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Occupy in Valsusa: The No TAV Movement*

Emiliana Armano,[†] Gian Luca Pittavino^{††} & Raffaele Sciortino^{†††}

Translated by Emanuele Leonardi and James Brookes¹

1. Introduction

The No TAV² movement against the high-speed train line bears similarities to the Occupy and Indignados movements in its capacity to interweave struggle and social cooperation. Like those two movements, the No TAV movement acts as a strong point of reference for demands for mobilization and countersubjection, which, given the global crisis, have also re-emerged in Italy, albeit not without difficulty. In this article after briefly outlining some elements of its development, we will focus on the dynamics that have made the No TAV movement a *commune of struggle*. This struggle has been forging strong ties among both those who live in the territory and those who arrived at the height of the mobilization. It has also rekindled strong allegiances to the country among many who see the No TAV movement as a restarting point and a possible common perspective in the context of a terrible and ever-deepening crisis.

We are in the Susa Valley, a broad alpine valley to the west of Turin, and one of the central traffic corridors between Italy and France. Since the late nineties there has been a movement of resistance against the construction of the high-speed railway line, which is planned as part of the Lyon-Turin-Trieste-Ljubljana-Budapest railway

*A preliminary version of this paper was published as “Occupy in Valsusa” (Armano, Pittavino, and Sciortino 2012). These notes, which do not represent the breadth of opinion expressed by the movement as a whole, draw heavily on a long interview conducted with three activists of the No TAV Committee of Popular Struggle: Luigi Robaldo, Ermelinda Varrese, and Luigi Casel. To a great extent, this article owes its existence to their contribution.

[†]emi_armano@yahoo.it.

^{††}gianlup@hotmail.com.

^{†††}rafkurz@yahoo.it.

¹The introduction is translated by James Brookes, and the rest of the essay by Emanuele Leonardi. The authors thank them for their attentive and careful translation. This article is a joint work of the authors, whose names appear in alphabetical order. If, however, individual authorship is to be assigned, Gianluca Pittavino wrote the introduction; Emiliana Armano wrote the second and the fifth sections and Raffaele Sciortino all remaining sections: third, fourth, sixth, seventh and conclusion.

²The acronym TAV in Italian stands for *Treno ad Alta Velocita*, which means high-speed train in English. The No TAV movement arose more than ten years ago in the Susa Valley, an alpine region in northwest Italy that connects the Turin area and France, in opposition to the planned high-speed train line and its impacts on the territory. For information on the No TAV movement and the project itself, see <http://www.notav.eu>.

axis in the Trans-European Rail network. The Turin-Lyon line is one segment of the European Union's Trans-European transport network and was officially authorized in 1996,³ though it receives minimal funding from the E.U.

The Turin-Lyon high-speed railway project proposes to construct a new 235-kilometer international railway line between Turin and Lyon, despite the fact that a railway line already exists between the two cities. Although the project has undergone many transformations since the early feasibility studies in the 90s, plans for a new 57-km track between the Susa Valley in Italy and the Maurienne Valley in France remain. The high-speed line would primarily carry freight, but it would also have passenger service.

To date, resistance against the high-speed train has been successful, particularly following efforts and progress made in 2005.⁴ Construction work has not yet begun, and only a single plot of land has been fenced off for an exploratory tunnel that is to be built prior to the construction of the main tunnel between Italy and France. No TAV has achieved this success despite the fact that the high-speed train is supported by all the main Italian political parties, including the center-left. The project has also gotten a boost from the Left with explicit support by newly elected French President François Hollande.

The TAV's impact on the environment and people's health raises numerous significant concerns: the duration of the construction period, which is expected to exceed fifteen years; the further concreting-over of the land; and the various types of pollution the construction of the high-speed train will produce. Pollution from the project includes the dispersal of asbestos and uranium that is present in the rock that would be bored to build the tunnels (Giunti et al. 2012). Furthermore, it would exacerbate already existing environmental problems from two high-capacity roads, a motorway, an overhead power line, and a railway line, all of which run the length of the valley.

