁶⁴ Gerardo Chiaromonte, 'Il valore e i problemi della lotta alla Fiat', *Rinascita* (24 Oct. 1980).

⁶⁵ The Giovanni Gili deposit at the Fondazione Istituto Piemontese 'Antonio Gramsci' in Turin (inv. 3530) contains thousands of *volantini* from the trade unions, *Movimento delle donne di Torino*, Brazilian Fiat workers, and even those distributed by the *capi* on 14 Oct., yet none by the Turin PCI (who had unexpectedly won local and regional elections in 1975).

⁶⁶ FLM leaflet, Polo900, Turin, Giovanni Gilli, inv. 3530.

⁶⁷ 'La Lotta alla Fiat – Il giudizio del PCI torinese. Documento approvato dal Comitato Federale Torino', 1 Nov. 1980. Polo900, Turin, Giovanni Gilli, inv. 3530.

⁶⁸ 'I 23,000 – Bollettino per i lavoratori FIAT in Cassa Integrazione' (Dec. 1980), PCI Turin Federation. Polo900, Turin, Fondazione Vera Nocentini, 27 F 59 cart 6.

been replaced by 23,000 temporary on 'managed mobility'. The company, and its workers, could now envisage a route out of its crisis. The conclusion of the '35 days' was thus portrayed as an honourable draw and one whose eventual outcome 'had not been predetermined'.⁶⁹ Though the deal was voted down at mass factory-gate meetings of Fiat delegates on 15 October, these votes were not registered by the union leaderships, nor did they lead to a renewal of the strikes by a demoralised workforce.⁷⁰ The attempt by the PCI to incorporate the strike's outcome into the historical narrative of a rising workers' movement growing in strength, maturity and influence would become increasingly implausible.

On a national level, however, future visions were becoming less dependent on proposals for structural transformation. In the immediate aftermath of the strike's defeat the PCI leader began a major new campaign on the 'moral question' (*questione morale*). The timing of the shift in the aftermath of a strike where Berlinguer had played such a distinctive, unexpected and public role is significant. Launched by Berlinguer in an interview with Alfredo Reichlin in the PCI newspaper, *L'Unità*, on 7 December, the party leader criticised the corruption of the whole political system, called on Italian citizens to join an 'ethical-civic' crusade against the PCI's former collaborators (in the DC and PSI) and definitively broke with the moral appeal for workers to accept austerity developed during the 1970s.⁷¹ The party's major public campaign emerged in the context of the exposure of the covert P2 Masonic lodge (an extreme elite, anti-communist organisation with links to fascist and right-wing terrorist forces), the DC's inefficient and wasteful response to the Irpinia earthquake and the PCI's public break with the Historic Compromise strategy on 27 November. Privileging the moral question had implications for the party's conception of its place within political time: the progressive and rational development of the productive forces – one of the PCI's abiding concerns – was becoming less important as the primary motor of social and political transformation change in its imaginaries. The immediacy of possible moral changes in the present gained in relative importance. The PCI national leadership's future-orientated horizon consolidated around growing presentist perspectives, and the predominance of the political-ethical dimension in party communication contributed to a general retreat of future-oriented perspectives on the Italian left.

The temporal orientation of the trade union leadership would shift further after the mid-1980s as the full consequences of Fiat's *cassa integrazione* programme became clearer. Of the 34,000 workers placed on furlough by Fiat between 1980 and 1982 only around 8,000 ever returned to work.⁷² In half a decade, Fiat had reduced its labour force by half and the most well-organised sections of its huge Mirafiori factory fell to only 12 per cent union density.⁷³ Luciano Lama, alongside other union leaders and Fiat executives, broke their silence in the late 1980s. Each portrayed the 1980 strike as just one particular moment in the unstoppable eclipse of the classical working-class political horizon. Lama argued that the outcome of the strike had been inevitable given the 'fragility' and 'incoherence' of the workers' movement in the face of 'unprecedented technological transformations'; the intransigent element of the workers' movement, 'rigid even in the face of a profound process of innovation', shared much of the blame for not realising this before 1980.⁷⁴ Bruno Trentin also related the problems of the union movement to the restructuring of Fiat's Taylorist production process and

⁶⁹ 'Bozza di discussione per i congressi delle sezioni Guido Rossa Fiat Mirafiori', PCI, 1981. Polo900, Turin, Partito comunista italiano – Federazione provinciale, Torino, b. 22; f. 56.

