

March First: courses of action leading to an unexpected strike*

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«On March 1st the migrants will have their first strike»

March 1st was «the first strike of thousands of migrants and Italians against the exploitation of migrant labor, spread across a vast region»¹. March 1st, 2010 was certainly more than just that. At least 300,000 people filled the streets of dozens of Italian cities: from Trieste to Syracuse, from Palermo to Turin, including large demonstrations in Milan, Naples, Brescia and Bologna. In various small Italian cities, possibly for the first time, the widespread presence of migrants in the social fabric was demonstrated through picket lines or rallies. These assumed a communal tone of refusal of the dominant discourse, connecting racism to that which is commonly defined today as *institutional racism*.

Even if this was the only result achieved by this act of mobilization, there would be something to cheer about. Criticism of institutional racism had in fact even penetrated certain academic environments, such as a large section of civil society associations, which for years had used the lenses of multiculturalism, immigration, or volunteerism through which to view the migrant presence. The double effect of these approaches had been to depoliticize the presence of the migrants and to relegate racism to the level of a purely social phenomenon, as if society itself can be considered neutral in respect to the various results of State laws².

The eruption of migrants as individuals and key players on the scene had then broken open, at least for a day, the cage created by solidarity against subjects considered to be *weaker*, in need of help and constantly withdrawn into the centre of their communities organized by nation. This allowed for a glimpse at the political potential of the migrant presence³. A cage, as we should note, that was attacked on all sides in the last ten years, but whose presence was difficult not to notice even in the discussions and courses of action that led to the last large anti-racist protest on October 17, 2009. This protest brought out tens of thousands of people to Rome and showed the *limit* of the discussion and of anti-racist activism. A political limit, in the true sense of the term, and not simply a limit of will on the part of the collective subjects is what that protest brought together. For those who watched or were active in the series of mobilizations of migrants and anti-racists that took place in Italy over the past years, that protest can be considered a swan song in some ways. The large migrant presence in the piazza, which in 2004 and 2005 expressed itself disruptively, was now starting to indicate that such

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¹ *Coordinamento per lo sciopero del lavoro migrante in Italia*. The *Coordinamento* worked as an umbrella coordination between migrant organizations, collectives, and networks from Bari, Bologna, Brescia, Mantua, Milano, Padova, Roma, and Torino. The document can be viewed at <http://lavoromigrante.splinder.com/post/22353749/come-si-racconta-il-primo-marzo>. On the political category of the “migrant labor” we refer to the introduction of F. Raimondi, M. Ricciardi to *Lavoro migrante. Esperienza e prospettiva*, (edited by F. Raimondi e M. Ricciardi), Derive/Approdi, Rome, 2004, p. 5-21.

² See the article by Ranciere, *Il razzismo viene dall'alto*, published in «il Manifesto» from 9/26/2010. <http://www.sinistrainrete.info/societa/1029-jacques-ranciere-il-razzismo-viene-dallalto>.

³ When speaking about individuals we intend, instead of giving a definition, to highlight a problem. That which permits us to indicate the rupture that the migrant behavior causes both on the institutional and social borders that they cross as well as in respect to every position that is presumed to be “natural”, as in religion or the community, and the excess that they convey. As stated by Devi Sacchetto, «The singular character of every individual indicates that they express themselves in the world around them through social relationships based on the uniqueness that they represent and that they, willingly or not, drag along behind them.» The disassembly of community order however doesn't signify a «complete recognition of the worth of the individual», but instead the entrance in «standardized uniforms» that are a de facto «reduction and downsizing of the expectations and possibilities of the individual». For the migrants these factors, especially in the formation of social relationships, «place them outside of the natural proximity for those relationships that are mostly based on socialization at work and choosing from friendships near or far». This topic is discussed in D. Sacchetto, *Il Nordest e il suo Oriente. Migranti, capitali e azioni umanitarie*, Verona, ombre corte, 2004, pp. 19-44.

behaviour, maybe, *wasn't needed any longer*: the numbers that came out on October 17 indicated neither a new piece of data nor an expression of a need for attention, but instead established the mobilization as a challenge against the same old discourse and anti-racist practices.

Therefore it is not a surprise that a break in a long series of mobilizations happened in the most unusual and unexpected way: by means of a «wake up call» originating from France, and taken up as such by the press, then spread further on Facebook, including in Italy (where first it was looked upon with condescension by many of those that were privy to the plans of the migrants mobilization), then it was accepted. Finally the message had the power of massive circulation, shared between the thousands of migrant women and accepted by social movements. Change was present even in the piazzas where only a few dozen people came out, as they found themselves *de facto* connected to the other thousands of people that were striking and protesting in Italy. Paraphrasing the words of an Egyptian protester, which were reported by a few newspapers during the days in Tahrir Square, if before the migrants were watching television, that day it was the television that was watching the migrants. It is certainly true that the migrants had never been «in front of the camera», but on March 1st a development was produced that was capable of modifying perspectives. The connection between the previous struggles and protests and this development needs to be understood.

The events were made possible thanks to a series of factors, first of all, the fact that for weeks a phrase circulated on the Internet, on social networks, and in the national press, which exercised a strong pull and had the ability to pull in, in a manner of speaking, very diverse subjects: «On March 1st the migrants will have their first strike»⁴. Speaking of a strike in relation to March 1st served to make it known that, even where there was no strike, that day would represent an occasion of new and powerful mobilization.

The word *strike* was put into circulation and then it was discussed: on the one hand, it provoked misunderstandings, hasty declarations, legal analysis – before, it should be noted, of the renewed debate that this word created a few months prior as a result of the FIAT referendum in Pomigliano – and even distancing. On the other hand, some groups decided to build a mobilization in order to organize a real strike: they found a widespread desire on the part of the migrants to be key players, for the first time, of a strike that would be *their own*. The desire on the part of the migrants to lead a strike was not new, the novelty was instead the limelight and the fact that this strike was, in a way, announced. No one knew where it was coming from, but the phrase was circulating: «On March 1st the migrants will have their first strike».

There were different interpretations of the strike, in fact many interpretations, even between those who then were at the time key players in the organization of the day, asserting simultaneously that it was impossible or at least insufficient in respect to the questions concerning the migrant condition. The topic that stands between these two sides in apparent contradiction was that of work: sustaining the impossibility of a migrants' strike would've meant in the first place considering the barriers of exploitation and migrants' subjection to racism, both institutional and not, insurmountable. Supporting the insufficiency of the strike meant saying instead that *precisely due to these obstacles* the strike couldn't bring the diversification of the migrant condition to light. Many, searching to distance its link to the labor aspect, therefore neutralized the world strike. The *unsaid* that was implicit in these discussions brought together a diverse set of participants, livening up large debates and encouraging them to take a stand. The collective components immediately called to the cause were mainly two: the unions on one side, and different associations, groups, and protest groups occupied with the subjects of anti-racism or, more generally, of migration on the other. Neither side understood that the problems that were signified were exactly *what was at stake on March 1st*, for those who wanted to accept the political challenge.