It would, however, be a mistake to see this struggle as just another example of the environmental movement at work. The No TAV argument has broadened to include not only the defense of a territory, but also a questioning of the interests and basic model of development that lie behind such grandiose capital projects. The main motivation behind the creation of the TAV has nothing to do with future flows of

³Council Directive 96/48/EC on July 23, 1996.

⁴We are referring to events from the "battle of Seghino" to the reconquest of the plots of Venaus where the first construction site for the project was supposed to appear. Two films from 2006 document events at Venaus and plot the history of the movement up until that time: "Stop that Train—Video Inquiry Into the No TAV Movement—Images and Interviews from the Struggle," http://www.arcoiris.tv/modules.php?d_op=getit&id=5097&name=Flash, with subtitles in English, and "Centro Augestito Askatasuna e Comitato di Lotta popolare, Fermarlo é possibile. Fermarlo tocca a noi!" ["It Can Be Stopped: It's Up to Us to Stop It"]. For in-depth analysis of the events of 2006, we recommend Centro Sociale Askatasuna e Comitato di Lotta, eds. (2006).

traffic between Turin and Lyon. These traffic flows are in a declining trend and, according to numerous cost-benefit studies (see, for instance, Tartaglia 2012), cannot be turned around. The promotion of the TAV does, however, offer substantial opportunities for private profit in the work to build the train line. Thanks to a system in which the State makes the investments but the profits coming from those investments flow into private hands, this is a structural transference of public to private wealth. In addition, even if we accept the highly inflated official forecasts on passenger volumes and goods traffic, these future needs would be achievable more quickly and economically by modernizing the existing line, which currently operates at only 30 percent of its capacity.⁵

In the summer of 2011, violence escalated in this conflict. Then, at the end of June, authorities authorized a military occupation in Chiomonte where construction on the train line was due to commence. A camp known as Libera Repubblica della Maddalena (Free Republic of Maddalena), named for the locality where the movement had set up, was violently cleared. In response, a mass uprising erupted on July 3, 2011 with more than 50,000 residents of the valley and activists from all over Italy and beyond taking part,⁶ clashing with the army and police force throughout the day. The mobilization continued in the following months both with initiatives from the movement and in response to the decree of the new (and as of this writing, outgoing) Monti government, which declared the area a military zone. In January 2012, 26 activists were arrested after being accused of harming and resisting police during the July 2011 actions (Maglioni and Thomson 2011).

July 3, 2011 marked a turning point, when the movement became much more inclusive in its outlook and practice. From that point on, those mobilizing in Italian towns and cities have not merely shown solidarity to a valley under military rule, they have seen this as a struggle for everyone's future. A wide spectrum of people—from "ordinary" citizens not previously actively engaged in the political process to longtime radical critics—have felt called upon to take a stand on a point as simple as it is crucial: High speed, with whose money and to what purpose during an intractable economic crisis? What future is in store with this model of development? And is this democracy?

2. A Constituent No (In Its Own Way)

The No TAV movement has been, and continues to be, an important *laboratory* for the creation of co-operative *subjectivities* (Holloway 2002; 2012). Although this

⁵Analysis of the data for the project and its completion was undertaken by the participants of the recent conference, TAV Torino-Lione: Quali Opportunità e Criticità? [TAV Turin-Lyon: What Opportunities and Threats?], April 26, 2012. See <http://www.areweb.polito.it/eventi/TAVSalute/>.