⁷⁰ In the immediate aftermath of the dispute, a book published by a collective of Fiat workers on the extra-parliamentary left, Adriano Alessandria et al., *Con Marx alle porte* (Milan: Nuove edizioni internazionali, 1980), 47–8, calculated that the accord was rejected in the majority of Fiat establishments, including Mirafiori (Assembly: morning shift, 51 for the deal contra 49 against; afternoon shift, 20 for contra 80 against), Rivalta (rejected without a vote), Lancia, and Lingotto.

⁷¹ Enrico Berlinguer, 'La nostra proposta di governo', *L'Unità* (7 Dec. 1980). For more on the '*questione morale*', see Agostino Giovagnoli, 'La Crisi della Centralità Democristiana', in S. Colarizi, P. Craveri, S. Pons and G. Quagliariello, eds., *Gli Anni Ottanta Come Storia* (Catanzaro: Soveria Mannelli, 2004), 65–101.

⁷² Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat*, 106.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁴ *L'Unità* (7 May 1988).

changed professional boundaries after 1973.⁷⁵ Meanwhile the National Secretary of Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici (FIOM-CGIL) (1977–85), Pio Galli, defended the constructive proposals made by the unions in May 1980 on business modernisation and co-management in an analysis predominantly focused on the short-term. Galli criticised Lucio Colletti's 'aristocratic criticism' and 'petty and factional analysis . . . far away from the factories' and argued the resolution of the dispute had avoided a potentially 'catastrophic refusal of the accord'.⁷⁶ The CGIL trade union leaders all came to agree on the long-term inevitability of worker obsolescence and the permanence of the shift in the power, organisation and control of manufacturing workers from Fordism to 'post-Fordism'. Enzo Mattina, leading PSI member and one of the general secretaries of the FLM union during the strike, argued that the credibility of the unions as voices in the economy depended on understanding the inevitability of the strike's outcome.⁷⁷ On the other hand, Cesare Romiti – the managing director of Fiat – wrote of the strike's uncertain outcome (even in its last days and hours) in his memoirs.⁷⁸ The belief that Fiat's policy was a by-product of irresistible and inescapable technological and economic modernisation legitimated the idea that one era and its imagined alternatives had definitively closed and another, more circumscribed in the potential for radical change and where workers would no longer be major protagonists, had opened.

The hybrid sense of time exhibited by the trade union leaders in the immediate aftermath of the strike can be contrasted to the intensely forward-orientated sense amongst Fiat's white-collar hierarchy. PCI narratives paid relatively little attention to the experiences of these middling managerial and supervisory layers, despite their importance in the final days of the dispute. Though foremen had seen their powers gradually delimited in the organisational and technological transformation of the company in the 1950s and 1960s, the cycle of workers' struggles after 1969 were experienced as a personal assault on their status, power and identity.⁷⁹ The memories of Luigi Arisio, lead organiser of the so-called 'march of the 40,000', indicates the importance of autumn 1980 in establishing a new sense of history's direction amongst Fiat's middle managers. Arisio recalled how the 1980 strike turned the tide on a decade of intense social crisis.⁸⁰ 1970 had seen the sequestration of Fiat's 354,077 secret personnel files containing information on the political orientation, indiscretions and acquaintances of all their employees, after a law suit brought by a former company spy.⁸¹

From that moment on, Fiat could no longer carefully select its staff like before but was forced to hire dogs and pigs (*cani e porci*) . . . supporters of the *Brigate Rosse*, chronic absentees, layabouts, workers with two jobs, workers who in four years managed to be absent for three.⁸²

