

Nanni Balestrini



Carbonia (We Were All Communists)

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I actually went to work in the mines in Carbonia to run away from a girl I had got back from prison camp on August 29 I had got back home from Germany I had a bit of a holiday at home I was really emaciated I was really down I stayed at home all the time I didn't do anything I read some newspapers some books some stuff I found lying around I passed the time like that but then I needed money and I couldn't find any work

and so I went to sea I traveled around just about everywhere the first steamer I took was called the Gennargentu it did La Maddalena—Cagliari Cagliari—Palermo Palermo—Trapani it transported wine and passengers and that was the first steamer I went on it was a ship that used to go up and down the coast but now the war had destroyed almost all the ships and the crossings they made us do out there were real adventures once we went 36 hours without contact we ended up who knows where we were off Sicily and then a storm a terrible storm that lasted for days pushed us back toward Cagliari she was a really old ship the Gennargentu initially only used on the Palau—La Maddalena service a short trip but we had to do some real voyages with an old ship like the Gennargentu

I went on other steamers after that I was stopping off in La Spezia on July 14 and I was walking with some soldiers whose ship was in dry dock when a

ship is in dry dock if they lower the flag at the stern the ship is out of commission and when it's out of commission the crew goes to the barracks on land and they take everything down but when it's fit to sail even if it's in dry dock then there's still the radio and so at midday the captain receives the order to let the water back into the basin and set sail immediately and so the ship departed leaving nearly all the sailors on land apparently because the navy back in Rome had heard that something was happening apparently

shortly afterward the workers also received the news that there had been the assassination attempt on Togliatti and 13,000 workers walked out of the shipyards and the factories they all walked out and they crowded along the waterfront after a while a column of police arrived and was immediately attacked at three different points there was an enormous throng of people workers and sailors all together and all were in a fury the first five vans were rolled over and burned the police used their machine guns and two workers fell wounded but the police officers were immediately swept away and had one casualty and five wounded they ran away and barricaded themselves in the station they all ran away

the police force no longer existed the crowd assailed the offices of the DC and the Front of the Ordinary Man the doors and windows were smashed in people rammed them with tractors and then went in and destroyed everything red flags flew everywhere and all the roads were full of enraged people there were groups of workers and armed sailors wearing red neckerchiefs everywhere there was this great anger this desire to put an end to it once and for all and you could tell that the moment had come after all these years of defeats of disappointment of humiliation the moment had come to assert our will and we knew that this was what was trying to be done all over Italy assert our will

it was not because of Togliatti because Togliatti was only an opportunity because there'll be other leaders but everyone had started on their own accord to put an end to it once and for all and the partisan brigades had quickly reorganized weapons were seen everywhere even machine guns anti-tank guns everything was being pulled out but then the next day the PCI MPs arrived bringing orders to stop everything and that's how without an organization everything ended the weapons were laid down and everything ended all over Italy it ended with a lot of dead and wounded and a lot of people in prison that was my last crossing then I went to work in the mines my last crossing at sea

when this period here was over I went back to my hometown I didn't have a job for a while then a friend found me a job in Carbonia so I went there but before going to work in the mines I worked for a while in the woods planting trees for the Forestry Department it would take too long to say all that happened in that period anyway I went to Carbonia mainly because I

out they mustn't even get up the stairs at any cost that's what you need because otherwise all the rest is a waste of time because it's useless to carry out the struggle with sweet little smiles because the struggle's tough it's violent I say and I'll say it again struggle means war down to the last drop of blood it means diving into the fray not being afraid because otherwise it's all useless that is clear this is what everyone always has to get clear in their minds

because for example now here with this struggle for housing we know that we're acting against the institutions of the state against the institutions they've made to go against the proletariat we're acting against the laws they've made so they can exploit us more and more and we've teamed up against them to put an end to this abuse of power because we've had enough we've had enough of working like beasts for a pittance so that a few thousand people can get richer and richer we've had enough of them sending us to die in their construction sites in their factories and in their wars we've had enough of being herded around here and there prisoners in all these ghettos these fields these workhouses always prisoners of their shitty jobs

when there's a political struggle it has to be full-on when you do a sit-in in a building the people who do it have to know how to fight and there has to be a real battle when the police arrive the building has to become a fortress the police officers mustn't get in if they do it has to cost them dearly a lot of them have to go to hospital that's what it has to be like that's what the struggle is if we are eventually forced to leave the building can't be left in a livable condition for Christ's sake it has to be reduced to a pile of rubble this is what we have to leave behind us to let the bourgeois masters know that we'll take the houses otherwise it will go on like this forever they have to realize that

because there's no two ways about it this is the only method it has always been like this this is what I've learned from experience in all the struggles I have fought in my life over all these years because they're hardly willing to hand back what they've been stealing from us every day for so long they're hardly willing to hand it all back to us just like that because we've got nice smiles and there's no way you can think about making a deal here it's a matter of us or them and so it's about who wins and who loses it's like in all wars the side that wins is the one that fights the hardest that goes all the way that uses everything it has got we've lost many struggles and we'll lose others but we've also won some and we will keep fighting on and on because it's us we have to win in the end

had to get out of marrying this girl that's the truth in short this girl was expecting and I didn't have any money I didn't have a job I didn't have any prospects I was also really tense very touchy I had been like that since I had got back from prison I was like that

I wasn't very well I felt strange I was also drinking a lot if I didn't drink I couldn't have a good time I was always sad and it took years before I was really able to get over prison but the thing that really made me angry was the fact that when I got back to my hometown I found that there were still all these Fascists for example there were these people who used to play these Fascist records Faccetta Nera and songs like that there was a place where you could dance and all sorts of people used to dance there rich and poor there was a big hall and everyone used to go there then once there were some Fascists who played these records and I didn't want them to play those records

I told them not to play those records anymore but they played them again and so I went round there and I smashed all the records and the gramophone too I smashed all the equipment all of it into pieces out of anger I made a real mess that time my blood boiled when I heard something that had anything to do with fascism with Mussolini with all those things because I'd just got back from the prison camp in Germany there were three of us in my town who had been in the camps two had been with the Wehrmacht but me I had been with the SS and the SS was something totally different

and there I still found all those people who were in charge before half Fascist and half Christian Democrat as they are called now after the end of the war they had filled my head with all that stuff that everything had changed that there were no more bourgeois masters and that they shouldn't be in charge anymore and instead they were still there they had only changed from black to white but they were still in charge for Christ's sake and they were the ones who told me you are a Communist and so because I was a Communist in the town I couldn't find a job anymore and I had to leave my town because I was a Communist

but I had already become a Communist before Germany when I was sent to sea during the war in the navy because I had some mates who were Communists they were Genoese sailors and even though I was very young then I'd understood one thing I'd understood that we couldn't win the war because it didn't concern us that war was a war that the Fascists and the bourgeois masters made us fight that nobody wanted to fight and we had all understood that then as our navigation became more and more difficult and more and more dangerous the enemy airplanes could sink us whenever they wanted we no longer doubted that the war was by now lost nobody doubted it

once in Naples we were on the quay where there were the anti-aircraft batteries in Pozzuoli and there were some soldiers in these batteries who were

barefoot they only had some cloth wrapped round their feet and they came to us with their frightened thin faces asking for something to eat then I remembered when we had picked up some British pilots at sea who weren't in such a bad way because they were all well dressed with boots and they had enough to eat and so we wondered but how on earth can we win a war that nobody wants to fight and that we don't have the equipment for we don't have any of the things we need not even shoes we don't have anything

then once during the war I went back to my hometown for a few days when I was given leave because the ship had been bombed and partially destroyed and there in my town there were these Fascists who were still saying these things about winning and that we were going to win et cetera but I knew that that was only foolishness because by then I had realized that we were heading toward a rout that it was all over and that that was the best thing and then there was the fact that I knew I really hated the Germans for example when there were some of them on board with us I couldn't stand them I didn't like them they made me edgy I didn't like the way they behaved

one time for example when we were going to Tunisia we were going to Bizerte and there were seven or eight Germans and two who were engineer officers had embarked with some equipment that wasn't called radar back then but were those devices to see airplanes from a distance and these Germans were putting on airs they always kept to themselves but then when we were attacked by formations of American torpedo bombers and bombers and the bombs were hailing down all around us then these German engineers huddled there the whole time white as sheets and crying from fear hugging their equipment and this made us laugh in a way because we were hardened to those things in a way

