

The No Tav Movement, a Guarantee for the Future

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You have to be able to lay claim to an important past to aim at embodying a guarantee for the future. Our Movement has now got a long past and even deeper roots that - after many years - feed its present and guarantee a long-term outlook. A vision in which the meeting we start today becomes part of a continuum (after we started a common path all together last year, with the signing of the Charter of Hendaye and with a meeting in Avigliana and in Strasbourg).

Anyway, you might be justly curious to know (in brief) your host's' history.

As a matter of fact, there is no real "birth date" of the Susa Valley No TAV Movement¹ but what is certain is that our small community and the stretch of alpine land that hosts it since the beginning of the 19th century have represented a case and a place in the history of exploitation of natural resources with an industrial aim and - above all - a culture of "resistance": a heritage of knowledge that is naturally inspired by the fight against Fascism, but also by the extraordinary wealth embodied, in the years that followed, by the sequence of events such as the workers' struggles that took place after the financial crisis and, later, after the failure of the Susa Valley Cotton Mills in the early 60's, and the birth of the first students' and workers' collectives that then started the mythical 1968 era in Turin and all over Italy. A year that was, you could say, anticipated in the Susa Valley (*A book by Aris Accornero, recently published by Il Mulino, reconstructs its history*).

But it is primarily in Condove that the main events took place: Carlo Carretto, a long-time school principal there, a prophet and a difficult person for the anti-fascist Catholics; in Condove - at the Moncenisio Factory - there was also a worker, Achille Croce, who fasted, who did Yoga, read Gandhi and Capitini. And then, a priest who was considered slightly "eccentric" by the very traditional diocesan administration in Susa, Father Giuseppe Viglongo, was "moved" to Condove - which was a village surrounded by a large mountain area full of small villages emptied by the industrialization of the lower valley. He came from the area around the town of Vercelli. After serving in the army, he worked as a typographer but he got TB. During the long months he spent in a sanatorium he decided to enter the seminary but it was a "late vocation", he had not grown up in the backyard of the diocesan administration with some priests teaching him and some nuns looking after him. In his sermons he didn't speak much about the Holy Virgin's apparitions but he talked a lot about conscientious objection, against the use of weapons (in a valley worshipping mountain artillery, alpine troops and their army chaplains). He spoke about workers' rights and about the right to education: he managed to find some funds to buy a pre-fabricated building and he convinced the factories in the valley to give him some drafting machines, workbenches, free tools and free evening classes were born. He spoke about Father Primo Mazzolari ... and in the following years he spoke a lot about Father Lorenzo Milani, Prior in Barbiana. He funded a newspaper, Dialogo in Valle (Dialogue in the Valley) - after the paper of the diocesan administration in Susa, "La Valsusa", refused to publish the so called "dialogue" with young people, the first conscientious objectors, with the trade unions, with the Acli (Christian Workers' Associations) on a self-managed page! He also promoted a film club where they did not show the parish

¹ Nevertheless, it is possible to fix the birthdate of the No TAV Movement on October 13th, 1989, when a delegation of people from the Susa Valley took part in the conference about "Alpine areas across borders" that was organized in Trento by the late member of the European Parliament, Alexander Langer.

youth club films but new releases – even some films that, at that time, were considered “risqué”. Even a group was born from all that. A group that still today does not confine itself to cultivate cinema but it produces it, promoting a film festival which hopes to give birth to more festivals around Italy (nowadays - during a profound cultural crisis - there are six events linked together by a fine project started in Naples and called - following a popular solidarity experience that was at the point of being forgotten - “Of the suspended café”).

But above all, the first motion we know of in which a workers council unanimously proclaimed their refusal to build war weapons and bombs and warned the company - the Moncenisio Factory - against accepting any possible military contracts in the future (at the cost of giving up their job and salary). Of course the union representative who suggested all that was Achille Croce, who soon after that wrote a long letter about the ethical refusal of contract work!

Then, in the last few years, the consolidation of the struggle to defend our territory against the numerous attacks that have taken place without long-lasting solutions for more than a century, that were then intensified in the last 50 years (after the subjugation of the lower valley and of water resources with the birth of the textile industry and the subsequent de-population of the mountains, which created the basis for hydro-geological instability). They can be summarized as follows:

- the creation, at 2,000 meters above sea level, of the largest hydroelectric catchment area in Europe - Moncenisio Lake - which caused a devastating movement of soil both in its volume and in its social dynamics with the arrival and consolidation of mafia interests.
- the uncontrolled construction speculation (and naturally notable mafia infiltration) which transformed vast areas of pasture and forest into concrete jungles destined to deteriorate rapidly due to the use of low-quality material and the prohibitive conditions for constructing to respond to demand inflated by the “primordial” speculation this valley has unfortunately been witness to.
- the construction of the Fréjus highway tunnel and the connecting A32 highway which occurred with similar characteristics to the construction racket to the point that after just 20-odd years viaducts and tunnels are homes to permanent construction sites for repaving and even re-facing large areas!
- the realization (economically) firstly of the doubling of the steepest and most tortuous tract of the Turin-Lyon railway line (between Bussoleno and Salbertrand) and then the recently concluded re-facing of the Fréjus railway tunnel to allow for the passage of larger-sized wagons.

