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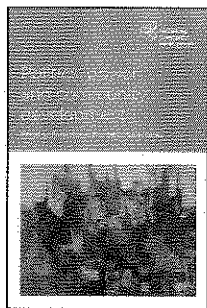
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# CLASS, INEQUALITY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Edited by  
Mae Shaw and Marjorie Mayo



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## **Working-class communities and ecology: reframing environmental justice around the Ilva steel plant in Taranto (Apulia, Italy)**

*Stefania Barca and Emanuele Leonardi*

### **Introduction: the confiscation**

In July 2012, a local preliminary hearing judge ordered the closure of the most polluting furnaces of the Ilva steel plant in Taranto, the largest and one of the oldest such factories in Europe, finding its management guilty of environmental and public health disaster. After decades of an imperturbable – if unequal – balance among social actors, the confiscation<sup>1</sup> set in motion an unprecedented conflict between environmental and community activists on the one hand and the company owners, backed by government support, on the other. The conflict inevitably extended to the Metalworkers' Union Confederation, sparking a profound and irreversible crisis. In this process, its initial manifestations of loyalty and support to the company – in continuation of decades-long attitudes of quiescence because of the threat of large-scale job losses – encountered the unexpected opposition of substantial parts of the rank and file (and the local population at large), causing the union to lose much of its credibility and a significant number of affiliates. Such an explosive situation – which attracted the attention of the New York Times, The Guardian and The Economist – opened up entirely new social dynamics and an ongoing process of cultural and political reframing at the community level.

How can we make sense of this epoch-changing event in the history of the city? To answer that question, some background data need to be taken into account. The Ilva facility is startling in terms of its physical size, economic relevance and record of pollution. With a surface of 1500 hectares (scattered over 200 km of railway, 5 blast furnaces, 10 coke oven batteries and 6 exclusively dedicated docks), Ilva accounts for more than 30% of Italy's steel production and for approximately

75% of Taranto's GDP. Furthermore, it employed 11,980 workers in 2012 (including blue collar, white collar and managerial staff), which rises to over 20,000 if associated services are considered (Comito and Colombo, 2013). And its gigantic scale is perfectly mirrored by the dramatic data concerning polluting emissions: in 2010, Ilva emitted over 11,000 t of nitrogen dioxide, 11,300 t of sulphur dioxide and 1.3 t of benzene, all well beyond the thresholds established by national as well as EU legislation (Vulpio, 2012). As a consequence, evidence about health issues in the area is truly worrisome: the figures for both early mortality (1980–2008) and cancer incidence (2006–07) show epidemiological evidence of disproportionate risk of a number of causes of death, among which lung cancer and cardiovascular / respiratory diseases, both acute and chronic, prominently figure (Piratsu et al, 2013).

These data give an idea of the sheer dimension of the environmental and public health damage brought about by (and through) the Ilva plant in its 50-year operation and make this case of utmost relevance to current European Union (EU) policies, which regulate a variety of phenomena: industrial hazards; public health monitoring; carbon emissions; contamination of life-support systems by Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP) and heavy metals, environmental clean-up and economic transition. All of these phenomena characterise the Taranto area as an industrially contaminated site, with consequent social and legal implications. In the language of environmental justice – an action research approach that emerged in the US in the mid-1980s and which is currently adopted in social science and community activism worldwide (Bullard, 1990; Sandler and Pezzullo, 2007; Schlosberg, 2007) – Taranto is a 'sacrifice zone'<sup>2</sup> of industrial development; its population configures as a discriminated community, whose right to a safe and clean environment has been disregarded and heavily discounted in politico-economic terms.

This chapter will consider the theoretical implications of the Taranto case for a reframing of the environmental justice approach. The principal argument is that such communities typically experience moments of crisis, or the rupture of pre-existing equilibria, due to a mix of exogenous and endogenous factors. In the case of Taranto, this crisis combined industrial restructuring linked to shifts in global markets with a judicial trial resulting from a long series of workers' and citizens' mobilisations. The 2012 judicial sequestration constituted a turning point, allowing for the full emergence of the internal contradictions represented by the job / localisation blackmail and the possibility for

openly questioning the cultural premises on which such blackmail rested.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it will illustrate and discuss the environmental justice approach from a working-class community perspective and propose an innovative framework for integrating the two, which is termed the Working-Class Community Ecology framework (WCCE). Subsequently, a WCCE approach is applied to the Ilva case in order to show how it can account for the environmental injustice played out in a working-class community.