I had made love to a girl and I cared about her I had met her when she was very young I was also really young back then she was a nice girl she had knitted me a sweater but I was very edgy back then because of the prison camp I had been in in Germany and in that period my situation was definitely not that of someone who was comfortable and had enough money to be able to get married I was penniless and jobless and it was to run away from that situation that I went to Carbonia but before that I had managed through a friend to find something to do on a farm in the woods planting trees for the Forestry Department in the woods

because her family was not badly off the girl's father used to be a marshal in the Forestry Department and they had their own house she was a student in fact now she's married to a doctor and she's happy but then the girl's brother who was a carabinieri found out where I was and came to the farm to see me but I immediately convinced her brother who had come with belligerent intentions all I did was take him to where I slept there in the wood and I asked him would you let your sister live here can't you see that I don't have anything I don't even have a bed here

commissioner said I want to negotiate but it was all a ruse we all knew that anyway it was an excuse to make them waste a little more time and not let them in while they thought they would be able to convince us to let them in

this is part of the instructions they have from headquarters that says try to negotiate first et cetera and then this commissioner came over and said I want to negotiate with the committee and then we all shouted we are the committee you can talk here in front of everyone if you've got something to say but he obviously didn't have anything to say or he got frightened and so he went back then all those police officers the hundreds of police officers pulled down the visors of their helmets and as we had had a bit of experience we realized this meant a charge pulling down your visor

they advanced with tear gas at the ready but they had to waste a fair amount of time to get through the barricades and in the meantime we went into the building and we put chains and padlocks on the doors and so they had to find some chain cutters to get in and this wasted loads more time when they eventually succeeded in climbing the stairs where there was the first flat they had to evict the door was blocked with furniture and everything and so they wanted to try talking again look we'll have to break the door down we will but none of us answered but insults rained down on them that's how we answered them

until the commissioner decided they had to enter and he had them break the door down but a small accident happened the door hit him on the head and he cut his head that started bleeding and so it took them until three in the afternoon to do one eviction from when they had left at eight in the morning and also that was when they had to go because they obviously have their hours too they should have done thirty evictions we saw the list they had and they only did one and so we'll talk about it again in May as they can't come back before then because that's what the law says they can't come back before then

and in the meantime the fight to reduce rents spread around the neighborhood and this struggle gave us the possibility to go to the houses of the proletariat and when you're there you can talk about communism you talk about the revolution you talk about the possibility of improving our conditions you make them realize that it depends on us to unite and fight together and when there's an organization that fights then the bourgeois masters have to evaluate the pros and cons before making a decision they have to think about it because generally no one really wants to sign to throw us out even if they can get anything they want from the police the courts the council the government with their billions they can get anything they want

when the police come to evict the fact is you all have to stick together and we have to get organized so that when the police officers arrive to kick us

the first thing we did was send two groups down to the barracks where they normally left from then we went and blocked several roads above all the railway bridge we put some tires across the road there we poured petrol on them and we set them all on fire with four five bottles that's to block the traffic and so you already start to make them waste time and so to begin with you do propaganda we also handed out flyers we explained to people that this struggle for our houses is a struggle that concerns the whole proletariat even if the motorists get angry when they see you blocking the road the motorists might set on you

and so when they arrived they found this incredible chaos of cars in a jam and it took them more than an hour to get across the bridge this was a victory because the most important thing when the police come is to make them waste a lot of time to begin with because they have a lot of evictions to carry out and if they waste time they can't do as many they can only do one or two because they can't do more than so many if they don't have enough time and we know that when they carry out an eviction they have to make a list of everything because you can demand a list of all the things in the flat from where you've been evicted you can demand that

for example when they went to carry out the eviction at Stefano's house he had a lot of books as he's a student and so he demanded they write down the title and the author of each book there were some books that he'd lent me and that I'd read like Ponte Rotto by Lazagna or A Journey to the Center of the Earth by Verne there was Vogliamo tutto and Germinal by Zola history books like Proletari senza rivoluzione by Del Carria and also La rivoluzione tedesca 1918-1919 and I also remember I minatori della Maremma by Bianciardi and Cassola and of course I remember his Toni Negri books

there was also the story of an underground explorer a speleologist that I had read there was an electric manual that was mine and also some Gordon Diabolik and Tex Willer comics and all the newspapers and magazines Potere operaio Lotta continua and Stefano wanted them to write everything down and it took them hours and so they only managed to evict him that time because they didn't have any more time to do any others anyway the police arrived in our neighborhood that morning all armed and kilted out for war there were probably 500 of them a whole convoy of vans and jeeps all of them had their shields their helmets and their rifles with tear gas ready for war

we had set up barricades in the neighborhood with pipes beams rubbish bins we had blocked the street in front of our building and it had gone ten by the time they managed to arrive there were all the families and many comrades who came from elsewhere behind the barricades and so when they arrived we started with the slogans and shouting at a certain point one of them a

in fact I didn't even have a bed I had laid two pieces of wood on the ground and put some branches and twigs on top of them and that's how I slept on those two pieces of wood I don't have no money I got nothing I told him I've got a job that just about gives me enough money to eat do you think it's right that your sister marries someone like me and comes to live in a place like this and then her brother the carabinieri lost all of his belligerent intentions and was apparently convinced and I worked in that wood for another six or seven months I worked for the Forestry Department planting trees all around there until I managed to find something better and I went to work in Carbosarda as they called it then the mines in Montecatini I went to work in the mines

but I didn't work as a miner for long only seven or eight days I went down there to dig I spoke a little German that I had picked up in Germany in the camp it wasn't like I spoke that well I got by and there were some German engineers in the mine who were putting in some new equipment and so for that reason and because during the war in the navy I had been an electrician they transferred me straightaway I was transferred to Seruci and there I worked a bit with those Germans and then they gave me shifts as an electrician down there in Seruci and since then I have always worked as an electrician and that's my job

I work as an electrician now too on the site where I'm working they're digging a tunnel in a hill where the Rome—Florence high-speed train will pass there's an enormous fully automated machine that digs into the hill and gives you a totally finished tunnel the American engineer told me that it's the biggest digger in the world it has a really long conveyor belt behind it that goes on forever the digger moves on its own it's all hydraulic it bores into the earth and digs out the whole height of the tunnel and the earth is automatically brought out and a space opens up inside the hill that is big enough to put the enormous cement arches that one after the other form the internal walls of the tunnel

there are the naphtha locomotives in the tunnel that take the carts back and forth it's hell the noise is dreadful the air is stifling it's worse than the black dust in the mines because of the smoke of the locomotives that are put under strain and that they hardly ever do maintenance it burns your eyes your throat your lungs and down there we earn 28 percent extra for working underground while you normally earn 48 percent because they say that it's an agricultural area there but it's not like we're planting potatoes and onions in the tunnel it's obvious that underground is the same thing in the city or in the country and so why shouldn't they give us 48 percent and that's why we're starting the struggle

to begin with there's the struggle for housing for the reduction of rent that has now spread to the whole neighborhood all you need to do here is look out of this window at the hideous houses in this neighborhood where

they make us live to see what the living conditions are all these buildings look like badly built army barracks without a certificate of occupancy they say that there's a slump and the rent we have to pay will go up but wages are very low and so it works out that they take back half of your wages just on rent that's why we are angry and have the hate we have and that's why we have to rebel against this state of things and first of all these pigs can forget about being able to carry on like this calmly stealing all this money from us and they can also forget about being able to throw us out of the houses when they want with their police

that's why here now with this housing problem I say to those who want to fool themselves by waiting for government intervention I say that the elections the governments the parties the unions are all just a total waste of time all our experience has taught us that there's only one way to solve our struggle and it is first of all that we all have to be united together in the struggle and then that we have to move forward with total determination and it has to be a violent struggle if we really want to win these are the three main rules that we have to always bear in mind and that we must never forget

this struggle in the district is a struggle of organization more than anything else it's not easy for it to become a violent struggle of the masses like what happened in the mines in Carbonia or like what happens in factories or in other places where the workers are compact it's a struggle that won't mean there'll be a big risk for us if it's well organized of course if they start using tear gas and beating people up we too know how to answer to that it's not like we'll just sit there and take a beating we also have what we need to defend ourselves and we know what to do we too know how to use violent means if they make us if it's necessary

after the struggle for liberation we didn't continue with the struggle we'd started to lay at least the foundations of communism instead nearly 30 years later we find that we are still like we were in '45 actually even further behind because back then there was the hope that things would change straightaway but now if you don't start a determined all-out struggle things will go on like this forever because those who are in charge today are the same for Christ's sake they've actually become stronger they're getting better organized while they first made us fight their war and then they got us to do their reconstruction and then their economic miracle all of which they kept for themselves and now we have to bear the brunt of their oil crisis and so we always get it rammed up our asses

when there was the war I went into the military I went into the navy I had fought in the war until my steamer was broken in two by the bombs just off Pizzo Calabro and that's how it caught fire it was a cargo steamer that hauled goods to Messina by which time Sicily had been occupied by the Allies and the Germans crossed the strait in Bette MZs they wanted to establish a