All of this should be added to the historic “transit corridor vocation” assigned to us which (*apart from wanting to identify us as one of the many passes through which Hannibal passed with his mythical elephants*) has always tagged us as an “obligatory passageway” to and from France first along the Roman roads, then the medieval and Napoleonic ones (*across the Clapier Pass, Moncenisio, Monginevro and the Scala*).

Add to this the manipulated allocation of world championships and the winter Olympics which accentuated pre-existing faults in the valley and, at the same time, gave the citizens of Turin the unenviable honour for the most indebted citizens in the country with the highest public debt in Europe.

And, to talk about the present, the second militarization of our towns for the forced establishment of a preliminary (non)construction site to excavate new tunnels planned 20 years ago for a high-speed train, for unlikely travellers eradicated by links on both the French and Italian sides, which have de-classified it for even less probable freight passage...

Never mind the semi-clandestine start of excavation for a “safety” tunnel for the Fréjus highway tunnel and the adjacent railway tunnel (both of which, at this time, consist of a single tunnel without adequate emergency exits).

In such a context it is almost natural that a radical protest movement should be created against the realization of additional infrastructure within an area that is already subject to every sort of servitude, at the risk of the significant impoverishment of the water sources and the spread of asbestos fibres in the atmosphere along with other pitchblende dust and the spread of radon gas!

However, it was not underestimated that, with time, the level of conscience would grow and a culture of struggle against a model of development which, today, demonstrates its erosion and incapacity to combine physical limits with the delirium of free and unencumbered finances.

The historical context for the birth of this struggle to defend a territory must be identified - regardless of its eventual success - within this complex framework. It is surely destined to be considered the longest-standing of the many movements started in our country and which identifies its next moves from an almost unique situation in the tormented Italian political landscape: the formal coordination of the activities of all the environmental associations (elsewhere in perennial competition with each other) which has in Mario Cavargna, the founder of Pro Natura, its most representative exponent.

With the construction of the first tunnel and then the Fréjus, an alliance between all the environmental protection associations existed though, unfortunately, in those years they didn't find the appropriate institutional support.

But the perverse effects of the rise of construction sites and, more importantly, the lack of respect for the memorandum of intent imposed by the Piedmont Region after the environmental struggles (though without the option of sanctions if contravened) ended up convincing even the local administrations more apt to follow the party line of something that today finally the majority of Italians have started to understand: that you cannot believe the promises of politicians or think you can resolve problems with the outdated logic of political alignments.

As a result of this experience, the Habitat Committee was formed in defence of the remaining “viability” of the Susa Valley: university professors, technical experts, cultural figures and citizens are united by an association which provides the community, free of charge, with knowledge that normally is sold to those who push **Unnecessary Large Projects** (*who, in the meantime having operated in a way that utilizes public money with the same impunity that one could legitimately squander their own money, where cost is no issue*)!

It's a Saturday afternoon on the 14th of January, 1991. A very crowded assembly in Condove (in the public cinema with standing-room only) ratified the movement's birth, 21 years ago. But it wasn't born of nothing: in the previous years, along with the highway struggle, there were many other occasions for protest - even successful ones - like the one (thanks to large-scale popular participation) that was able to stop the doubling of the Grand'Ile - Piossasco power line which would have crossed the length of the entire valley. It was one of the many initiatives of the Meyer Vighetti Centre from which the Bussoleno Committee for Popular Struggle was born, and which also is responsible for the No Tav flag whose image, in the meantime, has travelled around the world.

And regarding the specific theme of transportation and the bulimic infrastructure which is used as an alibi for inundating the continent with iron and cement, one must remember the defence of the alpine ecosystem (from the drawing up of the

Berchtesgaden Convention, still unobserved and, no surprise, particularly with regards to transportation) that the people of Susa Valley are committed to. From the beginning, they participated with a small delegation – on **October 13th, 1989** - in a seminar on alpine areas with mountain passes in Trento held by MEP Alexander Langer and from which the SOS Transit Movement was born.

On November 20th of that same year (*Verona was purposely chosen as the location because of the proposed use of an area larger than the urban area to realize a mega-project the Interporto "Quadrante Europa"*) a sensitization initiative against alpine traffic began which, the following year, led to the realization of three important cross-border meetings (*a bit like the one that is opening here in Venaus*) in Aosta (with the French and Swiss on February 3rd and 4th), in Merano (with the Austrians and Germans on March 3rd) and in Trieste (with the Slovenians on June 16, 1990).

This is our history and - if you will allow me - our international vocation which has never diminished not even when (after dozens of meetings through the networks of French ecologists) we had to accept the cold shoulder of our French counterparts at the time.

Until the more profitable meetings in Bardonecchia - organized in the context of CIPRA - but only after 2005, the year of the great popular revolt in Venaus which led to the abandonment of the construction site (one of many) destined to destroy this lovely community which today, has been reborn - thanks to initiatives like our friends from the cooperative **dALLa TERra NATIVA** who were able to capture the principles of the de-growth movement in a concrete initiative.

It is also thanks to them that we have access to this location where we inaugurate this meeting full of anticipation.

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