⁶The history of those days is richly documented in numerous works by media activists. See, for example, the documentary film, *Fratelli di TAV, I peccati della Maddalena* [Brothers in TAV, The Sins of Maddalena], 2011, <http://vimeo.com/27579834>; a collective e-book, *Agenzia X*. (2011); and a concise reflection on the July uprising, Carls and Iamele (2011).

struggle has traits specific to the issue, it has also elaborated a language (and tackled political problems) that goes beyond the specific issue of the TAV. The village of Venaus was the first place confrontation between the movement and authorities reached high levels of conflict. In December 2005, the movement “reconquered” Venaus⁷ and has continued its activities insofar as the adversary has persisted in its intentions. Furthermore, the movement has consolidated itself as a diffused and intergenerational movement in a number of ways. It has reinforced its disseminated local presence in different forms and widened its areas of interest to include more general issues. It seeks to coordinate with other mobilizations around real democracy and social commons (e.g., M15, Indignados and Occupiers), and territorial and natural commons. As such, No TAV finds common cause with the No Dal Molin against the enlargement of the U.S. military base at Vicenza, the No Ponte struggle, which is mobilizing against the planned Strait of Messina bridge between Sicily and Calabria, struggles against incinerators and new landfills in the region of Campania, and the referendum against the privatization of public water systems. Just a year ago the movement actively blocked a series of planned logging operations, which after one month resulted in a retreat of the drills brought into the valley during the night to assess the engineering aspects of the TAV project. Meanwhile, the movement has resisted adopting the tactic of the Observatory⁸—the invitation to shift from a so-called “destructive” stance of opposition to one of participation that has “seduced” some previously skeptical mayors. No TAV has held true to its position of radical openness while maintaining the clarity of its goal and the distinction of political roles towards those political representatives and local institutions that participate in the struggle against the TAV, even if just to a certain extent.⁹

As a result, the opposition to the TAV has become something deeper: it is aware of and informed by collective involvement. The quick intensification of the conflict—particularly the militarization of the valley—along with a consolidation of support *after* the uprising spurred this deeper understanding. It is worth noting that this process of consolidation enabled the recognition of the enormous work of organization, learning, and communication that the first groups of activists carried out *before*—sometimes well before—the decisive confrontations. In this way, the consolidation of support has reactivated the non-institutionalized memory of past struggles. Maybe these dynamics—which can be defined, without emphasis, in their

⁷This phase of the struggle is well documented in the documentary, “Stop that Train—Video Inquiry Into the No TAV Movement—Images and Interviews from the Struggle.”

⁸The Observatory is an institutional device used in negotiations that was proposed by the movement targets following the resistance in Venaus. Beyond its rhetoric, the Observatory aims to soften radical positions taken by mayors in the valley and the *Comunità Montana*, a local institution whose aim is the management of mountainous districts.

⁹The local elections in fourteen municipalities in 2010 was not experienced as a high point of the participatory process, much less the political outcome of the struggle. The same can be said about “lobbying” *Comunità Montana*, led by a dissident member of the former *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* [Left-wing Democratic Party]. Moreover, the movement has always refused to endorse the referendum as a political tool, since in the current context, it could only be used against its goals (author interview with L. Casel).

own way—tell us something about the phase we are living through, and also about the link between struggle and organization.

3. From the Critique of *Grandi Opere* [Big Infrastructures] . . .

The above developments in the struggles against the TAV reveal the peculiar mass character of the movement. The term *community* is often used to describe this situation. Whether we like it or not, the fundamental element is that this is not a given or natural community. Rather, it formed itself within and through the struggle (and, as a consequence, it is always at risk). The question of how it formed itself is significant.

The movement was small at the beginning and initially focused on the technical, environmental, and economic impacts of the TAV project. In doing so, it incorporated the knowledge of technical “experts” in a sort of permanent learning laboratory, which helped to create and spread a body of knowledge about the project (Cancelli, Sergi, and Zucchetti 2006). This has been a collective endeavor that little by little has spread widely through a process of mass self-communication (Castells 2002). At first, activists concentrated on the bargain the TAV offered: territorial and health-related costs in exchange for nonexistent social and economic advantages. This line of inquiry revealed a sort of reverse cost-benefit analysis, which No TAV activists have been able to use against corporations and politicians.

