

**IL VIAGGIO - from number 3, January
2002**

A bit of silence, we implore you. Let's allow our steps as eternal travelers that have landed by choice or through necessity on the streets of Turin to speak.

Let's listen to them: they are steps of galley-slaves. So much is lacking if we want them to become the steps of people who are freeing themselves, and what is lacking above all is the capacity to truly speak with each other, to dialogue. No, we are not referring to the empty and impotent chattering in which we all too often lose ourselves. It has nothing to do, then with the continuous bawl of the television. Dialogue is a concrete thing: it is staking oneself once and for all, it is speaking about the life that we live because we are disposed to change it. We have as much need of this as of the air that we breathe.

But democracy takes it away from us, this capacity to dialogue, rendering us noisily deaf and dumb.

From one side it affirms freedom of speech, from the other it maintains and deepens social division, that is to say, exploitation and authority. In unfortunate words: the governments and masters are deciding everyone's future; the exploited are free to say as much as they want, as long as, in reality, they can decide nothing. And when speech is separated from its concrete power to change the world, the words themselves are emptied, they lose force and meaning. Deluding ourselves that we are participating in decisions from which we are actually excluded, we lose the capacity to formulate discussions that are not empty and powerless. It is as if we kept a leg immobilized for years and years until it atrophied; afterwards, someone could tell us, "now, walk!" We would no longer walk, we would have lost the capacity and the whole idea of walking. How much space still exists within us for imagining words that change life, then? What is left of our capacity to say and understand them? We don't know with certainty.

The only certainty possible is that if dialogue must be concrete to exist, the place where it is practiced and the way in which it is practiced must be equally concrete.

If dialogue is staking oneself, then we can stake ourselves only with those who, like us, have very little to lose from a change, those who live the same social condition, exploitation. Any other place of dialogue is illusory. Claiming to dialogue with the masters, for example,, makes no sense, because they have an entire world to lose.

If we want this staking of oneself to be a collective thing and at the same time profoundly individual, the only way we have for dialoguing is the direct and horizontal way, without delegation. It is not possible to dialogue, then, with the structures that are organized in a vertical manner in which, due to leaders, sub-leaders and spokespeople, some decide for others. Not even with those parties and unions that talk of being on the side of the exploited, let us be clear.

Only on these simple conditions, that have nothing to do with democracy, is it possible to dialogue. Only on these conditions will we find the words for doing so.

The Price of Existing

History, it is said, should lead us to reflect on the horrors of the past so as not to repeat them. It is more than 50 years since the second world war ended and is so much that reminds us of the massacres committed by the Nazis. Full of rage, with tears in our eyes, we look at images and read books that document life in the Lagers, and we ask ourselves: why didn't anyone try to prevent their construction? Why, within the frames of the documentaries about Nazism, are there always and only images of people applauding at one of Hitler's speeches and never images of people rebelling?

Our consciousness tells us that if we were ever to see such horrors, if a new Auschwitz should ever arise, we would immediately oppose it with all our might. As always, in this case we are mistaken.

In Italy recently the walls were erected, to be precise, in 1998 by the center-left government. Obviously, democracy needs to sweeten the pill, and, just as wars become "peace missions", concentration camps are called centers of temporary residence for illegal immigrants. As many know, there is one here in Turin, in Corso Brunelleschi. Indeed, in the last few months the local authorities have been discussing moving it out of the city. They haven't said yet where they intend to move it, because they are afraid that the inhabitants of the area in question will protest, not because they consider a lager unacceptable in itself, but because they don't want to see it – they don't want to see the "guests" – when they make an appearance at the balconies of their houses.

Many will think that calling the centers of temporary residence lagers, as we do in these lines, is a forced rhetorical exaggeration. In reality, we do so because, all things considered, from the juridical point of view, these two structures are far more similar than one may think. Individuals who had previously been deprived of nationality were enclosed in the Nazi lagers; they were no longer considered citizens, but mere members of the human species, deprived of rights. Those who have no identification papers end up in the centers for temporary residence: in other words, those who are neither Italian nor foreign citizens, who, from a legal standpoint, simply do not exist. After all, as long as documents exist, there will always be those who do not have them, and conceding a right to someone always means determining to deny it to someone else. The democratic state, just like the Nazi state, divides those who live in its territory into two quite distinct categories: those who are citizens – to whom civil penal and prison rights apply – and those who are not. These latter are hunted down by the forces of order and the squadrons, and end up in the camps not existing. So much for them, one can do what one wills. We know what ended up happening in Germany, that which will not happen to us again.

Then there were the Jews, the subversives, the gypsies and the homosexuals; today instead there are illegal immigrants. But the camps in which they are enclosed

remain the same. We ask ourselves then how those who, like us, call the centers for temporary residence lagers dialogue with those who built them. Wouldn't you have considered it ridiculous to implore Hitler to close Auschwitz? To demand more hygienic and dignified conditions for those who were enclosed there wouldn't have seemed to be merely a macabre joke to you? One has to be completely against lagers, without compromise of half measures; otherwise one is complicit. That's all.

It is much too easy to attribute all the blame for the unfortunate fate of the unwanted of that time to Hitler, Mussolini and their collaborators, pretending one doesn't know, one didn't know. And yet, it was impossible not to know. History is not just made by great personages; it is also made by those who support them or who simply say nothing. Just as many of our grandparents were complicit in the Nazi lagers, in the same way, we are complicit in the lagers for the illegal aliens.

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