hook and I slit their throats and of all the meat on the whole animal we only ate the legs we roasted them on the barbecue in the garden they were big fat sheep like rams the rest we threw away and in winter I used to throw them in the wood burner my wife reminds me of that sometimes here in Italy now that things are like this sometimes she reminds me

there's an economic slump at the moment the bourgeois masters sometimes cause them to recover the money we've managed to get with our struggles there was a hot autumn bitter struggles and we'd managed to extract a little money a small wage increase but that hasn't lasted they took advantage of the war between Egypt and Israel the oil crisis and there's also Berlinguer who's taking advantage of the coup in Chile to make the Historic Compromise and preach austerity but prices are rising people are angry they don't see why it should always only be the workers who have to pay and so the struggle is spreading outside the factories a struggle for rent for bills for everything the struggle's spreading

there's revolt in the air everywhere young people have realized things have to change that we can no longer trust the old windbags on the Left who only want to make deals with the bourgeois masters so they too can finally get a bit of power and in the meanwhile give the powers that be a hand who use terrorism against the young people who are rebelling against them using bombs shooting them in marches and demonstrations but strikes and sit-ins are breaking out everywhere anyway people have realized we can't go on like this that the time has come to change that we have put up with it for too long and nobody believes that the parties the institutions can improve their lives anymore we have to do it ourselves all together everywhere to improve life

it all started here when this bourgeois landlord decided to increase the heating bill from 3,500 to 9,000 lira without an explanation without giving any notice my wife went there to pay the rent and they told her no Madam you don't have to pay 38 but you have to pay 43 and then she asks why because you do because the heating has gone up so then I made the decision and I didn't pay anything I'm not going to pay the heating for starters and then we'll see and then I talked to some other people who had done the same thing and so we started to get organized and then we extended the struggle from the heating to the reduction in rent until the evictions started with the police who came to carry out the evictions

when they came here the last time it was October and we were ready we knew they had to come we worked hard for two nights and we were all ready that morning at six o'clock we had prepared everything to block them chains to lock the gates tires bottles and all that stuff I didn't go to work that morning none of the workers went to work that morning so they could defend their houses we'd contacted a lot of comrades who came from outside to picket and so that morning everything was ready we waited for them with the pickets

perforates the wall and doesn't let the dust that gets into your lungs spread they don't have anything

on the other hand in Australia there are the Aborigines and the Americans control the whole area of Australia where there are the Aborigine reserves that are like those they made for the American Indians but they've discovered oil nickel uranium and all that stuff in these reserves so now they've rounded up these poor wretches and told them you have to leave here now go somewhere else and so if they discover oil for example in this other place they'll send them away from that other reserve hoping that in the meantime they'll have all died like they did with all the American Indians

and in fact if we look at the Australian population now we can see that there were several million Aborigines in Captain Cook's day and now there are no more than 10 or 20 thousand abandoned on the reserves decimated by TB and other diseases without schools and there's very little possibility of integration only very few of them can go to school and that only serves to serve the white master better and they teach them to write sitting on the floor so that when they write it looks like they are bowing and all this is in a very rich country that could really be heaven for everyone as it's a very rich country

just look at how the people live in the hills near Durban for example and everywhere else in this country that is one of the richest countries in the world in a country that is so rich that wheat is burned so as not to lower the price where cows die in their thousands in Queensland because nobody wants to keep them anymore and nobody buys them because in Australia they've got milk and butter coming out of their ears there and sheep's wool they export some of it but they've got too much meat and they spend millions to burn the rabbits with airplanes with this enormous abundance that's frightening with all this waste why for crying out loud do the Aborigines have to starve with this enormous abundance

because even if there in Australia I earned loads more than I do here with the job I had as an electrician in a company that did wiring and where for example after a while I bought myself another house by the sea in Landmark one of the nicest parts of Sidney that I sold for 18,000 dollars later before I came back here and I had a car and a motorboat there but there's no comparison no connection between all that money and the wealth that you saw all around you that came from our work and that wealth was wasted and even burned so it couldn't be given to those who were starving they even burned it

I would go out in my car on Sundays sometimes and go to the country I bought myself two sheep for a dollar then in the garden I had a back garden in my house where the kids played I hung them up on a tree by their legs on a

bridgehead in Calabria but there was the Anglo-American aviation that had absolute dominion above them and then there was the fact that the Italian troops were in complete disarray which we could plainly see all around us and nobody wanted to carry on with that war we could plainly see that all around us

we had departed from Genoa we went to La Spezia then we stopped in Salerno where there had just been the heavy bombardments of Battipaglia and Salerno and it was totally deserted there wasn't anybody around you didn't see a soul in the streets in all of Salerno there was only a brothel open with two women inside then we found an abandoned little boy in a garden we gave him something to eat we brought him on board we wanted to take him with us but the commander didn't want us to then there was also a small fire on the ship but anyway we managed to depart and from then onward there was endless fighting airplanes repeatedly attacked us until they hit us in Pizzo Calabro and there the ship was hit

we were in a convoy there were four or five steamers but we sailed separately for example in Salerno there were two steamers the other two arrived the next day we were armed with small-bore guns and machine guns but they weren't any good only one steamer had a four-barreled German machine gun that was any good and when we reached Pizzo Calabro which is in front of Messina right there in front of the lighthouse there is a mountain and the Hurricanes came down from there they were the most feared fighter planes they were British fighter-bombers and they came from the part of the mountain where the sun was and they dived down and dropped their bombs from 400 meters they were bombs with fuses that made them explode when they reached a certain height

they were bombs that were mainly used to demoralize the ships' crews but also to decimate them and they did kill and wound a lot of us then they hit the ship the ship was hit but it didn't sink and then it was towed away and then I don't know what happened to it what I do know is what happened to me I was wounded by the shrapnel that hit me here in my arm and also here in my thigh back then only the seriously wounded stayed in Messina me well they put me on a Red Cross train that was in a tunnel in Pizzo Calabro they put me on that Red Cross train

they took me up to Tuscany to the Regina Elena hospital near Torre del Lago and so the war ended for me but I had made a lot of crossings to Tunisia Africa Corsica Greece Sardinia and bombardments and torpedo attacks were the order of the day wherever I had been there was not one convoy that arrived as it had left because there were terrible spies everywhere for example if you went to a brothel in Greece or Tunisia and when you were in there a whore would ask you where are you from ah you're on such and such a ship and so when are you leaving and so they always had the information they needed and the convoys were always attacked especially when America entered the war

they had an enormous air force and we were always attacked

there was absolute poverty in Greece I saw a place where they lit a bucket of oil and put it in the middle of the square and everyone went there to get a light because they didn't even have matches but despite everything I saw that the Greeks didn't really hate the Italians like I saw later when I went to Australia where I met some Greeks who didn't have it in for the Italians because they looked at it like this like the French did and all the other countries that we had occupied they thought that if there were the Germans instead of the Italians it would be much worse it's better to have the Italians otherwise it would be much worse

for instance if the Germans found some graffiti on a house they got the owner and shot him on the spot but the Italians would just say listen get rid of it at worst they put him inside for a bit but then they would let him go they didn't torture him but the Germans no the Germans would get the Greeks and torture them and then they would just disappear and then for example they would round up twenty or thirty girls and they would take them to their brothels behind the lines the Italians had their brothels but the women there were Italians in the Italian brothels

then there in the hospital in Torre del Lago they had to cut into my thigh because of the shrapnel that had ended up inside me and my leg had swollen up so big and it was all blue I've still got a piece of shrapnel from the bomb I kept it it was right here where I've got this scar and that's why they cut into my thigh and then they sewed me up and anyway I was better off in there it was a huge hospital where the wounded soldiers came from all over the place at the front there was a long beach that went all the way to Massa Carrara and that's where I stayed for almost three months I mean July August and September of '43 and I went swimming in the sea it was lovely there the beach and I liked swimming in the sea

it happened when September 8 came I was still in the hospital in Torre del Lago and there was an incredible amount of confusion everywhere and we were all in disarray when the King and all of them escaped and the officers had thrown away their uniforms they were in mufti and all they thought about was escaping and even the ones who were wounded tried to escape by motorcycle on foot by any means they could and there were a whole load of soldiers left to their own devices and then some Fascist officers who wanted to recruit soldiers arrived but hardly anyone paid any attention to them so they left because no one paid them any attention

then a lot of anti-Fascists started appearing among the soldiers and officers and there were also a lot of anarchists from around there especially from Carrara many of them had spent many years inside and they had been freed from prison that had been opened in fact the first anarchist I came into contact with

they lowered the stuff down the shafts with ropes in Sebariu they had also dug some tunnels that went 50 or 60 meters outside the perimeter fence and had put some explosives there and so when the police armored cars arrived and were above them they let the charges off and the armored cars were blasted into the air when they let the charges off

and that's how we won in the end because you only win if you fight and that's how we made sure that nobody could be sacked anymore there in Carbonia and there was written in the agreement that was made that if someone wanted to leave and he had a family they'd give him two million and if he didn't they'd give him one million I couldn't put up with that life in the tunnels anymore I didn't feel like I was cut out to work underground forever in those five years I'd done too much for too little money and now I wanted to change and so I went to Australia and during the trip on the ship there was a terrible storm during the trip to Australia

when the ship passed through Aden which was a British colony back then I saw the pitiful conditions in which the people there lived just then a truck passed to pick up the corpses from the streets and it was the same when I came back from Australia years later this time coming round the other way and I saw Panama which is controlled by the Americans there are the American districts where they live like kings where the multinationals and banks have their enormous offices while the rest of the population is wretched and is only there to work as domestic servants I saw that people all over the world are divided into two categories those who are on the top and those who are on the bottom and there are these two categories everywhere