Other senior managers complained at the time about an intolerable situation in many plants; many of the company's office and supervisory workers had welcomed the sacking of the sixty-one. Cesare Annibaldi, Fiat's head of industrial relations, told the press that:

⁷⁵ See Trentin's foreword in Pio Galli, *Fiat 1980: sindrome della sconfitta* (Rome: Ediesse, 1994), 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27. This argument was also articulated in 1980 by CISL's Centro di studi sociali e sindacali, *Sindacato e lavoratori nella vertenza FIAT dell'ottobre 1980* (Rome: Cesos, 1980).

⁷⁷ For Mattina, drawing parallels between the Fiat strike and the trial of the 'Gang of Four' in China, 1980, represented the closure on more than twelve years of struggle and victories. Enzo Mattino, *Fiat & sindacati negli anni '80* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1981), 105–14.

⁷⁸ Cesare Romiti, *Questi Anni Alla Fiat* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1988), 123–4.

⁷⁹ Giuseppe Berta, *Conflitto industriale e struttura d'impresa alla Fiat. 1919–1979* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998).

⁸⁰ Luigi Arisio, *Vita da capi: l'altra faccia di una grande fabbrica* (Milan: Etaslibri, 1990).

⁸¹ Diego Novelli, Turin's PCI mayor (1975–85), was a long-time nemesis of Arisio, who attended the same Salesian school. For an account of Fiat's spying empire see D. Novelli, *Spionaggio FIAT* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1972). See also Lotta Continua, *Agnelli ha paura e paga la questura: i documenti dello spionaggio e della corruzione FIAT* (Milan: Edizioni Lotta Continua, 1972).

⁸² Luigi Arisio, 'Arisio: "Sono pronto a replicare la marcia dei 40mila alla Fiat di Pomigliano"', available at: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/arisio-sono-pronto-replicare-marcia-dei-40mila-fiat.html> (4 July 2010) (last accessed 3 Sept. 2019).

Used contraceptives are found inside some new cars, our foremen are intimidated and forced to march with red banners in the front line during demonstrations [and] some wives receive threatening telephone calls. Then there is the violence. Three employees have been shot. Several others wounded. We could no longer just sit back and watch.⁸³

Restoring managerial control in 1980 solved the company's problems with 'governability' (*governabilità*) and allowed Fiat executives to make unimpeded plans for the future. Quickly co-opted into a brief political career in 1983, Arisio was elected as a Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI) senator on a list headed by Susanna Agnelli, sister of Fiat's principal shareholder, Gianni. The outcome of the 1980 strike legitimated the past suffering of Fiat managers like Arisio and opened a new era of individual autonomy. Berlusconi's Canale 5, one of his television stations, celebrated its twenty-year anniversary on 30 September 2000 by broadcasting a hagiographic documentary tracing the history of the station to its birth during the strike. As black-and-white footage of the *capi* played, the voiceover explained that 'the seventies came to a close (*Si chiudono gli anni Settanta*), marked by violence in the factory and by terrorism'.⁸⁴ The ability to plan unimpeded was experienced as a great release for *capi* like Arisio after a decade when they lacked the capacity to over-ride the power of their subordinates over the labour process they had been employed to oversee. Economic decisions after 1980 could now be made by managers and executives without the same expectation of violent reprisals or social conflict.

A cohesive narrative of the past built around the 1980 strike was central to the notion that visions of self-avowedly modern and revolutionary anti-capitalist time had definitively ended. Though this past remained aporetic and partially concealed, the perceived role of the 'march of the forty thousand' in ensuring that Fiat restored its authority over the workers' movement spurred a new future-orientated temporal horizon amongst Italy's new right and middle-class fractions. The 1980s was not the 'end of history' for such forces but the beginning of a new and hopeful era of autonomy. The radical renewal of a future-orientated sense of time amongst Fiat executives and managers indicates that 'presentism' was not a universal condition.

