

The struggle against the Cruise missile base in Comiso 1981–83



1983

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Comiso in Sicily became a prime place on the NATO nuclear armaments map, having been chosen to house 112 cruise missiles. A prosperous commercial and agricultural centre, it is characterised by poverty and unemployment, a situation that prevails among Sicilian peasants and manual workers. In contrast to what was being said by the Italian government — that the missile base would bring wellbeing and jobs to the area — some local anarchists (comrades in Ragusa and Catania) decided to give a more realistic picture based on the social and economic effects that such a base would have, along with the organisational proposal to form self-managed leagues in all the area, which would coordinate to occupy and destroy the base.

The anarchists criticised the typical pacifist approach to the struggle which tended to see nuclear weapons as a problem in themselves, making reference to complicated analyses of international politics. They also denounced the political parties that professed to be against the base, in particular the communist party with their massive rallies and demonstrations which did nothing to threaten the deadly programme being put into effect by the American and Italian governments with the help of the mafia who held all the building contracts.

So they set about working towards a mass occupation to attack and destroy the Cruise missile base. For almost two years they acted incessantly, including doing outdoor meetings throughout the region and opening a place in Comiso for the coordination of the self-managed leagues, the proposed organisational form that began to take shape.

The difficulties were many — lack of funds, police repression, threats from the mafia. There was also incomprehension by comrades who had little experience of the reality of social struggle, so different from the activity of traditional anarchist groups. As time went on it became clear that the local population were waiting for words to become actions. Most of them had pronounced themselves to be firmly against the base, many agreed with occupation and destruction as the only effective way to prevent its being built on their doorsteps, and some had even gone beyond that and made specific commitments for the days of the occupation itself. But they wanted proof that the anarchists were serious in their intentions, and the green light from the local political power structure, in order to take such a huge step.

Introduction

Comiso, a small town of 28,000 inhabitants in the south east of Sicily, has been chosen to house the largest arsenal of Cruise atomic missiles in Europe. If the local population does not mobilize soon to prevent this criminal manoeuvre decisively along the lines which have been successful in places such as Larzac in the south of France (where shepherds and peasants managed, after years of occupation and struggle, to regain their land from the French State's nuclear project), not only Comiso, but the whole of Sicily will shortly be transformed into a militarised desert.

The foundations for this US strategy have already been laid (see American bases in Sicily). The Cruise missile base, with its accompanying contingent of 15,000 US technicians and soldiers, is planned to become the nerve centre to link up the already existing structures, in turn preparing to house this, mobile arsenal of death during their intended excursions throughout Sicilian territory, for that is the intention: to move the missiles throughout Sicily in lorries to program their genocidal trajectories to Russia, Libya, or wherever else US interests feel themselves to be threatened.

Certainly, for the Sicilians the perspective of a foreign domination is nothing new: from the Romans, Arabs, Byzatin Normans, French, Spanish and Piedmontese, the exploited of the island have known domination and submission, the bourgeoisie dealings and enrichment. No doubt this fact also influenced the American assassins' choice, complementary to the island's strategic position in the Mediterranean. The long-suffering proletariat of the island (once a fertile garden, the granary of the Roman Empire) deliberately kept below poverty level by capital concentration in the north, are so accustomed to foreign invasion that it has become almost a way of life. An army of social scientists have been studying the coup, and the first of the invaders have arrived, especially chosen Italo-American families, nice people with nice children and lots of nice dollars to spend on rents, cars, furnishings, etc, in such a way that the most avid of the shop-keeping and commercial class and the most alienated part of the bored youth far from the explosions of rage in the northern metropoli are beginning to hope that the American dream has finally reached their doorsteps. Not so for the thousands of unemployed farmhands who fill the piazzas at dusk in the hope of finding work for the next day (with the chance of about one day out of every fifteen), the thousands of proletarian housewives incarcerated in the drought-stricken quarters of the town (running water two hours a day, yet Comiso is built upon a natural spring and underground wells containing millions of litres of water), the hundreds of building labourers deliberately made unemployed through the political strategy of anti-seismic laws (where the threat of earthquake prevents them from building two-storey houses and at the same time permits the installation of an atomic bomb plant) in order to render them, out of desperation in a land where the misery of social security sounds like an Arcadian dream, favourable to the base as bringer of jobs to the area. All these strata and many more are profoundly against the arrival of the Americans and their deadly wares. Why have they not done anything about it then?

As well as a certain defeatist and long suffering attitude, as well as the mafiosi politicians of the Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party (Socialist "defence" minister Lagorio at national

level, and mayor Catalano of Comiso) who signed the agreement to house the missiles, great responsibility lies with the local political forces who claim to be against the base, in particular the Communist Party which still holds considerable credibility in the area. This party, the largest communist party in Europe, can at the drop of a hat mobilize a demonstration of 100,000 people by laying on buses and bringing them from all over Sicily and the rest of Italy, and this has been their strategy: to call for a massive peace march, a day of letting off steam, shouting of slogans, dancing in the fields then, home to wait for the next directive. A few of their leaders have participated in symbolic limited hunger strikes; a petition has been signed including 12,500 signatures from Comiso alone. Good democratic, totally ineffective dissent. The CUDIP¹ – CP initiative permanently in existence in Comiso, is another democratic vent, as is substantially the international peace camp which includes the MIR², various colours of pacifists, buddhist monks, etc. Their good intentions are exceeded only by the ineffectiveness of their gestures which have until now included the construction of a wall of cardboard boxes in front of the airport, the drawing of corpses on the streets of Comiso, debates on theories of pacifism, encounters with archbishops, and are always available for discussion with other expressions of the power structure such as police, politicians, the Pope, etc. Even the FLM³ from Milan, reputed to be one of the most combative unions in Italy, in their only public appearance during the week their delegates spent in Comiso, simply covered the piazza Fonte Diana in multi-coloured paper doves and gave a talk with no precise indications. In the zoological park that Comiso had become, concrete proposals of struggle were essential.

Anarchist groups Rivolta e Liberta' of Catania, and Ragusa anarchist group have been working to this end since May this year. May, June and July were spent doing a series of outdoor meetings in Comiso and the twelve or so surrounding towns and villages, with bookstalls, mass distribution of leaflets containing counter-information concerning the base and urging workers in the area to organize against it.

An international anarchist conference was held in the municipal sports ground in Comiso July 31 and August 1 to discuss the position of the anarchist movement on the struggle in course and to measure the participation of the movement at the level of regular space in anarchist publications, printing of posters, radio programmes, subscriptions, etc. In spite of the terrific heat the conference (attended by about two hundred comrades) was fairly positive, and culminated in a public meeting in the piazza Fonte Diana where comrade Alfredo Bonanno talked to the comrades and the people of Comiso (male workers and unemployed, the women of Comiso do not circulate freely and the female comrades went to talk to them in their places of repression, i.e. the home), denouncing the criminal US project and urging those present to organize to fight it.

The meeting was also the scene of an antimilitarist action: anarchist comrade Pippo Scarso who lives in the Ragusa area and is extremely active in the work against the base, made a declaration as to why he had refused to turn up for military service when called up the previous month, (see statement further on in document) and tore up his call up card. None of the hundreds of carabinieri surrounding the piazza budged to arrest him—they realized the local sympathy was strong and that an arrest would be counter-productive. Pippo is still working at Comiso, he has been informed that he is to be tried for “instigation to commit a crime” as well as do twelve

¹ CUDIP: United Committee for Peace and Disarmament in Comiso

² MIR: International Reconciliation Movement

³ FLM: Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici (Metallurgists' and Mechanics' Union)

months sentence for objection against the armed forces. After the meeting comrades marched in the dark to the Magliocco airport, proposed site of the missile base. The police presence was massive but the demonstration did not allow itself to be provoked and the point was made, at this point symbolically only: that if we want to prevent the base we must go towards it, not from it as all the previous grandiose marches had done.

As the weeks went on, however, the comrades realized that there was a positive response to their efforts but that it was necessary to go beyond counter-information and suggestions. A concrete organizational proposal was necessary as the logical consequence of their discourse. It was necessary to find an organizational form which would automatically, through its methodology and general principles, make the class selection necessary for a direct attack on the base. The form chosen was the self-managed League, an autonomous, anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical, mass organism (see Document) which can be formed even by two or three people, but always in the optic of a quantitative growth and with the sole and unique aim of occupying and destroying the base. The League as instrument of struggle is not foreign to the local peasants and farmhands who used this method in the years following the war to occupy the land and successfully expropriated it from the landowners. Many of the townspeople of Comiso have also known the experience of mass rebellion. Comiso was one of the major towns in Sicily to rise up against the Italian State's call back to arms at the beginning of 1945. Exhausted and disheartened workers returned from the front to find their families in abject poverty and they refused to return to fight. A great antimilitarist insurrection took place in Comiso, Ragusa and many of the nearby villages, and the State's tanks and machine guns did not intimidate the Comisani then. It is towards this situation of mass rebellion that the work carried out by the anarchist comrades in the area is directed.