I reached Perth a city in Australia and the first thing I bought myself in Australia was a house a hovel that I did up myself and I divided it into two flats there was a bricklayer who helped me and I helped him I did his wiring for him we helped each other then I let the other flat to a Chinaman and I had some friends there who were Australian but racist and once I hit one of them who was called Bill with a shovel and I broke two of his ribs he was drunk and he'd insulted me because I had this Chinaman in my house he'd insulted me and called me a Dago and all that sort of thing because I had this Chinaman in my house

I couldn't stand these racist things even though they were nothing like what I saw when they sent me to work in a place in South Africa where every year 6,000 blacks die of silicosis because they've worked in the mines gold mines diamond mines coal mines where thousands die every year I saw them there in the mountains those people they recruit from all over the place from Tanzania Zambia they bring them in and after two years they're like corpses they send them down the mines 3,000 meters underground and they don't give a damn about anything when they go down they don't have protective masks they don't have water-jet drills that is the tube that sprays water on the bit that

everyone realized we needed to make sure that machines didn't reduce the number of men and that nobody was sacked because otherwise it would be the same for everyone one at a time and so the strike was first for one day then for three days then as long as twenty days nearly a whole month without going down the shafts then we occupied the shafts the internal commission decided that the last shift that ends at midnight shouldn't come up but had to stay underground and the next shift instead of going underground would stay outside and block the road to the police who will arrive en masse sooner or later but they found the road blocked

in spite of the secret the police found out straightaway from the guards from the snitches because the mine is like a big resonance box and it's difficult not to be overheard and police reinforcements immediately arrived there was always loads of police and carabinieri in Carbonia there was a mobile battalion there permanently with armored trucks with caterpillar tracks with all those gizmos they have and they walked up and down the streets of Carbonia with their haversacks full of bombs with their helmets and their submachine guns with their fingers on the trigger they walked up and down the streets of Carbonia

a few days later they turned up en masse at the mine and they tried to provoke us to enter but they were pushed back forcefully and so for several days they tried to surround the shafts so provisions couldn't reach those who were underground but all the miners from the other shifts were there on the surface to prevent this and there were some violent clashes that lasted for hours they even used weapons bursts of rifles and submachine guns their armored cars charged us to break us up but we charged them too we were well organized in teams with stones pickaxes and explosives we were all well organized

afterward they started arresting some miners they had taken photographs of during the clashes for example when the general manager was taken and hung upside down they had secretly photographed the comrades who were there and so they could identify the comrades with the photos that was the only way they managed to do it but they weren't able to all the time because if when they arrested someone and took him straight to Buoncammino that's the prison in Cagliari then they got away with it but if they took him to the prison in Carbonia we went there and we made them let him out of the prison in Carbonia straightaway

the women brought pasta bread cheese to be taken down and there were people who stayed underground for many days in the mine to occupy the shaft towers we managed to get them some stuff to eat through the abandoned shafts that the miners who had built them knew well they knew the mines like the backs of their hands because they had built the mines and

was one who had a duff leg he had been wounded in Spain in the International Brigades I was just a boy and I didn't really understand all that political stuff then but anyway everyone was with these anti-Fascists and they'd had enough of the Fascists the Germans the war everyone had had enough

this anarchist with the duff leg had come to the hospital with some others and I and a lot of others followed him they'd told us to go to the mountains with them to fight against fascism and so we went to the mountains loads of people went there we walked up paths for ages and when we got to the mountains I found there was already a lot of other people there were soldiers from all divisions Alpini the air force the navy and there were workers and farmers we were in the mountains above Massa Carrara near Marinella up there in the mountains

in the meantime the Germans had arrived there too and had occupied the whole area along the coast they were digging holes for their machine guns all over the place and there were tanks near the hospital the Germans needed to control the area because their columns had to pass through there to go down to Calabria where the front was and so the first house-to-house sweeps started there were some fierce clashes in the mountains the Germans massacred many of us they hung those they captured by the feet and they doused them in petrol and then they set them alight for Christ's sake they set them alight like that

there were more than 400 of us there above Massa Carrara we stayed in farmers' houses and in their stables and the officers organized us we did drills and many went on missions laying mines under bridges setting ambushes and many died we weren't a partisan organization yet but there was talk about the Garibaldi division and you started to see red neckerchiefs round people's necks all this lasted a month and a half then one day they came en masse the Germans and Fascists made a massive sweep and a good many of us were caught a few escaped they shot a lot of them only a few managed to escape

2

the Germans first took us to a place that was a children's summer camp then they loaded us onto some army trucks and took us to a town where there was a sawmill with a big fence round it which as the days passed filled up with people with disbanded soldiers or people who had gone up to the mountains and the Germans brought everyone they found to that sawmill surrounded by machine guns on the roofs and closed behind a big gate with

an armored car in front and we spent many days there outside day and night without knowing what was going to happen to us for many days

we slept on the ground and there was hardly anything to eat every morning we expected them to come and take us up before the firing squad but just one person came and took someone off for interrogation mainly those who they knew were officers there were also some ass-licking Fascists with the Germans whom we feared more than the SS because they wanted to get noticed by them at all costs and in fact they did during the interrogations that they carried out in a house nearby many of the people they took didn't come back or they came back all beaten up

and there were rumors that stopped us sleeping well we heard they were going to bump us all off nobody could forget that when they'd captured us they had put a good many of us in front of a rock in a quarry and then they shot them at point-blank range but they were obviously waiting to round up others they wanted to get a fair number to ship out when we arrived at the sawmill there were almost 150 of us nearly all soldiers but then the courtyard had kept filling up day and night there were many wounded soldiers and they told of terrible things but that they weren't that different from the stories we had to tell because terrible things had happened to everyone

all the people around there were very sympathetic toward us but we were a long way from the town and it wasn't easy to help us very much but they always managed to get something to us to eat and some bottles of wine and it was there that I ate German black bread for the first time they gave one loaf for every four of us and it wasn't enough of course and we complained but later there were even worse things in store for us and even more indescribable suffering and in the meanwhile hate began to grow in me a new emotion that at that young age I had never felt about anyone before I had fought in the war against the Allies who had wounded me but I had never felt like that about them what I felt about those German pigs and those filthy Fascists I had never felt like that about anyone

at about five on the evening before departing a Blackshirt and some other Fascist buffoons come and say that we can redeem ourselves and enlist with the fascists otherwise we'll have to face the consequences nobody moves and nobody joins them instead we hurl words like murderous pigs ass-licking sellouts at them they leave immediately and the German guards fire some rounds with their submachine guns to regain order there's a deathly silence in the courtyard until at about nine in the evening we hear a shout in German and they pile into the middle of the camp and they use brute force and the butts of their machine guns to get us to line up in fours and then they start the count as we're lined up in fours

then in groups of fifty they make us march toward a small station that was a kilometer and a half away and they push us inside the cattle wagons with kicks and the butts of their machine guns when they close the doors we're crammed in

long because they soon realized that when there was a strike there was a strike and that's it and they didn't try anymore and so when there was a strike there was a strike for everybody and that's it

until then when there was blasting you shoveled the coal by hand with shovels then they decided to make Seruci a model mine and Seruci was totally mechanized instead of the cars that are the small wagons that bring the coal to the surface they put a one forty conveyor belt where all the coal from the mine went then it is tipped down a chute into a car that sets off automatically when it's full and goes up and dumps its load and then comes back down before you needed 40 or 50 or perhaps even more people to do all this because the cars had to be taken into the cage and there were the cagers on the level there was a man who hooked it up and there was a man who unhooked it up at the surface and the same thing was repeated when it went down