A Motor that is Immobile: The Receding Workers' Horizon and Present-centric Time

The idea that present-centric time can be traced to the scepticism of future-orientated classical philosophy of history, ideology and political utopianism since at least the 1960s or the political victory of capitalism in 1989 would make little sense to the recently disempowered Fiat workers.⁸⁵ Rather than Koselleck's layered, sedimentary conception of time, the reactions of Fiat workers to their exile from the factory show how diverse and contradictory senses of time can characterise the experience of periods of major historical change. Present-centric time was, for many Italian workers, conditioned by processes of collective class disempowerment in the decade before the end of the Cold War. 1980 marked a caesura in the order of time: a decade-long cycle of struggle had tied personal and collective fates together in a single historical continuum. Giovanni Falcone, a member of the Fiat workers' council, gave powerful expression to this feeling of a historical break during a union meeting on 15 October. Like many other worker activists gathered to vote on the deal negotiated by their trade union leaders, Falcone had moved from the country's south to north in order to find work; for ten years, he told the delegates, he had refused to accept the 'productivist logic of the boss' and now, for this intransigence, he was exiled from the factory along with the disabled, women and all those who Fiat 'couldn't dominate and exploit one hundred percent':

A comrade said to me: 'It's a fact of history: another comrade just like us spoke in '69 – now this time it's your turn to speak and bring an epoch to a close.' It started back then and now it ends. I have to say it leaves a bitter taste. Because for me those twelve years of struggle were not just any

⁸³ 'Unions off Balance as Fiat Acts against "Intimidators"', *Financial Times* (23 Oct. 1979), 46.

⁸⁴ Polo and Sabattini, *Restaurazione italiana*, 7.

⁸⁵ For an argument for the former, see Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, *History in Times of Unprecedented Change: A Theory for the 21st Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019). For the latter, see Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 104–7.

old twelve years, but a long political experience for myself as for all of us. Think about it. I was an immigrant coming up from the countryside like so many others. I didn't know how to say a word, I was too shy to make political speeches; in part I still am, but I've overcome a lot since then. Do you think that Fiat can still keep someone like me in the factory? Can they still take me back?⁸⁶

Whilst the memories of the Fiat strikers did not receive the same legitimisation in television and popular culture as the white-collar *capi*, studies conducted by the trade unions, the left and sympathetic academics attempted to rescue the experiences of laid-off workers like Falcone. Personal testimonies of former workers collected by the '*Coordinamento dei lavoratori Fiat in cassa integrazione*' and published in 1990 show how profoundly unsettling the strike had been for their perceptions of time.⁸⁷ Formally constituted in 1981, this organisation was crucial over the next decade in co-ordinating and mobilising the laid-off workers to ensure the full application of the accord and their re-entry back into the factory. It organised mass demonstrations, lobbied government ministers and officials, ensured legal defence for victimised trade unionists and published a workers' comic (*La spina nel fianco*) and diffused radio transmissions.⁸⁸ For many of the original 23,000 workers placed on *cassa integrazione*, the strike's outcome was experienced as a definitive 'end of an epoch' and their last experience of collective protagonism. The contributions by Battista Bastanza and Michele Santomauro exemplify what the leading figure of the PCI's left-wing, Pietro Ingrao, author of the collection's introduction, termed '*le storie dei singoli*' (individual stories).⁸⁹ The stories were united, according to Ingrao, by a singular identification with 'the work group: a collective entity, albeit materially substantive, which seems to stand above and transform the specificity of the individual experience'.⁹⁰ Their collective 'popular protagonism' had been fragmented by their individual powerlessness to resist the impersonal objective forces which justified their exclusion from their factory, former social and political identities, and the 'enormous investment in the future which sometimes seemed so close but then tragically slipped away'.⁹¹

