The FIM-FIOM-UILM guide and the methodology of workers' investigation for a participatory approach to prevention ("The Unions' model for the control of the working environment")

Diego Alhaique

(Fondazione Giuseppe Di Vittorio)

FIM - FIOM - UILM
Sindacati Metalmeccanici

METAL SECTOR UNIONS

L'AMBIENTE DI LAVORO

THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

1. The Guide “The Working Environment”

- The guide was the outcome of a research work within Unions and workers of Fiat plant “Mirafiori” in Turin.
- The most widespread unions publication: 130.000 copies.
- Its layout is still very effective.
- One of the most important characteristics of this manual was the usage of images.
- In every page there was an illustration, representing a worker facing the work related risks.
- In the northern Italy a lot of workers originated from the South, they were illiterates, semi literates or having quit education at the end of primary school or before, so the images were very important to obtain an immediate communication.

2. Summary

3 - Origins
4 - The unions' model for the control of the working environment
5 - Spread and Fortune of the Model
6 - Present State and Value of the Model

3 - ORIGINS OF THE MODEL

3.1 Union action in Osh at the beginning of the 1960's

- At the beginning of the 1960's, the struggle against occupational risks was not yet supported by nothing specific or truly effective within the unions, the labour movement or society in general.
- Research, control, assessment, evaluation, solutions were all in charge of the State and the employers.
- The unions "used" experts and researchers (few) as "advisers" or "specialists" to obtain opinions and find "technical" solutions to "political" decisions as well as to obtain "proofs" from people with "a certain expertise".
- Moreover, the working environment issue was not yet dealt with by any specific union training initiative.

3.2 – A new approach by the Turin's Unions

- In the first 1906s, a different approach to contractual policy, definitely alternative to the national approach, came from the Cgil of Turin.
- By developing a "line of conduct which was political as well as cultural", in line with the tradition of the 1920 Works Councils, the Turin's Union aimed at a "transformation of the technical progress into social progress" through the control and modification of technology by the "homogeneous workers' group", intended as the subject of union action.
- This new line led to the development of experiences and considerations on the working environment that were to gain momentum after the autumn of 1969, named "the hot autumn" for the intensity of the struggles and strikes promoted by the unions for the renewal of national bargaining contracts.

3.3 – The knowledge of the working cycle

- Bargaining for the working environment improvement implied the knowledge of the working cycle, the substances used and their health consequences.
- Thus meant creating a new producer's awareness, taking into account the workers as a whole rather than the single specialized unit, already a marginal element in the production process.
- The tireless defence of the "consciously-productive labour" principle revealed all its potential, particularly in relation to the definition of the concept of democracy.
- Even during the most difficult years, the Turin's unions' managerial groups never underestimated workers' awareness and for this reason believed that trade unions should represent for workers the opportunity to discuss and develop feasible alternatives rather than foster the development of an abstract "class awareness".
- In Turin the struggle against environmental health hazards became the banner used by the unions to launch and enhance a new and different type of action.

3.4 - Complaints by workers of Farmitalia

- In 1961 the introduction of new professional categories - social workers, students, doctors - into the unions' activity brought about a particular situation at Turin's "Labour Chamber", the Cgil organizational structure on the territory.
- Moreover, the workers of Farmitalia, a large chemical-pharmaceutical industry of Settimo Torinese (near Turin), began to complain about the unbearable presence of high quantities of harmful substances in the working place.
- The origin and development of this movement was surely urged by the great number of experts working in the plant.

3.5 - Turin 1961: Farmitalia survey

- During 1961, in Farmitalia, a survey on environmental health hazards was carried out.
- The survey was promoted by the unions and characterized by research, development, struggle and wage disputes.
- For several reasons - the methodology followed, the results achieved, the workers' participation in the assessment of risks and hazards in the working environment - the survey is to be considered:

  - a milestone in the history of workers' health struggles,
  - as well as a starting point for the unions, that would soon adopt an original and independent line in the struggle against environmental health hazards.

3.6 - Un innovative survey (1)

- The significance of the survey carried out at Farmitalia lies in that the disturbs and diseases denounced by the workers were finally used to assess the actual situation of occupational risks and damages - never fully assessed within the plant - without taking into account other clinical and instrumental data.
- The survey highlighted that the symptoms claimed by the workers corresponded to the type of disturbs which can be envisaged in relation to certain kind of risks.
- The situation resulting from the survey had of course to be verified through epidemiological tests by measuring, registering and comparing the environmental data with the biostatistics data.

3.7 - Un innovative survey (2)

- The “Farmitalia” methodology can appear obvious today, but although it has been experimented in several factories and envisaged by the 1978 sanitary reform law in Italy, it has not yet been implemented.
- For the first time, a survey carried out by the chemical workers’ union and originated from the workers’ denunciation of an unbearable situation of environmental health hazards was supported within the factory and the union by several experts, who attached a new and different meaning to research.