but with the new automated systems with all this mechanization that has spread everywhere now and that creates so much unemployment because instead of allowing people to work half as much it serves to sack half of the people and the other half works more than before and so the mine yields more and the profits double as they indeed did actually the profits tripled and so they decided that they could run the mine with 1,500 workers instead of 4,000 and so all this mechanization all this whole automation is only good for sacking people and increasing the bourgeois owners' profits so what do we care about progress it's better for us to keep using wheelbarrows we can't do anything with progress

it's not that I don't care about progress it's not that I want to use a wheelbarrow but wheelbarrows give me a job and let me stay here I do want progress though and I want more and more of it because I don't want to break my back with a wheelbarrow anymore progress for man should mean you don't have to do shit jobs anymore and letting you work less but if this progress only means putting more money in the bourgeois owners' pockets and taking it from me then I'll oppose it because I should be paid the same to work less because progress has to benefit those who work letting them do less laborious work and making their life better this is why there has to be progress

when the coal was shoveled by hand you needed a lot of miners it was essential then but once they'd put the mechanical diggers and all that they only needed two instead of four because two could sort out and watch the belts or do other things but what were they to do with the other miners what could the others do they had to sack them of course so we immediately opposed this decision we said no that we don't agree that these two have to leave there was a meeting and at this meeting the majority of miners decided to intervene that is an all-out strike that's what the majority of miners decided

receipts and the scams that were inside everything was blown up

I learned a lot from the struggle in Carbonia for example I learned we could only count on our own strength in fact who had helped us with our struggle in Carbonia nobody absolutely nobody the people who solved the struggle were the miners the women their children all the people in Carbonia and how did they solve it they solved it against the police against the carabinieri against the police vans against the armored cars using every type of struggle and every type of weapon they could from knives to gelatin there were some arrests there were some people who ended up in prison or in the hospital some died but we always got what we wanted because we took what we wanted

the struggle in Carbonia succeeded because the people there were united and they said without thinking about the president of the republic or anything else they said our enemies are the bourgeois masters the capitalists who use their armed forces against us and so we all have to fight against them and win and this we did in Carbonia twenty years ago where the only thing missing was a spark to set it off where we were all Communists we were a compact working class because everyone lived in the mine here there are small-shop owners there are pensioners there are office workers in the neighborhood now but they too have to realize that this struggle to lower rents that we're carrying out is also in their interests and that their problems and needs are the same as the problems and needs of everybody else

4

there was the great strike in Carbonia after the introduction of mechanical diggers because they thought they could clear the face after blasting with two people instead of four and the Sicilians had been blackmailed so they wouldn't participate in the strike they were afraid of losing their jobs the sulfur mines were in crisis and this was their only hope we managed to talk to them and convince a lot of them and those who we couldn't talk round we convinced with force because we had some ways that were very convincing

when there was the strike in Carbonia we didn't let the coaches leave we went there and punctured the tires with sharp bits of metal or we used other violent methods but there were these scabs who said we can go by bicycle or we can go by motorbike there were never many of them 30 or 40 in all but there was a bridge that you had to cross and so we put a steel cable across the bridge and so when they arrived they ended up falling off then these scabs were singled out and at night we got involved in some stabbings but that didn't last

like sardines and we stayed in that position for four days and four nights without eating without anything without opening the wagon doors with all the hygienic problems you can imagine and four died in my wagon during the journey they only opened the doors of the wagons once at the border at Brennero but only to let some SS collaborationist sellouts on Russian Lithuanian Polish Hungarians who plundered us of our money watches of all the few miserable things they had left us with when we departed they plundered everything we had

we reach the station of Bremervörde on a railway siding set aside for goods and when they finally open the doors and the guards angrier than ever make us get out it's dark but this doesn't stop us from seeing some sacks of potatoes we manage to pick up a few and they are like steaks to us then they make us line up and we form a really long column many were struggling to stand on their feet we found out later that the last ten wagons that had remained closed behind of us were full of Jews I didn't know what it meant to be Jewish then or what it meant for the Germans but I found out what immediate elimination meant soon enough while there was a long agony for us perhaps worse than the Jews' fate the long agony that awaited us

we reach the camp after a four-hour march and I receive my first butt from a rifle from one of the German military police we arrive in this immense camp where the people looked at us with indifference they'd got used to seeing these new arrivals it didn't take long to realize that there was very little human nature left in the people there they were like human larvae all dressed the same with striped clothes the thing that struck me most when we got closer to them was their skinniness and the dazed and lost look in their eyes they spoke but nobody understood them there was only one German Protestant priest who spoke to us and he told us that our huts were only transitory and that in the last three years they had been filled and emptied many times in the last three years

so it seemed logical for us to ask where they'd gone when they'd left he made a gesture with his hand and pointed to a corner at the far end of the camp and then made another gesture in the air it was all clear in fact the next morning at six that was as cold as midwinter once they had assembled us we saw some prisoners carrying some stretchers coming out of the huts there were some completely naked corpses on them and they set off escorted by some SS guards toward that place the Protestant priest had pointed to at the far end of the camp where there was nothing other than an enormous mass grave many of my comrades from that train would end up filling it with what remained of their bodies and also many comrades from other trains

life in the camp at Bremervörde started at five-thirty in the morning in North Pole-like temperatures gathering naked in front of the but ordered to wash without soap and to dry yourself with a towel that seemed like it was made from steel the SS came to watch and check whether each of us had washed with the freezing water it was a good excuse to start meting out their

sadistic methods on people who were by then defenseless by then reduced to a heap of skin and bones with hardly the will to continue with a life that sooner or later would lead to the end of each of us either death from starvation and disease or beaten to death this would be the end of each of us

sometimes those bastards came into the huts and they shook us in our beds to see who was still alive they walked in front of the rows of bunk beds with three or four levels with torches but it was worse when we had to wake up our companions who were reduced to skeletons with the fear of seeing whether they would wake up or not or when they said I feel too weak or sick to get up so then you tried to convince them to pluck up the courage and muster all their strength because otherwise it meant it was their death sentence if they didn't muster all their strength

but perhaps these companions were the bravest because even though they knew what it would mean for them they waited for the end with resignation in fact one of the rules of the camp was that when someone stayed in bed sick the jailers came and picked him up and took him away to the hospital from which nobody ever recovered or came back in fact they gave them some injections or they were gassed or hanged but not with a rope but just with a hook like the ones butchers use for hanging lambs and other animals they hung them up by the neck with a hook like that

once a Neapolitan had stolen a potato so they made all of us jump around like frogs for hours until we collapsed exhausted in the mud and snow then they dealt with the Neapolitan who even though he was all black-and-blue from the beating they gave him one eye dangling from its socket his head a swollen mass with pieces of his scalp hanging off and a tattered ear he could still stand the SS did their torturing well and in the end they killed him with a shower first they put him completely naked under freezing water then under boiling water we heard his screams his face contort his body writhe in pain begging for mercy but there was no mercy

other than Germans there were a good many Hungarian Russian and Polish collaborationists among those pigs all delinquents and murders real sadists sick people the one I best remember a certain Ralik a Prussian farmer two meters tall a madman who cracked people's heads against fence poles and fired his submachine gun in the huts when he was drunk another episode I'll never forget is that of a certain Menicale from the Alpini Brigade Tridentina he was a giant of a man and when he had soup he would never use a spoon he took the bowl in his hands that were like shovels despite his skinniness and he drank it as if it were a cup of coffee in his big hands like shovels

the cruelest death was perhaps his there were some cement sentry boxes around the camp to stop any potential escapes by prisoners and after having tortured him they put him with his shattered ribs and other parts of his body

he touched the wires he got a shock and was glued to them like that as soon as he touched the wires

he left with his eyes bulging out of their sockets his tongue had gone all yellow in fact there were 500 volts but he had a narrow escape but he didn't come back to work with me and then they questioned me but I had quickly put the fuses that I had got out of his pocket back and so when they questioned me I told the engineer that you could see that he wasn't any good as an electrician you could see that he had forgotten to take the fuses out because all this didn't happen if you took the fuses out

as for the guards the first warning we gave the guards who bothered us was this when a guard threatened any of the miners or if they handed out a letter of punishment later when we got out of the shaft instead of going to hand in our lamps we lined up we stood in two rows one on one side and one on the other side so that when the guard came out he had to go down the middle of the two rows and then we started pushing him we shoved him down the line bouncing him from one side to the other kicking him in the shins and punching him and sometimes even worse than kicking and punching him

this was just a warning and if he didn't understand that that was a warning then we passed to heavier tactics for example once they found this one guard who had fallen down between two cars nobody knew how it had happened they found him with all his ribs fractured both legs broken and all that and he had to use crutches the rest of his life .0 he did and they never even found some others because a section of the gallery caved in and it just so happened that they were right in that section of gallery that caved in