Workers examining their personal histories for the Laid-Off Workers Group (*Coordinamento Cassintegrati*) stressed their sense of collective belonging, socialisation in factory struggle and desire to maintain a sense of togetherness, despite the rapid technological and industrial changes which had barred them from the factory. The 1980 strike was an ongoing defeat for these former Fiat workers even in the early 1990s. Articulating a common yet individualised historical narrative was one way this group of working-class activists attempted to maintain their collective protagonism whilst outside the factory. For Marco Revelli, the working class – 'the factor par excellence for contestation of the existing order of things' – became 'a motor that is immobile': the essence of the 'movement' seems in fact to have been *immobility*, whereas the essence of conservatism seems to have been *movement*.⁹² The sense of time that prevailed amongst worker activists before 1980 was tied to the belief that any future society run by their class was not just rational and desirable but inevitable. From this perspective, capitalism – like the successive modes of class society before it – contained internal contradictions that could be superseded if its contradictions had matured and workers had attained consciousness of their true capacities. Evolutionary and teleological modes of thought inherited from classical Marxism implied a direction of

⁸⁶ A sound recording of this meeting on 15 Oct. is transcribed in excerpts in the collection of primary documents compiled in Perotti and Revelli, *Fiat, autunno 80: per non dimenticare*, 114.

⁸⁷ Coordinamento cassintegrati Torino, ed., *L'altra faccia della FIAT. I protagonisti raccontano* (Rome: Erre Emme, 1990).

⁸⁸ Gian Mario Bravo, ed., *I Cassintegrati FIAT: gli uomini, la storia, gli ambienti, le fonti documentarie* (Turin: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1989).

⁸⁹ Bastanza was born in Cerchiaro in 1948 and entered Fiat Mirafiori in 1969 before moving to Lingotto. He was placed on CIG in July 1981. Santomauro had been born in Minervino Murge (Bari) in 1950, joining Fiat in Sept. 1972, and had been placed on CIG since Oct. 1980. Coordinamento cassintegrati Torino, *L'altra Faccia Della Fiat*, 75–85, 273–87.

⁹⁰ Pietro Ingrao, 'Introduction', in Coordinamento Cassintegrati Torino, *L'altra Faccia Della Fiat*, 8–10. The Italian original: 'il gruppo di lavoro: un'entità collettiva, pur'essa materialmente *corporea*, che sembra sovrastare e trasformare la specificità dell'esperienza singola'.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹² Marco Revelli, 'Worker Identity in the Factory Desert [1992]', in P. Virno and M. Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 114–19.

travel, velocity and motor. The capacity of Fiat workers to imagine themselves as a powerful historical agent became increasingly implausible to themselves, their enemies and even many of their supporters.

With a feeling of loosening connection with the immediate past and anxiety about the future, an indefinite present became the point of departure for inquiries into the past. The Fiat workers' culture after 1980 was marked by the perceived absence of historical memory of the past or collective capacity to plan for the future. Furlough was an all-encompassing present where the sense of time was distilled into the rhythms of daily ritual and the primacy of the personal quality of life – experienced by some as a liberation from guilt and personal anguish and by others as an ever-present reminder that they now lived permanently outside factory-time.

Testimonies of workers collected during this period indicate that this shift was experienced in very divergent ways. Many younger workers who had joined Fiat after the late 1970s welcomed being laid-off as a chance to live a future of freedom to 'do what I like'. 'I feel great staying at home', said twenty-one-year-old T.R. 'I'm having fun here, I'm fine, I do what I want. I go to the gym three hours a day and when I want I go to the mountains; I take educational courses, I see my friends: it's the kind of life I've always dreamed of!'⁹³ On the other hand, older workers like D.F., a forty-year-old father of one, saw the factory through different eyes. He remembered how a sense of his own individuality ('a chance to find myself') had been nurtured through an awakening of class belonging in the factory:

I felt part of a powerful class (*classe forte*) arrayed against a powerful boss (who could even afford to give us a new suit every two days) . . . being at Fiat gave me a sense . . . that if I was walking around on my own, I was also walking with the whole working class. I felt like a worker (*operaio*), a Fiat worker. Before I worked with four or five others and I didn't matter at all, but at Fiat I'm important (I was important). We mattered as a class who imposed our own ideas on the boss (*padrone*).⁹⁴

Younger laid-off workers, many who had been hired in the late 1970s and with experience of anti-work counterculture (particularly the youth movement of 1977), were often incredulous of the anchoring role of the factory on collective identities.⁹⁵ Roberto D., born in 1957, explained the reaction by the older generation as due to their inability to imagine an identity outside their dependence on the factory time, which E. P. Thompson had first discerned amongst the early English working class:

The other day, I met one of those laid-off in Lancia. He complained about being without a future, he felt miserable and wretched. Meeting up and complaining like this is useless; the fact that many experience a crisis is because we don't know how to live without work, without a factory, and without a stopwatch that regulates us.⁹⁶

After wandering in what he termed the 'kingdom of freedom' of *cassa integrazione* – spending two months in Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi, a small town in Italy's southern Campania region – even Roberto D. returned to the trade union offices, critical of himself and his comrades for:

being unable to deal with these [months and years without work] ourselves . . . This is partly my problem as well; the fact that from the first day of furlough I ran to Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi and then back to the *Lega* [trade union league] on my return means that without a job or a union even I get lost, I am not able to organise myself. We don't know how to have an identity outside of work.⁹⁷

⁹³ Testimony of T. R. (aged 21) in Quaderni di Formazione ISFOL, *Cooperativa Matraia: Caratteristiche e comportamenti degli operai FIAT in mobilità*, 3 (May–June 1983), 26.

⁹⁴ Testimony of D. F. in *Cooperativa Matraia*, 25.

⁹⁵ For more see Paolo Bassi and Antonio Pilati, *I giovani e la crisi degli anni Settanta* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978).

⁹⁶ Testimony of Roberto D. in *Cooperativa Matraia*, 27.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

Twenty-one-year-old A. B., on the other hand, argued the *cassa integrazione* was a moment to recover and expand his identity – to learn new things and open up new possibilities of personal advancement:

After two years at Fiat . . . I had decided of my own accord to put myself on zero-hours for an indefinite period. Then here came the news of the furlough scheme. It saved me. I was lucky. I took a year off. I slept and knitted. I was at peace. I needed it. Now I've started studying again for a diploma as a chemical expert. I'm taking a design course and a course in gymnastics. I couldn't do any of this stuff before because I did not have a salary. If Fiat wanted me to return, I would never go back. All I would do is ask them how much money they would give me in order that I would never go back. I would do anything but go back to Fiat or any other factory.⁹⁸

Even those divorced from the culture and solidarity of the workers' movement felt they had been 'blocked (*bloccato*)'. The forced inactivity of furlough could represent, for older workers less able to adapt to the brave new world, a totalising experience of dependence, loss of direction and lack of autonomy. R. G., forty-eight years old and with thirteen 'faithful' years in the factory behind him, reacted with shock, recurring guilt and the inability – even fear – of losing the ritualistic habits and tempo of working life:

When I saw my name on the list [for *cassa integrazione*] I couldn't move a muscle! Why me? I had always done my job in the factory! . . . In the morning I wake up at half past five and I can't sleep. I think about what I did wrong . . . Yes, I go out and do the shopping, but I'm never calm. I'm indecisive (*titubante*) because those who are indecisive no longer know what to do. My wife always tells me that that I'm more nervous now than when I was working. I'm afraid that if I continue like this, I will lose the desire to work for good.⁹⁹

If some workers believed their time had been liberated by furlough, the structure of temporal continuity could also be internalised. The worker's body became a primary form of reference for those suffering from work-related injuries. In the absence of the stopwatch, their bodies became clocks which corporally expressed the accumulated stresses of a lifetime of muscular effort, as well as their own mortality. C. M., a fifty-five-year-old former quarryman, immigrant worker in West Germany until the age of thirty, and then Fiat worker until 1980, experienced *cassa integrazione* as the final stage in a longer trajectory of bodily decomposition and exhaustion:

