

**What happens in the greatest factory of the southern Italy?**  
**Modern Times in the Cassino FIAT factory**

September 2001: a worker, dripping with sweat and with the voice broken by the hard work, draws near a colleague, member of the S.in.Cobas workers delegation in the Cassino FIAT factory, and – in a low voice – asks him: “Come on, why don’t you organize a “little hour” strike?”. The S.in.Cobas union representative looks at him in his eyes and answers: “You should know that struggling against the new workload parameters we’ve organized hundreds of “little hours” strikes, this year. And following your boss directions you didn’t strike for a minute. But if you stop working now, I’ll do the same”

This could be a good summary to understand the struggles and the processes going on in the largest factory of the southern Italy: trying to face the restructuring plan carried out in the Cassino factory, which lead to the production of the new car, the *Stilo*, any possible “little hour” rest from the hard working of the factory, might come only with the help of those workers which struggled - with more than 40 days of strikes – against the new massaging organization of the work. But unfortunately, at the right moment, those workers couldn’t negotiate with the firm. Their fate has been directly negotiated and decided by the national secretaryships of the great categories union federations, climbing over all of the workers delegations of the factory, making the struggles vain. Infact the negotiation had started in a weak position for the FIAT, and in consequence of the strikes the company asked to meet the workers delegation in the last march, and this could lead to obtain something more than just to accept the restructuring plan of the company.

So we should better understand what happened in the Cassino Fiat Factory, that is to have important informations about the scenary that the steel workers have to face in Italy and not only.

What is this factory today? How did this factory change? Once it was a factory with more than 12.000 workers and it represented the development and social integration hopes for thousand of families. Today it appears as the leading-edge place of a productive model in which the workers exploitation multiplies, as the precariousity of their lives, and that can offer development perspectives for the community only if it’s ready to be devoured and submitted to the factory’s demands.

First of all it must be said that in that place surrounded by the same enclosure, where at the top of the Gate 1 you can see the “FIAT” sign, there’s something more than the FIAT factory now. Since 1997 the company proceeded selling parts of the factory, in the concertative silence of the great union confederations (CGIL, CISL, UIL): the working clothes have changed their colour, the buildings have changed their names (Logint, Comau, Delfo, Sirio, Fenice, Sistemi Sospensioni Apco) , every worker keeps working the same way, producing Fiat cars, but the workers are selled to a new company, their pension funds are not paid and go to the new company, their job becomes precarious, every struggle is fragmented on different fronts, and soon there’ll be a change in the application of different National Contracts (with a loss of wage and rights). The Fiat dependants are still the majority (around 4500), but are 2.000 the dependants of the new companies. The struggles of the last year have involved all of the workers, but formally the negotiations dealt only the greatest of the firms in the enclosure.

In the last year the factory in Cassino has been **restructured** in a very interesting way. Answering to the workers struggles of the seventies, the Fiat restructured its production to make it unattackable by strikes. In Cassino this lead to the end of the end of the “big-snake” (a single enormous and long production line) substituted by four parallel lines. To stop production with a strike, workers had to stop all of the four lines, because it was possible to transfer the production from one line to the other. In the last year, surprising only the ingenious people, just when everybody speaks about the end of the *Ford* organization (the “big-snake” model, the same we remember in the Charlie Chaplin movie *Modern Times*), the Fiat has restored the “big-snake”, even longer than before. With just one difference: different phases of the production process are worked in companies with different names. But basically it’s the same model that facilitated the workers struggles of the seventies, as we’ve seen with the strikes of the last year. So why this imprudence, to have a factory easier to stop? The answer comes by the most experienced workers: “Fiat was sure that the conflict was over – says a Cobas representative”. The concertative years gave the company the certainty to have no opposition. This worked for years, and meanwhile everything went worse for the workers”.

The agreements signed by the unions with the owner, moreover, are terrible for the workers. In the march of the last year, the agreement signed by Fim, Uilm, Fismic and Ugl, has ratified the new organization, with heavy workloads, new measuring parameters of productivity, cut of the number of workers with the same production, strong limitations to the strike right. Against this agreement the S.in.Cobas – that has never been part of the concertation model - and the Fiom-Cgil. But the decision of this federation to stake everything on a *referendum*, has simply stopped the strikes, and produced a bad figure in front of the Labour Tribunal. And know this decision – to stake on a *referendum*, even if unsuccessful in Cassino, is what the Fiom wants to open again the National steel workers Contract, signed by the other category federations. This *referendum* has no legal base and so it will never be possible. The agreement signed with the Delfo (first signed by the Fiom too, which later cancelled its sign) and the agreement signed with the Comau ratify the increment of the number of turns of duty – 18 a week in the Delfo and 20 a week in the Comau – so that workers are goin to live their lives ignoring saturday or sunday. The uncirclement of the Fiat workers proceeds, starting from the weakest workers. Moreover, in the factory start being “athipical” the no term contracts, so we can understand the precariousness regime that is the base of the firms strength, in a district with 100.000 unemployed people on 450.000 inhabitants.

But today the Fiat in Cassino has promised a lot of assumptions. “In the forms used by Fiat” say the firm managers. That means hired workers and temporary workers. A job has been promised, according to the rumours in the factory, to 20.000 young people. Managing this promise and the assumptions (if it will ever be real) with the *agreement signers* is the real *fuel* of the productcion, today, in Cassino. An assumption promised for the son of a worker blackmails two of them. So everybody silently works with no protest. Counting numbers a lot of people will realize the faith was not be recompensed, but meanwhile the unlistments to the *signers* federations grow, and people cancel their name from the Fiom list. Stable is the S.in.Cobas, which has never been part of the game, and which lives only with struggles as the workers know.

The war wind affects the Fiat factory now. Less than other factory of the group because of the new car production. But it’s clear that the permanent war will be used, here as elsewhere, to criminalize the dissent making it equal to the sabotage, exiting the crisis to obtain back a new legitimization so affected in the last year. In the last year we’ve seen also the explosion, in a mass dimension, of a great movement against the neoliberalism that has started a dialogue with the workers, also the Cassino workers. One of the most beautiful moments of the dramatic days of Genoa struggle against the G8 has been the march of the workers from the Cassino Fiat workers with the Fiat Mirafiori (Torino) beside the signs of the Cobas. A lot of photos, a lot of applauses. A lot of those young people in Genoa would probably wanto to know the know that experience of struggles that conquered all of the rights for the workers, so strongly under attack today, to find out, togheter, one way to conquer back them again for everyone and, if possible to increase them.