The month of August was spent preparing for this next phase in the struggle, and in September small premises were opened near the centre of Comiso, a co-ordinating office as point of reference, communication and support for the Leagues which were beginning to form in the area. The whole of the ground covered in the early months was returned to: Over twenty outdoor meetings, thousands of leaflets distributed, Document relative to the Leagues printed, radio and television programs, etc. The results to date have been encouraging. There are now almost ten self-managed Leagues in the area, and the terminology and project which they are proposing has become popular knowledge. In Vittoria, a town of 40,000 inhabitants 6 km from Comiso, 400 school pupils came out on strike spontaneously on reading the leaflet from the Coordinamento (see leaflet). They have since formed a League of students whose first initiative was that of leafleting all the other five major secondary schools in Vittoria, calling them to an immediate strike and outdoor assembly. Within an hour the piazza Gramsci was filled with over a thousand 15–18 year olds, enthusiastically discussing the problem of the base and the mystifications that surround it. The almost immediate arrival of police and carabinieri did not deter them, some of whose names were taken in the controls that followed when the major part of the meeting had dissembled. Debates are now being organized in the schools, and in Comiso a students' League has been formed. There also exists an intersectoral League in Comiso, as well as in Pedalino, Chiaramonte, Belpasso, Catania. In the county of Mistretta, a mountainous area in the north of Sicily between Messina and Palermo, a self-managed League against the missile base at Comiso has also been formed. This area has recently been chosen by the government to become a firing range for the Italian army. The large mountainous area is at present an important sheep-rearing area, and the

local shepherds, determined to fight the decision, have forced the 13 local mayors, many of them Christian Democrats, to go against their party's criminal plans.

Another very important area that has been reached by the comrades through the Coordinamento is that of the 3,000 workers of the ANIC petrol refinery in Gela, in south western Sicily. The Americans now have over fifty per cent shares in the company which is at present under restructuring, i.e. sacking of 500 workers, another 700 due to be laid off. Clearly once the Americans have not only financial but also military control of the area, they will not hesitate to close this now out of date plant which no longer interests them. Their health (another worker was killed there two weeks ago) and environment ruined by poisonous fumes, the only perspective that faces the workers there is to join the already hundreds of unemployed in the town square every morning in the vain hope of finding a day's labouring. The solution of the past — to pack the cardboard suitcase and join the assembly lines of Switzerland and Germany is no longer even open to them. Clearly they have every interest in organizing in first person to fight the arrival of the Americans and to create a force capable of imposing their demands on the structures of economic power. Their interest in the contents of the leaflets are the Leagues and eventual occupation and destruction of the base was great, to such an extent that the morning shift did not go in when the bell rang, and the lackeys of the management rang for the police. The comrades present were driven to the police headquarters and threatened with expulsion from the area with sinister menaces of what would become of them should they return as they said they would. The ANIC workers meanwhile had obliged a trade union and CP representative to go to the police to get the comrades out. Since then two more leaflets have been handed out at the ANIC, and at a meeting held in the main square of Gela with several hundred workers and unemployed present. On the workers' request attempts are being made to hold a general assembly with them inside the factory, a project that has obviously met with the obstructionism of the unions. However, this area remains one of potential explosion.

The forces of repression in all their forms, police, politicians, mass media, etc, are doing what they can to obstruct the work of the Coordinamento. Open attempts to intimidate, the spreading of rumours, printing false information are but a few of the well-worn techniques that have been put into practice until now. The work is continuing, and comrades are determined to intensify it over the next weeks so that the occupation of the base should be possible in the spring. If things continue as they are going there is every chance that this will be possible.

It is necessary for anarchist comrades everywhere to be aware of what is going on in Comiso and realize that this is not a local problem, but one which concerns the whole of Europe and the world. All comrades can participate in the struggle, either by coming to Comiso themselves, or keeping informed and distributing counter-information in their own areas of struggle. Financial support is essential to meet the expenses which go far beyond the possibilities of the local comrades.

THERE IS STILL TIME TO PREVENT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CRUISE MISSILE BASE AT COMISO!

Steps and countersteps of a project of death

1979

DECEMBER 6. In accord with the US the Cossiga government officially decides to house Euromissiles in Italy and has full support of the majority parties. A determining role is played by the PSI¹, totally subservient to American interests, authorizing the government to sign production agreements. The only parties to pronounce themselves against the missiles were the PCI², who asked for a six months' suspension, the PR³, PDUP⁴ and the independent left.

Of course the whole thing was hushed up and no one continued to show their dissent until-

1981

SPRING. News begins to leak regarding the placing of the missiles. The site chosen is the Magliocco airport situated three kilometres from Comiso, a town of 28,000 inhabitants in south-east Sicily in the centre of a vast plain cultivated with olive groves and vines and greenhouse produced crops. The area immediately surrounding the airport (which has been abandoned since 1972) is also cultivated. The government justifies the choice of site by declaring the area almost deserted. The base is programmed to house 112 atomic Cruise missiles of American fabrication (General Dynamics).

Discussion and unrest in the Ragusa area in all the towns and villages which by their position would be immediately affected by the base.

In Ragusa anarchist comrades distribute leaflets, intervene in conferences and dedicate a great deal of space to the problem in their paper *Sicilia Libertaria*, denouncing the criminal decision of the Italian and American militarists, placing it in the context of the underdevelopment and colonialism of which Sicily is a victim.

AUGUST 8. Government officially declares that missiles are to be installed at Comiso. The construction of the base is to take six years and 200 billion lire to be spent by the NATO for the infrastructure.

Once again the politicians come out on the subject.

Regional president, Christian Democrat Mario d'Aquisto states that the region cannot cope with the aversion to the base already manifested by the local autonomies and social forces.

The mayor of Comiso, Salvatore Catalano (Socialist Party), declares, "My council and I will do everything we can to prevent Comiso becoming a nuclear firing range. We will leave no stone unturned to prevent the actuation of this decision." All declarations in the heat of the moment, they soon returned to positions conforming to those of "democratic" parties.

¹ PSI Partito Socialista Italiana (Italian Socialist Party)

² PCI Partito Comunista Italiana (Italian Communist Party)

³ PR Partito Radicale (Radical Party)

⁴ PDUP Partito di Unity Proletaria (Proletarian Unity Party)

The DC publishes a document accusing the PCI of pro-sovietism, saying that the NATO operation is one of defense.

Catalano the Socialist mayor says it is not possible to ignore Lagorio's (Socialist Party defence minister) guarantee of compensation for the base, although laments the lack of consultation at local level.

The PCI also redimension their declarations, asking for the base to be "frozen" while awaiting the outcome of the Geneva peace negotiations.

SEPTEMBER

The only forces who remain in the field of struggle are the revolutionary comrades, among whom the Ragusa anarchists and comrades of *Lotta continua per il comunismo* who form a Gruppo Promotore against the installation of the base. With leaflets and outdoor meetings they denounce the government's decision and the broken promises of the parties who declared themselves to be against the base.

In Comiso the CUDIP⁵ is formed, intending to express its dissent from the government's decision. The CUDIP has in Cagnes, ex PCI deputy, ex-mayor of Comiso, its major promoter and president.

On power's side the project is developed

The number of soldiers stationed at the airport is increased.

Lagorio pays an unexpected furtive visit to inspect his future creature of death.

The Americans, for their part, decide to increase their influence and presence in Sicilian soil at economic level in particular in the chemical industry. By forming the ENOX society, a fusion of the Italian State ENI with the American multinational Occidental, they gain control of the ANIC in Gela, Montedison at Syracuse and the Petrolchimica in Augusta, the three major petrol refineries in southern Italy. The Gruppo Promotore against the installation of the base publish a single issue *Contro la Guerra* (against war) and call for a national conference with the same theme.

OCTOBER 11. The Gruppo Promotore hold a national conference in Comiso with 2,000 comrades present from all over Italy. Intense debate starting from three themes introduced by promoting group: imperialism and war; militarization of territory; waste of environment due to construction of base.

OCTOBER 11. On the same day as the conference the CUDIP organize a peace demonstration, changing the date from October 4 to create confusion and boycotting of conference. Later *Sicilia Libertaria* reports in an article entitled 'Between boycotting and militancy': "... the Conference differed from the other folkloristic demonstration of the afternoon organized and orchestrated in puppet-like fashion (majorettes, bands, town hall banners), march which took place backwards, i.e. left the airport (the objective of struggle) to reach the town."

Following the march of October 11 Peace Committees spring up in Sicily and all over Italy along the model of the CUDIP with the aim of spreading the struggle against the base all over Italy. These committees, however, being the expression of the various parties and similar structures (PCI, PDUP, DP, PR, etc.) do not manage to go beyond analytical wrangling, peace marches and conferences.

⁵ CUDIP United Committee for Peace and Disarmament in Comiso

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER. Many marches, imposing and significant for their number of participants (17 October — 50,000 in Turin, 24 October — 300,000 in Rome, 25 October — 100,000 in Milan, 28 October — 50,000 in Venice, 29 October — 70,000 in Vicenza, 28 October — 170,000 in Florence, 29 November — 50,000 in Palermo), but not so for their content, a general request for “peace”, and the suspension of the construction of the base at Comiso, and even less so for the indication and objectives of concrete action to stop the construction of this temple of death.

The logic of the PCI and its satellite parties is not to give precise objectives of struggle to prevent the construction of the base, their interests lie rather in mobilising as many people as possible so as to have as much weight as possible at parliamentary level.

The need to develop and concentrate the struggle in Comiso and other places where imperialism is trying to put its plans into effect and to give oneself precise objectives becomes the subject of wide debate in the revolutionary movement and within the Gruppo Promotore.

The comrades of Lotta Continua per il Comunismo maintain that it is necessary to break the social pact in the places of arms production, energy and informatics, making the objective that of working to create a mass movement of antagonism in Italy.