When they hired me I was healthy as a fish (*sano come un pesce*), I worked a lot. I never had one day off sick. In the early years I can admit now that I also worked a lot of overtime: I worked for a whole shift, came home and then returned to the factory to do the last four hours of someone else's shift. This would happen every day. I never went on strike. I admit now that I was a boot-licker (*ruffiano per il padrone*). That was until 1978; that's when the machine broke – when my body refused to continue on the same rhythm and the force snapped (*forza si spezza*). The decline began: health problems came all at once: I have cervical osteoarthritis, lumbar osteoarthritis, sciatica, diabetes, circulation defects, and I risk a heart attack at any moment – I can't drive, I have high cholesterol, blood poisoning . . . I can't tolerate humidity, heat, noise, effort; I can neither stand nor sit for too long, I can't stand the smell of paint . . . They [Fiat] progressively marginalised me, offering a little work post that suited me just fine: I controlled a painting robot. Then kept me on but reduced my hours to zero (*a disposizione*) . . . hours and hours spent on the bench with the shame of being seen by others to do nothing . . . I don't know how long I'll live, but as long as I'm alive, I have to live; *they have to let me live, they have to think about us*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Testimony of A. B. in *Cooperativa Matraia*, 25–6.

⁹⁹ Testimony of R. G. in *ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Testimony of C. M. in *ibid.*, 22.

Furlough represented the collapse of a moral universe and the breaking of a pact they had with their union and the company. Workers were de-linked from their old roles, spaces and rhythms of movement; their days were ordered not by the factory siren but the internalised logic of their declining biological clock. They were left alone, like C. M., with their work-induced illnesses as the only link to their former lives.

The offer of redundancy payments further exacerbated the divisions amongst the Fiat workforce and isolated their culture of solidarity. Interviews conducted by journalist Gad Lerner show that southern workers were increasingly portrayed, even by the local PCI officials, as concerned with personal and familial advancement, rather than an older form of collective working-class activity.¹⁰¹ The year between autumn 1979 and autumn 1980 was a threshold between historical epochs: the start of a new golden age for the strike's victors and the stasis of exile for its losers. Forty-five-year-old rank-and-file worker leaders (*capo-corteo*) were left isolated in their memories:

He continued to march during the frantic last days he was in the factory with his drum made from a Fiat oil can. Then came the long, silent exile of the furlough scheme in a suburban neighbourhood with the inopportune name: Borgata Vittoria. Until one morning, four years later, he got up as early as he had done in the past, took the brick red flag of the FLM off the wall, put the old drum back on his shoulder, and in a last solitary procession he crossed the city in a last, impromptu protest.¹⁰²

Members of classes who have felt themselves defeated by the impersonal force of history have also exhibited the sense that time had halted and lost its bearings. Hartog describes how for François-René de Chateaubriand – a French royalist, Catholic and aristocrat – the world of 1840 was also balanced between two impossibilities: ‘the impossible past, and an impossible future’.¹⁰³ And Carlo Levi observed, in towns not dissimilar to those left by the Fiat workers before their own journey to Turin, a similar sense of constriction in the horizon of experience:

In the monotony of the passing hours there was place for neither memory nor hope; the past and the future were two separate unrippled pools. The entire future, as far as the end of the world, was merging for me too into the vague *crai* [tomorrow and forever] of the peasants, with its implications of futile endurance, remote from history and time.¹⁰⁴

