

**We Want
Everything**

**Nanni
Balestrini**

**We Want
Everything**

the novel of Italy's hot autumn

**Translated
by Matt Holden**



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Introduction Rachel Kushner

In the penultimate moment of Luchino Visconti's 1960 film *Rocco and His Brothers*, the factory siren of an Alfa Romeo plant on the outskirts of Milan sounds, indicating that it's time for *Ciro*, one of *Rocco's* brothers, to return to work. The workers, *Ciro* among them, all turn around and head toward the gates, showing viewers the famous automotive logo on the back of their coveralls. *Ciro* is the 'good' brother, the one who found a way to live in industrial northern Italy: he accepts his social position as an unskilled worker, marries a nice local petty bourgeois girl, and lives cleanly. *Ciro* has just reported his brother *Simone* to the police. *Simone* has murdered *Nadia*, a prostitute he and *Rocco* have fought over. *Rocco* has gone off to pursue a career in the brutal world of professional boxing. The family is shattered and dispersed. The youngest brother, *Luca*, standing outside the Alfa plant with *Ciro*, says he hopes to someday return to the southern region of *Lucania*, where they're from.

Why would they have left *Lucania* to begin with, a world where you relax in the sun, go to the beach, take a tomato from the vine when you're hungry? There was chronic underemployment in the south. The soil was of poor quality. After grain markets were deregulated, prices plummeted. For rural populations in the *Mezzogiorno* there was simply no future. At the same time, the Italian postwar economic 'miracle' meant there were jobs in the factories of the rapidly industrialising north. Between 1951 and 1971, 9 million people migrated from rural to industrial areas in Italy. They often arrived in the big cities with nothing, and were forced to live in train station waiting rooms or on relatives' floors, if they had that option. They worked day and evening shifts on building sites or in factories that offered treacherous conditions and long hours.

This history is all deftly evoked in Visconti's film: the alienation that *Rocco's* family finds in damp and cold Milan, an abject and miserable life in the basement of a housing project, and their attempts to survive in a city where they are little more than pariahs, *terroni* excluded from northern working-class life. The film ends after the southerners return from lunch to their shift on the assembly lines at Alfa Romeo, and yet the saga is not over. It is far from over. The end of the film opens outward to the portents of the future. To what was to come, and eventually did come.

Almost a decade later, in 1969, the workers from the south on the assembly lines of the north revolted in waves of wildcat strikes and violence. And yet it was not really a *workers'* movement along the available spectrum, then, of

worker organisations and, most notably, the Communist Party. May Day, for instance, a celebration of work, seemed imbecilic to these newly migrated workers in revolt. They regarded the Communist Party as an impediment to real change and little more, an organ of compromise with company bosses. These workers were ready to reject the entire structure of northern life and of work itself. Their revolt was an all-out assault on their own exploitation. They wanted everything, as their placard slogan and shop floor chant famously expressed, *Vogliamo Tutto!*

We Want Everything is a novel of great energy and originality that succeeds on three different levels simultaneously, as a work of astounding art, a document of history, and a political analysis that remains resonant to the contradictions of the present. The artfulness lies in the tone: the person who speaks in the first person in this novel is nameless, but not at all unknown to us. He is intimate, insolent, blunt. He's full of personality, full of humour, and rage. He speaks in a kind of vernacular poetry that gets into the mind, and stays there. 'All this new stuff in the city had a price on it,' he says, 'from the newspaper to the meat to the shoes; everything had a price.' His story is likely that of a real person, named Alfonso Natella, to whom the book is dedicated. Perhaps crucially, the protagonist speaks in a vaguely testimonial form to those who were not there. He was there, and he knows we, his readers, were not, and so he gives us a full account of his life. The book in its entire first half is something like a dossier, and we know the dossier matters: it's the case file of someone who was witness to the clashes and convulsions of his own historical era.

Our hero arrives in Turin and is lucky enough to have a place to sleep at his sister's, while many of the 'great tide' of southerners washing into Turin are living in the second-class waiting room at Porta Nuova train station, which would admit anyone with a Fiat ID card or a letter from Fiat stating that he had an interview at the factory. The police patrolled the train station vigilantly, but not on the lookout for loiterers and squatters. The police were looking for journalists, making sure they didn't get anywhere near the second-class waiting room, 'this dormitory, for free, that Fiat had at the Torino train station', as the protagonist says.

At the Fiat plant, he seeks employment along with 20,000 other new hires. 'The monsters were coming,' he says, 'the horrible workers.' And their monstrosity is magnified by the high demand for labour. Many workers left after just a few days, the work was so unbearable. Some withstood only half a day before choosing destitution over the demands of the assembly line. The protagonist is part of this tide of necessary monsters, hated that much more because the factory must hire them, must deal with them.

He goes through an interview process that is a pantomime (everyone is hired), then a factory medical assessment, which is even more comical and absurd. The protagonist endures muscle-strength testing on newfangled machinery, a blood test in a room that features high piles of stinking, blood-soaked cotton balls, a piss test that the men prepare for in a circle, ‘making beer’, as they joke, and then finally, the doctor’s examination, in which the protagonist, for the hell of it, seeing that the whole thing is a charade, announces that he is missing one testicle.

He’s hired despite his lie. They are all hired. ‘Maybe they wouldn’t have taken a paraplegic’, the protagonist speculates. But the medical exam has not been *entirely* a charade. To this reader it seems a necessary stage in these workers’ exploitation: they are handing over the rights to their sole possession—their bodies—to the bosses of Fiat, transferring ownership of their selves to the factory. And so when the protagonist claims to the company doctor that he’s only got one ball, he is throwing *them* an insult, telling them that their new body on the line is faulty; it’s not even a full man!

On the assembly line, the real fun begins. The work is back-breaking, and in this era, wages were tied to productivity, meaning workers didn’t get a decent base wage; they could not earn enough to live on unless they produced a certain profit margin for the company. At one point our protagonist is put on a line where the work requires use of just one shoulder to rivet with a heavy pneumatic gun, a repeated motion that will deform him by twisting his back and bulking his muscles asymmetrically. Meanwhile there are some on the assembly line who are dedicated to work and to the Communist Party (PCI), northerners from peasant backgrounds, ‘really hard people, a bit dense, lacking in imagination’, who spend their whole short lives working. People for whom ‘work was everything’. To the narrator, they’re worthless. ‘Only a drone’, he says, ‘could spend years in this shitty prison and do a job that destroys your life.’