3.8 - Un innovative survey (3)

- A new process was set in motion, aimed at identifying the causes of the workers' disturbs through the assessment of the different sectors' main features:
  - the number of workers, their tasks, their work schedule, their disturbs and diseases, the shop-floor volume, the substances used, the degradation products of the production process, the protection means, the actual function of the factory's doctor and his/her criteria.
- Furthermore, the union tried to involve in the struggle a wider number of subjects by relating to external democratic representative bodies, such as the Municipality, and outlining the most general problems and solutions.

3.9 – The dispute resulting from the survey

- In the new mobilization climate and as a consequence of the survey, unions opened a new dispute with the company, involving 97% of the workers.
- The contribution of the factory's experts led to the experimentation of new and original forms of struggle. Thanks to their expertise, it was possible to organize short but very effective strikes in the most critical phases of the chemicals' processing cycle.

3.10 – Unsuccessful end of the struggle

- Nevertheless, the opening of the bargaining for the national bargaining contracts put an almost immediate halt to the dispute, which was later closed with the organization of a survey on the working environment conditions that saw the participation of a doctor appointed by the union itself.
- The situation kept on being “quite similar to the previous one” because no permanent control mean, to be managed by the workers, had been obtained.

3.11 – A basic mistake (1)

- According to the critical analysis of the protagonists of that experience, the unsuccessful end of the struggle had to be ascribed to a basic mistake.
- While the starting point setting everything in motion had been the actual situation of the workers and their denunciations, the struggle had gone out of the factory and far from the workers' reality, by
  - trying to explain the workers' disturbs with the support of the traditional medical literature and delegating the same explanation to specialists and particularly to doctors;
  - shifting from the actual unions' policy - the "monetization" of health damages - to an extreme position which can be expressed by the slogan "health is not for sale".

3.12 – A basic mistake (2)

- While the slogan “health is not for sale” is an unquestionable value, nevertheless it lacked meaning in a situation where the drive to change the working conditions was deeply related to the need for a wage hike.
- This led to the adoption of a solution that did not involve the workers. The objectives were far too ambitious for they were simple statements. The workers’ participation in the outlining of possible solutions to environmental health hazards was far from being achieved.
- This Farmitalia experience brought to light the true knots of the problem, and precisely:

  - the forms of participation of the working class,
  - the role of experts in the factory and
  - the environmental health hazards indexes, first of all that of absenteeism.
  - Union policies still mostly resorted to culture and scientific literature to disseminate any valid solution within workers.

4 - THE UNIONS' MODEL FOR THE CONTROL OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

4.1 – A strategy on OSH felt by the workers as their own

- Turin's unions committed their self to implementing a strategy centred on the environmental health hazards problem that could be felt by the workers as their own.
- While the members of the internal Commission of Fiat's foundry and deburring sectors began to cope with the risk of silicosis, at Turin's Labour Chamber a so called "medical commission" was set up.
- The medical commission:
  - came to host a permanent debate between unions and intellectuals and thus its activity widely interested and involved the unions' leaders;
  - turned into a true collective research group and provided the union with new opportunities to carry out assessment, socialization and training initiatives.

4.2 – Do not delegate to others

- Both the Farmitalia dispute and a survey on absenteeism carried out within Fiat convinced the Turin's unions that setting stricter protection rules was not enough to achieve actual improvements in this field.
- It was fundamental for workers to be actively involved in the planning and monitoring of their own working environments.
- These being the new terms of the problem, the unions' task became to "urge and promote an action:
  - where workers do not delegate to others the solution of their problems,
  - thus becoming at the same time the subjects of any assessment on their working conditions
  - and the persons in charge of identifying the changes to be made in order to fulfil their demands and the actions to be implemented in order to achieve such results".

4.3 – A research work on the working environment

- In this new perspective, a group of workers from the “5th League” of Fiom (the metal workers’ union’s territorial structure of Cgil) were involved in a research work on their working environment and proved the potential of this new approach.
- Starting from their own personal experiences, the workers provided the medical science with original data.
- They spontaneously oriented towards an epidemiological evaluation of the working environment health hazards.
- An approach which proved more effective than the traditional occupational medicine, based on the cause-effect relation between chemical-physical substances and pathologies.
- By systematizing the workers’ representation of their working environment, the Turin’s medical commission developed the “first system model” aimed at implementing workers’ control of their working environment.

4.4 – Universal language and spontaneous observation

- The need for a common analysis model for workers and a common language for workers and experts, as well as the need to work together in coping with concrete situations, led to the attempt of developing a “universal” language on the working environment.
- The development of this language had to be based on the workers’ “spontaneous observation” of environmental health hazards.

4.5 – Homogeneous workers' group

- This type of observation related to the experiences and growth of a specific sociological entity:
  - the main productive group, embodied in this particular case by the workers' group,
  - homogeneous in relation to the environmental health hazards
  - and provided with a historical, epidemiological and preventive experience.
- Such a group soon became the true interlocutor of the environmental health experts and was considered by the union as a key of their strategies and articulated bargaining activity.

