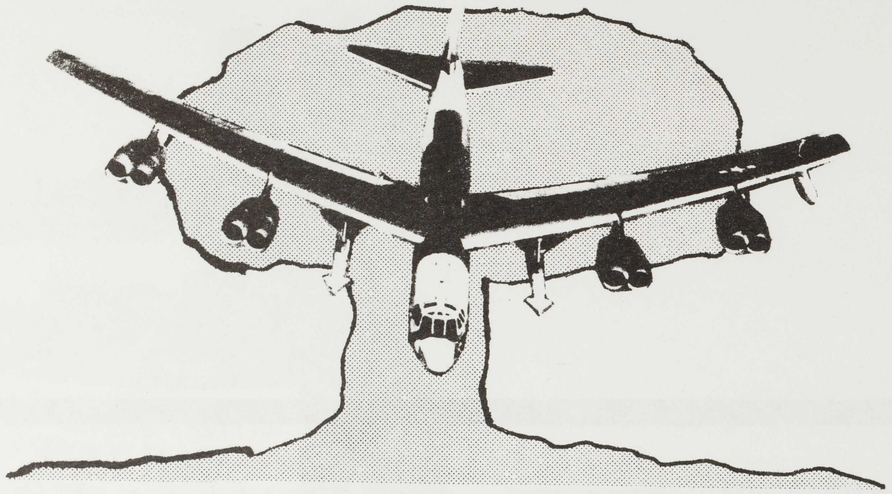

Report From Comiso

On August 8, 1981, the Italian government announced the decision to install 112 U.S. Cruise missiles in the Magliocco Airport, situated 2 miles from Comiso, a small town of 28,000 inhabitants in the southeast of Sicily. The area of the old military airport, used during the Second World War and abandoned since 1972, was to be enlarged and a NATO base for some 20,000 American soldiers and their families built on it.

"Why Comiso? The answer is simple", Pippo Scarso explains to us, two years later, in the one-room headquarters of the Coordinamente Leghe Autogestite contro la Base Missilistica di Comiso (Coordinating Body of the Self-Managed Leagues against the Missile Base in Comiso). "There are, of course, military reasons. From a strategic point of view, the installation of missiles in Sicily, in the center of the Mediterranean Sea, means a first-strike capability against the Warsaw Pact countries, control of states unfriendly to the U.S., like Libya, and protection of American oil interests in the Middle East. But there are also economic and political reasons. Sicily, like Friuli, Campania and Sardinia (other areas in Italy where atomic weapons have been installed), is an underdeveloped region which offers three conditions extremely favorable to capitalist domination: intensive militarization of the territory to the point of reaching the closure of vast areas and even their "desertization"; organization of the opposition entrusted to the parties of the so-called left, with whom it is always possible to enter into dialogue and reach compromises; and the great need for jobs, especially to avoid the prospect of emigration, which constitutes the most powerful blackmail for gaining mass consensus for the construction of the base.

"The construction of the Cruise base in Comiso", he continues, "has been hailed by most of the political parties, and the 'socialist' mayor Catalano, as able to solve the grave problem of unemployment (there are presently as many as 5,000 unemployed in Comiso), while the arrival of thousands of Americans full of dollars would ensure the permanent prosperity of the town. In reality, the work contracts for the base have been assigned mainly to northern Italian construction companies and not more than 200 local workers have been employed so far. Moreover, the expropriation of land around the base is endangering and eventually will destroy the cultivation of a large territory, thus weakening Comiso's main economic activity, the production of fruits and vegetables. The arrival of an American army of occupation will cause a series of other negative consequences: rising prices, circulation of heavy drugs, increase in prostitution, militarization of the territory, presence in our area of mafia organizations to sell drugs to the Americans, control prostitution, and speculate in real estate and on the contracts for work on the base. All this will mean an increase in violence (robberies, kidnappings, murders) and restriction of individual freedom (controls, roadblocks, militarized zones, etc.)".

Pippo Scarso pauses. He is a Sicilian anarchist with a big unruly beard, long dark hair, and lively eyes. He was one of the participants in an international anarchist conference held in Comiso July 31-August 1 of last year to discuss the position of the anarchist movement on the struggle against the base. At the close of the conference, he made a statement in the main square of Comiso explaining why he had refused to report for military service when drafted the previous month. He concluded his speech by tearing up his draft card. Because of this action, he is still awaiting trial for both "desertion" and for "instigation to commit a crime".