It is therefore necessary to start from this point in order to evaluate if and how what was at stake was in some way put into motion on the day of March 1st, knowing that the size of the challenge can't be considered in the classical terms of percentages of workers on strike. In fact, the strike, in the large majority of places of work in Italy, was not announced by anyone. In some cases its announcement

⁴ Various formulas were utilized: strikes by foreigners, immigrants, migrants, 24 hours without us. It was significant the choice of a right-wing newspaper «il Giornale», which on 1/21/2010, writing about the mobilization and unions' opposition to call a strike, titled *Immigrati: il sindacato vieta lo sciopero ai negri* (Immigrants: the union forbids negroes to strike).

represented the fruits of self-organized efforts. In other work settings, those characterized by a high level of informality in work relationships, no official announcement would be able to produce direct effects. Therefore, it is mainly the lens with which one is accustomed to evaluate strikes that is insufficient, more than the strike itself was. However, some data can be helpful: in the only summary available, put into circulation by the *Coordinamento per lo sciopero del lavoro migrante in Italia*, on March 1st, 2010 at least 48 companies in Brescia, 6 in Bologna, 7 in Parma, 12 in Reggio Emilia, and 2 in Mantua went on strike. The workers at one of the biggest European markets, Porta Palazzo in the city of Turin⁵, practically all abstained from work. Some witnesses described that «the market isn't even this empty when there is 2 meters of snow». The activity here was reduced to 10% of a normal day. The strike was not just limited to the workers and salesmen that decided not to set up the market stalls or not to stock them with goods, but it also saw an active intervention, a sort of picket line - also sometimes using brusque, threatening methods - to impede those who were setting up their booth or going to work. Organized picketing continued for a good part of the day, and then giving rise to the protest that saw a few thousand people come out⁶. The other cases that stood out involved for the most part metalworking firms instead, but it ended up also extending itself to groups of housekeepers and, in some cases, to blocking stores managed by migrants. The day involved situations that, while following different methods and for the most part acting autonomously, had constructed over the course of the mobilization a common path, summarized in a document on January 18, 2010, in which the beginning of a campaign to organize the strike of migrant labor on March 1st was affirmed. The strike also involved various other professions outside of these particular ones, such as the janitorial workers from the S. Chiara Hospital, Trento, or those from the portage and logistics industries from the province of Padua.

But it is impossible to evaluate with certainty where a walkout on the job was confirmed without some communication on a large scale, not to mention the completely isolated places of work such as Italian homes where foreign in-home caregivers work. In this last case it is very difficult to reconstruct credible figures, but the fact that something out of the ordinary happened was demonstrated by certain small facts. For example, the calls that were made to the Coordinamento Migranti Bologna by an official at the CISL who, surprised, asked what was happening that day and why some workers, mostly caregivers, had called him to get information on how to strike.

With these premises, our objective in the pages that follow will consequently be to demonstrate the experimental character of this strike, in order to bring to light the general political result that it was capable of achieving.

Genealogies of the migrant labor strike

One can reconstruct the events of March 1st on the basis of the chronological sequence previously cited that, beginning in France, reverberated online until it reached Italian migrant and anti-racist networks and associations, until it found the principal factor for acceleration and media mobilization in the revolt of the migrants in Rosarno. All of this is true and we will take it into consideration. What happened, however, cannot be understood if it is not put into relation with the cycle of national and transnational conflicts against what is commonly called the neo-liberal globalization, and the new boundaries imposed by it. Conflicts that, starting as early as the end of the 90's, have seen the migrants affirm themselves as protagonists and a political topic.

It is therefore necessary to include different temporal dynamics, such as those relative to the circulation of the rallying cry of migrant labor strike and of the local attempts, such as the strike in Vicenza in 2002, and spatial dynamics that make reference as much to the historical American experience of the «day without immigrants» on May 1st, 2006, which saw various American cities shut down⁷, as to the strike experiences that the French *sans-papiers* have set up in the last few years, that

⁵ Attached is the partial list of the companies that were on strike as established by the Coordination for the strike of migrant labor in Italy.

⁶ Another chronology can be seen in the daily newspaper of Turin «La Stampa» on 3/2/2010, the citation was taken from a Facebook post during the strike.

⁷ See the article published on the pages of the «New York Times» on 5/2/2006.

led hundreds and then thousands of migrant workers to strike for naturalization with the call «On bosse ici! On vit ici! On reste ici!»⁸.

It is always in connection to the struggles of the *sans-papiers*, in this case against the proposed Toubon and Debré laws⁹ in the second half of the 90's, that one can point out one of the first moments that affirmed the heroism of the migrants in the European political arena, even if it wasn't exactly this moment that initiated the mobilization of the migrant worker. In Italy, already the incident of the killing of Jerry Masslo brought to light the racism connected to the exploitation of migrant day workers, provoking a strong reaction both among the migrants themselves as well as in the public opinion. Together with the State condolences for the eruption of racial violence on the scene, the reactions led to the *black strike* on Villa Literno on September 20 and to the first national anti-racist protest on October 7 in Rome, with about 200,000 people participating¹⁰. One of the effects of this mobilization was the endorsement on a national level of a historic transformation that would have resulted in modifying globally the right to asylum after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the approval of the Martelli law that redefined refugee status, previously reserved for Eastern European citizens, and introduced complementary legislation on immigration. The demands put forward by the migrants, however, were substantially left unfulfilled: while a situation of progressing uncertainty and secrecy was being corrected, the pathway was being cleared for a more rigid organization of flow and capacity of deportation, producing a more rigid and defined partition between regular and irregular migrants. If the mobilization of 1989 was a beginning, the more recent caesura should be identified by the occupation, lasting about 54 days, of the Piazza della Loggia in Brescia by migrant workers in the spring of 2000, protesting against the restrictions on obtaining residency permits created by the Turco-Napolitano law, introduced as a modification to the Martelli law in 1998. An explosive and partly successful initiative, whose momentum went well beyond the local level and connected itself with the collection of migrant mobilizations that were being created in those years¹¹.

It is also starting from this background that one can explain the success of the migrants protest on July 19 against the then projected Bossi-Fini law, which initiated the days in Genoa protesting against the G8 in 2001. After this protest, the theme of immigration and the fight against Bossi-Fini became a central topic and it kicked off a cycle of scattered mobilizations from Brescia to Caserta, from the northeast to Bologna, from Rome to Sicily. According to many it represented «the embryo of a new political heroism of migrant work beyond the defensive characterization, duly anti-racist, of initiatives that were produced on the grounds of migration» in the preceding decade¹². Already at this point it signified that «the rallying cry of a migrant workers strike, that obviously is pointed to involve sectors

⁸ The strike was recently retold in the book assembled by P. Barron, A. Bory, S. Chauvin, N. Jounin, et al., *On bosse ici, on reste ici! La grève de sans-papiers: une aventure inédite*, Paris, La Découverte, 2011.

⁹ These projects not only made the preceding Pasqua law of 1993 worse, but also introduced favoritism of those who had helped an immigrant without a regular permit as a crime. For an interesting interpretation of the practices of disobedience and of the invention of "citizenship activities" cfr. E. Balibar, *Droit de cité. Culture et politique en démocratie*, La Tour d'Aigues, Éditions de l'Aube, 1998.