Most of the new workers are like the protagonist—alien to the prison of the factory, and they can’t stand the conditions. They fill the infirmaries with fake and real injuries until it looks like a field hospital. The protagonist hurts his finger, but only a little. He puts some black grease on it and asks for time off. When the doctor touches it, our hero swears in dialect. ‘If I swore in Italian’, he says, ‘it would seem like I was acting, but swearing in Neapolitan, the guy didn’t know if I was acting or not. Mannaggia ’a maronna, me stai cacando ’o cazzo, statte fermo porco dio, that kind of thing.’ Everyone is acting. The protagonist is acting the part of the *terrone*, and the doctor is playing the role of factory authority who, wearily, doesn’t much care.

The protagonist gets sick leave, but realises that he has no idea what to do

with himself, how to relax or what to do in Turin. The factory not only degrades work, it degrades the life away from work, too. This is alienation, the lived experience of exploitation, but it is demonstrated here without theoretical abstractions: it's an oral account of a person's life, that's all.

At a turning point, the narrator decides to dedicate himself totally to making trouble. It's a commitment to risk everything. 'I didn't want Fiat,' he tells the bosses. 'I didn't make it. I'm inside here just to make money and that's it. But if you piss me off and break my balls I'll smash your heads in, all of you.'

And so the struggle begins. But the protagonist's threat, that scene, is not a moment of singular heroism. As literature and history both, *We Want Everything* is not a story of one remarkable man. It's the story of the nameless and unknown who went north, like Rocco and his brothers and like the 20,000 who were hired the month the protagonist was hired, in 1969. It's the story of the men who worked these awful jobs and got fed up, directed their rage and their strength and violence, in the interest of no longer living in misery. (The women would not have their say quite yet: this struggle was about men and their exploitation, while women—exploited doubly in Italy, in the piece work they did at kitchen tables for the factories in the north, and by their families, for their domestic labour, domestic toil—would have to mark out their own path, and did. In fact it's accurate to say that feminism had the most lasting and successful impact among the demands made in the revolts of 1970s Italy. But women's demands were not part of the 'everything' in this everything of factory revolts, a reminder that the word has limits, a context. 'We want everything' meant we want to live lives with meaning, and we refuse to be forced to work in order to survive. It was a working-class male 'everything'; women would still be at home toiling away, even in the case of unlikely victory.)

The second part of the novel opens with a chapter on the wage, and marks the narrator's transformation into a theorist of his own struggle. He sees that as a worker whose wages are tied to productivity, he collaborates with the bosses against himself. The tone makes a subtle shift. The 'I' partly dissolves, and the book becomes something like pirate radio news bulletins of the war on the factory, the war in the streets. The struggle expands. The narrator, wherever he is now, is part of a new collective desire, calling not for higher base pay but the abolition of capitalism, for the bosses' economy to collapse.

I once asked a friend, an Italian from Milan who seems to know a lot of people, if he'd heard of Nanni Balestrini. My friend is in the art world, and I wasn't sure if he would have read Balestrini's work. We were in this friend's kitchen. He was making me a salad. He said 'Balestrini!? Nanni? But I helped him escape into France!' It turned out that, in 1979, when Nanni was going to

be arrested as so many were, for so-called insurrectionary activities against the state, this friend outfitted Balestrini with skis and ski gear. Drove him to the Italian Alps, and then crossed into France and waited for Balestrini to ski down on the other side of Mont Blanc, into Chamonix. I pictured the one photo I'd seen of Balestrini, a man wearing a scarf wrapped in a complicated and elegant manner, a person who looked more bohemian and urbane than athletic. I asked, 'But does Balestrini *ski*?' My friend held out his hands in emphasis, and said, 'You know ... good enough!'

Balestrini had been a founding member, in 1968, of the extra-parliamentary left-wing group Potere Operaio, whose focus was on factories and factory workers, on listening to workers and producing a movement of their voices and direct experience. It's likely Balestrini was outside the gates of Fiat in 1969. (Alfonso Natella, the subject and 'ghost author' of this novel was also involved with Potere Operaio, which is surely how they met.) This method of workers' inquiry—called *inchiesta* by its practitioners in Italy—has foundations in Marxism, but only truly took hold in postwar Europe, particularly in the tactics and tenets of the radical left French group Socialism or Barbarism, which then influenced workerist theory—*Operaismo*—in Italy. Worker subjectivity, it became apparent, was shifting, from building a labour movement to a resistance against the disciplines of work. The concept of collecting the stories of workers themselves, the idea that their accounts of work and of their lives would be essential to any revolutionary process, goes all the way back to Marx's 1880 worker's questionnaire, which was meant to be disseminated among French factory workers. 'It is the workers in town and country', Marx wrote, 'who alone can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer.' Simply put, there is no theory without struggle. Struggle is the conditions of possibility for theory. And struggle is produced by workers themselves.

But in its utilisation by Balestrini, who was not just a militant and theorist but a poet and artist, a writer to the core, *inchiesta* became something more, something else: a singular artistic achievement and a new literary form, the novel-*inchiesta*. Balestrini went on to employ this same method in later novels, *Gli Invisibili* (*The Unseen*), and *Sandokan*, both of which feature first-person protagonists who tell stories that serve also as historical accounts, the militancy of the autonomist movement of 1977, and the Camorra and its ravages of the south, respectively. These voices in Balestrini's novels are always one person speaking anonymously as a type. The voices have all the specificity of an individual—a set of attitudes, moods, prejudices, back stories, but they each speak in a way that exemplifies what life was like *for a person such as them*, in a moment when there were many like them. They are works that capture and illuminate voice. Voices speaking, rather than words

written. In this way, these works depart from the classical subjectivity of the nineteenth-century novel, and seem closer in relation to an earlier tradition, also oral, and heroic, and historic: epic poetry.

We need many epics for each epoch. If only we had the testimony of Balestrini's own life, his own *I* as an *any* and a *we*, his militancy and flight. In the creation of *We Want Everything*, he dissolved himself, became the mere medium through which Alfonso Natella speaks. As if Balestrini had rolled under the factory gates, like smoke, and was suddenly inside. Perhaps the novel–inchiesta is never a work of introspection, but always instead of refraction: a way to refract that which, as Umberto Eco wrote of this novel, “is already literature” *before* its refraction, its transcription, before its existence in a book. This novel was already literature when it was in the form of the passing thoughts a worker was having on the assembly line. And yet I'd like to think that Balestrini skiing down into Chamonix, his scarf flapping, whether told or not, is literature, too.



Nanni Balestrini *Potere operaio*, collage, 1972

First part

First chapter **The south**

In the south it had already been 10 or 15 years since it started. The intervention of the Cassa,¹ the new industries, the countryside that had to be industrialised. And at all the rallies you went to they said for progress in the south you had to work. For a new human dignity you had to produce. That you needed a new south, development, bread for everyone, work for everyone and all that. The Christian Democrats said it, the Communist Party said it, they all said it.