4.6 – Why a universal language

- The interlocutor being identified, the “universal” language basics - an alphabet - were finally developed.
- The adjective “universal” embodies the true or presumed drive this new language should provide to the communication of scientific discoveries from the experts to the workers and vice versa.
- This form of communication (“socialization”) is meaningless if considered as a mere exchange of information, while it acquires new meanings when related to the transformation of the working environment as to suit the workers’ needs.

4.7 - Non delegation and consensual validation

- Two concepts represented the essential keys of this language:
  - the “non-delegation”
  - and the “consensual validation”,

  both intended as permanent tools for the analysis of the relation between working environment and health.
- The participation of the “homogenous group” of “non-delegating” workers became the fundamental starting point for the solution of environmental health hazards problems.

4.8 – Consensual validation

- The “consensual validation” of the working environment lays its foundations on the workers’ acceptance of their working conditions, thus resourcing to their awareness and judgment of such conditions.
- In other words, the workers became the “unit of measurement” of their own working environment, both in relation to the bargaining activity within the factory and the political struggle.
- The “consensual validation” thus coincides with the active participation of workers in the development of a “worker-tailored” factory.

4.9 – Four groups of harmful factors

- The working environment control model provided the methods for environmental health hazards assessments by defining:
  - four groups of harmful factors
  - and the tools to be used in the registering of such hazards.
- In a schematic form, they reproduce the contents and language of any hazard claim filed by workers.

AMBIENTE DI LAVORO

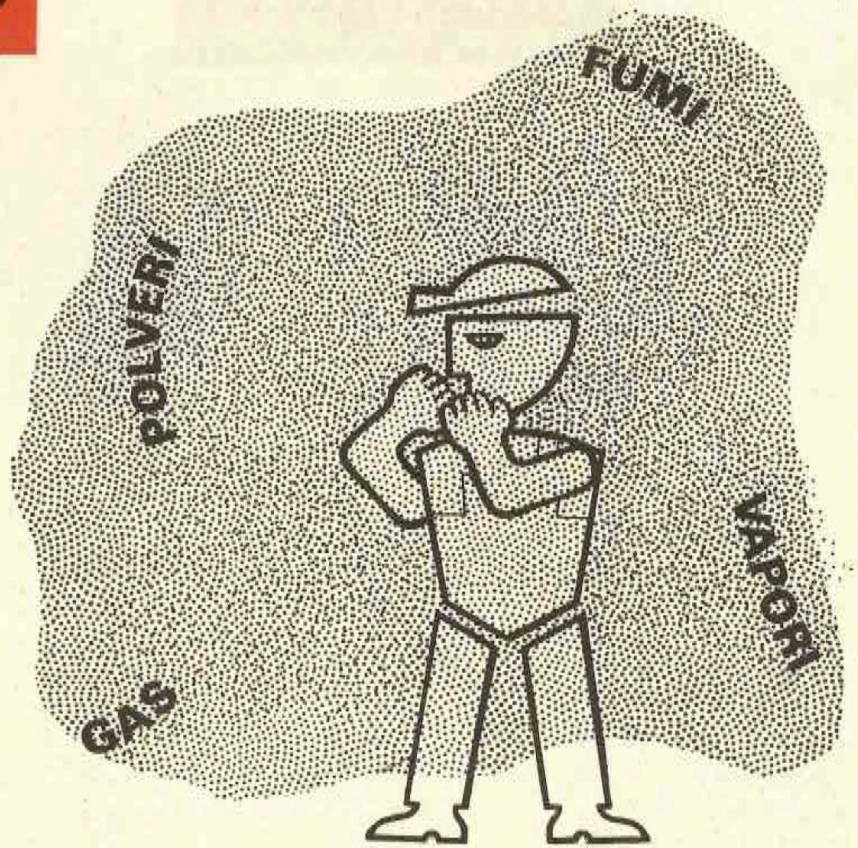
FATTORI NOCIVI

4.10 – 1st Group of harmful factors

- When analysing environmental health hazards, any group of workers (the homogeneous one) would first of all refer to the same elements they would consider in the evaluation of a house:
  - noise, light, humidity, temperature, ventilation (first group of factors).

