

## English Version

1. To begin, could you introduce the context in which Contro Colombo was formed for Italian comrades and readers? By context, we mean both in terms of the historical moment, on the heels of the George Floyd uprisings and their continuations around the country, and also in terms of the Italian American communities you're addressing with the campaign?

The idea of Italian New Yorkers coming together collectively has been floating around for quite some time. Those of us on the left who are aware of our people's history in the early labor movements of New York City naturally have a sort of yearning for the militancy of the past. This year, during the George Floyd rebellions, we found ourselves in the perfect context to bring such a collective into existence.

Anti-colonial struggle is currently at its highest level since the 1960s. The Black- and Indigenous-led movements against Columbus and other settler-colonial figures that have emerged over the past several years have had a serious impact on the character of the recent rebellions, and at some point people all around the country began vandalizing, tearing down, and destroying monuments to Columbus.

Locally, in response to mounting public pressure and the very real possibility of protesters tearing down monuments themselves, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, an Italian-American, gave a public statement regarding the most prominent statue at Columbus Circle in Manhattan: "I understand the feelings about Christopher Columbus and some of his acts, which nobody would support. But the statue has come to represent and signify appreciation for the Italian American contribution to New York. For that reason, I support it."

This statement is infuriating, and it was at this very moment that one of us put out a call out for Italian New Yorkers to come together and organize ourselves against Columbus. Through our work thus far it has become apparent to us that Italian communities in New York City are the linchpin in this struggle. Although a significant number of Italians want to disavow ourselves from Columbus, there are several Italian fraternal organizations and cultural institutions that are firmly entrenched in the electoral political system and claim to speak for all of us—using their power to protect the Columbus monuments and the Columbus Day holiday. It is our goal to drown them out with voices that are otherwise unheard.

2. What is the relationship of Italian Americans to the figure of Christopher Columbus? Is he, in fact, taken to be a symbol of Italian American culture by working and poor people as Governor Cuomo seems to suggest here?

Many Italian New Yorkers have no relationship to Columbus. We don't care about the holiday, the parade, or the monuments. It has been more than a century since many of our ancestors arrived here. Since then, we are totally assimilated. Some of the only remnants of our culture

can be found in Italian delis, or in pizzerias, many of which aren't even run by Italians anymore as the "pizzeria" has been fully integrated into American culture. Any practical context or conditions requiring us to function as a group are decades behind us.

That being said, there are many of us who still strongly identify as Italian, and, for some, Columbus is an important figure. Our campaign understands this connection to be a symbol of successful assimilation into civil society. What this means to us is that as Italians became recognized and accepted as white, we were elevated into a position in the settler-colonial hierarchy that is inherently antagonistic toward oppressed people of color, particularly Black people. Italians became a prominent force in the NYPD, and fully adopted the capitalist, white supremacist ideology of the United States. Thus, we understand some Italians to be defensive of Columbus because they view engagement with imperial domination to be a positive thing. Columbus correctly symbolizes Italian power and authority over the oppressed. Italians are to the settler-colonial state what Columbus was to the Spanish Crown.

3. What has been the response of Italian-Americans and others that you have reached out to since forming the campaign?

Thus far, all feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Young Italian New Yorkers are excited and looking for an outlet to express anti-colonial politics.

4. On the level of tactics, describe how Contro Colombo plans to proceed.

Currently we are putting forth different tactics and forms of building this collective. We distribute propaganda on our social media channels, engage in conversation with our neighbors regarding the project and the image, and are doing our best to key into already-existing struggles led by BIPOC groups, both individually and as members of Contro Colombo.

In September, we hosted a teach-in with participants, including scholars of Italian-American radicalism and comrades from Italy. We will be following this with more forms of collective education as we grow.

While we are not monument removers ourselves, we support the development of revolutionary consciousness that enables such actions and stand in solidarity with those doing the work of removing monuments to the settler-colonial project, along with the project itself. This struggle will necessarily be waged both in the streets and on the level of language, which we understand to operate in tandem.

5. What connections to you see between anticolonial struggle in the US and in Italy/Europe?

This question has been analyzed by many different scholars and militants thinking about international struggles and how they are necessarily related and interwoven given the histories of colonialism and in the contexts of globalization and financialization.

Firstly, as regards transnational migration—that has become ever more treacherous for migrants and more and more necessary for global capital to continue functioning—the horrific violence levied upon migrants from Northern Africa and other former European colonies as they undertake the perilous journey to continental Europe is mirrored in the violence faced by migrants attempting to enter America through the border with Mexico. In both cases, nationalist ideology and hyper-militarized police forces kill, brutalize, and torture migrants, who are often escaping political violence and instability produced by the very country or countries that the migrant is attempting to enter: American-backed coups and fascist regimes in Central America on the one hand and the legacies of European colonialism on the other. As European (especially Italian) coast guard ships purposefully ignore or reject migrants as they drown in the Mediterranean Sea; as the European Union passes legislation (like the Dublin agreement) to force countries struggling with North-European imposed economic recessions to house migrants which only builds right wing nationalist legitimacy in the eyes of oppressed workers; as American border police terrorize asylum-seekers, capitalists continue to thrive off cheap and disposable migrant labor: from the farms in California to the farms in Calabria.

Furthermore we can think about the connections in terms of necessarily internationalist struggles: against financialization and economic violence, for ecological justice, for an end to police violence and incarceration.

6. How can comrades in Italy assist in this struggle? What kind of connections do you hope to forge?

Firstly, comrades in Italy will be vital to dispelling the (American) myth that Columbus represents Italian culture and values. Rather, as most Italians will be the first to point out: he is a backward figure in our history whose legacy shouldn't be upheld. Though we fear that this may just compel right-wing Italian-Americans to then distance themselves from their Italian history and to claim exceptionalism, this is still part of dispelling the Columbus myth and rather showing support for Columbus's violence to be what it really is: support for the settler-colonial state and racialized, capitalist oppression.

Secondly, we hope to connect with comrades in Italy so that we can together assist in anti-colonial struggles for liberation in our respective contexts. By forging connections, we hope to collaborate and build together.