Instead it was the green light for emigration, the signal for everyone to go to the factories up north. Because in northern Italy and Europe the factories were ready to take that mass of people. The assembly lines at Volkswagen and Fiat needed them all. And that was the type of worker they needed: a worker who could do any job on the line, who had been a labourer or a road digger in the south and who could, when necessary, just as easily be unemployed.

Before it had been the other way around. Labourers had to stay peasants, they had to stay tied to the land. The workers of the south had to all stay tied to the south. Because if they'd all gone to work in the north and in Europe before about 15 years ago there would have been a big mess up there. Because they weren't ready with all the factories and everything up there then. I didn't know about these things that had happened, before. I learned about them by talking to the comrades. After I'd given up on work, for good. After the trouble I started that day at Mirafiori.²

At that time in the south the Communist Party's slogan was: Land to whoever works. But what the hell did a labourer care about the land, about owning the land. They only thing he cared about was the money that he didn't have: the security of having it guaranteed, all year round. In the end the Communist Party in the south changed its policies from the time of the land occupations. It retreated into the provincial towns, where there was nothing to do except run along behind dissatisfied tradesmen and office workers. Meanwhile the big struggles at Battipaglia³ and Reggio⁴ exploded, though the Communist Party thought those people were just a shitty underclass.

Apart from anything else, it's not as if the south in general had ever been poor. The landowners had always made plenty of money, and that continued after the Cassa del Mezzogiorno, except it was only the big landowners who kept making money, while anyone with less than five hectares was supposed

to just disappear.

Take, for example, the owners of the fertile land on the outskirts of Salerno on the Sele plain. There were *pommaroli* on the plain, people who plant tomatoes every season, with the whole family working. Little by little, as they made some money, the landowners turned all this work into an industry. Now they do it all, from field to can. And the labourers become workers, and with machines there are fewer people working but they're producing more. And the other people from around there, well, they're meant to just disappear.

The rich landowners whose land was expropriated by the Cassa pocketed hundreds of millions of lire. It was in their interest, too, to see industry develop. With all those millions they built apartments in the cities, thousands of them. The people who came to work on the building sites weren't from Salerno, most came from out of town: from the interior, from villages in the mountains, from the Apennines. They were all people who owned a house, a pig, some chickens, some vines, olives, oil, but who could no longer get by. They sold up, bought apartments in the city, got jobs in the factories. And so the unemployed in the cities stayed unemployed; in fact, there were more than before.

It was especially the people from the interior and the villages in the Apennines who had to go up north. The Cassa did nothing for them, it was as if they were supposed to just disappear. Go north for development, because our underdevelopment was useful to them in the north, it helped their development. Who developed the north, who developed all of Italy and Europe? We did, the labourers of the south. It was as if northern workers and southern labourers were something different, something other than an underclass. It's us, southerners, who are the workers of the north. What is Torino if it's not a southern city? Who works there? Just like Salerno, like Reggio, like Battipaglia. Corso Traiano happened, the same as Battipaglia, when people realised that they couldn't go on. All the stories of work up there and down here, there is work or there isn't work, it's a scam. You understand that the only answer is to burn everything, like at Battipaglia. The same thing will happen everywhere soon when we get organised. And in the end we'll change everything. We'll tell them all to get fucked, them and their shitty jobs.

The building workers came to Salerno from Nocera, Cava, San Cipriano Picentino, Giffoni, Montecorvino. They came from all these towns in the morning on scooters and mopeds. There was a lot of work building factories, truck drivers to carry cement, stone, steel, to make roads and everything. There was a building boom in Salerno in the '50s. Everyone bought scooters or mopeds. You saw the first mass-market car, the 600, which even workers

had. And everyone bought TVs, antennas sprouted all over the place.

Money really started to circulate. And there was always more stuff in the clothing shops and the grocers, and new shops were opening all the time. Everyone made more and spent more in Salerno. But generally it wasn't the working class or the unemployed from Salerno. It was the people from the villages around. Money got to those villages, but naturally it didn't stay there. You busted your arse every day to come on your moped or scooter or in your 600 from Montecorvino to Salerno for work, and then turned around and went back every evening. Then you looked for an apartment in town. In fact, all the new apartments in Salerno housed people who had come from out of town.

Lots of people worked on the building sites and then lived in the apartments they'd built. After a while they went to live in these apartments in town, renting and even buying them. These people weren't proletarians like in the city, the people who had fuck-all. In their own way they were land owners, they had the house, the pig, chickens, grape vines, olive trees and olive oil. And they also managed to buy apartments in town. Then they found jobs in the factories. To be taken on in a factory, you needed a raccomandazione.⁵ These yokels brought prosciutto to their local councillors. They brought oil, wine, all kinds of stuff and that's how they got jobs. That was the only way they managed to find a position. And then they became proletarians like those in town, although that's really what they had been all along.

I found a job through an uncle, too. Now he's retired; he worked in the finanza. He had a cousin in the employment office. He took me to the employment office and said to his cousin: this is one of my nephews. You have to help him, you have to find him a job somewhere. He gave me some paperwork, sent me along to Ideal Standard. I had an interview, passed the health insurance medical. Then I went back for the aptitude test. You did the aptitude test at the same time as the office workers. But we had longer. They had to do it in a minute, we had three. Then they said they were sending us to do a course. The guys who'd done best in the aptitude test went to do a course in Brescia.

We asked why we were going to do this course. They said the Cassa was paying for training to get southern technicians ready for southern industry. When I heard talk about a course I thought it was just a technical thing. The whole time I was unemployed after I finished technical school I did courses. Works mechanic, fitter and turner, I did courses in all these things but I learnt fuck-all: they were no use at all. They were only there so the employment office looked like it was training people. I don't know what the political motives behind the schools were.

Anyway, when I heard course I thought we were going there to listen and have things explained to us. They gave us tickets to Brescia and lunch for the journey. At Brescia station a social worker from Ideal Standard was waiting for us. They called taxis and they knew us by name, all twenty of us. Ten here, five there, seven somewhere else: they'd even found pensiones for us to stay in. These are the pensione we've found, they said. If you don't like them you can move. And the next day we turned up at Ideal Standard. They told us we were good lads, strong and all of that, and they ask us if we'd like to go to France or Torino or Milano. The company ran regular excursions. But we really didn't give a stuff about the excursions, so we said, yeah, sure, OK.