FATTORI NOCIVI

2° GRUPPO

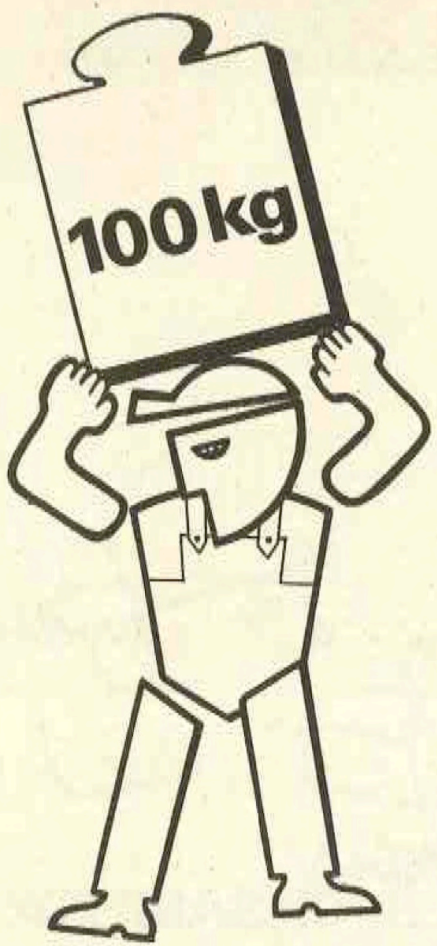


4.11 – 2nd Group of harmful factors

- Secondly, workers would consider the presence of
  - any substance or energy in the form of vapour, gas, dust, fogs, fumes, vibrations, radiations (second group).
- This second group includes factors which are more likely to be present in working environments than in houses.

FATTORI NOCIVI

3° GRUPPO



LAVORO FISICO

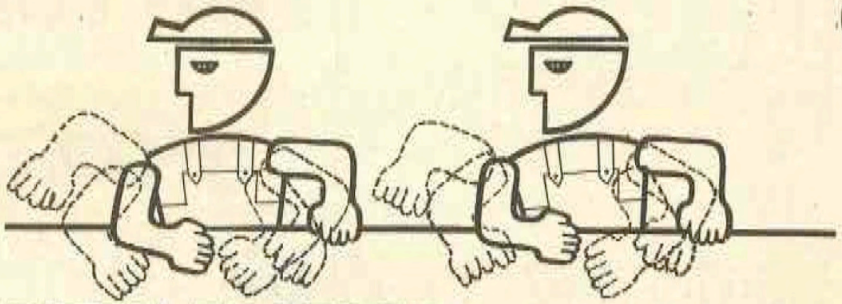
4.12 – 3rd and 4th Groups of harmful factors

- Then, again, they would consider whether:

  - the working conditions bear tiring effects due to muscular activity (third group)
  - or excessive work pace, anxiety, hierarchical relations etc. (fourth group), all of which are ever more typical of the industrial work (still nowadays).

FATTORI NOCIVI

4° GRUPPO



RITMI ECCESSIVI
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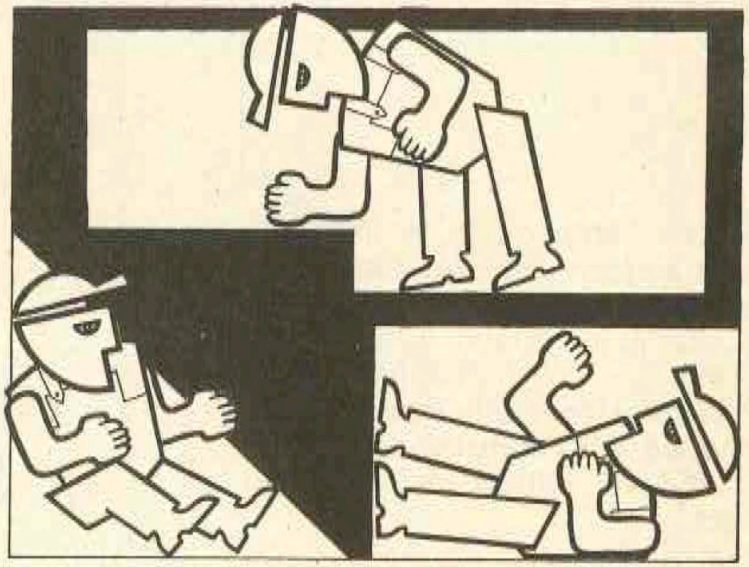
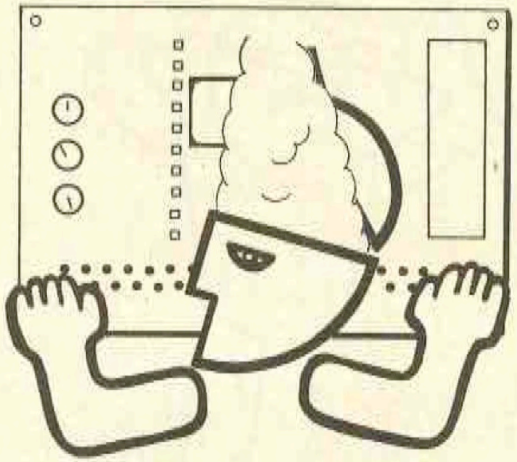




ANSIA
RESPONSABILITA'

ALTRI
EFFETTI
STANCANTI

4.13 – Measurability and consensual validation

- This classification particularly suits workers.
- Moreover, it is of utmost importance that:
  - while the first and second group are objectively measurable with instruments (thermometer, anemometer, phonometer, dust konimeter, Dräger for gas etc.),
  - the third, if only partially, and the fourth group can only be assessed on the basis of the workers' judgment - the "consensual approval".