then there's the story of this Martineddu the story of this swindle he had set up in Carbonia with this Buoni Fidus thing this Buoni Fidus was a real swindle for the workers and you know why because the workers who had some problems who needed money went there and they lent them some money but all this was a scam organized by this company of crooks that this Martineddu had set up in Carbonia and the management of the mines so it was the same bunch of crooks who took advantage of the workers twice the same crooks

in fact what did the workers do when they needed money they went to this Martineddu who gave them a loan for example he gave them 50 thousand lira cash 100 thousand lira or whatever they wanted but this money because of an agreement with the management was then deducted from their wages but these loans never ended because on top of the money they had borrowed they had to pay extortionate interest that the miners had no chance of understanding the whys and hows of and after a while the interest rates went through the roof and if you didn't pay it was all over and so one night the building where Buoni Fidus and Martineddu had their offices was blown up thanks to four sticks of gelatin one for each corner with all the papers and

impose its will and the guards couldn't use the stick anymore if they did they wouldn't be able to tell how it would end because there are cave-ins that just happen in the mine and then there are those that you can make happen and then nobody says anything and so they had to be very careful now that they could no longer dictate things saying do this otherwise I'll sack you because there was this mass that had now succeeded in imposing how work should be done and in putting an end to the orders all those orders and with working more and more it had succeeded in putting an end to all that

here in Carbonia for example when there was a comrade they wanted to get rid of the bourgeois owners used these methods here for example they put a new guy who had come from another mine or from some other part with this comrade and his job was none other than to get the comrade to fight down there because if that happened there was this hard-and-fast rule down there that when two people get into a fight underground or if they have matches they are sacked on the spot and not even the union can do anything about it because there's an agreement about these things between the union and the management and the union can't do anything about it

even though these things often happen underground two people getting into a fight because a miner's job is hard and a man may get mad sometimes and two people might give each other a black eye or a fat lip but you never grass on anyone you say you bumped into a prop and then you're mates again just like before but if it happens in front of the engineer for example then he sacks you and so what happened well if you had a fight with one of those then he grassed on you and you got sacked but he didn't because he was a Fascist and he was simply sent back to the mine where they'd brought him in from because he was a Fascist

it happened to me once too they put a new guy with me to do that to get me into a fight and so I used my method that is as I'm an electrician that's my job I used this method here that is when we had to switch the current off we electricians other than putting the switches in the open position we also took the fuses out for greater safety because someone might go there and pull the handle and so we also took out the fuses that make a bridge for the current to go through and it goes into the circuit but if you put any sort of bridge a wire for example instead of the fuse then it's practically like you never took it out if you put a wire for example

then what happened well I realized that this guy they had put with me wanted to play some dirty tricks on me I didn't trust him I said to myself this guy here could switch on the current while I'm working he was a dogged sort he hated me and I naturally felt the same about him and so once while he was working he happened to touch the wires even though he wasn't worried because he'd taken out the fuses and put them in his pocket but as soon as

broken inside one of these sentry boxes his agony lasted four days you could hear his moans all night and given his build it seemed like he would never die until one day we didn't hear him anymore and we all stood to attention for him when we came back into the camp the German pigs went crazy and to get their own back they made us stand outside at the entrance of the camp under the rain with our hands behind our heads for the usual inspection under the downpour for hours and hours out there under the downpour

they always carried out these inspections and if they found anything on anyone they would shoot him on the spot or torture him but despite these inspections I had succeeded in bringing into the camp some maps rolled up under the belt of my trousers but that happened later it happened at Kiel where I was lucky enough to be transferred after Bremervörde to work in a Straflager as they called it we were mainly used to set bombs off we were divided into teams for example Russian prisoners who had rebelled or French partisans or Polish partisans and everyone were under the direct control of the SS or the control of the Gestapo

divided into these teams they sent us all around outside after bombing raids to set the unexploded bombs off he had to dig around the bombs with a shovel then put blasting gelatin with a detonator they attached the wires to an electric detonator they pushed it and made the bomb blow up many of us died because there were some bombs with delayed fuses that blew up after a while but they said not to worry because if they were American bombs they wouldn't explode because the German emigrants who worked in the American factories put straw instead of explosives inside but they were all lies because many of us were blown up by those bombs that didn't explode but many of us were blown up

in the end the Germans made themselves some shelters covered with six and a half meters of cement that bombs couldn't penetrate and that's why the Americans invented bunker bombs that have I don't know how many atmospheres of air closed up inside and they tried to drop them in front of the camouflaged shelters which were enormous lumps seen from the air and these bombs released their energy inside the shelters and the people died everyone died but in a terrible way air exploded in their lungs you found them with broken noses blood coming out of their mouths but we were happy that those bloody Germans died in fact we finished killing them ourselves for Christ's sake without letting ourselves be seen by those bloody Germans

then when the all-clear siren sounded they took us and made us climb into trucks and they took us to pick up the corpses this was also one of the jobs that our teams had to do we piled the dead into the trucks then we took them to a big pit and they too ended up in a mass grave I changed camps many times American bombs destroyed the first Bremervörde killing almost everyone who was there then those who were left took us to an old school an

enormous building that was full of Russian and Polish prisoners and there was another bombardment there that night and 6,000 Poles died and the SS didn't have any bunkers and barbed wire there and when the school started to collapse the Russian prisoners leaped on the SS and they butchered them and they all escaped into the woods after having butchered the SS

in the camp near Kiel they had taken a photo of each of us with a number in front and behind I was in but 13B and that was camp number 1,439 it was a huge camp then they gave us a uniform with stripes with KGF written on it and they shaved a cross into our hair so they could recognize us even if we escaped and they made me start work in a factory in Kiel as an electrician that's my job German industry needed workers and I worked at the Krupp Germaniawerft where they repaired submarine and tank engines and all types of engines at the beginning I repaired electric drills later I also repaired all sorts of big motors

they woke us up at four they made us line up and every morning we walked two and a half hours there and two and a half hours back in the evening the camp was fifteen kilometers away and we worked fourteen hours it was warm there inside the factory and you didn't have a submachine gun pointed at the back of your head I was better off than my companions who worked outside in the open and they're all dead the ones who had to dig holes and the rubble after the bombing outside in the cold in worn-out clothes wooden clogs and an empty belly and then there was the fact that the surveillance in the factory was a little looser even though the head of the department was a Nazi delinquent but there was less repression in the factory there was less surveillance

I met that German worker there who was a comrade because there were some German Communists who helped us a lot even though there was tight control by the Gestapo they kept us up-to-date with the Allied advance where the troops were and when there had been the landings and the time they'd tried to assassinate Hitler and then there was also an organization the Russian officers who were prisoners had formed in the camp near Kiel by then we knew the Russian troops would soon arrive and I gave the Russians the messages the German comrade gave me in the factory once I even took some maps rolled up under the belt of my trousers into the camp I managed to get them into the camp

when we were in the room where the motors were tested where there was a terrible noise and when the boss was not there the German comrade made signs to me then he left the messages in the rubbish bin and I went over and picked them up and took them back to the camp he treated me badly in front of everyone else but then he would leave a hunk of bread in the rubbish bin for me and we even managed to talk sometimes when the head wasn't there once he showed me a photo where you could see armed workers and sailors he

what it was like many Sardinians died in Marcinelle and in the other mines too many Sardinians died

the last method they devised to reduce our numbers was to choose fifteen or twenty from each shift from each of the shafts that at the end of the month added up to a very large number and at the end of the month when one of these knocked off from his shift and went to give back his lamp they handed him his medal and a letter that said from this moment your employment underground at the mine has been terminated they gave every cageload of miners that came up one or two of these letters and they made them work outside instead of underground and maybe that guy felt happy for a while to be working outside

but then the second letter arrived soon after it said that unfortunately due to health reasons or reduction of personnel depending on the occasion it said that their indefinite contract with the company had been terminated and after a few more days the third letter arrived which informed him that he had to leave his house because the house was owned by the company they only gave him two days to move out they didn't give any severance pay they didn't give anything but this only lasted a few months because the struggle began we stopped it with our struggle

first of all we brought the few people they had managed to evict to the center of Carbonia that was called Red Square in front of the church where there are the porticos and the town hall we brought them there with all their bags and all their stuff and their children under the porticos we prevented the others from being evicted with violent fighting with the police it was in the Scelba period and other than the permanent mobile battalion Cagliari had also sent a battalion of select carabinieri who were all a load of Fascist criminals and they beat up and massacred everyone women and children but we faced them with sticks of gelatin with bombs and the whole works and some people were killed and there were loads of wounded and also some people were killed

in Red Square between the market and the Centrale Hotel there was a great clash we had organized ourselves into teams with all sorts of weapons with bombs rifles knives and gelatin et cetera and so they had to retreat because they saw that the whole town was involved in the battle everyone fought with the miners shoulder to shoulder and so they realized that it would be impossible for them to win against the whole town unless they destroyed it like the Germans did but it wasn't worth their while they realized that there was nothing they could do with the miners and so they had to retreat because they realized that there was nothing they could do

they wanted to break this great mass of politicized miners but they couldn't just sack this mass whenever they felt like it now that it had been able to

lived together there in Carbonia but there were some people who had problems with that and always hassled me but we eventually sorted all that out once we went to Cagliari we made everyone think that we had gone to Cagliari to get married but all we did in Cagliari was get a wedding ring I bought it and slipped it on her finger and so when we returned everyone called her my missus and nobody hassled us anymore me and my missus