This trajectory led to the second question: Who is going to profit from the realization of the TAV, and how will it be financed? The answer emerged in the model of subtle privatization, which suits *Grandi Opere* [big infrastructures] projects particularly well. *Grandi Opere* are carried out in a contractual system that relies on the State to provide liquidity for investments but grants the construction work to certain big private companies (the “general contractors”) without calling for bids from others. This model entails a constant escalation of construction costs and is structured around a system that utilizes subcontractors who employ and exploit precarious labor (Bologna 2011)—as has been widely documented with the high-speed lines that have already been built throughout Italy. Despite the inherent corruption, this model survived the Tangentopoli era¹⁰ and was subsequently refined under the rule of center-left governments during the nineties. It reached its zenith with the passage of the *Legge Obiettivo* (Goal Law), during the Berlusconi government in 2002, creating a classic example of socialization of losses—in the form of negative externalities—and privatization of profits (Cicconi 2004).¹¹

¹⁰Tangentopoli, which translates loosely as “bribesville,” refers to a period of widespread corruption investigations in Italy between 1992 and 1996 that involved, government ministers, delegates, senators, businessmen and former prime ministers.

¹¹Cicconi’s book, *Le grandi opere del cavaliere* [*The Cavalier’s (Berlusconi’s) Big Infrastructures*] has been fundamental to the movement. Notwithstanding its title, the book also contains strong critiques of center-left governments.

The ability to elaborate and present such a critical point of view explains the constant presence within the movement's discursive toolbox of issues linked to political corruption and organized crime. It also accounts for the particular focus on the issue of public debts. However, this line of inquiry is not from a "populist" stance. Looking closer, what we see is the emergence of a "situated" form of criticism toward financial capital, especially with regard to its destructive effects on a whole territory: that financial capital is creating an uncertain future—no longer in terms of mere employment but in terms of life in general—with a debt-based economy organized around the structural plunder of the "public" sector (Sciortino 2011). From this perspective, the No TAV struggle is a *local* conflict, but not *localistic*, that is, one affected by the NIMBY syndrome. What is at stake in this conflict is territory, not as an egoistic object of re-appropriation but rather as a *commons*, a concept that refers to the crucial elements of production and, more generally, redistribution of social wealth. This notion of territory as commons allows one to grasp that politics and economy are strongly interconnected. From this vantage point, threats to the territory from projects like the high-speed train provoke a practical critique of *public political economy*.

4. . . . To the Critique of Political Representation

Consideration of these issues prompted a new awareness: the movement was responding not only to the project of *Grandi Opere*, but also to the crisis of legitimation brought on by institutional powers—i.e., the crisis of political representation in the post-democracy era (Crouch 2005). This is an important development, which stemmed from concrete practices to grasp the material base of the current "crisis of politics," namely the link between the state, the banks, big companies and institutional consortia. The mass resistance that mobilized to safeguard the territory strengthened through the awareness (which at a certain point became generalized) that it was acting legitimately against an arbitrary legality imposed on it by the state and political parties. Understanding this as *another legality* (Mattei and Nader 2008) compelled the movement to break the law to exercise its power to insist on real democracy in the territory. Accordingly, in the early stages of the struggle, organization took place outside traditional forms, such as parties and unions, since these traditional entities were deaf to the movement's claims (Melucci 1991; Farro 2001; Biorcio 2005). This went on until the full autonomy of local institutions became a value in itself and a necessary condition for the essential question of "who decides?" (Chicchi and Leonardi 2008; Greyl, Healy, Leonardi, and Temper 2012). This element along with defending the territory against rapacious development, represented the specific commons the movement was protecting—one well beyond the Susa Valley. This was accomplished within a democratic practice that proved to be both effective and self-organized and that was characterized by the originality and creativity of procedures, "institutions," and communication circuits. In other words, the movements practiced real democracy (Citton, Querrien and Secretan 2011), a sort of "democracy of control" over local

political institutions (della Porta and Piazza 2008; Caruso 2010). Although some terms lose their relevance, the word “horizontality” still fairly precisely describes the movement’s organizing and participatory practices. During moments of heated conflict, the process of decision-making has remained in the assemblies where, so far, it has always been able to find agreement on actions that reflect both the unity of the movement and the direct reference to the goal; indeed, this constitutes the most fundamental shared principle.