The Ragusa anarchist comrades, not agreeing with this analysis, saw instead in Comiso the focal point of the struggle as point of departure for successive stages and more advanced perspectives.

For the anarchists in Catania, on the contrary, the struggle at Comiso cannot be considered a “political battle”. The conflict assumes, from the beginning, a social and revolutionary nature and must address itself immediately towards solutions — in the short and medium term — of an insurrectional nature. They criticize the Gruppo Promotore for having lost themselves in great specialized analyses on imperialism and of not having made a class analysis regarding the problem of the missile base. The methodology of struggle is therefore that of attack, and the objectives to strike are those responsible for the decisions concerning the installation of the base and the structures of American interests in Sicily, national and international capital.

DECEMBER

The contradictions within the revolutionary movement are great and there is a split in the Gruppo Promotore

1982

FEBRUARY 13. NATO meeting in Brussels where news leaks out that the order to fire the missiles could only be given by the American president, and that Italy would only have the right to a “political veto”. Moreover it was learned that the missiles are to be transferred every three months to other parts of Sicily, and in the case of conflict the lorries on which the launching ramps are placed will be dispersed within a range of 350 km. The estimated cost of the base doubles from the 200 billion lire stated in August to 400 billion.

MARCH 5. News comes out that the plane that exploded in flight on June 27 1980 where 81 people were killed had been struck by a missile fired by American naval forces during an exercise in the Ustica area.

MARCH 26. Work begins on construction of the base. Contracts given to Ragusa firm, ICI. Preparations are made to demolish the old structures of the Magliocco airport, and for this receives 825 million lire,

APRIL 4. Sicilian peace committees, after long period of inactivity, organize another peace march in Comiso. It is obvious that the parties within the committee have no intention of directing the spontaneous will to struggle and continue to operate as a safety valve, again organizing the march to start off from the airport and walk away from it. 80,000 people participate in the demonstration. While the opposition to the base does not find the means to concretize its will to struggle, squeezed between the instrumentalisation of the PCI and hangers on and the inadequacies of the revolutionary movement which does not know how to come out of its shell into the social field of struggle with actions and indications, power continues its work.

APRIL 4. Another criminal episode due to militarization takes place. The internal flight Milan-Palermo is almost hit by a missile which explodes 2 miles from it. There were 115 passengers aboard, and the event took place in the same airspace, between Ustica and Ponza, as the previous "accident". This time there is a NATO exercise in course, Distant Drum 81.

JUNE 4. In same airspace a plane carrying 100 passengers is forced to turn back because of unknown fighter planes crossing its flight. Again there is a NATO sixth fleet operation in course. Following numerous complaints American high officials explain the operation is due to end 26.6.82 and that perhaps it would be better to suspend all flights in the zone of exercise until then. At the same time the Americans intensify their military occupation of Sicilian soil. The population of Pantelleria denounce the presence of about 300 American soldiers in the area and news leaks out that a project also exists to build a NATO base similar to the one intended for Comiso in that area. The old barracks of the Magliocco airport are to be rebuilt to house the first thousand American soldiers.

JUNE 4. Defence minister Lagorio, supreme Architect of the atomic armament project, sends invitations to participate in the contest for contracts for the base to 13 Sicilian firms, prevalently Catanese; Ceap-Immobiliare Sicilians, Ciem, Craci, Condotte-Buscemi, Costanzo, Compagno, Mario-Rendo-Guardiani, Ugo Rendi, Pizzarotti Soltedile; Mec-Ipresit; Saisep; Ici-Provera e Carassi; Ivrate-Lodigiani. Most of these firms have strong links with the Catania and Palermo mafia and some of these contractors have since been charged with fraud and have arrest warrants pending. On the front of the struggle against the base, following the split within the Gruppo Promotore, the comrades of Ragusa anarchist group and the anarchist group Rivolta e Liberta of Catania engage in working to coagulate the mass antagonism towards the base, giving the clear indication that the only way to stop it being built is for the whole population to occupy the site, and that now is the time to organize with that aim in view.

JUNE/JULY

A series of outdoor meetings are held in Comiso and the fifteen or so surrounding towns and villages. Counter-information regarding the effects of the base was distributed in the form of leaflets, photographic exhibitions, bookstalls accompanying the meetings. The response was positive, and the comrades realized that their analyses encountered the true feelings of a very large part of the population, the part that has nothing to gain and everything to lose by the presence of the base and its side collateral effects. Acting on the indications that emerged from the population, the comrades took it upon themselves to suggest self-managed Leagues as the

optimal organizational form to prepare for the occupation and destruction of the base, based on a project of permanent conflictuality and hard direct struggle.

JULY 26. Pacifist camp opens in Vittoria, 6 kilometres from Comiso.

JULY 27. Pacifists stage sit in, in front of the airport.

JULY 31/AUGUST 1. International anarchist conference in municipal sports ground of Comiso. About 200 comrades were present and various groups undertook to carry the Comiso struggle to their own reality, to publish bulletins regarding the struggle against the base, and to support the struggle by subscriptions. Sunday August 1, meeting in evening in Piazza Fonte Diana, Comiso, attended by about 150 comrades and twice as many local workers and unemployed. The effects which the installation of the missile base would have on the local population were underlined by comrade Alfredo Bonanno who underlined that the only way to prevent this was by organizing to take direct action against it. Anarchist comrade Pippo Scarso tore up his call up card and made a speech as to why he was refusing to do military service. The meeting concluded with a demonstration from the town centre to the airport, the first to get the direction right, even if only symbolically at this point.

AUGUST 7: On the anniversary of the massacre of Hiroshima, the activities of the international peace camp (debates, round tables, sit-in, etc) culminate in the building of a wall of cardboard boxes in front of the entrance to the Magliocco airport.

SEPTEMBER 1. Demonstration of 200 pacifists and a peace happening in front of the airport with prayers and religious rites songs and music.

SEPTEMBER 8. Archbishop Rizzo of Ragusa goes to talk to pacifists at peace camp.

SEPTEMBER 11: In Comiso, in via Conte di Torino, 1, the Coordinamento delle Leghe Auto-gestite contro la base missilistica di Comiso is opened, a technical office and point of reference for the Leagues which are starting to form in the area.

SEPTEMBER 13: The mafia give signs of having reached the area when a bomb explodes in a sawmill in Vittoria with extortion threats.

SEPTEMBER 14/15: The two remaining tents at the peace camp are slashed as act of provocation by local interests in favour of the base.. The camp is abandoned two days later due to bad weather conditions. Pacifist conscientious objector Turi Vaccari reaches 23rd day of hunger strike against the base. The mayor of Comiso, Catalano, forbids the placing of posters in the piazza Fonte Diana where Turi is fasting.

SEPTEMBER 22. The militarization of Sicilian territory continues with the eviction of 91 peasants and their families from Gangi, a small town in the Palermo region. The reason given for the evictions was that the area is to become a permanent firing range.

SEPTEMBER 27. Turi Vaccaro reaches 35th day of hunger strike aimed at making the Pope come to Comiso to pronounce himself against the missiles. Pacifists hold a regional meeting to discuss future activities. Antimilitarist demonstration announced for Christmas.

The Coordinamento continue their work at capillary level in the area with about 20 open air meetings, talking to the proletarian women in their homes, the students in the schools, the unemployed at the labour exchanges.

SEPTEMBER 28. On reading the leaflet handed out by comrades of the Coordinamento pupils of one of the schools in Vittoria refuse to re-enter when the bell rings and instead hold a spontaneous assembly in one of the town piazzas to discuss the question of the missile base. Some of the students form a self-managed League, and two weeks later call all the six secondary schools of Vittoria out on strike and hold a huge meeting (over 1,000 present).

OCTOBER. In the early days of October Turi Vaccari stops his hunger strike.

OCTOBER 4. In Castel Di Lucio 2,000 shepherds, peasants and local villagers as well as representatives of the trade unions and parties demonstrate in the rain against the government's intention to turn a part of the area into a firing range.

OCTOBER 8. Two of the three main hotels in Ragusa are completely reserved for two years for NATO use. The imminent arrival of 300 NATO officers is announced. Already numerous residential areas have been rented in block for the next three years at extortionate rents.

OCTOBER 14: A worker at ANIC, Gela petrol refinery, is killed due to faulty equipment. Two of the three times that comrades from the Coordinamento go to the factory to give out leaflets and to talk to workers regarding forming a League to fight the base which will affect them directly, the management send for police. They were released from custody after pressure from the trade union on the workers' request.

OCTOBER 15. Excavation work for the foundations of the base starts at the Magliocco airport.

OCTOBER 16. In Toronto a truck containing dynamite explodes in front of "Litton Systems Canada Ltd", producers of Cruise missile components, following an anonymous telephone call to the police headquarters. Part of the factory was destroyed by the explosion. 22 Canadian pacifists are awaiting trial for having entered the plant last year without authorization. The NATO criminals plan to locate 572 "Cruise" and "Pershing 2" missiles in western Europe from next year.

OCTOBER 24. Top secret meeting of NATO high officials in Comiso to discuss commercial relations, renting of houses, etc.

NOVEMBER 4. Germany. A US army lorry carrying Pershing missile collides with a car. The whole population of the village of Waldprechtsweier is evacuated due to fear of an explosion during the emptying of the petrol tanks.

NOVEMBER 5. Pacifist sit-in against militarism.

NOVEMBER. Schools in Vittoria come out on strike against the missile base following distribution of a leaflet calling for an immediate assembly by the students' self-managed League. The League had been formed a few days before following a spontaneous strike by one of the schools on reading the leaflet given out by comrades of the Coordinamento.