They gave us white overalls with the IS logo on them. They took us into the factory, where the temperature was in the 30s. It was humid because of all the ceramics drying: the water evaporates and everything gets soaked. We felt like we were suffocating. We had darker skin than the Ideal Standard workers from Brescia. Being in that heat and humidity all the time you have to shower every night, and your skin gets paler. And it's not as if there's much sun in Brescia. Coming from the south, where it was the end of summer, we were black, which scared them all a little.

Anyway, they show us the toilet bowls, the bidets, the hand basins, the stands for the hand basins, the bathtubs. They show us cross-sections, explain how thick they have to be. How many minutes a hand basin has to stay in the mould, how many minutes all the different pieces have to stay in the mould. They explain how the mould is made and other stuff. And then they start to show us how you do it. I could see that the workers from Brescia did the work straight out without thinking about it too much, bam, bam, just like that, almost like it was nothing. So I said to myself, Christ, what the fuck is this course about? Are we talking about real work here, or about becoming foremen?

All right, I thought, if we're talking about becoming foremen then we won't have to work much, and so I took it easy. My workmates worked on two toilets while I made one, and I went along like that. After we'd been there two or three months we joined this struggle. There were strikes, and we went on strike too, instinctively, with the guys from Brescia. The Cassa del Mezzogiorno paid us; we got ten thousand lire a week living allowance, more than forty thousand a month. And they paid us sixty thousand lire a month and we had free meals, in the company canteen. We had free transport all over the city, on every route.

Before Brescia every one of us was from a different town, from different areas. We all lived the typical southern life. But there five or six of us stayed at each pensione, we ate together, we caught the bus together, and so we

started to understand the advantages of industrial work. It wasn't as if they were exploiting us in that work, we were only being trained. We didn't feel exploited, at least, that was our impression. Some union organisers from the factory came to see us, saying that once we went back down south we'd have to start up the struggle. The south had to be brought to the same level as the north and all that.

One day these Ideal Standard workers went out on strike, and we stopped too and talked to the union organisers. They were striking for an increase in the production bonus and they said that we were productive, too. And I said, No, we're just doing a course. No, you're productive, because they sell the units you make. You're not just doing a course, you're productive. A toilet bowl costs ten or fifteen thousand lire, it's not as if you're doing fuck all. This was fine by us, this discovery, we thought we'd been freeloading, living off the company. So we sat down outside too, and refused to go in.

Then the manager of Ideal Standard Salerno came to Brescia. He saw us sitting around outside and asked us what the hell we were doing. Yeah, we're on strike. But you're going in, aren't you? No, we've decided to join the struggle. Then after two days the workers from Brescia stop, but we decide to keep going. It was just us, twenty of us outside the gates, the others had gone in. While we were there a security guard came and called us: the manager wants to speak to you. We go in. Shit, the manager wants to speak to us, who knows, maybe they want to give us a pay rise.

We go in and he goes: Listen boys, down south there are lots of unemployed workers, you're not the only ones. We can throw you out right now. In fact, I already should have. Why did you go on strike? Did the union tell you to? Are you in the union? No, I said, do you have to be in a union to go on strike? Yes, you can only strike if you're in a union. If you strike and you're not in the union we can kick you out. Well, we didn't know that. We joined the struggle just like that, the other workers went on strike so we did, too.

Anyway, you want a pay rise, but did you know you're not producing anything? Did you know that in the factory in Salerno they started work a month ago and are already producing sixteen units, some even eighteen? And you lot here make fourteen and get paid more? We said that can't be true, that's impossible, that's a lie to make us stop. No, he says, I can end the course right now and send you back to Salerno. If you want to work, come and work, if not, get lost. We don't care. And we won't be giving you any pay rise.

Either I kick you out right now, or you all decide here and now to go back to work. If you do that I'll think about whether to send you back to Salerno or take you back on. So we discussed it among ourselves. I say, OK, it's better

for us to be tough, isn't it? We say we don't want to work and so they kick us out. We'll go back down south, all twenty of us, and make trouble outside Standard. But some of them say they're married, that they want to finish the course as soon as possible. They want to work and earn money in Salerno, they don't want to make trouble. And so we decided to go back to work without having won anything.

After a month we finish the course and go home to Salerno. Well, there we discover that they were paying workers from Brescia, that is, workers from Ideal Standard at Brescia, with money from the Cassa del Mezzogiorno, with the excuse that they have to train the workers from Salerno. And that the workers were already producing more than us who'd done the course in Brescia. The factory had been in Brescia for thirty years and they made sixteen units a day. It had been at Salerno for two months and they were already making eighteen. They explained this by saying the factory was modern and the equipment was more efficient.

It was only because instead of lifting the units by hand, you lifted all the units together with a hoist. Some of the processes were automated, which at least saved your back. But something that was good for a worker's health cost you two extra units, that is, two more toilet bowls. I didn't go for that, thinking of the workers in Brescia who all had bad backs. They had their sides all strapped because they were getting muscle strains. And here, this new thing, using a hoist instead of your back to lift things, they'd done it to stop people going on benefits with pulled muscles. Which they made us pay for, by getting us to make two extra units. I mean, the new equipment in the new factories was only there so there were fewer workers but everyone produced more.

They didn't want to listen to reason. They said: Look, the others work, they make eighteen units. Everyone was making eighteen units, it was just me who only made sixteen. So they call me into the office. They say: listen, you seem like a good kid, but you have to change jobs. We should really sack you because you're not productive enough. But we'll send you to another section. They put me in another section, but for two days I had to stay in the old one, in the casting workshop. There were some units that had dried that I had to finish. I had to take them out of the moulds and finish the units that I was still working on.

I went back down from the office and found someone from the union who had been to ask for an increase in the piece rate. The management had given him the finger and this guy had said they'd have to go out on strike. As soon as I hear this I say: Great. And I join in with the union organiser shouting: Strike, strike. I go to my comrades in the casting workshop and I get them to leave. A

supervisor comes and says: What are you doing here, this isn't your section? I say: Yes, it's still my section because I have to finish some units. So why don't you finish them? Because there's a strike, right? And the guy says nothing.

There were about fifty of us not working. They start to check who is still working. So we go to the guys who are still working and herd them out. The supervisors get pissed off and one of them threatens me. I was eating and I shoved my sandwich in his face. I'm jumping on him, my comrades are holding me back, they say: You've done the right thing, but that's enough. Then we go into the other sections and make them stop. We all go out into the yard and hold a meeting. We strike for fifteen days, with pickets day and night. Police vans all around. Then we march on the Salerno prefecture as well.