Even the spatial dimension has been reconfigured. Meeting places (no longer confined to party or union offices, but *presidi* [protest sites on the territory], “re-appropriated” buildings of local institutions, streets, schools, courtyards, etc.) have become open spaces where people interact in two ways: multifarious goal-oriented co-operation and (re)construction of social relationships against atomization. This is the true bonding agent of the movement, the essence of its *political work*: “It is a form of submissive and dormant subjectivity that the population of the Susa Valley seems to have refused” (Leonardi 2008, 419). This dimension has allowed a constant and diligent quest for unity within heterogeneity: a unity built around different subjects, visions, individual histories, perspectives, and even political roles (Pittavino 2012a; 2013).

It is a real process—as such not always painless, and by definition non-linear—of unification among concrete subjects who cannot be reduced to a pre-given common perspective. These subjects transformed themselves through struggle, creating new relations, and producing something not only unprecedented, but, prior to it happening, even unthinkable.¹²

5. A New Kind of Inquiry

Different themes of discussion and analysis that share a common interest but incorporate different problematics continue to take place in the internal debate within the movement. We see a kind of collective participation that valorizes specific competencies and sensitivities (Centro Sociale Askatasuna 2012). Through systematic work that sometimes operates below the surface, an *ensemble* of critical but not easily available information integrates the contribution of the “experts” in an intelligent way.¹³ Just a few months ago, for example, the Co-ordination of Susa Valley Physicians presented its conclusions on how public health in the valley would be affected if new construction sites for the TAV began work (see <http://www.notav.eu>).

¹²From our interview with Ermelinda Varrese.

¹³For a recent analysis of the features of the No TAV movement, we recommend Centro Askatasuna, eds. (2012), a collective edition with numerous in-depth interviews with activists and No TAV militants, experts, and inhabitants of the Susa Valley. See <http://www.saradura.org/>.

The movement has spawned a true program of self-education, starting from a critical reflection on issues such as the environment, pollution, quality of life, and mobility. This program also spurs energies and ideas that circulate through a larger body. There are no assumed intellectuals; knowledge is produced by many in a process of direct integration between competencies and practices of struggle. Having said that, we do not suggest immediate continuities between these processes and previous experiences of workers' inquiry or co-research (Montaldi and Alasia [1960] 2010; Alquati 1975; 1993). Yet, the inquiry-form strikes back in an embedded guise as an internalized but non-theorized practice in the No TAV movement (Armano and Sciortino 2006).

Activists obtain official documents (many of which are often technically complex), analyze them by comparing their contents with their own evidence and experiences in the struggle, and discuss them publicly. In so doing, activists elaborate and produce new critical knowledge. Knowledge thus becomes an endogenous element of the movement, one of its internal productions. There is no "objective" or "scientific" knowledge to be automatically trusted, no deference towards experts. When new technical elements emerge, the movement must be in the position to discuss them. Meanwhile, the relationship with knowledge is, so to speak, "thing"-related, namely non-ideological. Thus the movement acquires specific—not specialistic—content. Experts are welcome, but they do not set the agenda: knowledge is knowing together. It goes without saying that this kind of behavior entails a merciless but attentive critique of mass-media propaganda on issues relevant to the movement.¹⁴

The movement utilizes new media, but does so in a sober manner (as tools of diffusion) to reinforce previously established face-to-face relationships. In this way, communication through networks proves important to practices of resistance (InfoFreeFlow 2012; Pittavino 2012b). In fact, it deploys itself either on previously nonexistent bonds or on links created by struggles. Moreover, it shows the full potential of message proliferation and mass self-communication, a hallmark of new media.

On this basis communication turns into organization. Fluid, open and non-hegemonic, it is able to involve different subjects around common goals without imposing an exclusive point of view. Rather, it respects different practices and forms of expression. Through these modalities, the movement is able to *reflect on itself* and question its moods and perceptions. In other words, it educates itself through the production of new information. In this way, knowledge, communication networks, and organizational processes overlap with subjective self-recognition and self-constitution (personal as well as collective).