NOVEMBER 11. Military ceremony at Magliocco airport to inaugurate new command of airport under Major Aldo Michelin.

NOVEMBER 6. 30 more apartments under rent contract to NATO authorities. Another 20 are due to be let by the Occhipinti firm. Next week the first significant number of workers employed by the Pizzarotti, Parma, are due to begin work. There are already about 30 employed inside the airport.

American military bases in Sicily

SIGONELLA

As well as being the main support of the Sixth Fleet, Sigonella is the base that links the NATO forces in the Mediterranean. All the services operating in Sicily are dependant on it. There are almost 50,000 units operating these services in Sicily. It seems that the southern NATO command has been transferred from Bagnoli (Naples) to Sigonella. Sigonella includes three structures:

- an autonomous village for a thousand American soldiers and families;
- an airport, missile ramp and satellite communications plant. This airport permanently houses the Rapid Deployment Squadron; and Operational Bomb Squadron; Patrol Squadron; Antison Group (P3 Orion Lockheed aeroplanes); a Marine Helicopter Group and a Helicopter Transport Group.
- A nuclear base in the province of Enna. Very little is known about this base. Possibly contains a fairly large nuclear arms depot and an assembly line for pieces or nuclear heads.

The Lockheed P3 Orion which constantly patrol the whole of the Mediterranean area take off from Sigonella. These planes carry anti-submarine apparatus including deep torpedos, missiles and bombs. Hercules F 104 and C130 aircraft also take off from Sigonella, as do the F 14 of the Sixth Fleet. The plane (AB-204) which lost two missiles almost over Catania, also took off from this base. Sigonella is destined to increase in importance generally, especially after the installation of the Cruise missiles as they are easily transportable and could be concentrated largely at Sigonella, to be transported by land not only to Comiso, but over the whole of Sicily.

Other outstanding military installations are:

AUGUSTA

There are missile deployments in the mountain surrounding the bay. The related work began in 1958. There also exists an underground base for nuclear submarines. To the south of Augusta are powder magazines and a huge military arsenal.

MELILLI

There is a Marine radio station near the wharfs of the Montedison plant docks. A few indications confirm that near Melilli there exists a tunnel linked under the sea to underground missile depots in the mountain upon which Melilli is built.

CARLENTINI

In the area towards Villasmundo traces of military construction are to be found which could be missile bases.

PORTOPALO

Radar plant for satellite communications.

PORTOPALO-PANTANO LONGARINI

Radar plant and mobile missile station.

POZZALO

Helicopter base and meteorological station near Cape Passero which seems to be camouflaging a land to air missile base.

VITTORIA

The area of the ex-concentration camp of Vittoria (Ragusa) is to become a support structure of the Comiso base.

MARZAMENI

Radar sighting and interception of approaching bombers and missiles.

TRAPANI-BIRGI

The airport has been enlarged to allow for the arrival of the B 52s under NATO direction. At the moment it functions both as goods and passenger landing post and for landing of the F 104 which patrol the area.

The cruise missile base at Comiso can be Prevented!

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– July, 1982

Why Comiso and Sicily

US imperialism's decision to place Cruise missiles in Comiso, in the centre of Sicily and the Mediterranean, is of easily comprehensible military and strategic significance. Beyond the pro-American propaganda on a purely military and technical level, which explains away this criminal decision as necessary to maintain an equilibrium with the Soviet missiles located on the Eastern frontiers of Europe, there is the fact that the very decision to build the missile base places itself in the optic of "preparing for war to maintain peace", forever the battle-cry of States who see in war a solution for the difficulties of domination and the continuation of exploitation.

Why Comiso? The answer is simple. As well as the strictly military ones there are economic and political reasons. Sicily, like Friuli, Campania and Sardinia—other areas chosen for the installation of atomic weapons—are underdeveloped situations where three perspectives that are extremely favourable to capitalist dominion are foreseeable: a) intensive militarisation of the territory to the point of reaching the closure of vast areas and even their "desertisation"; b) organization of the struggle entrusted to the parties of the so-called left, with whom it is always possible to enter into dialogue and reach compromises; c) the great need for work, especially to avoid the prospect of emigration, which constitutes the most powerful blackmail for gaining consensus for the construction of the base.

These are the reasons for the choice of Comiso, and therefore also constitute an outline of the difficulties that any revolutionary struggle intending to subvert and defeat imperialism's project of building the base in Comiso will encounter.

The Sicilian reality

One of the levers of consensus that American imperialism can count on in Sicily is a certain mentality of delegation and fatalism which has inserted itself within the popular strata, especially the land labourers, and which finds a response in the mafia mentality that manages a power alternative to that of the State and which is often more efficient than the latter.

Local capitalism in Sicily contains a strong mafia component and has relations of patronage both with the intermediate strata and with the poorest of the population. These relationships substantially substitute State power, often seen as something far off and attainable only through the intermediary of the mafia.

The Municipality, the Province, the Region and the various organisms of assistance are used in an exclusively patronal context, serving to support a capillary and efficient structure of consensus. The bureaucracy has not yet reached the technological levels that characterise it elsewhere but still has the great Bourbon tradition transplanted from Piedmont which renders indispensable the element of mafia power manoeuvres and the connection between the political and economic mafias.

The industrial centres are anomalous. The greater part of the island working class does not have any industrial specification but, having foreseen with the shrewdness characteristic of the poor that these installations were essentially capitalist traps, has not lost contact with their original peasant reality and at present find themselves in a situation that is neither working class nor belonging to the strata of peasant or farmhand. The weakness of the struggle from this area is striking.

The land labourers are basically the most combatant proletarian reality because they are linked to very difficult and often minimal situations of survival. The Communist Party, the Socialist Party and even the Christian Democrats are trying to involve the latent dissent of this strata in productive organisations such as cooperatives, giving a prospect of continued work and guaranteeing consensus to make it safe for them to approach moments of greater social tension where they will not be able to keep the promises they have made. In the Ragusa area the present situation presents more complex characteristics due to the greenhouse productive sector where alongside the proprietor of a particularly profitable piece of land one finds the figure of the half-day labourer, at the same time wage-earner and small proprietor, nominally available for the struggle but substantially tied to the profit perspective, that of small property and therefore of compromises with power capable of guaranteeing or destroying the conditions that make the small peasant greenhouse cultivation productive.

The lumpenproletariat strata fluctuates a great deal. It grows during the phases of increased unemployment in the building industry and when the possibility of work in the industrial sector diminishes. Farmhands and day labourers who are, within certain limits, available for the struggle, also enter this undoubtedly interesting strata. The source of income for the lumpenproletariat of the Ragusa area is extremely varied: from social assistance to sweat labour, from lay-off money to work on the land, from microscopic commercial activities (street-selling, small transporters, middlemen in improbable real estate affairs, etc), to simply survival. This strata is accustomed to poverty and suffering. In the Ragusa area the tendency towards the organized crime typical of the Palermo and Catania areas is more restricted and this could become a considerable area of absorption when, in the perspective of the base being built, the large mafia organizations intervene massively in the area.

The illusion of wellbeing

The argument of the wellbeing that the Americans would bring to the Comiso area has been put forward alongside that of the slight or inexistent dangers the installation of the base would represent.

This is an argument that always attracts the attention of the exploited. They can understand it because for them the concept of sacrifice—of any kind—is inherent in the concept of work. The State is far away, hence if one wants to obtain anything it is always necessary to refer to local

patronage, but when the State approaches to propose a grandiose project, then the old illusions are rekindled.

The poor foster a hope of solving their problem, and the rich know with certainty that, even for only a period, their wealth will increase. The army of those who are neither rich nor poor tries to obtain the maximum utility from the occasion.

In this perspective the affair is proposed by international capitalism, local forces are mobilised by national capitalism who, in agreement with the mafia structures guarantee the functioning of patronage and lay the foundations for its concrete realization. The exploited try to extract all possible benefit. The blackmail of precarious wages, commercial affairs, increased sales for shopkeepers, reach insupportable levels.

The consequences of this are very serious: the breaking up of the cultural homogeneity which alone could have guaranteed the progressive development of the struggle and therefore also collective wellbeing; upheaval of the local market (rise in prices of goods of prime necessity, rents, abnormal development in circulation of money and goods); militarisation of the territory which could even go as far as the closure of wide areas and periodical or continued blanket control, to the presence of large contingents of the army and various police forces; impossibility of exploiting even the minimal advantages guaranteed by the same irrational managerial and commercial activity; rationalism of the mafioso patrons on the Palermo model; presence of serious mafia conflicts resulting in hundreds of murders; rise in criminal activity (robberies, extortions, theft, violence of every kind); rationalisation and increase in heavy drug market (in the first place heroin and cocaine); spreading and mafia control of prostitution.

Social peace

The “peace” of the bosses is built on weapons, declared and potential conflicts, missile installations, armies, police, military and mafia-type cultures. It is the peace of the graveyard. Along the road of capital’s transformation from formal dominion to that of real dominion the contradictions typical of competitive capital are diminishing, leaving the perspective of profit at any cost in favour of increased State intervention in the economic field. This intervention transforms the conditions of economic competition, puts the profit objective in second place, rationalizes exploitation and centralizes domination, which is camouflaged by the democratic and representative charade.