When we went back to work I was in a new section. I had to load finished units onto a line. Another guy checked them and two more put them onto trolleys. But to make up for the strike they decided to run two lines. Two checkers and two more packing. Whoever had to load the units onto one line now had to load them onto two. That is, it was me who had to do this double process. To make this work, they'd told the checkers, who checked whether the finished units were good or not, to speed up the checking. That is, if the guy in front didn't pack a unit, they were authorised to put it on the ground. Generally you can't put units on the ground, because they're easy to break.

They told me to keep putting new units on the line. To push the units up close together. But you can't put them close together, they might break, because they're made of porcelain, they're not meant to touch each other. And they authorised me to squash them up. I said: You're crazy, they'll break. And they replied: What do you care, do it the way you've been told. Their only concern was to increase production. The guy calls me a comrade, a unionist and he says to me: Listen, these people here want to make us work more. They want to put on two lines instead of one and then you'll have to bust your arse, you'll have to load both of them.

I tell my workmates who are packing and they say: Fuck, so we'll have to go slow. And they say to the checker: Why the fuck are you rushing? Take it slow. He says to them: No, I don't mind working like this. I spit in his face and go off to the bathroom for a piss. The supervisor of the kilns comes, a draughtsman. He says: You're breaking people's balls, be careful or we'll fire you. Yeah, I say, if your balls are so delicate you can keep them at home. Anyway, I go back to my workplace, and the checker kept going like crazy.

The next day I get to work and the security guards call me and hand me a letter. I open it and it says I've been sacked for fighting in the factory, for

sabotage and I don't know what the fuck else. Because of that they weren't even paying me the eight days' notice and who knows what other entitlements. I say: Can't I go in? No, you can't go in any more. Now, I knew these security guards, one was the father of a friend, and I'd made friends with the other one. It didn't want to fight them, I didn't have the stomach for it. At that moment I decided that if I ever went to work in a factory, wherever it was, I wouldn't ever make friends with the security guards.

I waited outside for the manager to come in so I could make him give me my money. But while I was there I needed a shit, so I went to have a shit and the engineer went past. To cut a long story short, I didn't get there in time to grab him. So then I went to the camera del lavoro⁶ and I told them that they'd sacked me for these reasons. Ah, don't worry, we'll take care of it. We'll bring a nice little case. They'll have to give you everything. Anyway, they asked me if I'd joined the union. I said I'd signed up during the strike, I'd coughed up a thousand lire. OK, so they get me to do a letter to Ideal Standard. They get me to send it express and registered, I spend another two or three hundred lire. I wait about a fortnight: more than two weeks I waited for something to happen. I went to them and I said: Listen, I haven't heard anything more, and I need the money.

Well, you've got to be patient, don't worry. If they don't pay we'll bring a case against them and they'll give you everything. I got really jacked off with waiting. One morning I went and waited for the engineer to arrive at the factory. When he got there I jumped in front of his car. He stopped, I opened the door and slipped in as he tried to lock it. I put a hand on his shoulder and threw the letter in his face. I said: Why didn't I get the eight days' in lieu of notice? You fired me and now I want to be paid. Not just the eight days, but the month of work I've missed, too.

I want everything, everything that's owed to me. Nothing more and nothing less, because you don't mess with me. He said: Listen, I wasn't there when you were fired. If it were up to me I wouldn't have fired you. You're a good lad, I would have moved you. If you want to come back to work I'll give you a better job, a job where you won't be like the others, a job just for you. I said positions at Ideal Standard didn't interest me any more. I've had it, I want my money right now, immediately. No more and no less than I'm owed. He says: Yes, don't worry. He takes me to the office, calls the clerks. He says: Work it out for him. Work what out? Everything, all of it. Really? Yes, everything, he says.

They work it out and I'm owed one hundred and twenty thousand lire. He calls me and says: Is one hundred and twenty thousand lire OK? I say: No. Then he says: Listen, with the accounts as they are, that's all I can give you.

This is what we'll do: I'll get the supervisor to punch your timecard for the month of November. I'll get it punched for you so that next month you can come and collect your wages without working. OK, I say, that's OK by me. But no messing around. Next month I'll be back. I see you going by Fuorni every morning; I know where you live. So let's not mess around. The engineer says: OK, but I want to tell you something. Get your head straight and I can find you another job.

He was from Brescia; he'd been transferred to Salerno. He didn't want to make too many enemies, apparently. He didn't want to lose sleep over thirty or forty thousand or a hundred thousand lire that wasn't his. What the fuck did he care about it? He even said he wanted to help me: I'll find you another job, he said. No, you don't understand. I don't want to work any more. I want to do nothing. And so I went and collected the money the month after and that was the end of the Ideal Standard story. I was unemployed for a while, but I bought nice shoes, an overcoat, some clothes. I spent all the money in less than a fortnight. I spent it all. I didn't have a single lira.

I didn't get unemployment benefit because I didn't have two years' worth of work stamps. But in the south the employment office was running building site schools — which was just a way to distribute money to people. They give you seven hundred lire a day. You go to the building site, which is not even a building site: it's an empty field where someone calls a roll. You say, Here, he marks the day down and you take off. Then on Saturday you go and collect the money, four thousand two hundred lire. And with that I could buy cigarettes, go to the movies, more or less manage to get by. As for whatever else I needed, I was living with my family.

One day I decide that was no good. I did the last of the summer work at Florio. There are lots of canneries there, mostly tomatoes. The work is seasonal. In the past this seasonal work lasted maybe three or four months. Now it's barely a month because there are fewer tomatoes. Anyway, I got a month at Florio, doing twelve hours a day, working Sundays. I made a hundred and fifty, a hundred and sixty thousand lire. I didn't even sign up for benefits because I decided I should go to Milano. Usually people who do the seasonal summer work get two or three or four months, even six months of benefits. They get fifteen hundred or two thousand lire a day. That's what they do when there's no work. They go on the dole.

Second chapter **Work**

I'm from Fuorni, which is a village near Salerno. There's Giovi, Caserosse, Mariconda, Pastena, Mercatello and so on. At the end of primary school my father and my mother were thinking of getting me to continue so they got some advice from the teachers. These teachers buttered up my father and mother. All parents should do this, they told them. They gave them some advice. It's better if he doesn't go to middle school. Apart from anything else, you have to pass the entrance exam. And you study more, the load is heavier. You need more books, it costs more. And then maybe he won't be able to finish, because it costs so much.

Your son can go to a trade school and then he'll be able to get a job in a factory. Be a foreman, a section head. The words foreman, section head sounded like a fairy tale, you didn't even really know what the fuck it was. How could we know, when there weren't any factories there yet? My father'd done a thousand different jobs. As the son of a peasant he had done everything, from smuggler after the war to labourer on building sites as he was now. And so it was decided that I should keep going to school. I was scared of going to high school, as it was called. Luckily I had friends from Fuorni who were going too.