I went to the beach to get away from that dark and dismal atmosphere in Carbonia that was always full of smoke the trees and everything were a dull gray and like wilted and there was that mountain where there was the slagheap where you sort the coal and you separate out what's unusable and you throw it there and it had become a black mountain and there were many of these black mountains around Carbonia dotted about all around and they would always spontaneously combust catching fire so when the wind came in from the sea it blew this bloody smoke all over the place and there was always this foul smell and so I preferred to go to the beach whenever I could because the sea has always been my life

we were all Communists all that great mass of miners we also immediately convinced the new arrivals that we should all get more for the work that we did that we needed to fight against the bourgeois owners and all you needed to do was look at the elections in Carbonia the mayor always won with 97 or 98 percent of Communist votes there were some secondary schools and training colleges with teachers who came from outside and those were the votes that were missing they only tried to open a local MSI party office once but it immediately disappeared with a little dynamite it immediately disappeared

so the bourgeois owners and the government wanted to start to break up this compact mass of workers and they started with doing X-rays X-rays had never even existed there before there were some miners who had been working there for 10 years and they'd never had any X-rays because when they'd been making a lot of profit they hadn't given a damn about X-rays but now they'd thought that they needed X-rays to get rid of the Communist miners they declared that some of them were sick and they would replace them with the Sicilians who came from the sulfur mines or with people who came from the country with some farmers who were on the bourgeois owners' side perhaps even in good faith and they wouldn't strike because they were on the bourgeois owners' side in good faith

another method they tried to get rid of us with was that of getting us to emigrate and a good excuse came when they founded this ECSC as the European Steel and Coal Community was called and so they first tried to corrupt the miners to get rid of them with false hopes go to Germany go to Belgium you'll do well there you'll earn a lot of money but hardly anyone fell for it all it took were some letters from two or three people who had left saying

showed me that one of the men in line with a rifle was him he was a boy then and he told me it had been a great Communist revolution that the Communist revolution in Kiel had been a great victory I later read about the story he told me in a book

it had been during the First World War and there was the Imperial Naval Command there in the port in Kiel but the war was lost by then and everyone knew it and so when the commander of the fleet had given the order to raise anchor for the last battle and he had said to get ready to scuttle with the flag flying the sailors told him to go on his own then they put out the fires in the boiler rooms to stop the ships and many of them barricaded themselves in the bow but then they had to surrender and more than a thousand sailors were arrested and they were transferred to land and they arrested more than a thousand sailors

then the next day all the sailors of the fleet and also those on land held a big demonstration in the city to free their arrested comrades and they wrote a leaflet inviting the shipyard workers to participate who came out en masse and when this huge procession arrived in front of the military prison there were units of armed officers and cadets there blocking off the road because all the sailors had refused to shoot their own companions then the cadets shot into the advancing crowd and there was a bloodbath the demonstrators dispersed but they were all seething with hatred and anger then there was a meeting in the Union House and the sailors decided to get organized and arm themselves there in the Union House

there was this great union between the shipyard workers and sailors who were carrying out the struggle and the sailors had got hold of some weapons from the garrisons and barracks during the night they got hold of 20,000 rifles and machine guns and the workers declared a general strike and they occupied the shipyards and when some officers shot at the people in the street from the windows they were chased and were swept away killed or taken prisoner and then headquarters declared that the imprisoned sailors would be freed that the people responsible for the slaughter would be punished that the departure of the fleet was suspended and so they totally capitulated because otherwise the crews of the ships in revolt had threatened to fire on the city with their guns and so they totally capitulated

by which time however the whole city was in the hands of the revolution that had been led by the workers' councils and the soldiers who had taken control red flags flew on the barracks the factories the town hall the tower of the castle they flew on the cruisers the battleships the submarines in the port the roads were full of people celebrating groups of armed workers and sailors with red rosettes and the revolution also spread to Hamburg Lubeck Cologne Munich Berlin where workers and soldiers' councils were being formed everywhere which took power until and in a few days the revolution had won the

emperor had abdicated and there was the proclamation of the republic and the revolution had won

there in the camp they needed to make us work all the time to keep us busy to abuse us for example on Sundays or on the days when there was nothing to do they made us dig for water in a swamp which was completely useless or move a mountain of stones which they'd make us carry back to the same place the following Sunday and for the smallest of things there were collective punishments like jumping like a frog they made us get in line and crouch down on our knees and you had to jump about like that until you collapsed on the ground exhausted and then they'd beat you until you bled when you were on the ground exhausted

the Russian officer whom I took the messages to in the camp was called Ivan I often spoke with him in French in the prisoners' latrines I understood him a bit and he explained communism to me I had a crucifix round my neck the only thing I had left and he said if you're a Communist you mustn't believe in a heaven after death but you have to fight for heaven on earth when you're alive this talk frightened me it was so different even from what my father used to say who was also very anticlerical we talked a lot even when there were the bombardments and we were in a shelter that was nothing but a sheet of metal with a bit of earth thrown over the top we talked under the bombs and he convinced me and in the latrines one day I snapped the crucifix into little pieces I threw it into the latrine

but the greatest suffering we faced was hunger hunger made the cold worse too it didn't let us sleep it was always on our minds the only important thing was to find a piece of bread anything to put in your stomach I remember that at one end of the camp there were some bushes that one day in spring all of a sudden bore a lot of small red berries it was the only beautiful thing my eyes had seen in all of that hell one night they all suddenly disappeared we ate them all down to the last one and then we all had stomachaches because of all those red berries we had eaten

when the cans of food arrived we pounced on them with our spoons and we scraped them clean we even ate potato peel it tasted like the most delicious thing ever and it was impossible to eat a piece of bread there in front of all the others because they would leap on you everyone turned into animals there it was a struggle for survival man lost all his dignity and in fact the first thing the Germans did was to make you lose your personality at a certain point you became a nullity I was even ready to die but this terrible hate for the Germans was born in me I only wanted to get to the end so I could kill some Germans and this was the only thought that kept me alive the thought that I would kill some of them

there was this Raik a Prussian who was two meters tall a man who would kill prisoners with his fists I dreamed about him at night I hated him more than any other thing I would have given my life to kill him when the Russians arrived we

the moment came that the mountain decided to break itself it started with massive bangs that made everyone leave all the working faces everyone pulled back and then when you returned you found these props and timber sets had become like pieces of paper because the cave-in had reached as far as the face and it had made a complete mess of the face

the most important job I had was to take the leads to the face I checked the wires because you fired from a place that was behind where all the cables ran and there was a 500-volt detonator there and I used my ohmmeter to see whether the charges were primed I checked the cable the resistance of the cable and I knew how long they would give me then I said to myself this is ready to blast I connected the wires and I set the charges off but this happened when the last miner had got out from there there was a telephone I talked to the foreman because only an electrician and a supervisor stayed there so I talked to the foreman who was the only one who could give the order to blast and I waited for the order to blast

then when he said fire we started to set off all the mines along the face and all this to avoid gas explosions because this gas generally explodes with the volleys even if you use a type of gelatin that doesn't explode in flames another precaution against the gas was to sprinkle ground-up quartz along the haulageways to neutralize the coal dust because that's what makes everything go up like a powder keg when the firedamp explodes instead if you sprinkle this quartz even if the firedamp ignites it doesn't spread and it stops there it only burns a little section and it stops there and after you have blasted you phone and give the all-clear after you have blasted everything

they gave me hardly anything for this job but in those days I wasn't married and it was enough for me they gave me 9 thousand lira to blast on top of the average wage of 57 lira an hour all in all I took home 80 or 85 thousand lira a month it was in 1952 when I started they gave us next to nothing for all the hard work and risks and the fact that we all suffered from silicosis and anyway we used to go back up to the lamp room and hand in our lamps and we stripped had a shower and changed and the coaches took us to the stop where they had picked us up and so on and so on and then it was the same again the next day and so on and so on

those who had a bit of land near their house and who had been farmers spent their free time tending to some vegetables the others went to drink a glass of wine with the neighbors you chatted and listened to the radio or you went to a workmen's club there were eleven of them in Carbonia and you could have a drink and play cards there and we often went dancing too there were some places where they put on some records and you danced I had a girlfriend and I went with her to make love with her and very often when I could I went to Sant'Antioco to the sea when I could