The production of value is subordinated to the production of social peace. Consensus becomes the main industry around which the whole State machinery turns, exclusively directed towards guaranteeing international capitalism exploitation on a planetary level. The local problem passes into second place in the perspective of the equilibrium and projects of the multinationals. Welfare is gradually taking over from the logic of production.

But the solving of capitalism’s contradictions, especially at a regional and local level, cannot be attained unless it goes beyond the conditions of present-day capitalism which are often backward. Social conflicts are still acute and can even worsen as a consequence of the need to progressively extend the project of real dominion to all parts of the world. The difficulties in the production of social peace are therefore still great. And it is in this direction that the efforts of those struggling against domination must address their efforts, against the State and against Capital. Our class enemy has a vested interest in preparing for the final extinction of any opposition and revolu-

tionary dissent but to do that it must improve the conditions of exploitation which at present cause, among other things, one death every hour and one wounded every five minutes in Italy alone. This improvement will rationalize exploitation and therefore the class struggle will become more complex, but time is needed to put it into effect. In the meantime it will always be necessary for the bosses to oppose each other in the international clash both at the economic and the narrow military level. This tragically leads to nuclear decisions, atomic war decisions, and decisions such as genocide (Lebanon, Afghanistan, San Salvador, etc.) which lead back to the problem of the level of the class struggle.

In this way capitalism works towards war while speaking of peace. It builds, sells and uses traditional and atomic arms, but affirms that it does so because there is no other way to safeguard social peace. The exploited have no interest in this “peace” of the bosses.

Those responsible

Limiting ourselves to the construction of the missile base at Comiso it is possible to identify a few basic responsibilities.

International capital and its national and local equivalent have an interest in the armed defence of their projects of domination. The NATO, in as far as it is a specific organism created for this defence, is the armed gendarme that intervenes to put a brake on situations which are dangerous for capital and to prevent situations of social conflict being created in perspective. To do this both military (coordination between different armies, new armaments, common exercises, deployment of military contingents), and political means are used.

In the political perspective the Christian Democrats are the party that has revealed itself to be incapable of undertaking the task of protecting the interests of international capital. For this reason, in the orbit of government, the Italian Socialist Party has been inserted, and has increasingly become the party of the Americans and the most suitable political force at a technocratic and managerial level for doing what the Christian Democrats—too tied to mafia patronage with a backward mentality—failed to do.

But the essential cover is supplied by the Communist Party. It is this party that takes charge of putting a brake on the rebellious impulse of the exploited, organizing the recuperation of every form of dissent, breaking up the combativeness of the land labourers through the formation of cooperatives and other swindles such as participation in factory profits, channelling the quite legitimate hopes of those who have never had anything to cause them to lose their conflictual content. We have seen clearly how, in the case of Comiso, the gigantic party machinery has been activated to develop formal and platonic dissent through marches, petitions, and hunger strikes, all to prevent any real and effective dissent taking place based on occupation, sabotage, attacks on the bosses’ interests, the preparation of the means to prevent the construction of the base.

Another strata which bears a strong responsibility in the project of sackage and death that is being planned for Comiso is that of the shopkeepers. Their miserable interest in increasing sales, of seeing dollars circulating instead of the usual few lire, has been exalted as a benefit that would be enjoyed by the collectivity of the whole area, while it is dramatically obvious that their personal and circumscribed interests would be heavily paid for by the poor, if not other than by an immediate and considerable rise in prices from rents to goods of prime necessity. There can

be no doubt that one of the obstacles to be contended with in the struggle will be precisely the organization of the shopkeepers in the area.

Another category that bears responsibility is that of the small proprietor who conformed immediately to the indications of struggle supplied by the CP, precisely because they are convinced that this strategy does not intend to do anything of any immediate real content. In fact the small proprietors, even those directly damaged by the construction of the base, want to prevent its construction, but this is subordinated to an eventual proposal of an indemnity allowance by the organs responsible. In other words their struggle is linked to an uncertain condition: first they want to see how the State and the Region behave, only then will they really be available to struggle and could go back on this if a proposal by the responsible bodies, should become convenient again.

But there is one last category which will bear a great responsibility should it not respond coherently to the proposals of the bearers of death: the category of workers, especially the labourers in the building sector, and even more so the great number of unemployed who have deliberately been thrown in the gutter over the past few months in order to create a favourable disposition towards the base (bringing work and wellbeing!). The swindle is not difficult to understand. The consistency and duration of the work itself is practically minimal, the benefits to be drawn from it will have the same limited duration and soon be reabsorbed by the increase in prices, hence the solution would still be that of remaining unemployed or of leaving to swell emigration. One might just as well impose one's own conditions right away, establishing the terms of the struggle immediately, making it impossible for the bearers of death to continue their blackmail. It is necessary to be very clear on this subject. Struggling immediately and efficiently, two results could be obtained: the construction of the base would be blocked and the bosses and politicians be obliged to find a solution to the problem of unemployment with other initiatives which will be realized more quickly the more effective the struggle against the base.

An organizational proposal

Our intervention in the reality of Comiso and the whole of the Ragusa area—in the towns of Ragusa, Vittoria, Modica, Ispica, Giarratana, Monterosso and the principal villages of the coastal region—which is still in course, can be divided into three phases and culminates in a proposal of self-managed organization.

The first phase has developed and is continuing to develop a direct contact with the different situations through meetings in the town squares and leafleting. The points chosen for the meetings and the drawing up of leaflets have been deliberately simplified, avoiding very detailed and complicated analyses in order to centre the argument on one point: the construction of the base can be prevented, on condition that means suitable for doing so are employed; the means suggested and put into practice by the Communist Party are not suitable for preventing the construction of the base. This aim will not be reached through colossal but ineffective marches, courageous but isolated hunger strikes or the signing of petitions which will be rendered useless by the swindles of power. Such means are fictitious ones which have no real intention of preventing the construction of the base. It is necessary to employ harder and more effective ones. The bosses and their servants understand only one language: that of fear. It is therefore necessary to frighten them, as has been done in the past. It is enough to think of the occupation of the land that has put an

end to the injustices of the big landowners. It is therefore necessary to have recourse to means such as occupation, sabotage, hard frontal attack.

The second phase in our intervention is centred around the organization of the international anarchist conference, which will take place in Comiso in the municipal sports ground on July 31 and August 1. It will be a fundamental occasion for the anarchist movement, along with the most sensitive area of the proletariat and lumpenproletariat, to go into the problem of the struggle against the base. From this conference should emerge indications of method, analytical indications and more general indications of struggle as the problem of Comiso runs a very great risk of isolation, i.e. of becoming closed as a specific struggle within a precise area of Sicily and within that kind of struggle which has as its point of reference antimilitarism, the struggle against war and against nuclear power. The passage to the generalization of interventions to other sectors, and therefore the discussion and examination of methods to be used in struggle against the base in Comiso can only be realized through an analytical and creative contribution of the movement as a whole.

The third phase is predominantly organizational and does not necessarily follow the first two but can develop parallel to them. Our aim is to suggest the creation (and therefore to contribute to creating) selfmanaged leagues against the Comiso base in the various localities, leagues which will be able to continue the struggle in first person, determining the characteristics of the conflict, decided by the various localities, leagues which will be able to continue the struggle in first person. In our opinion, and basing this on the results of the first phase of intervention, we are reasonably certain that a strong dissent exists in the various provinces of Ragusa and particularly in Comiso itself among the base of the CP concerning the methods of struggle suggested by this party. Moreover there also exists considerable dissent within the base of the Socialist Party who do not share the positions of Craxi and Lagorio, and this component is very strong, especially among the old farm hands. Moreover one can count on a non-political dissent which could, if opportunely sensitized through a capillary intervention in the peripheries of the various towns, draw in the proletarian women in particular. In a struggle such as Comiso the function which this strata could develop should in no way be underestimated.

In conclusion, it appears that our efforts should be directed towards the birth and growth of this organizational structure with self-managed characteristics. The development of the struggle, which we foresee must necessarily address itself towards harder and more acute levels, would then have a solid base which would necessarily and autonomously be capable of operating the class selection which will make the positive result of the revolutionary engagement possible.

Organizational document of the self-managed leagues against the missile base in Comiso

Coordinamento delle Leghe autogestite contro la base missilistica di Comiso, via Conte di Torino 1, Comiso tel. 0932/966289

The decision to build a base for 112 American Cruise missiles at Comiso is part of the project of political and military equilibrium between the two great superpowers. The justification given to this deadly enterprise is that it is necessary to counter pose with all possible means the Russian atomic bases that are lined up against Europe.

In fact it is not possible to put a brake on the criminal initiatives of the Soviet Union, which as a superpower has betrayed the antimilitarist ideals of the international proletariat through just as criminal initiatives as those of the United States and their European servants. The increase in atomic bases does not defend from attacks from anywhere but constitutes a grave threat for the survival of the whole planet. The struggle must be directed towards preventing new bases (such as the one at Comiso) but also to destroying those already in existence, including the Russian ones and those of all the other States.

Comiso is destined to become the largest atomic missile base in Europe and forerunner of other bases to be built in Spain, Germany, Great Britain and elsewhere. If we do not manage to prevent this criminal project we Sicilians will be the first to have the responsibility of seeing the largest atomic bomb plant in existence in Europe today in our land.

This sad record will be accompanied by a series of other negative consequences which the arrival of an American army of occupation (15,000 US soldiers are expected) will immediately give rise to. Rises in prices, the circulation of hard drugs, an increase in prostitution, militarisation of the area, the presence in our area of mafioso organizations to sell drugs to the Americans, to control prostitution, and speculate on the contracts for work on the base. All this will mean an increase in violence (robberies, kidnappings, thefts) and restriction of individual freedom (controls, road blocks, militarized zones, etc).