"In the weeks following this conference", Scarso goes on, "we realized that to stop the construction of the base, we first had to find an organizational form more effective than those already existing, i.e., the Communist Party and the International Peace Camp. The Italian Communist Party, the largest in Europe, can easily mobilize a demonstration of 100,000 people, bringing them from all over Sicily and the rest of Italy. And this has been their strategy: to call for a massive peace march, a day of letting off steam, shouting of slogans, dancing in the fields, then home to wait for the next directive. The International Peace Camp is a collection of well-meaning pacifists whose good intentions are exceeded only by the ineffectiveness of their actions, all symbolic in nature. The organizational form we chose was the self-managed League, an autonomous, anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical mass organism which could be formed even by only two or three people, but always in the direction of a quantitative growth, and with the sole and unique aim of occupying and destroying the base.

"Since then we have operated within this organizational structure. All our efforts have concentrated on organizing the population of Comiso and the surrounding area into self-managed leagues. We are now preparing a mass occupation of the base to take place July 22-24. We believe this is the only action really capable of stopping construction of the base."

Pippo Scarso concludes our conversation by saying that much hard work has gone into preparation for this action, and that they hope enough people will join them to prove that it is possible, through direct action, to halt construction of the base.

After leaving the office of the Coordinamente Leghe Autogestite, we drove the two miles to the growing base and circled it, following the barbed wire fence. A huge red and white water tower dominated the scene. It was built to provide sterilized water for the Americans' delicate systems. We passed a group of old red brick and clay tiled buildings, once a farm, on one of which was written "Questa terra e nostra", "This land is ours". The base construction looks like a shopping center -- lights, macadam, and "plastic" buildings. As we drove past the entrance taking pictures, a menacing Italian soldier yelled at us to leave immediately.

The July occupation started as planned with 500 people present on the 22nd and more expected in the next two days. The night of the 23rd, when 200-300 people were still gathered near the base, police attacked without warning and proceeded to savagely beat everyone in sight. A lot of people were hurt, and many arrested. On August 7, during a non-violent blockade organized by the pacifists of the International Peace Camp, police attacked again without warning shortly before the planned conclusion of the action. Again, the attack was conducted with extreme brutality. Police used tear gas and hit non-violent demonstrators with clubs and chains. Tens of people were hurt and hospitalized, among them four members of Parliament participating in the blockade. Twenty people were arrested. Four foreign pacifists were subsequently expelled from Italy.

The struggle against the Cruise base in Comiso goes on, even if until now the attempts to block the construction work have failed. The increasingly brutal repression on the part of the police, the threats of physical elimination from the mafia, and the hostile attitude of part of the local population who still believes in dreams of jobs and prosperity, are some of the obstacles that the anti-militarist movement has to face in their struggle.

The closer the date gets for the installation of the Cruise missiles in the Comiso base (spring 1984), the more imperative it is for all of us to become more involved in the fight to avert nuclear holocaust. The comrades in Comiso who are exposing their lives for us need all the solidarity and financial help we can give to them.

COORDINAMENTO LEGHE AUTOGESTITE CONTRO LA BASE MISSILISTICA DI COMISO
Via Conte di Torino, 1
Comiso ITALY

INTERNATIONAL PEACE CAMP
Via G. Morso 29
97013 Comiso ITALY

AAA ALL-REGION CONFERENCE OCTOBER 1ST AND 2ND

The Anarchist Association of the Americas is convening its first all-regions conference this fall in the mountains outside of Morgantown, West Virginia. Interested anarchists are welcome to attend and observe. Interested in participating? Write AAA, Box 840, Washington, DC 20044 for more details.

ANARCHISTS DENIED VISAS

Dario Fo and Franca Rame, an Italian anarchist couple noted for their brilliant satirical plays, have been denied visas to enter the United States for the second time because of their political beliefs.

Fo and Rame, scheduled to appear in a New York production of their works on September 13, have been rejected as suitable visitors to this country for advocating anarchism and supporting anarchist organizations abroad.

This denial of visitor's status by the U.S. Department of State has drawn protests from the theater world, as the husband and wife were to appear at Yale, New York University, and to assist in the productions of several of their plays in the United States. Their play "Adulto Orgasmo Escapes from the Zoo" is currently playing at Joseph Papp's Public Theater.

Fo's international hit, "Accidental Death of an Anarchist," is scheduled to open at Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage on February 3 and will run until March 8. It is based on the murder of Giuseppe Pinelli, a militant of Italy's Federated Anarchist Groups, who was pushed to his death from the fourth story of the Milan police station in 1969 while being "interrogated."

Pinelli was being questioned concerning a series of bombings alleged to be the work of left-wing terrorists. The explosions later were revealed to be the work of fascists and police officials were implicated in these acts.

Joseph Papp, the producer who was bringing Fo and Rame to play in New York, said of their work that the couple were the best interpreters of their comedic materials. "The State Department is making a political issue out of something that is a cultural affair," Papp said.

Zelda Fichandler, producing director of the Arena Stage, said: "I'm glad to see the State Department thinks art is so potent."

Welcome to the land of the free and the home of the brave.