¹⁰ See, for example, the article published in the Repubblica on December 15, where the growing power of the words of the *hidden population* after the killing of Jerry Masslo, and in which Guido Bolaffi maintains among other things: «how against all of the social powers even the immigrants in Italy are writing their own story. If they continue not to exist under the law, they will at this point take action in the so-called political market as a real organized group», «Repubblica» on 12/15/1989. The context in which the incident came to fruition was recently reconstructed in the magazine *Napoli Monitor* by Luca Rossomando, <http://www.napolimonitor.it/2009/02/25/una-rotonda-sul-ghetto/>. A partial documentation of the "black strike" at Villa Literno can be found on the site http://www.inac-cia.it/extracom/masslo/home_masslo.htm. The incident is also reconstructed in the book by Giulio di Luzio, *A un passo dal sogno. Gli avvenimenti che hanno cambiato la storia dell'immigrazione in Italia*, Bari, Besa Editrice, 2009.

¹¹ Following this conflict was the opening, in the final phase, of a dispute directly with the Interior Minister that brought about the procurement of 6,000 residency permits in Brescia.

¹² *Per la centralità politica del lavoro migrante*, supplemental leaflet by Derive/Approdi distributed on the occasion of a national protest against the C.P.T. on via Mattei in Bologna in the spring of 2002, approved by the Associazione Città aperta - Genova; Formum Co/Scienze politiche - Bologna; Gruppo migranti del Brescia Social Forum; LUC Libera Università Contropiani - Bologna; Rete antirazzista - Venezia.

of the same Italian workers, circling now for some time where in particular the insertion of migrants at the centre of the industry was most consistent»¹³.

A few months later, on May 15, 2002, the first migrant workers strike in Italy was promoted in the province of Vicenza by a few of those networks that had revived this debate, particularly by the Tavolo Migranti del Vicenza Social Forum plus some divisions of the Rifondazione Comunista and the Cub unions, finding its possible circumstances in the improvised gesture of courage by the local CGIL (not even the strongest union in that area) which decided to commit itself, on its own, in the organization of the strike¹⁴. The initiative inserted itself into a new context determined by the beginning of the approval procedure on the proposed immigration law passed by Bossi-Fini. After the first move of the CGIL, the approval of the CISL and UIL followed. But it was mostly the assemblies that followed frenetically in succession over the days immediately preceding the strike who made 10,000 people come out in the streets of a surprised city of Vicenza that «in part was irritated by the number of participants in the demonstration, but mostly by their colour»¹⁵.

The success of the strike notwithstanding, the unions and branches of the movement weren't capable of seizing the step forward that an initiative of this type had signified in the dominance of the argument and the political heroism of the migrants. The unions, despite the openings for negotiation in the leather industry (which had a high concentration of migrants), which were established just before that strike, were not even effectively capable of producing a press release and immediately resumed their litigiousness, destroying the alliance that had supported the strike and made it possible. However it wasn't a matter of a simple propositioning of the problem of the relationships between the unions: the breakdown that was induced after the strike most importantly revealed the difficulty that came into play after this first attempt to «build a connection (or at least a channel of communication) between native and foreign working groups, attempting to put an end to the disgraceful solitude of the migrant workers»¹⁶. A complication that has its roots in the behaviour of the unions during discussions regarding migrant workers and in particular in the implicit choice to ignore the political result that migrant labor embodies in respect to all labor. Simply put, that which was not understood in the Vicenza strike was the sensational achievement of the work force such as the migrant one, part of the working class but at the same time capable of demonstrating its obsolete and inefficient character, taking control of the debate in front of the processes of government restructuring of labor, of an image of this last point calibrated around sentiments of identity and group membership – of class consciousness one would have said long time ago.

The criticism of the strike at Vicenza was almost immediate - in order to represent itself as we will see almost identical also in front of the path of the organization of the March 1st strike - coming from a universal prejudice that traversed the union sector and gave a general tendency to consider a strike led by migrants ambiguous and oriented only to themselves. In this criticism, there was ambiguity so that the migrants who wanted to could avoid extortion of their condition and none of them would be left to fight in solitude. None of the original promoters thought that this strike alone was capable of stopping the Bossi-Fini law proposed at the time, but its political and strategic character consisted of producing an experiment that could work on the fly for similar initiatives in other areas of Italian production. This, nevertheless, did not prove to work, if only through the insertion of the reference to Bossi-Fini in some local union strikes and protests.

In the following years, the migrant conflicts were signified by a growing evocation of the strike and the growth of migrant heroism: the innumerable local protests and the two large demonstrations that came out in Rome in December 2004 and 2005, with tens of thousands of migrants, were evidence of this. Demonstrations which, while showing the continuously growing heroism of the migrants, also revealed how the challenge of putting an end to that «disgraceful solitude of the migrant workers» was anything but tiring. And that in fact it was the migrant heroism to cast a new light on the challenge, in

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ This courageous gesture didn't come out of nowhere. A decisive role was played by the large protest organized by the CGIL on March 23 in Rome. For a report and an analysis of the strike in Vicenza see the contribution by the Tavolo migranti dei social forum del vicentino, *The story is always the same. Lo sciopero senza ricomposizione di Vicenza*, in *Lavoro migrante*, cit., pp. 62-74.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

which it wasn't only solidarity and anti-racism at stake, but the capacity to reopen the discussion about the practices, the conversations, and the priorities of the Italian movement. Together with social concerns such as home, the central point of these arguments was duplicitous: on one side the resident permit request, on the other side the breaking of the rigid connection between permit and work contained in the *residency contract*, the real cornerstone of the Bossi-Fini law.

It should be made clear that this issue is not going to disappear forever, but it is a fact that the strike on March 1st had in fact produced further movements on this topic. It is necessary to make a final consideration on this cycle of protests. As it came to light in a political document from an assembly of Italian and migrant workers in Bologna in September 2004 – one of the rare experiments on reason and finding a common ground from works on racism and Bossi-Fini – the strike began to be perceived in a different way in respect to the classic union way of understanding¹⁷. No longer a simple union tool, no longer the final result of a method of organization, the evidence of a strike of Italians and migrants against the Bossi-Fini law became immediately a point of political demands, a position at stake in which to invest and to fight for, as if it dealt with something new to defeat and not only a right to be exercised. A practice that while it expressed itself against a law and against those who benefited from it in terms of social power, it is also against a condition that migrants invested themselves entirely in work. It is in this sense that the political strike of migrant labor was intended, for this reason it didn't find its own sole polemic spokesperson in the ruling class nor in the government, but also in the union itself and in the politics of the movement. In this sense, the fundamental difference in respect to the classic union strike concerns the type of organization that it regards to: if it comes from a given membership in an union, to try to strengthen it in the moment of negotiation, the migrant labor strike is actually itself a moment of political subjectivation, that does not necessarily pass through memberships already given, but, on the contrary, puts strain on them.

From Rosarno to the strike

The trajectory of the strike of migrant work therefore has its origins in a collection of fragments, practices, discourses and organizational moments, but found the material conditions and accessibility for its realization only in late 2009 and early 2010. The news of the proclamation of the strike in France already circulated for several weeks, and in Italy a Comitato 1 Marzo (March 1st Committee) was organized along the lines of the twin initiatives that had already extended to Greece and Spain. Hardly could we explain the acceleration of the organizational processes, circulation of information among migrants and public opinion without taking in consideration the revolt in Rosarno.