4.14 - Working Environment Data Register

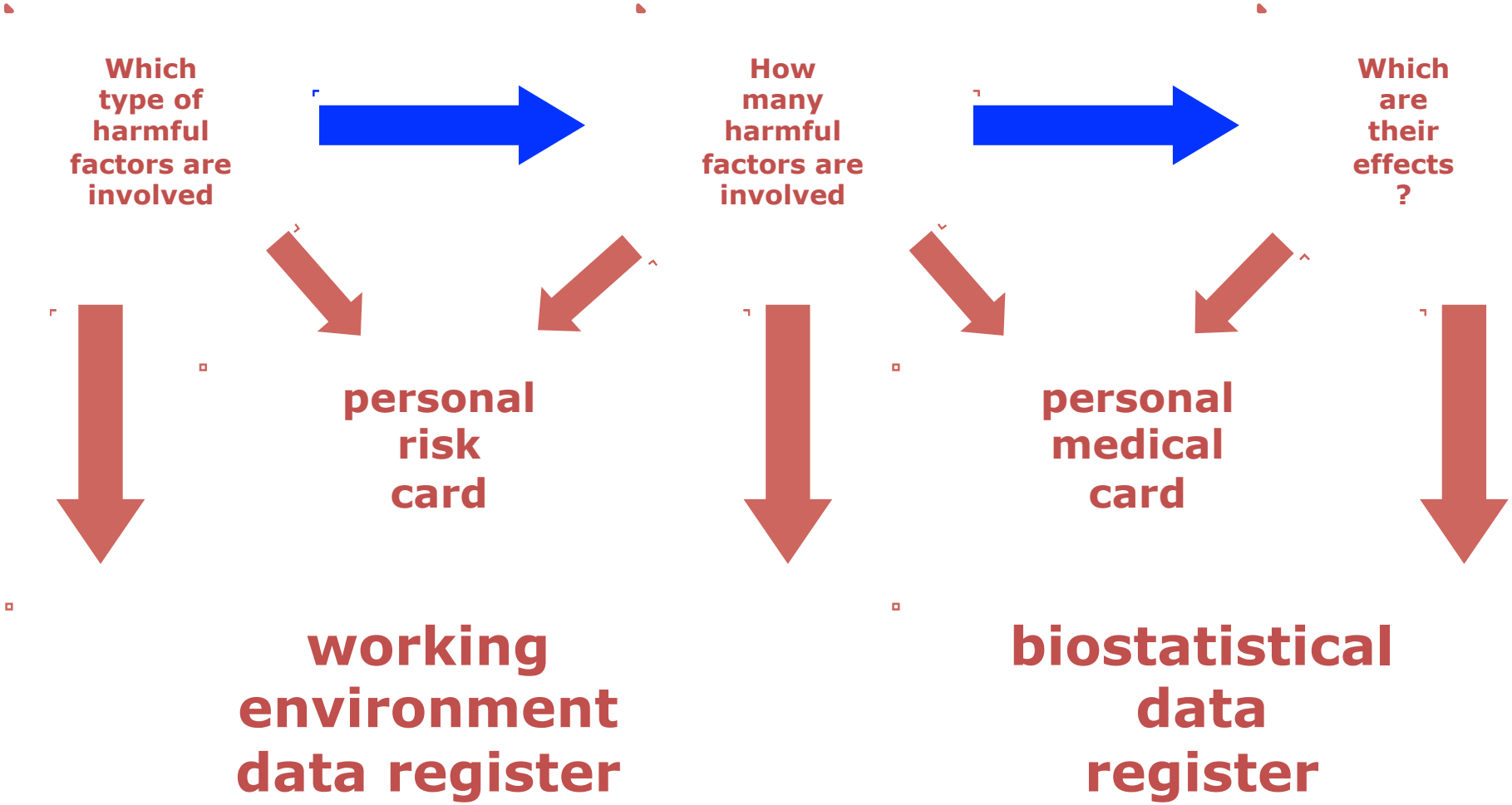
- Risk Card and Medical Card

- The denunciation of a group of workers implies an assessment of environmental health hazards, which is based on both:
  - empirically-assessed environmental data, periodically and rigorously registered ("working environment data register")
  - and on the data on sickness and injury absence and the disorders claimed by the workers ("biostatistics data register").
- At a personal level, environmental and biostatistics data are reported:
  - in the risk card
  - and the medical card.