¹⁴A common joke among activists is that the largest concentration of transportation experts in the world is found in the Susa Valley (Leonardi 2008, 421).

6. Development and Class Composition

As a first step, it is important to reflect on the composition of the movement, which is linked to a profound sense of space and thus, from a social and political perspective, covers a wide area of thought. When asked, some saw the movement as “purist” and were suspicious of its inter-class features; others saw it as “open but reductionist,” concluding the movement would be led by “reflexive middle classes”; still others saw it as “dismissive,” stressing the fact that since labor is not the centerpiece of the No TAV movement, it must be limited both territorially and in scope. The essential point, however, is to avoid confusion between political and “programmatically” evolutions of the movement, which can obviously be criticized. In this particular case, the movement did not occur in a pneumatic void, nor was it reduced to a merely environmentalist struggle *et similia*. From the perspective of composition and otherwise, we can say we are seeing something that embryonically has transcended both the traditional environmental struggle and the merely additive link between environment and labor.

In fact, looking closer, the generic inter-class and “popular” texture (made up by workers, public employees, old and new middle classes, small entrepreneurs, etc.) does not explain the peculiarity of the No TAV movement. What emerges is something else, something more disconcerting or more promising, depending on one’s point of view. This is something that arises from the struggle and can only be properly understood through its lenses, as is normally the case when referring to new social phenomena. What we have seen is the unprecedented connection of “ordinary” individuals who have been substantially deprived of traditional vectors of belonging and class identities, a typical situation in the declining Fordist industrial cycle. These individuals do not possess any organized protection against a new modality of production that has come to be exclusively destructive. They are women and men who are reduced (like everybody else) to a consumerist existence and forced to produce in a territory traversed by flows of commodity circulation. This territory is blighted by consumption cathedrals that have transformed it into a theater playing out an everyday mass commuting process toward cities that are desperately seeking a “cognitive” conversion for a manufacturing sector in deep crisis. In this desperate situation, it was *individuals* who took the streets, not because class relationships and social inequalities disappeared with the collapse of old social structures, but because capitalist relations are so pervasive that nowadays even individuals are weavers of *social relations*. Individuals are normally exposed to alienating and disrupting dynamics. Nonetheless, in certain conditions, it is possible to reverse such dynamics through the creation of a community that is not natural or pre-given, but rather must be continuously built on the potential richness of those *ambivalent* relationships that in everyday life are put to value for the market and not for oneself.

It is precisely this social composition (if we can still call it this, since the concept is very difficult to define in sociological or statistical terms) that underwent a process of antagonistic *subjectification*. And in the process it had to confront the issue of

development in a new way. Clearly, the No TAV struggle is not against the “primitive accumulation” of infrastructures; rather, it is against the destructive “enlarged reproduction” within globalization. The critique elaborated by the No TAV movement grew “spontaneously” against the idea of sacrificing people’s lives to a huge but useless logistic platform for the sake of commodity circulation and the transformation of land and communities into an open “space of flows.” Subsequently, such a critique refined itself against the model of private appropriation of public money, which, through the system of *Grandi Opere*, has not only made corruption a structural phenomena, but also led to the spread of precarious working relations—another typical feature of *post-Fordist* enterprises.¹⁵ In this way, opposition to the destructive features of a certain idea of “development” has acquired consistency. This kind of development is no longer seductive, since it increasingly dislocates on two opposite fronts: profits and losses. Moreover, it does so without offering a political and economic “exchange” to workers and/or small enterprises (as was the case in previous phases) for compensation for damages to social life and the environment.¹⁶ Needless to say, as a consequence of the economic crisis this disconnection is only getting worse.

Regarding the issue of work relations, labor is present within the No TAV struggle. Furthermore, a texture of productive and reproductive relations—Marx’s *social individual!*—has emerged from the collapse of the previous composition of labor (if we still want to use such a vocabulary). This new set of productive and reproductive relations strives to turn itself into a credible model for those capitalist relations that tend to cover the entire spectrum of life (Sciortino 2006).