It was the same response of the press to the facts of Rosarno to indicate on the March 1st an outlet for an explosive situation and factually unsustainable. In the *Corriere della Sera*, for example, you could read sentences like «on the internet there's a lot of turmoil for the organization of what is called the strike of immigrants and to be held precisely on March 1st. An initiative whose actuality is proven by the events in Rosarno»¹⁸. Also the government, and Lega Nord in particular, kept an eye on what was assembling, trying to cash in politically, approve the security package in terms of a direct threat to migrants. The Minister Calderoli commented: «I would exclude that the regulars want to do it. If irregulars instead led the initiative, it is simply the matter of expelling them». Calderoli shared, somehow, the conviction well entrenched also in the left parties and worldwide trade unions, that a strike against racism could only involve migrant workers, but added in a direct way the separation between legal and illegal ones. As on other occasions happened to representatives of the League, especially closer to the long battle that took place in Brescia under the crane on the San Faustino street, Calderoli has done nothing but agitate threatening to use the law enforcement: impossibility of *erga omnes* application of all its parts, its discretionary management, in fact, by the prefectures and the police turned out to be a political weapon in the hands of the authorities and employers.

¹⁷ The document entitled *Ci negano tutti i diritti – abbiamo diritto di sciopero!* is present in a leaflet by the Coordinamento Migranti Bologna and distributed at a town demonstration “for migrant freedom and rights” on September 25th, 2004 which attended, among numerous parts of the movement, even CGIL and CISL. A convergence of this kind, at least in the Bologna area, will not happen again after this experience.

¹⁸ [«Corriere della Sera» del 09/01/2010.](#)

This position, which revealed a few concerns, was opposed by a certain dose of paternalism, accompanied by an ill-concealed displeasure towards new forms of political activism. This was evident, for example, in the words of those responsible for immigration in the national CGIL, where an actual request to strike was kicked down to «suggestion» and judged difficult to achieve because of the working and living conditions of migrants themselves, characterized by «subjugation, submission, neo slavery in some cases». So, all of this made it difficult for them to «agree, [and] even for just one day raise their head».

What presented itself as one of the challenges and issues of the day to the CGIL was the obstacle, while the autonomous capabilities of organization and autonomous demands of the migrants seems clear. Tight within a static view of social relations, for the Union, the main problem was the suggestion of *migrant strike* because it would be an «auto-segregation» in response to the segregating tendencies of a society «that hosts them». Growing questions of a strike against the Bossi-Fini law, which were directed even at the CGIL, the largest Union answered in this manner and calling to a general strike, «maybe an hour», against racism. To those who were identified as promoters of the day, suggested then to drop the speech on the strike and to organize a party for immigrants on a different date, on 20 March¹⁹.

The reaction of the CGIL Trade Union toward a strike request expressed a displacement about a matter as partial as that of the Bossi-Fini law and institutional racism. What in fact was being excluded is that this could have a general character and that some working figures characterized by *special* conditions could attract a general mobilization. The movement was identified with national coordinators formally belonging to a rather generic appeal, without understanding that these could not in any way represent and lock up the mobilization that, if it was already brooding over the strike of the March 1st, became public knowledge after the revolt in Rosarno. A fact that erased at once the assumption that conditions of extreme exploitation could not allow a collective reaction, yet ended up being a driving force for successive mobilizations. It should be clarified that this attitude does not refer solely to the CGIL, even though among the first to react to the campaign, but to the entire world, including much of the basic trade unionism²⁰.

A strike, many strikes?

While the spread of news on Facebook and the impact ad attracted the attention of the press, in many cities concrete organizational steps toward the strike were taken. A certain *method* produced common practices in some important situations involving assemblies of both migrant workers and Italians, but the ways to organize the strike were diverse. In a very schematic way and with reference to the most significant situations, we can identify three main types: the first, which involved Bologna, was the result of an autonomous path, born out of the union and able to directly involve employees and the trade unions in weeks before March 1st; the second, which involved Brescia, has seen even from the very beginning protagonists migrants who held important roles within the union; the third has instead produced the dynamics that took place essentially within the union.

In Bologna, the Coordinamento Migranti, a self-organized reality of migrants and Italians which has been operating for years and has made the promotion of migrant labor strike one of its strong points, immediately aimed both on participation in the local committee as well as on the realization of strike through a series of assemblies and meetings, including the transfer of the assets from the FIOM and the provincial congress. Then a series of meetings and assemblies was organized with the participation of both individual workers and some delegates from RSU FIOM. Despite the formal accession of some unions, including the national FIOM, none of these had in fact called for the strike and the fact that it was formally proclaimed, with only two exceptions, only in situations affected by this path. It was the Coordinamento Migranti, in agreement with the workers, to call for the strike by sending faxes to companies that were then taken up by the RSU for the proclamation of the strike hours.

Here the strike of migrant labor was never intended to involve only migrants, but as a strike of all workers against the Bossi-Fini law and in particular against the residence contract for work. The

¹⁹ <http://www.rassegna.it/articoli/2010/01/7/56657/sciopero-migranti-soldini-cgil-rischia-di-fallire>

²⁰ One can cite, for example, the interview with Vincenzo Miliucci, spokesman for the Cobas, exit on Manifesto in the weeks before the March 1st.

starting point was a reasoning by which the immigration legislation, directly affecting migrant workers is reflected on the entire workforce. Either because it builds within the workplace differences that produce racism among workers, or because it attributes to employers the power management of the permanence of regular migrants. It is worth quoting a passage from the document calling to strike in the Bolognese companies: «The economic crisis affects workers without distinction, with layoffs and dismissals. But, because of the link between residence and employment contract established by the Bossi-Fini law, for migrant workers the crisis also means the risk of losing permission: migrant workers will not be able to renew the residence permit if they lose their jobs or if they don't reach the share of income required by law. Thus, the Bossi-Fini law blackmails migrant workers, forcing them to accept tougher tasks, less rights, lower wages. This feeds the racism and is reflected in the workplace affecting all workers. For this reason, the strike of March 1st is organized as a strike of all workers, immigrants and Italians, for abolishing the Bossi-Fini law and residence contract work»²¹. This position is intended to break the isolation of migrants, but also to promote a change of perspective able to engage the Italian workers, who in fact did not participate in solidarity with migrants, but recognizing the battle against institutional racism as their own interest. During a preparatory meeting for March 1st, at an event called "Day without permission", held on February 14, ten thesis on migrant labor were processed²², which were translated and circulated even in the European antiracist networks. From the tone of the debate that animated the day, it is clear that from the outset it was lived as a political battle: «there are those who say that in the crisis one cannot go on strike, and that the strike is impossible because of precarity and undeclared work, some people even if both the migrants and Italians want to strike against the Bossi-Fini law call it ethnic strike: it seems that everyone has a fear of a strike that puts the interests of many workers in front of the public eye. To these we say that even in times of crisis our work is essential to advance Italy, and that even a partial experience of strike would give a strong signal to everyone, a taste of freedom that you can conquer! During the Assembly of the *Giornata senza permesso (day without permission)*, this was the meaning of the discussion with delegates, including Italians, who declared their support to the strike of March 1st. With them we will continue to a day that will mark a new beginning! We think that the strike is a right of all workers and for this we will fight everyone, beginning with the RSU whose representatives were present at the meeting, to exercise it and bring others with us. We don't ask for solidarity, but the participation of everyone in this fight: the March 1st will be just a beginning».