Illustration from the union publication "Working Environment" (1969)

IN ORDER TO CONTROL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH HAZARDS

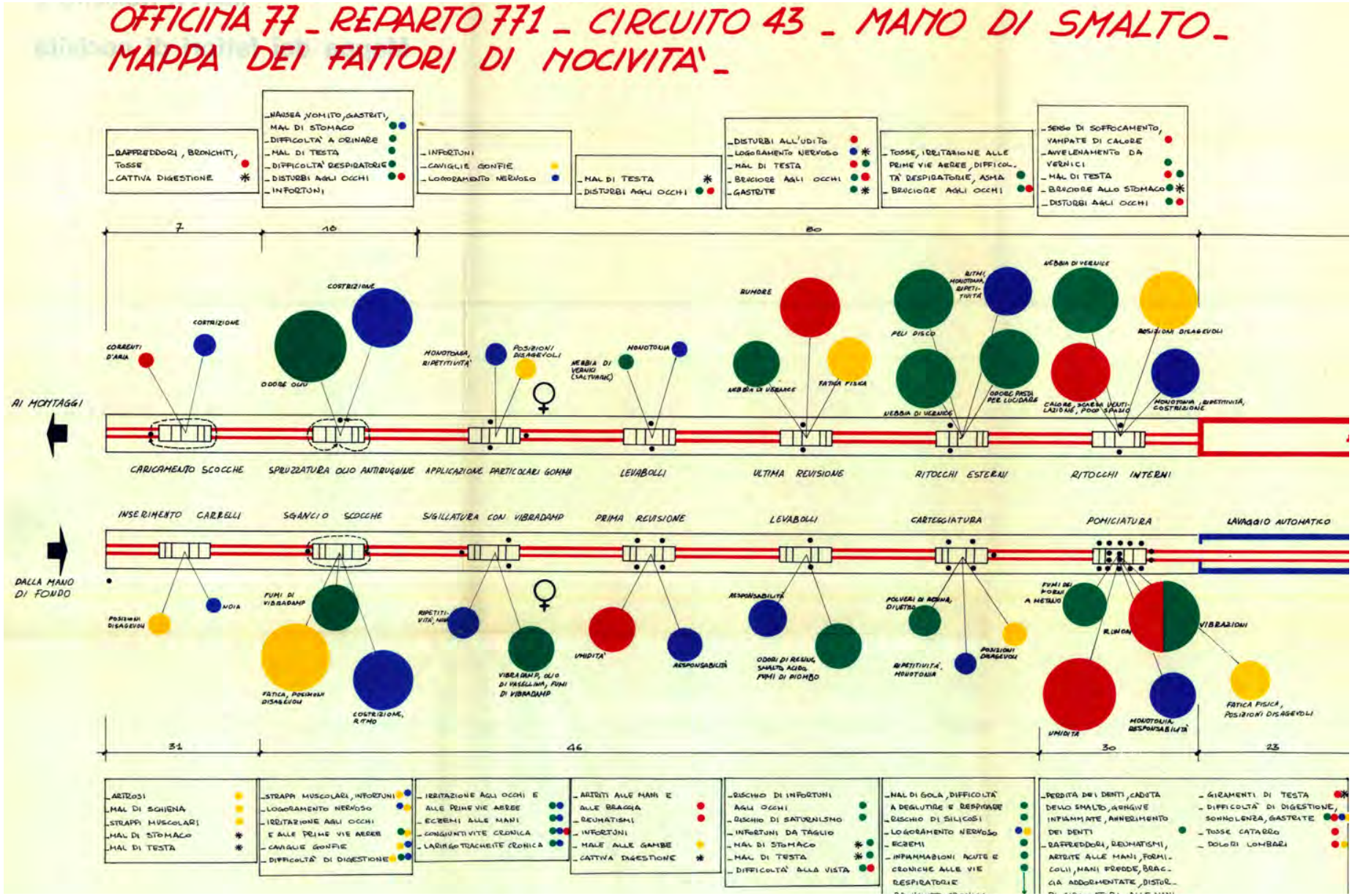
IT IS NECESSARY TO KNOW:



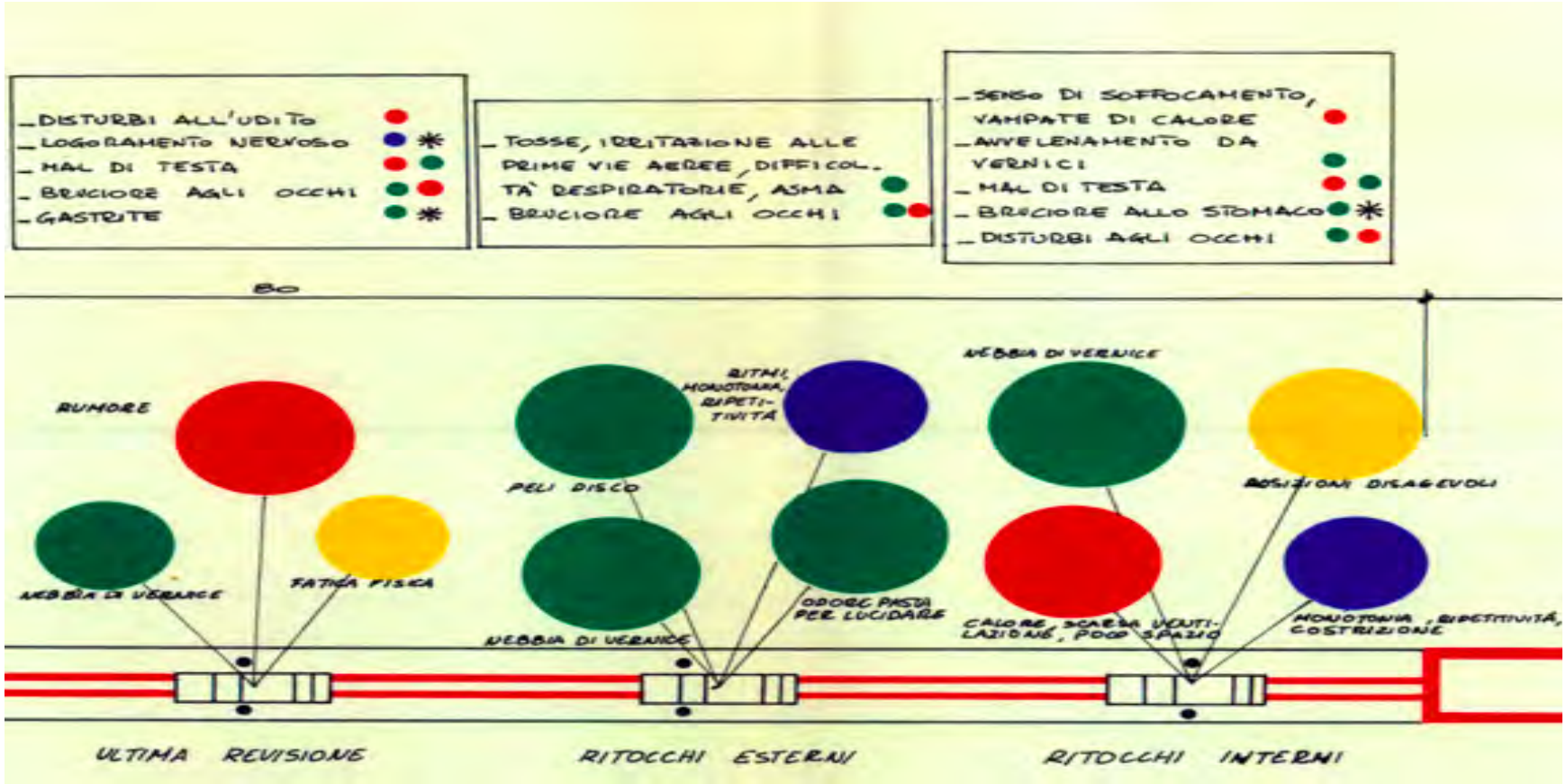
4.15 – Mapping the risks

- The outcome of the research work within Turin's Medical commission and workers of Fiat Mirafiori was the map of the risks of the plant.
- The map of the plant underline the existent risk factors for each shop.
- The following is the example of the paint shop.

4.16 - Risk map at Fiat Mirafiori plant



4.16 - Risk Map Mirafiori - Detail



4.17 – Improvements at Fiat Mirafiori plant

- During 1960s Mirafiori counted 50.000 workers.
- The factory produced 5000 cars per day and it was the 4th largest producer in the world.
- The plant was composed by a mechanical shop, a body shop and a foundry shop.
- Union struggles were especially focused on the prevention of silicosis, which was the most common work related disease in the factory.
- Workers claimed and obtained the introduction of aspirators, the use of masks, and modifications of the plant: the isolation of shops where silica dust was more widespread.

5 - SPREAD AND FORTUNE OF THE MODEL

5. 1 - Spread and fortune of the model

- The model, which was initially presented in a number of informal documents, was published by Fiom in 1969 as a text for union training.
- The model put forward by Turin's unions on environmental health hazards soon acquired great relevance throughout the country.
- In 1971 a reprint of the guide was edited by Unitarian Trade Unions of Metal Sector.
- It enjoyed a very wide dissemination: over 130,000 copies, as we have seen.
- It became the symbol of what has been defined as the unions' "only valuable attempt of cultural renewal".
- The numerous study and research initiatives carried out on the issue bear witness of the wide diffusion of the model.

5.2 - Huge increase of the struggles on the working environment

- Between 1970 and 1973 the struggles on the working environment and, more in general, on the organization of labour radically increased.
- Over the overall claims, the percentage of those on the working environment conditions increased from 3 % in 1969 to 16 % in 1972.
- Only during 1971, 4567 company agreements were stipulated, concerning 50% of Italian industrial workers.
- Among these contracts work environment agreements were 32%, mostly concerning the introduction of individual health registers, and registers of environmental data. And sometimes also concerning the transformation of work environment.
- In 1969 the national contracts of chemical workers came to envisage, for the first time in history, the Maximum Allowable Concentrations (MAC), both the risk and the medical cards as well as the right to bargaining on the occupational health hazard issue.
- Until 1974 the bargaining on the working environment led to a number of critical achievements: the contracts and agreements of the different sectors significantly enhanced the workers' rights of action and control.