We had to buy a bus pass, from Fuorni to the city. Right from the beginning there were divisions in the class, between the kids from the city and the kids from out of town. We came from Pontecagnano, from Battipaglia, from Baronissi, from Giffoni, from Nocera. The kids from the provinces were the so-called *cafoni*, hicks, the others were town kids. Some kids got used to this condition of inferiority. They tried to win over the kids from Salerno with ice cream, sweets, by lending a pen or a notebook.

Me and a friend from Pontecagnano preferred to meet this problem head-on. We went right at it with the kids from Salerno. We earned those kids' respect with our fists. Often when school got out there were punch ups, terrible battles. This went on for the whole first year of trade school. The second and third year were different. The difference wasn't between *cafoni* and town kids but between the smart kids and the dorks. We made fun of the dorks, we swiped their lunch and their money.

Next it was the discovery of the city, comparing life in the village with life in the city. I saw all these windows full of stuff. Trousers, bags, shoes, furniture,

radios. I saw more stuff to eat in the grocers. On the newsstands I saw magazines with women on the covers: when I went back to the village I saw women with skirts down to their ankles. In the city I saw posters with women who were so different. I saw them in the street, going to the movies. They were all new things that stimulated my imagination. I felt like I was beginning to understand something. And then I discovered a basic thing: to dress well, to eat well, to live well, you needed money.

All this new stuff I saw in the city had a price on it, from the newspapers to the meat to the shoes; everything had a price. It wasn't like fruit on the trees in the village that we used to go and get of an evening, or the fish that we caught in the river. They weren't the clothes that our mothers gave us, which they made themselves or that came from who knew where — pants or shoes that we put on without even knowing what colour they were because we didn't give a fuck. There was a huge difference between the upbringing we'd had up to now in the village with our families, our peasant environment, and this city environment.

I discovered the importance of money then and began to ask for more money at home on Sundays. But bloody hell, they couldn't give it to me. They gave me a hundred or a hundred and fifty lire a week. And that was a lot, there really wasn't any money at home. Then I noticed something else. I saw all my friends, the ones who hadn't stayed at school. They weren't going into the fields with their parents to plant tomatoes, the way things had been since I was born. I had broken with the way we did things by going to school, but I saw that these guys had broken with it another way. Instead of going into the fields they went to work on building sites, and they made more money in two months than their parents made with a year's harvest.

They made more money than their parents and they wore jeans. At that time jeans were the most fashionable thing. They were the years when you saw movies like *Poveri ma belli*.⁷ But if you went to school you didn't have a thousand or two thousand lire to buy jeans. The guys who had jeans also had pullovers, but not those pullovers that the shepherds wore up in the Apennines, in Irpinia, the hand-knitted ones. A pullover from a shop, lovely, in any colour. Then you bought a record player and records. Rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, all of that. And you danced like an American.

But you always needed money. Guys were already thinking of buying Lambrettas. This was exceptional, it broke with all the traditions of village life. Landowners had a horse and trap for going out on Sundays or going to town, or a bicycle, the type with high handlebars, and always black. And here were the sons of tomato farmers buying Lambrettas and all this other stuff.

That was when I started to say to my mother: Listen, I don't want to go to school any more, because I want jeans; I want to go to the movies, I want to go out for pizza. I want to go out and to do that you need money. If not, what am I going to do. I study, but then I'm stuck here wanting everything. It's no good living and wanting everything. I wanted to live immediately, right then. We were at the age when you start to have girlfriends and every Sunday we went dancing. My mother said: Listen, I'll tell you something. You're better, you're superior, because you go to school, you study. But I didn't listen, I didn't feel superior, I never had.

I judged superiority on the basis of things, on the basis of jeans, pullovers, record players, period. I didn't judge it on the basis of the bullshit they taught me at school, because look, that bullshit was no use at all for dancing, for going out, for eating pizza. So when my mother told me that I was superior, I didn't get it. I felt like it wasn't true at all.

One time we talk about it and my father is there, too. My father hesitates a bit. He thought that by sending me to school I would have a better life than his. Now that he saw that I wasn't a kid any more, that I was becoming a young man and had certain desires, he understood. But watch out, work's a bad thing, he told me. You have to get up early, you have to listen to the boss all the time. If there's no work you don't eat, if there is work you have to work hard. Work is never good. Work seems good to you because it will let you to go out for pizza, go dancing, go to the movies. But when you have a family you won't be going out for pizza, you won't be going dancing. You'll have to feed your family and then you'll see how tough work is.

This is why you have to think hard about it. I'm not telling you to go to school or to get a job. I'm only telling you one thing: work is bad, so try to avoid it. I send you to school because I think that's one way to avoid work. I felt this explanation, that work was a horrible thing, made more sense than what my mother had told me, that I was better. And I began to think that what my friends who'd gone to work in the building sites understood wasn't true, either: that money equals work, and that therefore work equals happiness. I began to have doubts about my discovery that happiness meant going to work on a building site.

It was as if, with this perspective on work and on his life, my father had said: See this family, see me, see yourself? Is this a happy family, your mother and I and your sisters? Poor, deprived, wretched, that's what we are. And then I understood that work is a fraud and nothing more, because in my family I didn't see any jeans, I didn't see any pullovers, I didn't see any record players. My father said: Here's a family, and here there's also work. Don't you think I work? And you can see what the result is.

I started to waver, I couldn't decide. Go to school or get a job? I'll get the record player and the pullover by working, but I'll end up like my father. Or go to school, which you could say might make me happier, in the sense that I wouldn't lead the life that I was leading with my family, the same life as my father and my mother and my sisters. And that was what made me keep going to school. I went to technical college because there were lower fees and fewer books, and the load was lighter: pretty much non-existent.

I did a three-year course in auto-electrics, a stupid thing because that's a trade you learn in the workshop. Young kids learned it by unscrewing globes and distributors. You need to know all the types of cars. But we learnt it all, you know, from books. We never saw the different types of batteries or distributors, ever. We learnt abstract things that were only useful for passing tests. But if a car blew a globe, a twelve-year-old kid from an auto-electrician knew how to fix it right away, and you didn't.

The only point of these technical schools was to give jobs to caretakers, headmasters and unemployed teachers. They were no use to us, spending money on textbooks and notebooks and lunches to go to school: they were expenses we couldn't afford. All that mattered was to know how to talk about the battery, the distributor, the dynamo, the starter motor. If you could talk about them, if you could remember what was in the book, you passed your tests. By then everyone was convinced that the fucking school was of no use at all, but if you talked to a teacher about it, naturally he denied it.