This position was also expressed in the dynamics of the square, where most interventions have taken the common character of the day and the presence of Italian workers was evident, starting with those of the companies on strike (in some cases the delegates argued that the strike involved the majority of immigrants and nearly half of Italians, other given the composition of the factory that the strike involved mainly Italians). The migrants themselves have stated the general character of the mobilization with respect to the work, describing it as a day against exploitation and denouncing the «war between the poor» produced by Bossi-Fini. Also, some Italian delegates explained that «the attack against migrants is an attack on all workers, so the fight against racism and against Bossi-Fini is our fight». Another significant finding was the communication that has developed after the strike between different working figures even within the same industry. At Ducati, for example, communication between workers led soon to strike discussion among different sectors. If for metalworkers in production the proclamation of the strike by the RSU Fiom allowed the strike, workers of the cooperative Felsinea Catering, working in the cleaning within the company, there was a problem of how to participate in the day. The activated channel with the Fiom delegates was not enough, they then worked looking for any union protection that could formally cover workers of this type of cooperative, finding it in this case at Italian Union Board.

Similar paths have affected other cities, although with different modes, including Brescia, reality whose importance for the self-organization of migrant paths is marked by years of mass mobilizations. We have already mentioned the occupation of 2000, Piazza della Loggia, suffice it to recall even the

²¹ the entire document can be downloaded at <http://coordinamentomigranti.splinder.com/post/22324962/primomarzo-comunicato-stampa-rsu-proclamano-sciopero>.

²² <http://lavoromigrante.splinder.com/post/22318404/primomarzo-materiali-10-tesi-sul-lavoro-migrante-coordinamento-per-lo-sciopero-del-lavoro-migrante-in-italia>

great demonstration of more than fifteen thousand migrants of 27 October 2007. It is within this long journey of mobilizations that the strike of March 1 should be placed, which managed to somehow translate into reality a boost grown over the years, as claimed by Ibrahim Diallo, at the time a member of the CGIL and the Coordinamento Immigrati di Brescia who saw within it representatives of different associations: «March 1st in Brescia was a March 1st to remember. Communities and various associations who in recent years have been engaged in the claims and self-organization of migrants [...] one-day strike and mobilization on immigration issues is something that for years has been requested! So when this idea was born and spread from France, here in Brescia it was quickly accepted and the preparations were immediately set in motion»²³.

In Brescia square and important organizational step was February 6, when a demonstration of thousands of migrants had ended making a date for the March 1st, and already a number of companies that would announce the strike: an important signal for the whole movement that something more than a media campaign was in the making for that date. The organization was somewhat different than in Bologna, whether for a greater dissemination of initiatives, or a more direct involvement of the trade union CGIL through migrant officials who have taken up the challenge. Again in the words of Diallo, 'there were two ways: the first is that of the various associations and movements, of the direct relationship with migrants through associations, meeting places. Then there was the setting up of assemblies in many areas. Workers have made it clear to officials and to the delegates that this was their day, that they wanted to be there and they decided the strike hours they wanted. Many delegates and workers have decided to declare eight hours of strike, in at least 12-13 companies».

The partial suitability to the Union of certain members of the Coordinamento Immigrati di Brescia helps explain the success of the strike, but even here the involvement was the result of a path, certainly not started from secretariats, which made the strike itself part of the stakes, and it can be argued that this independent push by migrants has been able to infect even the Italian workers. Not only for sharing a common cause, but also as an element of subjectivity: «many Italian workers in our Union, they said they wanted to participate and have declared a strike in their companies. The beautiful and important thing, which makes us proud, is the fact that all started from the bottom: it was the workers who came and said they wanted to go on strike».

Another example was that of Suzzara, where just a few months ago was born the Coordinamento Migranti del Basso Mantovano, which brought together mostly workers of different engineering companies in the area. Here too the path was initiated by a meeting, held on February 7, attended by a few dozen migrant workers including some shop stewards, while FIOM declared their opposition, but without blocking the initiative of its delegates. As told by Imdadul: «on March 1st we were able to make the strike even with a fight from the FIOM, eventually we got an hour to strike and a meeting to discuss with all workers what does the Bossi-Fini law mean, but even in that case it was necessary to fight as workers to obtain a shift from the union». Even in Suzzara, a country deeply marked by factory-migrant presence and concentrated industrial centre between the IVECO, the armature and the nearby Pegognaga, the mobilization has not only involved the migrants, but also workers and Italian students. In other situations, such as Reggio Emilia and Parma²⁴, the strike was proclaimed through a substantially within the Union, thanks to the initiative of some officials who were able to involve several not insignificant effects: obtaining RSUS were seven companies to strike twelve in Parma and Reggio Emilia.

On the side of the square, in four cities the numbers were considerable: in Bologna, Brescia, Milan and Naples, the reports speak of ten to fifteen thousand people. In many other Italian cities, from Palermo to Padua, Reggio Emilia, Florence, Mantova, among others, took to the square hundreds of people both Italian immigrants, reflecting the fact that not only the strike but the entire mobilization have been able to produce units from different conditions. To make a stir that this took place on the morning of a weekday, as in Brescia, or early afternoon, as in Bologna, a strong signal and visible success of the strike, which was flying to the growth of the mobilization in other cities. The first March was a day at the dawn of what little was written and a lot had to be written. Just when the news began to circulate

²³ The interview is part of a documentary produced by the Coordinamento per lo sciopero del lavoro migrante in Italia produced at the European Social Forum that was held in Istanbul in July 2010

²⁴ These should definitely be accompanied by some companies of Forlì where the strike has been declared, but without developing a communication with other realities.

along with the convening of the strikes and releases reports of principals and demonstrations that began in different cities, it was realized that he was really going on something important. It was this feeling of genuine mobilization to make powerful first March for workers who went on strike individually and in the many smaller initiatives and peripherals.

Migrants at work

Everything has changed for trade unions but not much progress has been made for the migrants. If we consider for instance what was observed by one of the first surveys done on foreign foundry workers in Reggio Emilia at the end of the 70s. This is a survey done in one of the places that in the middle of the 80s were considered among the most important for number and quality of the presence of migrant workers. Based on interviews of 88 workers, this research showed how for many the trade union was a positive thing, but did not work in the interest of foreign workers²⁵. One of the interviewed has explained so his position: the trade union «does not consider that foreign workers are twice exploited compared to the Italian workers», while in general it was accused to create discriminatory dynamics and not to welcome migrant proposals. The theme was a hot button, if it's sure that «that of the trade union is however the question that has arisen the most complex discussions also among them»²⁶. The ones who instead knew perfectly the migrant condition were the employers, who were asked whether they didn't consider too restricted the rules regulating the hiring of migrant workers. The blames were made mainly on the bureaucracy and the time for granting the permit needed for the hiring, not suited for the production time (to the extent that was proposed the granting of temporary permits from the Provincial Employment Office in order to hire workers and depending then on the accomplishment of the procedure in the long term). But the response to the question whether they consider fair repatriation in case of layoff was that in general it's fair that it would be so, for control purposes and that because in case of crisis it's possible to lay off, some proposing stricter measures for avoiding that more skilled workers would go working elsewhere²⁷.