5.3 – Occupational health hazard struggle centres

- Following the example of the Turin's medical commission, which in 1964 became the first "Occupational health hazards struggle centre", several local unions' organizations such as those of

➢ Milan, Bologna, Venice, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Perugia, Terni, Rome, Naples, Ravenna, Brescia, Asti, Cagliari

set up mixed commissions of both workers and intellectuals to cope with the problems of occupational health hazards.

5.4 – Common vision with student movement

- The 1968 student movement gave momentum to union initiatives.
- The research carried out by the Turin's Unions on a contestation of the organization of work based on the democracy of knowledge and the criticism to the neutrality of science, had much in common with, and was thus quite spurred by, the student movement's radical criticism against intellectual labour.

5.5 – Modifying the working organization

- Anywhere the workers' struggles of those years were targeted at modifying the ways they worked.
- In Italy trade unions:
  - succeeded in interpreting the workers' discontent and focused their strategies on a most important priority: the collective control of the organization of work;
  - attempted to bring about a true renewal of their policies and structures, pursuing a unifying strategy that caused quite a few harsh struggles within the same organizations.

6 - PRESENT STATE AND VALUE OF THE MODEL

6.1 - The present state of the model

- In 2006, a facsimile reprint of the guide was edited by Inail (Italian Institute for compensation of occupational accidents and diseases), in occasion the Ue campaign on OSH targeted to young workers.

  (here in vision)

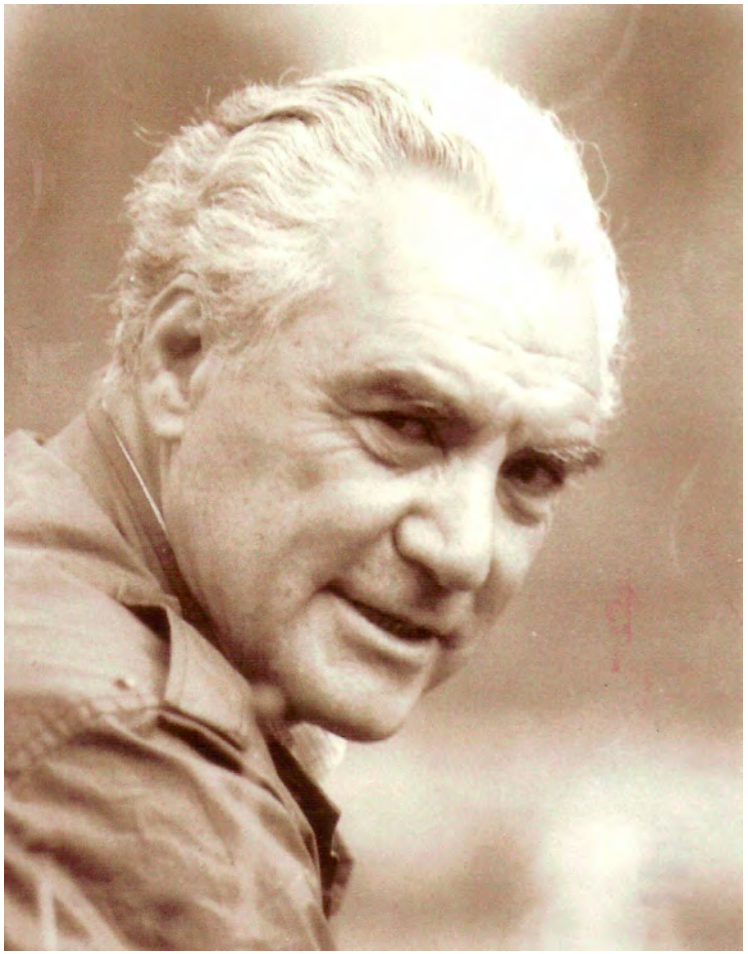
6.2 - The Concrete Information System (Cis) in the industrial area of Marseilles.

- A system aimed to control information on the relation between environment and work.
- A work of “research-action” participated by workers, physicians and experts in different disciplines and aimed to eliminate the eliminable diseases.

6.3 - In Turin and in Piedmont risk maps are used by Local Services for Occupational Health

- In Turin and Piedmont several Local Services for Occupational Health (network of the National Health Service) use the method of risk mapping in order to identify the main risks of the plants of the area of jurisdiction.
- On this base of information they programme their prevention plans of information, training and control and check the results.
- The risks taken into account are: carcinogens, stress, noise, airborne irritants, Msd, asthma, reproductive outcomes.
- In order to identify risks, it's fundamental the recovery of the workers and their representatives knowledge.
- These maps are available for every other subject interested (i. e. workers and their representatives) in order to foster his activity of prevention.

Ivar Oddone
Imperia 1923 – Torino 2011



Gastone Marri
Massa Lombarda (RA) 1922 – Roma 2006

Final (and open) remark

- Despite the changes in the world of work of today compared with that of the years 1960-70, the hard core of the model appears to be still valid:

“Starting from workers' knowledge and spontaneous observation to change working conditions”.

- This appears valid for the struggles for health
  - ➢ both for the fragmented labour in Western countries
  - ➢ and for the conditions of exploitation of labour in so called "developing" countries .