No, he'd say, that's ignorant. They're kids who only know how to do straightforward things. They do it but they don't understand why they do it. But you know what an electric current is, how it's created, how it flows. This is a superior fact. You'll go on to be foremen in the factories. They threw that in your face again, that you'd become a foreman. All of us, foremen, fifty or sixty of us, and all the technical schools in Italy turning out thousands of foremen every year. How many foremen did Italian industry need?

Finally I finished at this school where you didn't learn anything useful. And the teachers knew it too; no one failed the exams. When tech finished we all looked for jobs. We presented ourselves to the FIAT dealers, who had workshops. We spoke to them: What do you do? I'm an auto-electrician. But have you ever worked at it? No, but I studied it at tech. They never took us on. We went to Officine Meccaniche, to Autobianchi, to Alfa, to Lancia. They didn't take us on; they didn't need us. They needed their youngsters who learnt everything there and who knew how to do everything. So we all went our separate ways, we never saw each other again. I don't think any of us ever worked as an auto-electrician or a foreman.

That summer I went to work in the tomato canneries. I worked twelve hours a

day; I worked on Sundays too. I worked for two months and made nearly two hundred and fifty thousand lire. And with that money I bought an overcoat and other gear to get through the winter, though that wasn't enough. But I didn't go to work on the building sites like I had thought three years before. I saw the guys who had gone to work there and who were now turning eighteen and nineteen. Once you had the scooter, you stopped. Then you crashed the scooter, and you needed money to fix it. And for fines, and for petrol. And then the problem of getting engaged and married came up. You needed loads of money.

A whole lot of problems came up, and those guys didn't think too much about dancing and jeans then: they began to seem like second order problems. Sometimes they got fired. Work got tough. They started the piecework system. And then there was the fact that everyone was earning money. It was no longer the exception, a privilege like four or five years before. It was a need that became the same for everybody.

There was also a fixation: What's all this? You've been to school and now you want to be a worker? And so I couldn't do it. It was really a point of honour to not do certain work if you'd been a student. Then my parents had to support me so that I wouldn't have to go and work on a building site. When I worked in the tomato cannery they tried to keep it quiet, and so did I.

It was in those years that industrialisation started. The era of the development of the south started, partly to stop the labourers and the field hands rebelling because they weren't earning enough money to get by. So some industry started up. You could pay lower wages; there were no unions. People started working in the factories. But not too many, because they wanted most of them to leave for the north, to emigrate. But a little bit of money started to go around.

You saw cars, you saw fridges, television sets in people's houses. And I went to work in a factory for the first time, too. I went to Ideal Standard. And I discovered that what my father had told me was true: that work was just toil. It's a drag and that's all. So I was fired from Ideal Standard. And I thought about the avenue that was open to all southerners: that is, to emigrate, to go to Milano. To get myself up north, too, up where all these people were headed en masse: packed trains carrying away whole villages from the hinterland and the Apennines.

That wasn't the first time I'd been up north. I'd been there once before, straight after I finished tech, before Ideal Standard at Brescia. I went to Torino; I only stayed for a month. My married sister was there, the one who came back down every year for the holidays in a car. I was knocked sideways by that vast plain, by the work, by the mentality. And I came back in a hurry

to go to the beach, to hang around with my friends. I went to my married sister's place in Torino and saw that they lived in a flat worse than ours in Salerno, a flat off the entranceway on the ground floor. One room where they slept and they ate. But they came down in a car, the jerks.

I went up by train. The train was so crowded I wanted to get off after only thirty kilometres. I did the whole journey standing up. Drunk people with pieces of bread this big eating in the passageways. Babies crying, shitting. Suitcases, packages, boxes everywhere. An incredible thing, and these people had already been travelling for ten hours. I got on at Salerno and they were coming from Sicily. They'd already been travelling since morning: they were totally pissed off. It was April. Down south the custom is to leave in spring, because everyone knows that before that it's cold up north. So people all leave in spring.

In Torino I worked as a metal polisher. A Fiat is nothing more than so many parts, so many accessories that someone makes. Actually no one makes them. For example, the handles on the 500 and the 600 are all made of aluminium; there's all this stuff made out of aluminium. Various foundries make them, then the foundries subcontract out the finishing. There's the clean-up at the foundry. You need to do a rough clean-up of the part, then you polish it with another buffer. There's a buffer for cleaning it up and a buffer that polishes it, with steel fibres. You polish the handle and it gets shiny and smooth. That was the job. They gave me the qualification of metal polisher.

There you had to finish two thousand units a day. I didn't have time to blow my nose. I was always black with dirt. I was a metal polisher. But I didn't like being a metal polisher and after a month I took off. I made back the money I'd spent that spring. But this time, the second time I went up north, I did it differently. I saw it wasn't true any more that you needed less money to get by in the south, that things cost less, the things that by now everybody was used to; a TV set or packaged meat cost the same in Salerno as in Torino. Petrol cost the same, a scooter cost the same, the train cost the same.

In the south the things that you needed were no longer cheaper. Yeah, up until five or six years ago you managed to get garlic, onions, chickens, fruit easily enough. You went into a field and took fruit, basil, onions. But now the fields were all fenced in and there were guards behind the fences. There were produce sellers who sold the produce, and if you went and stole it you ended up inside. And people were ashamed to show they were poor, so now you had to buy the fruit and vegetables that, one way or another, you used to get for free. It might have cost a bit less than in Milano or Torino. But there wasn't any money, there was much less money. So I decided to go up north because you really earned more money there.

I knew families up north. Whole families had left: one that lived right next door to me had all gone. The father had been a tomato farmer, he planted tomatoes at Versecca, an area on the Sele plain. The sons were called Angelo, Rocco, Andrea, Armando, Carmine, Giovanni. They all worked together with their father on the tomatoes. All of them cutting reeds, all of them making ties; they used broom shoots to tie the tomato plants to the reeds so they'd grow up.

Then there was the custom of taking the tomatoes, cutting them in half and leaving them to dry in the sun. Then you pressed them through a copper sieve and out came the sauce, the concentrate, which you put into clay jars with fig leaves on top. That's how you made tomato paste, you made bottled tomatoes, too. Everyone made bottles. At lunch you ate tomato salad. In the evening, tomato salad; in the morning, tomato salad. Wine and that hard-baked bread they make there.