Some other studies done during several years have mainly confirmed this situation, while the law changes seem to have replied to the desires expressed by the few employers interviewed in Reggio Emilia²⁸. This does not mean that the employer's situation has not changed in the last few years: the law Bossi-Fini itself has been harshly criticized periodically by the Confindustria (Italian Manufacturing Companies Association) and openly by its research centres²⁹. However the entry mechanisms and the bureaucratic inefficiencies that have been criticized, in a debate that leaves largely intact the social power that the residence permit gives to the proprietors: the proprietors were and are still the real granters of a citizenship that is always weak and precarious for the migrants³⁰. The change of the employer's positions in respect of the immigration law during several years suggest also other considerations about the formative role of the State on the Italian entrepreneurial class dealing with the new composition of the global workforce represented by the migrants. It is understandable then that the criticism against the rigidity of the regularization methods has decreased over time, compared with the recognition of the advantages that this same rigidity offers for the elimination of the conflicting consequences brought by the migrant work. Nowadays, while in the economical crisis the Bossi-Fini law makes its victims promoting a process of illegalization, Confindustria says not much. We don't consider useful here taking into consideration also the high

²⁵ C. Carchedi, G.B. Ranuzzi, *Tra collocazione nel mercato del lavoro secondario ed esclusione dal sistema della cittadinanza (Between placement in the secondary work market and exclusion from the citizenship system)* in N. Sergi (a cura di), *L'immigrazione straniera*, Roma, Edizioni Lavoro/Isco, 1987, pp. 35-80.

²⁶ E. Grappi, P. Spagni, *Gli stranieri a Reggio Emilia. Indagine diretta con interviste a 88 lavoratori arabi e a 16 aziende (Foreigners in Reggio Emilia. A direct survey with interviews of 88 Arab workers and 16 companies)*, «Amministrazione Provinciale di Reggio Emilia», settembre 1981, p. 91.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 101-102.

²⁸ Another aspect that we just point out is the racism among workers. On this topic please refer to V. Ribeiro Corossacz, "Da 'marucchen a marrocchino'. Il razzismo descritto da operai meridionali e stranieri a Modena", *Studi culturali*, numero 1, aprile 2008, pp. 51-74.

²⁹ Refer for instances to the report of a conference held last year in Parma: <http://www.giornalettismo.com/archives/59694/immigrazione-governo-sta-sbagliando/2/>.

³⁰ F. Mometti, *Il laboratorio Brescia (The Brescia laboratory)*, in *Lavoro migrante*, cit., p. 59.

level of activity of the foreigners compared with the Italian citizens, a topic that is often reiterated for confirming the demographic aspect and the complementarity inside the work market as the only evaluation of the migrant presence³¹.

However we consider useful instead analyse briefly the data concerning the composition of the work of the legal migrant, the only one that is available since the percentage of the illegal workers, both on the administrative and on the hiring level, results from partial and changing estimates. According to the study Caritas/Migrants 2010, the total of migrants living in Italy is of about 4 millions and two hundred thousand. Of which, over a million is represented by minors³². Always according to ISTAT data during 2005-2010 the legal foreign workers in Italy have duplicated, from just over one million to over two millions. The majority- over a million and two hundred thousand- works in the service sector, over 400 thousand in the industry and around 350 thousand in construction. Comparing these data with the ones of five years ago can be observed a decrease of the workers in the industry going from around 26% of the total to around 20%, while workers in the service sector have increased from 50% to 53%. In the construction sector the percentage has remained around 16%, the same applies for the agriculture, with the percentage remaining around 4%³³.

In the North of Italy, where the experiences of strike considered in this study have focused, the percentage of the legal foreign workers continues to represent over the 50% of the total. The trends present on the national scale are here very evident: while there has been a slight decrease of the employees in the industry, going from the 4% to around the 3%, the decrease is evident for the workers in the industry, going from 32% of the total to around the 24%, which corresponds to a significant increase of the employees in the services: from 46% to around 57%. Less, of around 2%, has been the decrease of workers in construction, estimated around 15% in 2010.

The data try to give a picture of the changing situation, which is also related to a temporary frame corresponding also to emerging of the economical crisis. Moreover, they don't consider the illegal workers, both as far as the residence permit and the work contract are concerned. The usual illegality of the migrant work concerns in fact not only workers without the residence permit. As shown from some data about migrants in Rosarno and about cleaning companies in Puglia, Sicily and in the coastal area of Romagna, it's high the presence of former factory workers or workers on redundancy payment from metal-working industries in the north, which are legal, but because of the crisis have to integrate- or replace- their income with other work, among agricultural workers and itinerant workers for the summer season of the tourism industry. This data also don't consider the high percentage of migrants without residence permit usually hired in factories, in services and above all in construction.

Taking into consideration these estimates, the gathered data here presented show also other aspects about the work composition in the considered macro-sectors. Should we, as suggest by numbers see an occupational change of migrant from industry to service workers? The reply is not easy and doesn't mean the tendential lack of importance of the industry. While the relevance of the industry decreases, the data do not show the ever-growing importance of the work in the service *inside* the industry: in logistics, cleaning, assembling, and also in the sectors of the production itself³⁴. This refers to a process of reorganization of the industrial system to which does not correspond an effect of dematerialization of the work. It should be highlighted that this process cannot be limited only to the destructuring of the big Fordist factory but comprehends also small and medium factories, as shown by the increasing number of companies subcontracting production segments to third parties inside the factory itself or

³¹ It needs to be highlighted though that this utility should be of interest, even great interest, for Italian workers and also the movements claiming a change of the social welfare, since nowadays the taxes paid by migrant workers *pay* in a definitive higher extent in comparison to the benefits that the migrant workers take from them. Above all because the constant possibility of loss of the work permit results also in the risk of losing any social security and social cushioning benefits, even though scarce and inadequate.

³² The most recent data from ISTAT and MIUR for 2009 estimate that minors aged three are around two hundred thousand, and around sevenhundred thousands the enrolled in schools of different level, aged between three and eighteen. Minors not enrolled in school need to be added to this. The overall data come from the Caritas/Migrantes, *Dossier statistico (Statistical report) 2010* (XX rapporto).

³³ Elaboration of ISTAT data from 2010 by the authors.

³⁴ Following the Eures report, *Lavoro, diritti e integrazione (Work, rights and integration)* in October 2008 more than 11% of the tertiary is classified as "services to companies", (the report is available at the address <http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/news/eures23ott2008.pdf>).

in separate structures. Together with the redefinition of the industrial work comes also the multiplication of the contract types linked to the service sector, typologies which include the ever more blurred and extensive galaxy of co-operatives, freelance professionals and the well-known cauldron of temporary workers. This causes quite a problem when we look at what is work nowadays, both migrant and non migrant, and of how trade unions have replied to these changes: seeing the partial exit from the factory also of the industrial work itself does not mean the possibility of generalising the trade union model borne in it, but the opening of new political and organizational challenges.