The Socialist Party has shown itself to be a true servant of American interests, accepting the imposition of the USA and approving the order to build the base in Sicily through their defence minister Lago Fio. The Christian Democrats have set to work right away to control the building contracts for the hotels, apartments and restaurants that the Americans will need, and all the contracts for the construction of the base itself, through the mafia.

The Communist Party has given inefficient and discontinuous indications of struggle, showing themselves to be undecided, weak and inefficient. Marches (even of 100,000 people), petitions, hunger strikes, impress no one.

The struggle against the construction of the Comiso missile base requires other means and methods.

THE SELF-MANAGED LEAGUE

A) CHARACTERISTICS

- Is an autonomous organization of struggle which gathers all those who really and sincerely intend to prevent the construction of the base.
- Is not a bureaucratic organization. It has no statutes, associative rules, constitutive documents, etc. It can also have no permanent meeting place.
- The individual Leagues spread over the territory are born spontaneously and have as sole point of reference the general principles specified here.
- The League is therefore an organism of struggle which refuses to give permanent delegation to its representatives and so denies any specific professionalism of this representation.
- The League is constantly engaged in the struggle against the construction of the base.
- Each component of the League considers him/herself to be in struggle against the base and against the interests that want to realize it, recognizing that these interests are those of the exploiters and their servants.
- The League is not an organization of defence of the interests of this or that category of worker. It is therefore not a trade union or para-syndicalist structure.
- The propaganda activity of the struggle of each individual League will preferably be coordinated with that of the other Leagues, while it remains the independent initiatives with local characteristics it is also possible, but always with the objective of preventing the construction of the base and respecting the common principles.
- Adhesion to the League is the logical conclusion of whoever does not agree with the ineffective initiatives of those who are looking for a fictitious counter-position.

B) GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Permanent conflictuality

- The struggle against the construction of the base will only have positive results on condition that it be constant, uninterrupted and effective. A desultory, sporadic struggle with occasional interventions will become a losing battle.

Self-management

The Leagues are self-managed, i.e. they do not depend on any organization, party, trade union, patronage, etc. They receive no money apart from what comes from spontaneous subscriptions from the adherents to the Leagues themselves. This autonomy is their strength.

Attack

- The leagues refuse the road of mediation, pacification, sacrifice, accommodation, compromise. They support the need for attack against the boss interests that are bringing about this criminal project.

C) METHODS

The involvement of the bosses and the American criminals is constant. They take no time off. They mean to realize their project of death within a brief period. Their action is spreading against us in a thousand ways: unemployment, increase in prices, intimidation and repression. Tomorrow — should the base be built — this repression will reach the height of insupportability and we will be deprived of even the freedom to think. To constant repression the Leagues respond with permanent conflictuality.

- All work categories have an interest in preventing the base. The least wealthy categories but also those who are a little better off: even the shopkeepers who might imagine that they will cash in something extra on the arrival of the Americans must also take into account the mafia extortion rackets that will be organized to their cost in the area. The same goes for the peasants who are threatened by expropriation and have the right to put their land to really productive use. The other methods that the Leagues employ is therefore the widening of the struggle front.
- Counter-information on the real situation in Comiso is a further method of struggle. Posters, leaflets, newspapers, radio, television, etc, all these instruments must be addressed not only to the inhabitants of the area but also to the whole of Sicily, Italy and the world. Today Comiso and the problem of the base are at the centre of world attention. Through this attention it is possible to defeat the criminals and their servants with our struggle. But the management of information must be autonomous, i.e. must be against the information racket such as the local daily "*La Sicilia*" and the penny a liners in its service.
- To reach the strata that are excluded from having knowledge of the problem: proletarian women, housewives, children, old people. All of them have the right to know the grave danger that is facing them and it is right that they be able to bring their own contribution to the social struggle which is developing against the construction of the base.
- To accept idle chatter, putting off time, the promises made by power, means to give the criminals more time to realize their project. We must choose the immediate method of intervention and not put off to infinity what should be done right away.
- We should not forget that to be built the Comiso base requires our acceptance, the acceptance of all those who are working on it, those who allow the passage of materials with which it will be built. It is therefore necessary to widen the field of struggle to also having the workers of these firms participate, because with their strikes and blocks they will be able to delay and eventually prevent the construction of the base.

- The method that the Leagues consider adequate to really preventing the construction of the base is its occupation. But this occupation must be a conscious decision made by the Leagues and realized with all the means necessary at the opportune moment. We must reply to the foolhardiness and criminality of the American imperialists and their local servants with great responsibility and just as great decision.
- Each individual League meets as it thinks fit and the way it desires, with the frequency that it considers necessary and in the place it considers best fitted to its structure. Their initiatives are made known to the other Leagues — if this is considered necessary — through the coordinating body which, with this aim, draws up a periodical bulletin, where the decisions of the individual Leagues are published.
- Representatives of all the Leagues meet periodically at Comiso for a debate and exchange of views.
- The first duty of every League is intervention directed outwards to increasing its growth in numbers.
- The League is a mass organization, therefore as such can assume the form of sectorial League, (farm labourers' League, peasants' League, shopkeepers' League, students' League, lorry drivers' League, teachers' League, etc), or the intersectorial form of league (city League, village League, zone League, inter-zonal League, etc).

The choice of the struggle to be conducted is periodically decided by the individual Leagues from general meetings. The most important decisions are made at the meetings of the representatives of the leagues.

D) PERSPECTIVES

- The Leagues are not corporative organisms. They do not have the perspective of defending the interests of a category, village or social group.
- They are mass structures aimed at preventing the base.
- Any attempt from within or without to channel the Leagues towards electoral objectives, power, patronage, trade unions, simple resistance, etc, must be prevented.
- Developing the various initiatives the Leagues can make their weight felt at the level of mass organisms, imposing the decision not to build the base on the structures of power.

E) THE COORDINATING BODY

- The coordinating body of the self-managed Leagues has premises in Comiso, a technical office which serves as a point of reference for all the Leagues which have been constituted and for those in formation.
- The Coordinating body is able to give indications on the whole situation of struggle, the interests that are developing around it, the bosses' objectives, the companies that have been

given contracts, the arrival of the American contingents of occupation, the companies that are working to produce materials for the base, and the presence of the Americans in the area.

- It can also supply the instruments for widening the knowledge in Sicily, Italy and abroad on the situation in Comiso.
- It sees to bringing out a periodical bulletin with the various decisions and the various proposals of the individual Leagues, and on their formation and development.
- Organizes periodical meetings of representatives of the various Leagues, meetings to be held at Comiso.
- It is worked on a rotation basis by the components of the various Leagues therefore is an organism formed and constituted by the League itself which needs to take charge of the costs relative to its functioning (rent, telephone, propaganda material, cost of survival of those in charge).

CONCLUSION

The self-managed League is an organism of struggle to prevent the construction of the missile base at Comiso. It is based on the principle of autonomy of the struggle and permanent conflictuality. The method it chooses is that of attack against the construction of the base and against the interests of those who are realizing it.

The decision to give precise indications of struggle to the Leagues is up to the general meeting of the Leagues' representatives, as well as the establishing of methods and whatever is necessary to prevent the construction of the missile base at Comiso.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CRUISE MISSILE BASE AT COMISO CAN BE PREVENTED!

THE STRUGGLE MUST BEGIN FROM A SELF-MANAGED ORGANIZATION CREATED BY THE FARMHANDS, PEASANTS, WORKERS, HOUSEWIVES, AND STUDENTS THEMSELVES, OUTSIDE THE STRUCTURES OF THE PARTIES AND TRADE UNIONS

THE CONSTRUCTION of the missile base at Comiso, desired by American interests and supported by local capitalists, can still be blocked by the will and strength of all the workers and exploited.

The bosses' project of death can be stopped if we organize autonomously and struggle also against the blackmail of wages that have been promised to the unemployed if they work for the construction of the base. By attacking the bosses to demand a different kind of work and refusing to work for their project of atomic destruction, various results could be obtained: the secret agreements of the parties and trade unions who with their excuse of providing jobs also support construction of the base, could be denounced; the employers would be obliged to give work in other sectors; and the terrible rise in prices which will follow the arrival of the Americans would be avoided.

The methods of struggle indicated by the Communist Party have shown themselves to be insufficient. The bosses are not intimidated by great marches for peace, the collection of signatures or symbolic hunger strikes. These means do not force them to block the construction of the base.

For this reason many of those who participated in these struggles are aware that it is necessary to have recourse to other means—such as, for example, the occupation of the base and sabotage of the interests of the bosses involved in this project of death—means which can be decided and employed only from the direct and immediate will of all the workers and exploited.

An ideal point of reference for deciding what to do today can be found in the Sicilian revolutionary tradition. The great wave of Sicilian socialist leagues at the beginning of the century, the occupation of the land after the second World War, the events of Avola where peasants and farmhands were killed by police bullets: all these struggles, organized autonomously by the base of the workers, impel us to unite in SELFMANAGED LEAGUES AGAINST THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MISSILE BASE AT COMISO.

Ragusa anarchist group

“Rivolta e Liberta” anarchist group, Catania

July 23 1982

TO THE STUDENTS

While a new school year is beginning and from all sides you are being invited to study and engage yourselves to obtain the instruction that should open up a road for you in life and give you work, the forces of death led by American imperialism and the local bosses and mafia are doing everything to transform your future into a perspective of desolation.