My father, on the other hand, was a casual worker. He made stakes out on the plain: he cut reeds in the meadows and sold them. You needed two or three hundred bundles of reeds a week. He sold them to the pasta factories for thirty thousand lire: the pasta factories put pasta to dry on the reeds; it was an ancient occupation that has disappeared now. My father did a bit of that, a bit of labouring on building sites. He turned his hand to all types of work. Quite often he was a carter, because he had a horse and cart. He got by however he could, but there was no way he would work as a farm hand, he wouldn't pick tomatoes: that was a terrible job.

Sometimes I used to help that neighbouring family with their tomatoes. My mother would say: Don't go — do you want to get mixed up with tomato growers? By now that family had all migrated, but they didn't go all together at the same time. The first to go was the second oldest brother, Andrea, who was the black sheep of the family. He was the kind of guy who always dodged work; out in the fields he'd find a nice cool spot, the type who didn't like work. He was illiterate, he hadn't wanted to go to school either. He left to do his military service and then never came back down.

Every so often a letter came. And then he turned up in the village, all smooth and with plenty of money. He said he sold flowers, because people bought flowers up north. To us that seemed crazy, people buying flowers. He said he sold flowers, and that on the day of the dead he made seventy or eighty thousand lire. We thought it was unbelievable. Now he was trying to open a flower shop. He was getting a drivers licence, he wanted to buy a van to get flowers from San Remo and bring them to Milano: things that were like fairy tales to his brothers and his friends.

He told us these stories too; in the evenings we used to sit outside our houses,

under a grapevine. Now they've paved it all over, there's no grass there now. Sitting there of an evening we used to talk. So Andrea told us these stories about what he'd got up to up north. About three or four years after Andrea had gone away and been back a couple of times to visit his family, another brother, Rocco, left. This guy Rocco was one of the youngsters that everybody in the village talked about. He was the type who gave the finger to the landowners. He was the type that landowners don't like, the type who bought new clothes, too. At that time, if someone bought new clothes, the bosses and the landowners looked on it badly. They gave you a hard time because you had new clothes.

This guy Rocco was sick of life in the fields with his father, and he took off as well, to Milano. When he gets there they are building the Metro and he gets a job driving an excavator. Every now and again he wrote. When a letter came from someone who was away, the first thing you did was read it to the family. Then you let all the neighbouring families who knew the guy read it. It became a thing in the village: what he had written, what he said, what was new. You knew the postman had been with a letter: Who's it from, your son? What's he say? What's new?

There wasn't TV or movies like today or a newspaper with all the news in it. Before, letters were the most important way of getting news around. You would talk about a letter for a week or more. Then another one would arrive and on you'd go. That's how I heard that Rocco was driving an excavator in Milano. And I couldn't imagine what the fuck this excavator was. It must have been a really fine thing to drive an excavator. In a rural village the only thing you knew about were hoes and oxen.

Rocco wrote that he was working twelve hours a day, which didn't impress anyone because in the fields you worked maybe fourteen; there was no work schedule. And he was making, I don't know, some fantastic sum. Naturally his father was happy. Rocco was engaged to a girl from a nearby village and after a year and a half he comes back to get married. He shows up in the village wearing a black suit, with a white shirt, a black tie, black shoes. He turns up looking really smart, and everyone was looking at him. He had a suitcase too, not the usual box tied up with a bit of string that you took up north. And the landlord of the building where he lived, and where we lived too, called him over. He says: How are you, how are things going. He gave him a dirty look, from head to toe.

Then all the landlords and landowners were talking about him in the evening when they went to the barbers for their shave. In the village, labourers and farmhands who were at the barber's had to make way if a landlord or landowner arrived for a shave. The barber took out a new, clean towel,

whereas for everyone else he used the same towel all day. They changed them the next day, because they were filthy. But for the landlords they got a clean towel. And the beauty of it is that the landlords didn't even pay for a shave, while everyone else had to pay.

The landlords talked in the barber shop: Have you seen Rocco, he's back. Yeah, he's doing well, why don't you all go away too? And the labourers said: Come on, up there you don't live so well. There's fog, the air is bad. We're not going, only fools go. That guy thinks he's something, with his clean clothes. That is to say, the landlords didn't make these landlord-type judgements, the others did, the ones who stayed behind. The landlords only stoked the fires. They were checking to see how it went down, a country boy coming home got up like that, when they didn't even have clothes like that. It bothered them, this fact; it spoiled things. The only thing the landowners said was: But he's a good type, he's got it right. There's no doubt about that, the labourers said.

When he got married Rocco brought a suit for his father and clothes for his mother and brothers. All of them with new clothes, everyone looking at this family with new clothes. It was stuff that you couldn't get in the village, only in the city. There were waiters at the wedding who brought around sweets, champagne, the lot. And music. But a wedding in the south, for peasants, has always been a big deal, a mark of having arrived. People went into debt to get married, and spent the rest of their lives paying it off.

As things got worse for this family, they went away one after the other. All the brothers went, and Rocco found them jobs. Up north they did well, they got married and all the rest of it. In the end they all left, including the parents. There were lots of families that did the same; this is the family I remember best because I knew them. They were our neighbours, they lived right next door to us. And I decided to go up north too, because there was money up there.

Notes

1. *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* A government program established in 1950 to stimulate economic development in southern Italy, mainly by the construction of infrastructure such as bridges, dams, roads and irrigation projects. It also provided tax advantages and credit subsidies to encourage investment. Historians say that up to a third of the money was squandered, and many of the fund's beneficiaries were large northern companies given subsidies to build automated factories that employed relatively few workers.
 2. *Mirafiori* FIAT's headquarters in Torino, still the largest factory in Italy. The 2-million-square-metre plant employed more than 50,000 workers at its height.
 3. *Battipaglia* A town near Salerno in Campania. In 1969 two people were killed during an uprising by almost half the town's population against plans to close the local tobacco and sugar plants.
 4. *Reggio* A general strike in Reggio Calabria in July 1970 over the decision to make Catanzaro the regional capital led to five days of street violence. The government sent 5,000 armed police and carabinieri. Blockades of road and rail links to the city continued for several months, causing considerable economic disruption in the south. Reggio's port was blocked, leaving ships idle in the Straits of Messina, and Italy's main north-south autostrada was cut. The uprising, largely condemned by the left, was taken over by activists from the neofascist MSI, and was put down in February 1971.
 5. *Raccomandazione* A word by the right person in someone's ear was often the only way to secure a job in Italy, regardless of qualifications. It continues to be a problem.
 6. *Camera del lavoro* The equivalent of Trades Hall, a regional centre for the unions.
 7. *Poveri ma belli* Dino Risi's 1957 film *A Girl in a Bikini*
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