The multiplication of these internal work boundaries should bring us to think about the inadequacy of both the statistical system and the form of the trade union, rather than produce a complaint for the loss of the factory homogeneity, to which nobody would like to go back to. Trade unions are still organized in categories of commodity sectors and think that the unity of work is only the sum of several sectors and contract types and not a political stake. Rethinking the current composition of the migrant industrial work can offer still some interesting cues also when facing the trade union problem of conflict on the workplace and of the *disciplinary* consequences on workers. While the old factory discipline (not so old as shown by the cases of Melfi, Pomigliano e Termini Imerese) worked on a hierarchical model based on the manager's or entrepreneur's decisions, the multiplication of the figures being part of the factory or of the productive cycle introduces instead a kind of market discipline based on which the eventual infringements are punished not only at work but also with a potential thread of expulsion from the occupational cycle/unemployment managed by temporary agencies or co-operatives.

An expulsion that in the case of migrant workers is worsened by the loss of the work permit and in the fall into the aforementioned irregular work cycle, or in the effective expulsion from the country with the eventual passing into the administrative detention CIE. Based also on these considerations it's possible to evaluate all the newness represented by forms of micro-conflictuality put into action by this segment of workforce and by the choice of striking on March 1st.

The shifting, or should I say the evanescence, of this border between factory and the labor market, as well as the same explosion of the big factory, affects also the worker's imagination of the capitalist lead. While once the capital level was very evident, what is shown today is an ever growing process of naturalization of the company choices that are read as simple effects of the market and the crisis.

All these elements come together in representing an image of the work world more and more fragmented and that can be sometimes less represented at a trade union level. Also for this reasons it's surprising to hear the annoyed reactions of trade unions in respect to the migrant claims and the strike campaign for March 1st, even not too subtly accused of «splitting» the workers or even to undermine the «solidarity mechanism which should bind people working together, Italians and non Italians»³⁵.

Migrants between labor, trade union and citizenship

We intend now to look at the statistical relation between the population and the trade union³⁶. Concerning this point can be observed a high increase of the registrants going from 2000 till 2006, from just above 220.500 (summing up Cgil, Cisl counting the majority share of above one hundred thousand, and Uil) to almost 700.000 including this time also the registrants of Ugl. In 2006 the migrant registrants in all the confederal trade unions were around 5% of the total registrants, a datum that increases if we consider the active population only and the sectors where migrants can be present, excluding retired people, where the migrants are just few and public sector employment, where instead they cannot work, if not only indirectly, that is through subcontract to external agencies. This datum is above 11%³⁷. The increase involves all the trade unions for which data are available, with a percentage of registered migrants of around 35% for Cgil and Cisl and above 11% for Ugl. The percentage of migrant registrants on the total registrants shows instead an overall increase of

³⁵ National Department of Migratory Politics of Uil, 19th January 2010.

³⁶ This is also discussed by F. Raimondi, *Migranti e sindacato: tra sciopero e cittadinanza (Migrants and trade union: between strike and citizenship)*, in course of publication on Outis, n° 1.

³⁷ The data are from Caritas/Migrantes, *Dossier statistico (Statistical report) 2007 (XVII rapporto)*.

3%. However, in this case too, the datum would be higher net of retired and registrants of the public sector employment. This aspect should make trade unions think about the formulation of their strategies and claiming platforms.³⁸ It's interesting then to consider the information on the reasons bringing migrants to register to the trade union: in a research carried out by Eures in 2008 we find in the first position for all the categories of origin and age the «request of protection in the subject of law and legality of the contract», with more than 60% of the registrants, followed by «security on work» for more than 40%. This data should be taken with caution, but is relevant, and speaks of an increasing dynamics of politicisation of the migrant work, that we consider though ambiguous and difficult to judge, since direct questions about the legal practises linked to the renewal services and the handling of the residence permit, determinant for bounding migrant workers to trade unions, are not present as reply options of the questionnaire³⁹.

Another datum contained in the report has also caused astonishment on the national press, according which the 80% of the registrants looked favourably at the formation of a migrant trade union for migrants. A result that has been commented in a similar way from the national exponents of Cgil, Cisl and Uil, that have highlighted the contrast between this datum and the numbers of migrant registered; for instance the president of Anolf Cisl Oberdan Ciucci has said that these data «don't find confirmation in reality. The Cisl is the first trade union among migrants [...] they participate directly and hold extremely important roles» and the major force of the co-federals than any alternative hypothesis. These positions converge in interpreting the greater unionization of the migrants compared with the Italian workers on the basis of their weakness, «given that the social and working conditions of migrants are worse and consequently their need someone to defend their rights and interests is stronger», using the words of Piero Soldini, immigration Officer for CGIL⁴⁰.

The theme of the formation of a trade union for migrants is absolutely functional for maintaining this situation since allows to put the necessity of unity, strength, more representativeness before the political problem brought by the migrant work. The question also concerned a not clear utility of a trade union of this sort: considering the use that many migrants do of trade union, it's obvious that trade unions can be useful. Considering the isolation and the deafness in front of their problems felt usually by the migrants in the trade union, also for the aforementioned reasons, the datum does not astonish us.

These reactions have continued to mark the way in which the theme of migrant labor has been dealt with at the union level and even by some migrant associations and they have then re-emerged violently just before March 1st. On the one hand, the claim of representation is often used *against* the demands that come from the base, or not yet decided by the property, on the other hand it suggests more or less directly the idea that migrants are vulnerable people and, as such, in need of help. This barrier to the requests and speeches coming instead from migrant leadership, as a way to read both the work and the union limits, is based on an implicit fact: the national character, closely related to citizenship, of the union representation. This does not mean that migrants don't receive replies, a role inside the structures – albeit in a totally underpowered way compared to the numbers of the registrants – and assistance, but that their condition of *migrant workers* is constantly relegated to the background and split: they are considered either as workers, and therefore equal to all other, or as migrants and therefore in need of help or at most subject of integration campaigns. This inadequacy in understanding the complexity of the dynamics triggered in the migrant labor has also found a specific form of organization in the institution of the immigration offices or foreign centres, trade union institutions for the support/assistance to be provided to migrant workers in a number of administrative requirements related to their condition, placing in this way the union structures side by side with the many organizations and individuals providing services of this type. The purpose of these institutions would be to bridge the citizenship *deficit* differentiating migrant workers from all the other workers, but without grasping the overall and general depletion involving the same social citizenship in recent years, a set of individual and collective rights more and more ineffective in a context of social fragmentation and precarization of working and living conditions.

³⁸ Caritas/Migrantes, *Dossier statistico 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010* (XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX rapporto).

³⁹ The data come from the Eures report (2008), *Lavoro, diritti e integrazione degli immigrati in Italia*, cit. (*Work, rights and integration of migrants in Italy*)

⁴⁰ <http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/attualita-eures-i-lavoratori-stranieri-vogliono-un-sindacato-6215.html>.

However, it would be wrong to consider the trade union action limits, its being calibrated coupling between citizenship and labor – active manifestation of the «State thought» Sayad⁴¹ would say – a simple deficit of political will. From our point of view, on the contrary, they represent a symptom of an actual process of effective split between citizenship that finds in the migrants an important paradigm. The migrants, namely, have demonstrated and demonstrate that you can be a worker without becoming (or be able to become) a citizen. This should force us to think about how to put value into this fracture, how to overcome it and to think of new practices of freedom, rather than how to reassemble it. We are aware that this effort clashes constantly with the difficulty of imagining the social struggles and work on a stand-alone plan. Forcing Sayad, it could be argued that in order to represent the migrant struggles we see constantly the *thought of the union*, i.e. that set of mental but at the same time *objective* categories that lead, for example, to think on different levels the political and the trade union moment, individual and collective claims, the possibility of arising disputes in the workplace and about rights, job and life precarity.