I went to Sant'Antioco with this girl to eat and so on we were together we

and it carried all the coal that was mined then once the main belt had started you started the gathering conveyor belts that threw the coal from the faces into buckets and the gathering conveyor belt then dumped the coal onto the one-forty belt you needed really powerful motors to drive the belts and when the belts started the silence there was suddenly turned into a frightful din when the belts started

each team was composed of a miner or a shot firer and a laborer or two then after blasting at the face each team cleared the debris with sorting screens and so the coal ended up on the belt and then once the area was cleared they put in the props that are the wooden or iron supports the iron ones have got a French name it was the shot firer's job to lay the charges and drill the holes ready for firing in the next shift because you can't blast when you are inside and the next shift has to clear what has been blasted in the previous shift and so on and so on for every shift

then there were other systems there was the shearer but that was very dangerous where we were there were two shearers one was the British type and then there was the longwall there was the 300-meter longwall where we were and we built wooden timber sets one next to the other but sometimes when the mountain moved it was like the end of the world because there was a layer of quartz and sandstone 40 or 50 meters thick between one level and another in the middle of the coal and sometimes it didn't cave in for 300 or 400 meters it just stays there but the miners put up some safety props as they call them here and there so that when the mountain starts moving cave-ins don't occur so often without you feeling the movement of the mountain

I could actually sleep when the props were broken in two I slept down there quite happily sometimes because I knew the mountain warns you and then we all know about the rats when the mountain really starts to stir all the rats run away like what happens when there's gas in fact there are millions of these rats and sometimes we left our haversacks on the ground with some stuff to eat in them then we took them out and they're useful down there because they clean the mine they eat all the leftovers and whatever else there is rats can't last for more than four hours without eating and so they would even gnaw rotten wood nobody kills these rats because they're very useful if there's gas they run away if there's a cave-in they sense it before anyone else and they're the first to run away

when the mountain did start to stir it roared it moved so much air that it seemed like there was a bombardment or like when you're in the tropics during a crossing and there's a storm and it seems like the world is coming down sometimes when we abandoned a part of the mine which happens when a seam has been exhausted then you go in and make it cave in you keep the useful materials the good props you get everything and then you sometimes lay some mines but the quartz there and the sandstone didn't collapse but when

got him as he was trying to get away I could have died happy then the Russians captured him and tied him to a pole and we walked past him and spat on him it gave you real satisfaction I did it three or four times then a Frenchman doused him with petrol and set him on fire and he did the same to a Frenchman who was in the SS because there was also the Blue or Green Army or whatever the hell they were called made up of French collaborationists who were in the SS

when we were liberated there was first a massive bombardment I was in this camp here that was near some swampland so me and this guy called Jaro who was a Czechoslovakian escaped and we hid in the swamp at first then the SS started to retreat so then we hid inside a bomb crater we went inside there because they were still shooting the Russians arrived but they didn't know where the prisoners were and luckily they were a bit careful about shooting and eventually we saw some soldiers who weren't Nazis from over the lip of the crater they had red stars and so we were eventually liberated and that was the best moment when they liberated us

then they did X-rays on us and the first thing they told us was not to eat too much because sometimes prisoners die of indigestion because after suffering from hunger for so long that's what happens I saw an Alpini die for this very reason he had stuffed himself eating so much it looked like he'd gone crazy and then he died then I spent four months under observation a lot of people ended up in the sanatoriums in Merano and many must have died in those places because they were in a too advanced stage of starvation and disease they had typhus they all had these things here they were all diseased and emaciated

after the first period of widespread retaliatory killings which only lasted two weeks for us Italians and French we started to feel a bit better and we wanted to see some women and so that's what we all did but the Russians who however treated the population well didn't let anything drop I saw them take some SS tie them up with barbed wire and put them in the road and drive over them with their tanks I must say that only the Russians were able to really get revenge to really get justice and wipe them off the face of the earth something that the Americans didn't do though they tried to save as many people as possible with the Nazis in Germany just like they did with the fascists in Italy where they also tried to save as many people as possible

the German women there had lost all their pride they came to us ready to do anything for a piece of bread and they were scared but what have women got to do with any of it we didn't hate the women it was better to sleep with them and also they were looking for some life all the youths all the men had gone to the front and were dead and so everywhere a month later everyone was having fun there was dancing everyone wanted to forget it all and finally have a good time the only thing was that when three or four of us went out we used to line up without even realising it and we were always afraid and we kept feeling like that for a long time we were always afraid for a long time

then one lovely day they got us together and they told us we had to leave there was a goods train that was waiting for us and we decked it out we covered it with branches and flowers with anything we could find and that's how we set off from Hamburg Altona to return home and whole loads of people kept climbing on at all the stops the whole trip Italian prisoners from other camps who were going back home and they kept on having to add more wagons and the train became really long as it traveled through the whole of Germany in ruins which we crossed from top to the bottom for days and days until we arrived at the border and after Brennero people started to get off people got off little by little at every stop

3

besides being very tiring the work in the mines was also very dangerous it was especially dangerous because there was firedamp in Carbonia there was gas everyone knew it in fact there were explosions a couple of times in the years I was there the first time twelve people died in a tunnel the other time seven or eight it happened when the mine was still new they were still excavating the crosscut tunnels that are the tunnels that are cut into the rock and that lead to the coalface and there were only a few miners working there digging the tunnels otherwise who knows how many would have died in the tunnels

it was terrible you had to gasp for breath there were some places that were really low and you had to crawl to get from one place to another and it was terribly hot everywhere and you struggled to breathe when I got there they were working at 1,750 meters then they went down to 2,000 meters there were 4,000 workers and in the whole colliery there were 24,000 workers the peak was in '52 and '53 because they started closing everything down in Carbonia after that nobody gave a damn about coal anymore because there was oil the problem they had was to get rid of all those workers that was the problem they had

the basin of Carbonia is huge there were the shafts of Sebariu which is the most important then Suergiu and Cortoghiana there were many shafts dotted around the valley as far as the sea the thing that struck me the most on the day I arrived there was that you couldn't see the mine you could only see that thing the tall iron tower you couldn't see anything else the actual mine was all underground there're the shafts when you go underground you suddenly find yourself in the middle of this big anthill that is like an underground city and I wondered where all these people who went down went I

saw miners by their hundreds go down inside the cages then all of a sudden they all disappeared down there into the airways all of the teams disappeared down there

all these 24,000 people lived in Carbonia which was the biggest town then there were also Suergiu and Cortoghiana and the other towns around there and the miners lived there too every morning they took coaches that stopped at certain points around the town and the other smaller towns the ones who were married had a house to themselves or with another family the bachelors like me lived in a hotel lived in the Hotel Tre and after a while I managed to get my own room because otherwise you had to share a room with three or four other people there were people from all over Italy and some came there from a lot of other countries from Yugoslavia and Tunisia they came there from a lot of other countries

you got to the pithead with this coach where everyone had their own locker to keep their work clothes in you stripped down to almost nothing when you changed because it was really hot down there especially when you went down to 2,000 meters where there was no air and if it's not ventilated it's terribly hot there's a law of physics that I think says that for every 30 meters you go down underground the temperature increases by one degree and down there when no air arrives it's terribly hot it takes your breath away and then gases form and spontaneously combust and it gets really dangerous because the gases form down there

you changed and then you went to the lamp room that is a place where they keep the batteries and lamps and then you put the lamp on your helmet and the battery here on the side held by a big strap you took the lamp and the battery and you handed in your medal that served to see whether you were at work but that was returned to you when you came out we had a shoulder bag with us with our lunch in what we ate during the break and they gave us this lamp and this battery and then you waited your turn at the cage and then when it was your turn you got into the cage and you went down in the cage

we went down where the mine wagons were we went down to the first or second level inside the cages there were 120 of us in these cages that went down at tremendous speed it only took a few seconds and we were already deep underground as it took a few seconds to go back up at the end of the shift and then there was the mantrip that was waiting for us with its electric locomotive and it took us to the sections every team to its own section east west section everyone got on the mine wagons each in his own team the mine wagons set off and everyone got to their places and so work started when everyone was in their places

what I had to do first of all was make sure that the main conveyor belt started the main belt was one forty wide and three or four kilometers long