

Will the Prince's Fascists Shut Europe's Steel Giant?

by Claudio Celani

Aug. 3—A pitched battle is underway in southern Italy, where the Green fascists of Prince Philip's World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are seeking to shut down the largest steel plant in Europe—an act that would devastate not only tens of thousands of Italian workers' lives, but the economic potential of Italy and Europe as a whole.

On June 26, prosecutors issued orders to close the ILVA steel plant in Taranto, among the largest in the world, because of environmentalist allegations. The Taranto plant, equipped with five blast furnaces, produces 10 million tons of steel per year, and is a strategic resource, both for the Italian domestic economy, and for the Mediterranean region.

In a press release praising the decision, and announcing that it is joining the lawsuit, the WWF, whose local representative took the case to court, declared that the plant, which employs 12,000 workers, not to mention the thousands more who are employed in its feeder industries, is "doomed" anyway by the process of globalization, and should be converted to produce something other than steel. If the court-ordered closure stands, the plant will be dismantled.

Workers at the plant immediately went on a job action, which is being supported at other ILVA plants in Genoa and Novi Ligure; and the plants' managers, who are currently under house arrest, brought an appeal

before the court, which was heard today. The result is expected over the coming days.

Green Genocide

The Italian machine-tool sector, the most important industrial sector, and the largest export sector in the Italian economy, would be severely crippled if the plant were closed; and Italy, which produces 28 million tons of steel per year, would be forced to purchase it abroad.

Each year, 1,300 ships dock at ILVA's own port on the Ionian Sea, delivering 20 million tons of raw material, and loading 85% of finished products, which supply Italian auto manufacturing, home appliances, shipbuilding, the construction sector, etc. Part of ILVA's production goes to external European and world markets.

The WWF campaign to shut down the ILVA plant in Taranto began in 2005, led by the Fund's chapter leader Alessandro Marescotti, who is also founder and leader of a local environmentalist organization called Peacelink. Marescotti is still at the forefront of the campaign, using either the Peacelink name, or other local "social" or "citizens" groups.

In a statement July 27, WWF Italy welcomed the court's shutdown injunction, and announced that it had entered the ILVA suit as a plaintiff. While lying that it is "on the side of the workers," the WWF calls for a "re-



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The ILVA steel plant in Taranto is the largest in Europe, producing 10 million tons/year. Prince Philip's WWF greenie nazis are moving to shut it down.

conversion of the plant which . . . is doomed in the context of globalisation.”

ILVA attorneys insist that allegations that the plant has violated European Union limitations on emissions, are based on an EU law which will not go into effect until 2013, and gives four years for industries to adapt.

Nevertheless, court chairwoman Patrizia Todisco, on July 26, issued eight arrest warrants against former and current managers of the plant, including ILVA CEO Nicola Riva, and ordered the seizure and shutdown of the mineral-storage and “hot” sections of the plant. This is a complex procedure that will take several weeks, and will jeopardize the future of the entire plant.

The Environmentalist Fraud

On Aug. 3, *EIR* interviewed Prof. Carlo Mapelli, professor of Metal Technologies and Materials at the Politecnico University of Milan, who debunked the environmentalist allegations that the plant in Taranto should be closed in order to control emissions.

The emissions of the steel furnaces as such are fully within EU regulations, Professor Mapelli said, based on credible figures provided by the regional environmental agency ARPA, and by the health authority ASL.

Problems exist in the mineral deposit area, which is as large as ten soccer fields, and where coal is stored to be processed. Methods used so far, such as watering the huge heaps of coal when the wind blows, are insufficient, and other measures, such as building walls around the site, should be implemented, Mapelli said.

The best thing would be an urbanization program, to build housing away from the plant, and shift the population to safer areas. In the short term, this would be costly, but in the longer term, it would be profitable, he said.

If you shut down the plant, the entire shutdown and startup processes will cost at least EU1 billion, and take at least several months.

You can build an awful lot of houses with that amount of money.

The general problem in Italy is that, whereas so-called nature areas have been protected, while nobody can access them, no attention has been paid to industrial areas. Thus population centers have expanded into previously isolated industrial sectors, such that today, the industries are contiguous to residential areas. Now, local authorities tell industries: “You must move away because you are too close to us!”

The other possible weak point in Taranto is the coke plant, Mapelli said. The company has invested heavily here, and the gas emissions from burning the coal are recycled to produce energy. Furthermore, 60% of emissions are hydrogen—i.e., water. Nonetheless, there might be emission problems. This, however, must be investigated and, in time, can be fixed.

Professor Mapelli ruled out any emission problems from the “hot” areas—exactly those which have been hit by the court injunction.

Mobilization Underway

Even the Pope and an Olympic medal winner have intervened in the Taranto case. Anders Golding of

Denmark, winner of the silver medal in skeet shooting, stunned journalists July 31, when he dedicated his medal to workers of the Taranto steel plant. Golding trains during the Winter months inside the plant, along with Danish and Italian colleagues.

ILVA workers have mobilized against the decision to close the plant, from the moment it was announced. As the news of the court injunction was reported, thousands of ILVA workers marched out of the plant towards City Hall, and blocked all entrances to Taranto.

On Aug. 2, on the eve of the appeal hearing on the court procedure, a huge demonstration, with all ILVA workers, joined by other citizens, took place in Taranto, led by the national leaders of the three largest trade unions, CGIL, CISL, and UIL, plus the national leader of the Metalworkers Union, Maurizio Landini. As Landini was addressing the rally in the central square of Taranto, a few dozen ecofascists, calling themselves the Comitati di Base (Cobas), intervened in the rally, riding in a small truck, and cut the wires to the rally's sound system. The ecofascists then addressed the crowd with their megaphone, and threw eggs and firecrackers. Police finally intervened, but the rally was disrupted.

Only two of the trade union leaders were able to speak. Before the rally, UIL Secretary General Luigi Angeletti said: "People do not yet have the perception of the disaster which is being prepared. The trade unions have always defended the environment, safety, and life, but we know that we live in a country where unemployment is very large. In this context, therefore, health is not a priority, because those who are unemployed must first feed their families. There has been pollution for decades; how can you think to solve the problem in five minutes?"

CGIL national leader Susanna Camusso said: "You do not sanitize a steel plant by stopping it. We need to have investments which must be made with a functioning plant. We demand investments from the government and we want everyone to fulfill their duties."

A demonstration of ILVA workers also took place in Genoa, blocking the city with 12 large trucks and 30 other vehicles.

Needed for the Future

The ILVA steel plant was built during the "economic boom" phase in 1961, as the "Fourth National Steel Center," part of the national development policy by IRI,

FIGURE 1



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the state-owned industrial conglomerate. The policy included also a fifth center in Gioia Tauro, Calabria. Both sites had been chosen to promote the industrial development of Italy's Mezzogiorno, or southern region. However, the EU steel quota policy blocked the plan, and the fifth center was never built.

In 1995, IRI was privatized, and the entire steel sector sold off. ILVA was bought by the Riva family, which has restructured and modernized the plant. The Riva Group is today the tenth-largest steel producer worldwide, and the only family-owned producer among major steel groups.

The steel production center in Taranto is strategically crucial, not only for the current economy of Italy's Mezzogiorno, as an employer of skilled labor for 12,000 families and as a supplier for northern Italian industry, but also in view of the urgently necessary "Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean," where Italy's Mezzogiorno is a central platform. In deploying against the Taranto steel plant, the organization of Her British Majesty's consort, the WWF is clearly aiming at Italy's jugular, in the context of its declared objectives of deindustrializing, and reducing the world's population to 1 billion or less.