A depot of atomic bombs (Cruise missiles) is about to be installed in the Magliocco airport in Comiso. It is to be the largest missile base in Europe. If it is realized the Americans will be free—with the excuse of balancing the just as criminal Russian imperialism—to build bases everywhere. And to their eternal shame young Sicilians will have the sad record of having been the first to have accepted this project of death supinely, of not having been capable of doing anything to prevent it.

With the arrival of the army of occupation (15,000 American soldiers are expected) speculations of the mafia will begin on housing, hard drug dealing and prostitution. Bitter gifts from an invader who well knows the instruments of dominion and exploitation.

AND WHILE SCHOOL CLAIMS TO GIVE YOU A FUTURE MAKING YOU STUDY SUBJECTS WHICH OFTEN HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH REALITY, A BAND OF ASSASSINS AND PROFITEERS ARE MAKING THEMSELVES AT HOME. TOMORROW UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY, EMIGRATION AND EXPLOITATION AWAIT YOU, PLUS THE SHAME OF A FOREIGN INVADER IN OUR LAND.

LET US REBEL RIGHT AWAY AGAINST THIS PROJECT OF DEATH!

Let us organize in self-managed leagues of students against the construction of the base. The indications of the Communist Party and the various pacifists are not enough to defeat the Americans' and bosses' projects. Only a self-managed mobilization far from the swindles of the parties and politicians will succeed.

To build a self-managed league of students—to which other workers, unemployed, teachers, peasants, farm workers, etc. can belong—does not require any bureaucratic procedure. The will and common agreement of all those who participate is enough.

THE OBJECTIVES ARE: TO CARRY OUT AN UNINTERRUPTED STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BASE AND IMPOSE A HARD, CONCRETE STRUGGLE NOT BASED ON MARCHES, PETITIONS OR GRAND DECLARATIONS WITH NO BITE. THE BOSSES ARE NOT AFRAID OF WORDS, ONLY DEEDS STOP THEM AND CONVINCE THEM TO RECEDE.

Already there exists in Comiso a coordinating body of the self-managed leagues against the construction of the base, in via Conte di Torino, 1, tel 966289. This is a technical point of reference where all the initiatives relative to the formation of leagues can turn.

The time has come to fight the monstrous project of death which the Americans and local bosses (their servants) are carrying out in Comiso. Let us unite now in self-managed leagues or it will be too late to stop the homicidal hand of whoever wants to constrain us to live with the prospect of atomic death.

LET'S FORM SELF-MANAGED STUDENTS' LEAGUES

Saturday October 16 at 5.30pm in Piazza Umberto, the Coordinamento will hold a public meeting on the theme: “The League as instrument of struggle against the missile base at Comiso”.

Coordinamento leghe autogestite contro la base missilistica di Comiso-via Conte di Torino, 1, Comiso

TO THE SERVICES WORKERS!

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MISSILE BASE AT COMISO CAN BE PREVENTED!

While our wages are continually being attacked, prices continue to rise

While the government continues with its politic of patronage

While the parties of the left keep quiet or openly support the interests of production, and the trade unions have now turned to being the mouthpieces of the exploiters..

AT COMISO, A BAND OF ASSASSINS AND MAFIOSI are building the largest atomic missile base in Europe. The US Cruise missiles are being placed by American imperialist logic and are being situated in Italy by the traitors of the Socialist Party and the mafiosi of the Christian Democracy.

Instead of creating clean, productive work, instead of resolving the very serious problem of unemployment and the rise in prices, we are forced to emigrate, reduced to silence with the alms of dole money. Meantime the bosses are building atomic missile bases to allow criminal American imperialism to make war with the just as criminal Russian imperialism, and so doing are putting our lives in danger.

With the arrival of 15–20,000 Americans the installation of the base will mean total military and police control of the area, whereby any form of dissent or protest (even wage demands) will be strangled at birth. Rents will increase (at the Villaggio dei Gesuiti and Caucana they have already doubled) as well as the price of all essential goods. The mafia are operating to organize the trafficking of heroin and cocaine (two out of every ten American soldiers use such drugs), prostitution, speculation in the building industry, etc.

These will be the most serious and immediate consequences—as well as the possibility of atomic death—which the Americans will bring as soon as these new conquerors disembark in our land.

The services workers can contribute to stopping this criminal project. To complete the base local bosses and the American army of occupation will require electricity, telephones, water, street cleaning services, etc. It is up to us to decide whether to give them our collaboration or not, whether to render ourselves accomplices to a murderous project, or to obstruct their work by uniting and attacking.

Workers have always been against militarist projects, war, the enrichment of the bosses. They have always had recourse to instruments of resistance and attack in order to obtain decent wages and a happier life.

In the face of the prospect of poverty, unemployment, emigration and death, let us rebel now, right away.

The villages in the Ragusa area are responding to the construction of the base of death by organizing in self-managed Leagues, autonomous organisms named according to the traditions of struggle of the Sicilian proletariat.

LET'S ORGANIZE RIGHT AWAY IN SELF-MANAGED LEAGUES AGAINST THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BASE OF DEATH!

To form a League of workers—to which other workers, unemployed, students, farm labourers, etc, can also belong—does not require any bureaucratic procedure, the will and agreement of all the participants is enough. The principal aims the Leagues give themselves are: uninterrupted and hard struggle, destruction of the base and sabotage of work on the same. Marches, petitions and hunger strikes are not enough. The bosses do not fear such vague and general declarations at all. Only deeds stop them and make them retreat.

Let us unite in Leagues to attack and defeat the monstrous death project which the American assassins and local mafiosi bosses are trying to bring about.

LET US FORM SELF-MANAGED WORKERS' LEAGUES AGAINST THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MISSILE BASE OF DEATH.

Coordinamento Leghe Autogestite contro la base missilistica di Comiso
October 8 1982

A date was set for the occupation/destruction of the base: 22, 23, 24 July.

The struggle in Comiso. Elements of criticism and self-criticism.

What follows is an abbreviated account of what happened instead at Comiso on July 22 and 23 1983.

Here is a brief account of why, in our opinion, our work during the past two years in Comiso ended with a great many bruised and beaten comrades, a passive frightened population and a second suggestion from the local mafia “to get out of Comiso”. Does this mean that the people of Comiso prefer Americans and nuclear missiles in their land to having anarchists and punks walking around their streets? Or are there other reasons why they did not participate in what could have led to preventing the construction of the base?

Since the events of the 22nd, 23rd and 24th July we have been accused of exaggerating the phenomenon of the Leagues. ‘Triumphalism’, ‘disinformation’ information’ (*Peace News*), ‘blind optimism’, ‘false’ are some of the terms. Some say we dreamt the whole thing up. Comrades who turned up on the 22nd and did not find ‘the masses’ lined up outside the airport, decided after a few brief encounters in bars and hitch-hiking that none of ‘the locals’ had even heard of the Leagues. This led to their feeling the need to do something, anything, to show that the anarchists were in town.

We have described the Leagues as mass organisms from the start. It was pointed out that they were not trade union or syndicalist-type organisations, but nuclei, points of reference in the optic of a self-managed struggle against the missile base. Their methods were to be those of permanent conflict and direct attack against the base. As can be seen from their Organisational Document our aim was not to expand quantitatively. For example, in the town of Vittoria the students’ League brought all the local schools out in a spontaneous strike. The object was not to get them all to belong to the Leagues but to stimulate them, through their relationship point-of-reference/mass, to discuss and face the problem of the base and how it would affect their lives. The Leagues in other towns acted in the same way.

A great deal has been said about our ‘lack of clarity’ concerning the Communist Party. References to Spain and to popular fronts of more recent times abounded. But we too know about Spain. We are also aware of the meaning of “popular front” We didn’t completely lose our heads.

Never at any time did we foster any illusions about this party. We merely tried to put pressure on it at regional level as far as the Comiso missile base was concerned. At one point they found themselves obliged to publicly support us at a trial following arrests made after the students’ strike in Vittoria. Again, under pressure from the workers at the oil refinery in Gela, they had us immediately released from the local police station when we were arrested while leafletting. We knew it would take a lot more to force these traitors to an unofficial external support of the occupation. For them this would have meant the possibility of recuperation. For us, a certain guarantee, credibility, in a social reality where that party is still a force to be reckoned with. It would have gone towards dispelling the accusation of terrorism that had been made against us,

also to reducing the possibility of a military confrontation, preventing our isolation and generally increasing participation in the occupation.

Our main point of reference, those most receptive to the information we were circulating and the most combative, were the base of the CP. We didn't make an attack on the Party or criticise their politics. We talked instead in terms of their 'inefficiency' in the struggle against the missile site. We never had any 'base' to oppose or link with theirs, hence the absurdity of 'popular front' type allegations.

Our aim was to organise a revolt. We wanted to create the essential conditions for an insurrection. An insurrection which would be limited and circumscribed, perhaps, but which was to be based on the rebellion of the people. We therefore had to penetrate the reality of their lives, their mentality, their traditions, the symbols and commonplaces of proletarian values. While others talked, we set to work.

We were aware of the importance of an unofficial recognition of the occupation by the Communist Party. We also knew that would only happen if our strength forced them to. Our first indication that they felt sure of themselves was when they kept quiet after the attack on our house by the local mafia.