Though the dynamics of disempowerment of the Fordist working class, the French landed aristocracy and the peasantry of Basilicata are radically different, similar perceptions of a receding temporal horizon can be observed. Furlough and redundancy exiled union activists from the workplace – the space structuring common class experiences of solidarity and power – and severed a link between their past experiences, their present disempowerment and future visions of social transformation. This sense of temporal rupture was compounded by the incapacity of all levels of the Italian workers' movement to collectively historicise their defeat. For all except a minority of dissident ex-workers, the outcome of the 1980 strike was seen as a difficult but necessary prerequisite for Italy's technological, economic and political development. Historical reconstruction which continued to plot the movement's trajectory towards an expected destiny was relatively rare after 1980. Even the most accomplished observer of the Italian workers' movement found it difficult to explain the ‘decline of a culture’ in this period.¹⁰⁵ A powerful form of ‘presentist’ historical thinking was expressed in the collective memorialisation – above all, amongst its victims. Time was not only an objective phenomenon for these ex-workers

¹⁰¹ Lerner, *Operai*, 31.

¹⁰² Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat*, 23.

¹⁰³ See Chateaubriand's conclusion to his *Memoirs*, quoted in Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 106.

¹⁰⁴ Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 215.

¹⁰⁵ Aris Accornero, *La Parabola del Sindacato: Acesa e declino di una cultura* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

and their antagonists, connected to the rhythm of natural processes, nor subjective and psychologically related to personal or collective memory and experience. The horizon of time of the Italian workers' movement was also the product of conflicting social representations of the past and expectations for the future.

Conclusion

This article has shown how the fragmentation of the Italian workers' movement's experience of time was an important outcome of the decisive shift in the balance of power in favour of Italian employers between autumn 1979 and autumn 1980. This concentrated period opened a new future-orientated horizon for Fiat executives and managers, which they expressed as recovery of repressed individual and corporate freedom. The disputes came to symbolise how a 'silent majority' could end the social and political conflicts of the 'years of lead'. Italy's new Berlusconi right remembered the 1980 strike as the definitive supersession of Italy's 'governability' problem. The sense of purpose of the workers' movement in Fiat was fractured so comprehensively because the strikes between 1979 and 1980 came to demarcate the birth of a new social and political order.¹⁰⁶ This period froze Fiat's trade union and workplace activists into an eternal present bereft of their former horizon of expectation. For the protagonists of the strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the turn of the 1980s was experienced as a concentrated version of what Koselleck termed a 'Sattelzeit'. The present-centric sense of time amongst worker activists after 1980 registered their sense of powerlessness.

This article has attempted to develop a social and political history of senses of time by analysing the contexts in which new understandings of historical time were emerging. Historians have tended to share the interpretation of Europe's 1970s as an era of 'diminished expectations' where such transformation was either inevitable or highly likely.¹⁰⁷ However, the narratives of managers, trade union leaders, politicians and worker activists discussed in this article indicate that only in a concrete set of particular historical circumstances at the turn of the 1980s did the diverse conflicts associated with Italy's 1970s cease to provide worker activists with the resources for future-orientated plans. By analysing the narrative of events alongside the personal and collective memory of these groups we can see how the sense of the direction of history changed. How this transitional moment was remembered seems to corroborate Eric Hobsbawm's argument that 'memory is not so much a recording as a selective mechanism, and the selection is, within limits, constantly changing'.¹⁰⁸ The selection process in Italy was overdetermined by conflicting social and political interests within and outside the workers' movement and was expressed in their changing conceptions of temporality. It has been well established how Fiat workers' sense of self was eroded by the effects of redundancy.¹⁰⁹ This article has shown how narratives which justified worker obsolescence also expressed and contributed to the changing perceptions of time amongst the Fiat workers' movement. Narratives, constructed ex post facto, were all the more effective in rupturing a future-orientated sense of time amongst Fiat worker activists because they were popularised by a range of powerholders and individuals within the trade unions and left. Above all, the history of the Italian workers' movement after 1980 shows the inextricable link between undermining collective organisation, delegitimising shared temporal horizons and the plausibility of transformative visions of the future.

¹⁰⁶ Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2005), 453.

¹⁰⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1997), 206.

¹⁰⁹ Revelli, *Lavorare in Fiat*; Bracke, 'Labour, Gender and Deindustrialisation'.