7. Conclusion: Commons as Program?

The Susa Valley, where this struggle is taking place, is not an idyllic alpine environment; rather, it is the extension of a metropolis undergoing restructuring and is a densely infrastructuralized area.¹⁷ At stake is a territory pervaded by economic and power relations in which social life has become conflicted and compromised because of the private logics of profit-making. For this reason, the No TAV movement must face the new configuration of the territory, which is contested between the space of global-commodified flows and spaces of social life.

The movement is doing that, to a significant extent, through a non-traditional process of mobilization. Its strength—and partly its luck—is that it does not have to

¹⁵Author Ivan Cicconi has emphasized this point during the No TAV assemblies.

¹⁶A good example of this is the Open Letter the No TAV movement sent to local craftsmen and entrepreneurs in 2011 (see <http://www.infoaut.org>). The Observatory’s most recent attempt to gain consensus by substituting large contracts with small ones in order to involve local small enterprises in the process is not merely by chance.

¹⁷The valley was once an important industrial center, but today it is largely a rust belt. The valley has seen substantial immigration from Southern Italy and is traversed by three major highways, a train line, and a long-distance power line.

defend old structures nor use old tools to do so.¹⁸ A new field of forces has emerged, and it shows remarkable potentialities.

The main resource of the mobilization is linked to the fact that the struggle concerns the reproduction of a kind of social life that must defend something like a *commons*.¹⁹ This is an aspect that can widen itself through its connection to different but linked elements. It is now commonly acknowledged that crucial aspects of life—in this case, territory, health, mobility, decision-making, critical knowledge—run counter to the voracious quest of markets. These modes of reproduction must also be actively and collectively defended against privatization. There a thin line separates a “public” good—which can always be dispossessed from its producer via privatization (be it public or private)—and an authentic commons.²⁰

The No TAV movement has concretely posed this issue in Italy through its struggle of resistance, an amazing feat considering that similar attempts had been made—although in general and “ethical” terms—by the No Global movement. Despite its remarkable achievements, the No TAV movement is constrained in the existing conditions. In its isolation from a depressing national framework,²¹ the movement perceives itself as defensive. Consequently, it is having difficulty shifting from resistance to re-appropriation to an active production of commons. Nevertheless, sometimes activists do ponder what they will be able to do once the TAV battle is won, and further, whether they will manage to go beyond this situation, with regard to life- and labor-forms.²²

So far, it has taken a lot of determination and a little luck. The proliferation of struggles about commons, if these arise, will begin to answer to this question.

¹⁸The issue of degrowth, which is present in No TAV discussions that attempt to develop a larger perspective, becomes relevant here. However, a discussion of degrowth’s theoretical perspective, which presents both political and analytical shortcomings, and its reception within the No TAV movement is beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁹Here we encounter anew the labor issue: How can workers’ defensive struggles today find new vigor? Should workers present labor more as a commons than a right? Is this even possible for a kind of labor that is highly segmented? Or, do we need to explore the social dimension of salaries and ponder a new guaranteed salary system that covers all people living in a country?

²⁰An internal (neither external nor ideological) self-criticism should be addressed regarding this fundamental element. Particularly critical to examine are those “spontaneous” tendencies within the movement that emphasize the need to forge a “true” legality—i.e., a state without corruption or organized crime, etc. In fact, Beppe Grillo, the former popular Italian comedian whose Five Star Movement captured a much larger than expected number of votes in Italy’s recent election, has used this argument to great success. Grillo’s political activity has recently been centered around the notion of legality—or, the lack thereof in the context of Italian public institutions.

²¹Although numerous efforts to widen the struggle beyond the valley have been made, there is a diffused sense of separation among activists, which is perceived as an almost insurmountable obstacle (authors’ interview with Luigi Casel). Two reactions spring from this problem: on the one hand, the national political chaos is considered positive, since it magnifies the adversary’s difficulties; on the other hand, it prefigures a trend of disintegration, which is difficult to transcend (authors’ interview with Luigi Robaldo).

²²Authors’ interview with Ermelinda Varrese.

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