The subterranean work carried out by the small parties in their service within the population and the Peace Camp was beginning to bear fruit. They and the IMAC and CUDIP called for three days of blockades on the 19th, 20th and 21st July, the days immediately preceded the deadline for the occupation. That this was a deliberate act of sabotage was confirmed when the organisers didn't even turn up, much to the frustration and rage of the German, Dutch and English comrades at the Peace Camp who were sincerely committed to stopping the Cruise programme. They found themselves alone in the sweltering heat. The workers went in to carry on construction work. At about 11am a few 'progressive' MPs came along to have themselves filmed by the TV cameras in front of the gates.

So, the Communist Party had their alibi for not giving the go-ahead for the occupation. No one had come to the blockades (yet when they want to the CP can mobilise tens of thousands), so 'the masses' were not 'mature' for direct action. Another major effect of this operation was disorientation. With so many 'days of struggle' people had become confused. By instrumentalising the Peace Camp the CP had put a stamp on the days that were to follow. Already one part of the project was lost before it had begun.

As far as the pacifists were concerned, many of them were aware of the significance of the three days of so-called struggle organised by the politicians of the Peace Camp. They were tired of ideological/political discussions and were among the most enthusiastic and constructive of the affinity groups which had formed to prepare the mass occupation.

The punks' revolutionary impetus put all the other mistakes in the shade. It was they who made concrete proposals when it seemed that all should be abandoned. For many it was their first experience of social struggle, but they left the old 'mature' revolutionaries far behind, blinded by their various ideological positions.

Considering the nature of the situation, the presence of the Italian anarchist movement was considerable. It was small considering the numerical possibility of the movement. Some had imagined that they would find 'the masses' waiting for them outside the airport. Had we been so sure of that we needn't have made such an effort to solicit anarchists' presence at such a crowded appointment. Many however were perfectly aware of the situation, having followed it actively for

months beforehand. They came early to prepare the days of struggle along with the comrades of the Leagues. They were the ones who made the best working contribution to the affinity groups.

Then, of course, there were those who had come to 'observe' and criticise. We are convinced that a great number of comrades failed to understand the situation during these three days. Which explains the procrastination, doubts and arguments. During the preceding two years we had distributed thousands of leaflets, held over a hundred outdoor meetings, debates and conferences, had time on local television and radio. We approached and were approached by, truck drivers, tractor owners, people with experience of trades union struggles and some who had had personal clashes with the police. In this way we built up a network of people available for the struggle against the base. But they needed some evidence of our seriousness, our commitment, our numerical strength, etc.

We contacted comrades outside the area — Palermo, Naples, Calabria and elsewhere, and they in turn built up their own networks. We thus built a map of available people and means. Not a political or ideological map but a practical one. We can't go into everything here, but there were a number of trucks, tractors, equipment to build a tower in front of the base, barricades for the roads, other means to defend the occupation and make it last. But first we had to give something of our own. Certainly, if the Communist Party had decided to take an interest it would have been different. Instead, they set out to sabotage us, so that potential was lost.

There was also some bad luck. And some missed appointments. For example a well-known local ballad singer said he would do street concerts in the poor areas to get the women out of their homes and discuss the occupation. We knew that most of the proletarian women were against the base and that they were potentially a great force in the struggle, but they needed some kind of guarantee to push them to make the first step. There is no way of knowing whether the street meetings would have been a catalyst, but that was another thing that went against us.

Then there was the difficulty that comrades from completely different social and cultural situations had in communicating with the local people. This often led to misunderstandings.

But to get back to the organisational work. About ten days before, when the first comrades began to arrive, the idea of forming affinity groups was discussed. Most people there already were already part of some sort of affinity group and it was agreed by all that this was the most natural and effective way to decide upon actions for the days of struggle that were to come. That way it would be possible to avoid discussing delicate topics at open meetings.

It was agreed that it was essential to keep in close contact with the populations of Comiso and Vittoria. This was the indispensable cornerstone for transforming our action into a mass event instead of just another isolated political gesture.

A great deal of work was dedicated to this problem. A radio link was tried, but was found to be too easily intercepted. After unsuccessful attempts at a mobile radio system we decided on direct contact. We gained access to the main squares of Comiso and Vittoria for three days and set up loudhailers, amplifiers and bookstalls with the aim of constantly informing the local people of what was happening around the base.

Other actions were also discussed. It was essential, we all agreed, to avoid a head-on clash with the police. Being completely outnumbered, it would be impossible for us to keep the struggle going for three days. So, a number of things had to be done. Get material as near to the base as possible, cut the fence around the base at various points, and carry out minor diversive actions at various points around the perimeter on the first day. This would also test the police's operational capabilities. Actions were carried out, and the police seldom managed to locate the groups

involved. Even the local press pointed out the difficulties that the police were having for the first time concerning the base at Comiso.

The group in front of the airport were there to meet the local people who came out of interest and curiosity, and some comrades from the Coordinamento who were known locally were present in Comiso and Vittoria as had been decided at the affinity groups' meeting.

From dawn on the first day, we realised we'd made a serious mistake in not having specifically asked comrades to arrive a few days earlier to discuss the organisational aspect. It would have been useful to have had a conference somewhere earlier in the year—as proposed at the Leagues' general assembly and rejected by four comrades.

People kept arriving until late in the afternoon of the 22nd and were told of the affinity groups, but many didn't understand the situation. Some considered affinity groups 'not anarchist' and that everything should be decided at a general assembly.

At the end of the first day there was a call for such an assembly. Many were confused. Where were the masses? If they couldn't turn up, we might as well all go home. Many were asking what should be done.

We made it clear that all operative decisions would be made at a restricted meeting of affinity groups' representatives after the general assembly. Some said that the occupation was no longer possible in their opinion and that we might as well withdraw into minor actions and proposed the absurd alternative of occupying the town hall or the local employment office. Another made this his moment to criticise not only the idea of the occupation but the whole of our work until then, suggesting, to the astonishment and hilarity of those present, the formation of an antimilitarist structure at national level!

Confusion grew. Criticisms of the affinity groups' decisions abounded. Some maintained that everyone should be in front of the airport. Others questioned the method of affinity groups itself. The meeting, held in the public park (taken over by the Leagues as a camp site for these three days), ended in the early hours of the morning with the proposal to carry on discussing later at around 9am. Imagine! For the second day of struggle, the only decision was to carry on *talking*. This had an immediate and disastrous effect. Many people who were in contact with us, engaged to 'do' something against the base, declared they no longer intended to go ahead in the face of so much discussion and argument. Some stayed until the second day, and some were even present in the demonstration that was charged by the police, but only as passive observers.

Another example of the effect of this inability to reach a common basis for action was that three affinity groups, a German and a Dutch and a French group—who had organised to sabotage the generator of the base had already taken the necessary material to nearby points and were going to divide into groups to carry out diversive actions while another would go through the fence and work on the generator—faced with the pitiful spectacle of the general assembly, declared they were no longer prepared to listen to such chatter and left. They'd already spent two weeks at the Peace Camp where they'd been subjected to endless discussions on pacifism.

We're not saying that a decisive attack was ruined, but are pointing out how, from mistakes, incomprehension, lack of confidence and conflicting political tendencies, no good ever comes.

So, in the face of such indecision, the affinity groups' meeting could not take place as there was no common ground to start from, and because even the very idea of occupation had been put in question. Meanwhile the police were preparing.

For the comrades of the Coordinamento, we knew what we had to do. The struggle to bring about the occupation had failed, therefore it was necessary to put an end to the whole interven-

tion. There was no point in carrying out a symbolic action just to show that the anarchists were there. We had failed to do what we set out to do because of our inability to continue what had begun with the affinity groups. But the absence of an immediate response from the people of Comiso was also a factor. We did not discuss any of the original operative proposals at the affinity groups' meeting that followed. Strangely enough, at this meeting, those who had had most to say at the general assembly ...**

It was at this point that the punk comrades decided on a spontaneous demonstration to Comiso and the airport. We were against it for various reasons. Especially because it corresponded to all the things we had maintained shouldn't have been done at Comiso—direct confrontation with the police (this time inevitable as the demonstration was unauthorised), a symbolic gesture with no practical effect, no possibility of involving the local people.

However, we all participated in the demonstration, going through Comiso to the airport. The rest is chronicle of repression. As soon as the sun went down the police and the carabinieri sent up flares and charged the peaceful crowd of demonstrators who had long given up chanting slogans. Comrades through the vineyards to escape. Many were caught and beaten savagely. Some were stopped at road blocks and beaten, their vehicles smashed. Many were wounded. Six ended up in hospital.

In spite of all the mistakes and our individual and collective limitations we claim responsibility for the whole intervention at Comiso including the three final days. The insurrectionalist method applied in the antimilitarist struggle in Comiso was insufficient. Many elements prevented its correct and extended application. Both the negative and the positive aspects could not be seen clearly but only perceived piecemeal, often in a contradictory and superficial way.

We think this method could be applied in other struggles. That is why we have related this experience, and are asking comrades to reflect upon it and consider its application possible in another situation during other struggles. Naturally, we claim our involvement in the Comiso struggle beyond questions of method as we have always been against the missile base, armaments and armies. As convinced antimilitarists and anarchist revolutionaries we are against every kind of war, all war armaments, all forms of state terrorism. But we are not for simple declarations of principle: we are not for social peace, we are for the class war and therefore us the struggle has just begun.

A few comrades

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The struggle against the Cruise missile base in Comiso 1981–83
1983

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