

The Organizer

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Sequence 1

Turin, the late 1800s.

Omero is woken by his mother early one morning. He breaks the ice on the water jug before washing. His brother complains about having to go to school. His mother asks him to leave money for groceries before he leaves for work. Omero walks, alongside a large crowd, into a textile factory. Once everyone is in place the machines start up.

Lunchtime. The workers sit and eat together.

Eight o'clock in the evening. The workers are still at the machines.

Exhaustion is setting in. Mondino traps his arm in a machine. Others run to help.

Sequence 2

The hospital. A crowd gathers, concerned about Mondino. A collection is made for him. "Another collection. Is that all we can do?" asks Raoul. Others are just as angry. "We work a fourteen-hour shift with half an hour to eat," says one. It is decided that a committee be formed and workers' grievances put to the manager.

Sequence 3

A group of three, including Martinetti and Pautasso, go to the manager's office. They talk to a manager who claims to be on their side and implores them to drop their talk of a shorter work day. He slips out the back door, leaving the three humiliated.

Sequence 4

A vote is taking place in the factory. An early walkout has been proposed. Pautasso volunteers to blow an early whistle an hour early. He does so, but everyone else loses their nerve. Pautasso is furious with his fellow workers. "You left me high and dry. I had to pretend I was drunk." "We better get organised," says Martinetti. It's too late, says Pautasso. "Two week's suspension for me and a fine for everybody." Furious, he storms off – just as a train pulls into the station. Professor Sinigaglia has arrived in town.

In a classroom, Di Meo is teaching a group of workers to write. Sinigaglia appears outside the room and beckons Di Meo outside. Sinigaglia explains that he has come from Genoa, where there is trouble. He gives a letter to Di Meo. Di Meo agrees to house Sinigaglia for a short time.

Sequence 5

The following day a large group of workers assemble in the classroom. Raoul warns of lessons learned from the day before. “Think carefully before you try anything stupid again,” he tells them. Asleep in the back room, Sinigaglia overhears the discussion and intervenes. The “near total unanimity of intention” is a major achievement, says Sinigaglia, whipping them up. There is unanimous agreement: they must strike. Sinigaglia urges them to ensure they have sufficient food and supplies before they take action.

Sequence 6

The workers begin organising, preparing for the strike. Unbeknownst to Raoul, the committee assigns Sinigaglia to Raoul’s apartment.

Arro insists on going to work, in defiance of the strike committee. Sinigaglia, Pautasso and others go to his home to challenge him on his decision. They find an impoverished family living in squalor. The committee gives Arro permission to return to work.

Sequence 7

The strike continues. Management is concerned. They never expected this. Arro goes to work but argues with management and is arrested. A collection is made for his family.

Sequence 8

Management and the factory owner meet to discuss the situation. “Our losses from unfilled orders are piling up,” says the owner. “Everyone helps them: the troops, social service societies. If they have friends, so do we – and ours are more powerful. We’ll cut off their supplies, block the streets, until they know who’s calling the tune.”

Sequence 9

The workers steal coal from the train yard while Sinigaglia tries to convince the watchman that the railway workers should join the strike.

Sequence 10

Soldiers in local barracks feed the workers until an officer shuts down the operation. A soldier gives Omero’s sister some food and follows her home. While eating, the family talks about Sinigaglia. “I think he’s a swindler,” says Omero’s sister.

Words arrives that management has capitulated to worker demands. Sinigaglia and others meet to draft their demands. First, a thirteen-hour shift with an hour for lunch. Second, disciplinary action against Pautasso is ended. Third, all fines imposed on workers are repealed.

Niobe, a prostitute, daughter of one of the striking workers, appears.

Sequence 11

A group, including Pautasso – but without Sinigaglia – meet with management, who agree to the second and third demands, and accuse Sinigaglia of being “a rabble-rouser and a fugitive from justice” who has stirred up the workers. Management insist that they will bring in scabs if their terms are not met by the following day.

Scabs are transported to town by train. Sinigaglia, Pautasso and others block the train tracks. Pautasso is accidentally killed in the resulting confrontation.

Sequence 12

Pautasso’s wake. “There’s been nothing but trouble since that professor showed up,” Omero’s sister tells him. Sinigaglia brings a newspaper and explains that the scabs have been sent home to prevent more trouble. Raoul and Sinigaglia clash. “All you care about is your stupid ideas,” says Raoul. “You aren’t here to help us.” Sinigaglia explains that success of the strike is unlikely, but the struggle must nonetheless be fought for those who come after. “You’re not one of us,” says Raoul. “You’ll vanish one day just as suddenly as you appeared.” “You’re right,” responds Sinigaglia. “I’m not like you. I have no home, no family, no friends. No one’s interested in me except the police.”

Sequence 13

Di Meo is in trouble for organising a collection at school. Omero and his brother argue outside the school. “I want to work in the factory like you!” says the younger brother. “You’re going to graduate!” shouts Omero. “I’ll kill you before I let you do as I did!”

Sequence 14

The factory owner is angry with management. Much money is being lost. “Our clients are ordering their goods elsewhere. The time has come for action! These people will stick it out as long as that meddler is here. Notify the police that public safety is threatened. That bum of a professor has a record. Why don’t they arrest him?”

Sequence 15

Sinigaglia plays his piccolo in a fancy restaurant – and is asked to leave. Niobe runs after him and gives him some money. “How did you get messed up in all this?” she asks him. “Out of selfishness,” he says. “Because I like it. And to ensure that someday a girl like you won’t have to make the choice you had to.”

Sequence 16

Sinigaglia narrowly escapes being arrested at Raoul’s place. The police on his tail, he encounters Niobe in a café and takes refuge in her apartment. Later that evening she tells him that the factory owners are close to capitulating.

Sequence 17

Martinetti goes to the factory manager’s apartment to fix his stove. Martinetti tells him that the workers can’t hold out much longer. The manager tells Martinetti that the bosses can hold out for years. Martinetti tells this to his compadres, and encourages them to end the strike. Sinigaglia dashes from Niobe’s apartment to try and convince the workers not to capitulate. He addresses the crowd, which overwhelmingly wants to go back to work, and persuades them to continue their struggle. A demonstration of hundreds moves through the town. Soldiers fire into the crowd and Omero is killed. His sister blames Sinigaglia, who is arrested, for his death.

Sequence 18

Raoul’s girlfriend gives him a letter from Sinigaglia, which contains details of a friend in Lugano. Wanted by the police, he jumps on a train and slips out of town.

The workers – including Omero’s young brother – walk into the factory.