We believe then that assuming the point of view of migrants in its partiality, as it is expressed in the strike of March 1st, it is possible to escape this logic, flip it for that moment that allows you to think the political struggle independently, beyond the difference between political and union time and over the same horizon of citizenship.

Nobody denies that the *political* condition of not being citizens, and the social condition given by an often-unskilled placement work, are linked by a circularity aimed to the constant reproduction of clearly defined roles within social hierarchies⁴². What needs to be highlighted is that migrants show, in the struggles but also the subjective capacity to cross borders and to evade the international division of labor, a capacity of defining the same social spaces in which are to be located. From this point of view, the same light form embodied by “the services union” can be accessed in two different ways. On the one hand, it definitely fits into a trade union action of the redefinition process in the reformist and non-confrontational sense (the trade union of the services is a model proposed and discussed by the ICFTU as early as the 80s). On the other hand, it can be instead read as a product of the same subjective and related use made by migrants. This workforce segment is not tied to the union based on a spirit of belonging derived from the national social memory. From this point of view we find politically incorrect the very widespread reading, of this *surplus* as a result of an absence of a culture of rights, a symptom of the need to explain to migrants what the union is in order to ensure that they use it correctly. Instead, it is also present among migrants a memory, we might define of *class*, of past struggles that clashes with political balancing acts of the large or small national organizations and of many realities of movement. It is also in this way that we mean the *migration autonomy*, and this is a dimension that opens up several options not only for the union, but also for any fight on the terrain of racism and labor⁴³.

It is in this light, then, that the experience of the strike on March 1st showed, against all claims, an amazing *experimental* use of the trade union by the migrant labor that reveals the potential and greater utility of lighter trade union, in a phase of individualization market and forms of work. A confrontational tool in the hands of workers not traditionally represented, but bearers of a partial and at the same time general condition.

A political strike

The statistical survey mentioned shows also another fact: about two-thirds of respondents considered «quite useful or very useful» a strike of foreign workers in support of their claims, and «to foster greater recognition of the rights». A third of the sample had then replied that they would «definitely» do this kind of strike and the 45% «probably»⁴⁴. According to the authors of this report, the data

⁴¹ A. Sayad, *La doppia assenza. Dalle illusioni dell'emigrato alle sofferenze dell'immigrato (The double absence. From the illusions of the emigrant to the sufferences of the immigrant)*, Milano, Cortina, 2002.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 221.

⁴³ The concept of autonomy of migrations refers however to a broader dimension. See on this topic S. Mezzadra, *The gaze of autonomy: capitalism, migration and social struggle*, in Vicky Squire (ed.), *The Contested Politics of Mobility. Borderzones and Irregularity*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 121-142.

⁴⁴ Report Eures (2008), *Lavoro, diritti e integrazione degli immigrati in Italia (Work, rights and integration of migrants in Italy)*, cit., pp. 49-55.

showed «the urgent need for a change and a social and citizenship that goes across the entire community of immigrant workers in Italy». You may agree or disagree with this reading. The main point there seems to be another, that is, on the one hand the «growing awareness among immigrant workers in Italy of the value of their contribution to wealth, to the development and life of the host country», on the other hand the identification of the strike as a crucial tool for reaching claims of the migrant *condition*, starting from the legal status.

March 1st was able to intercept both parts of these trends and produce a powerful imagination that can disrupt not only the devices of the trade union representation, but also the social representations of work itself. In the strike migrants, for the first time in a massive size and widespread, were able to represent themselves as a collective force. This is to signify that the strike did not represent the final outcome of a process of subjectivation, but the very moment of its determination, managing to impose by force the presence of a widespread condition, that of migrant labor, over the fences of citizenship and the different forms of exploitation, has shown the possibility of reversing this state of things.

Also therein lies the political character of this experiment: a political strike since it didn't defend nor sought a contract, but has put Italians and migrants together in a particular condition that ends up involving all. A strike that has identified his opponent both in companies building their profits on the economy of the Bossi-Fini law, as in the legislative and administrative rules that allow this particular regime of profit accumulation. It was therefore a real experiment that has been able to show the innovative possibilities and at the same time has opened up a number of problems. In this lies the success of this experience, and it's with this that would like to conclude.

It was not an experience reproducible tout-court, as shown by 1st March 2011. The dramatic drop in participation and success of the strike showed first of all the impossibility of a ritual around a date on which the year before there was a convergence of a set of elements not reproducible in reality. A partial convergence is also made possible thanks to the ability to appoint different conditions of exploitation, although not all these conditions could be expressed in the strike. This, which has been the strong point of the day, also marked the limit starting from which it would be necessary to revive the discourse and practice of the strike, more than declare the failure as has been done by many. Also thanks to the success of the March 1st, 2010 was marked by other struggles discussed in this volume. The word strike is instead returned in the *strike of the roundabouts* organized in Campania in October, in which dozens of workers supported by the anti-racist activists have blocked sixteen roundabouts of the illegal hiring, refusing to work for less than 50 Euros and for the regularization, denouncing the criminalization of them. This mobilization is an important signal and indicates one of the challenging terrains for future strike paths of migrant labor: while the revolt of Rosarno has been a propellant for March 1st, the involvement of agricultural workers for the day remains an open challenge for the movement.

The need to dig into what that March 1st had somehow brought to the fore and sedimented has also contributed to the production of some important experiences through which the strike form was extended in 2011 to other moments of social reproduction, involving for the first time in Bologna students children of migrants and collective paths of women, migrants and non migrants⁴⁵. The transnational dimension of 2010, which affected in different ways France, Greece and Spain without producing similar dynamics to those in Italy, has been pursued in the involvement of some Austrian reality that in 2011 used March 1 to open new paths of migrants' mobilization which achievements and developments will be evaluated.

Even in this respect, it is necessary to insist on the connections and on the production of transnational communication. But it is the overall look on all the work that March 1st suggests of changing, both because the struggles of migrants are immediately on a transnational level, and just as they find in the State a controversial counterpart, cannot refer to the single State dimension, and because they impose an afterthought on the practices and claims. Starting from those that seem more urgent today that involve the issue of precarity. The migrant condition refers in fact to a precarious dimension that immediately shows the global nature of the ruling of the workforce. A ruling that can never give completely, and in the constant search for new and multiple means of discipline is forced to constantly

⁴⁵For a cronicle of March 1st 2011 in Bologna and for more information on the student strike you can refer to <http://coordinamentomigranti.splinder.com>. For the participation of women in the strike you can refer to the documents present on <http://migranda.wordpress.com/>.

repeat the motto, to quote a joke, «*divide the work et impera*» in the postcolonial world of globalization. If the precarity is, and not only now, a common condition that divides, if racism imposed on migrants is one of transnational tools of responding to these needs disciplining, then becomes necessary to consider the political separation imposed on migrant labor as a moment around which producing new convergences of living labor and open new scenarios.