### Environmental justice and working-class communities

In its first theorisation, by African-American sociologist Robert Bullard, environmental justice (EJ) is primarily a social struggle arising from the awareness of how the social costs produced by uneven development in the capitalist system have unequally affected different social groups, especially (but not exclusively) along lines of racial discrimination. As Bullard (1990) pointed out in his *Dumping in Dixie*, work has been a potent mechanism of environmental injustice and racism, considering that the most unhealthy and low-paying jobs in the US are those most likely to be filled by African-Americans and Latinos: 'Requiring people to choose between jobs or the environment is inherently unfair. The solution to this dilemma lies in making workplaces safe for workers. Anything short of this goal places workers at an unfair disadvantage' (Bullard, 1990: 86). Largely credited as the founding text for environmental justice studies and activism, *Dumping in Dixie* was built on a full recognition of the importance of 'job blackmail': the threat of relevant job loss as a structural cause for the production of environmental injustice. It is significant, however, that labour unions rarely figure in the book, suggesting that environmental justice activism had shifted to citizens' grassroots organisations and community organisers at the neighbourhood level.

This move from union to community activism as the privileged terrain on which grassroots environmental struggles are played out has been interpreted in social science as a shift from the conceptual framework of class to that of subalternity (Pulido, 1996). In the last decade, 'environmental conflict' has become an important way to describe subaltern environmentalism, or so-called 'environmentalism of the poor', generating a new array of social science research (Martinez Alier, 2002). Environmental justice, subaltern environmentalism, environmentalism of the poor and environmental conflict are all ways of conceptualising the various struggles of working-class people

over environmental costs and benefits, both in the urban and the rural space. Such struggles, however, often contain an unobserved or under-theorised link between labour and environmental concerns. For example, most social science research on environmental conflicts pays attention to community agency while overlooking the role that workers play in such conflicts and the wider relevance of work in mediating people's understandings of the environmental issues at stake. Paradoxically, work and its complex relationship to environmental concerns is probably the least examined aspect of environmental justice struggles and of environmental conflicts.

And yet work is – and has always been – relevant to these struggles, for the simple reason that 'subaltern' people, racially discriminated people or 'the poor' are typically also working-class people: people who occupy the lower ranks of the labour hierarchy, making a living out of the most dangerous and most unhealthy jobs while also living in the most polluted places. Furthermore, historical research has demonstrated that – despite many contingent, internal stratifications and differentiations – working-class communities do share common experiences and often develop a strong sense of belonging and identity based on some form of control over the work process, its social meaning and its scope. They thus develop a more or less explicit perception of the work / environment tradeoff that shapes their lives and the places in which they work and live. Their own bodies and mental capacities, as well as those of their families, are at stake in the continuous transformation of the local environment. They may even feel partially responsible for such environmental change, viewing it as a bargain that they have to make in exchange for survival. Such bargains are often overly simplified as 'jobs versus the environment', which obscures the nature and diversity of environmental activism that develops from working-class ecological consciousness (Barca, 2014a).

The history of work / environmental coalitions shows how they tend to be heavily influenced by cycles of economic expansion and recession and by political opportunity structures at the national level, which typically condition the extent to which job / localisation blackmails on the part of corporate or state policies are challenged and counteracted. Notable examples are the United Farmworkers Union's boycott campaign against pesticide use in California in the mid 1960s (Montrie, 2008) and the recent One Million Climate Jobs campaign in South Africa, in which a large coalition of unions, community and environmental activist groups fought for a socially just ecological transformation of the national economy (Cock, 2014; Leonardi, 2012). It is at the grassroots and local levels, however, that the convergence

between labour struggles for decent work conditions and community struggles for environmental justice face the strongest challenges. In too many cases, labour unions have maintained a detached attitude toward environmental issues or even openly opposed grassroots environmental action at the local level. Nonetheless, this has not completely impeded workers' environmental activism (Gould et al, 2012; Obach, 2004; Barca, 2012a).

The Italian case is significant in this respect. Several important trial cases against large polluting companies, especially in the petrochemical and asbestos sectors, have stemmed from occupational health grievances. Typically, those struggles have been based on 'popular epidemiology' research – collecting evidence about workers, which has then become class action – involving workers' families and larger communities, including local neighborhoods; the urban population affected by air, water, and soil pollution; local fishing, sports, and environmental associations, women's organisations and health professionals. While Italian trades unions strongly supported environmental regulation – especially in the industrial sector – during the 1960s and early 1970s, since the economic recession of the late 1970s they adopted a much more reductive approach to workers' health and environment grievances. In some cases local unions have even aggressively boycotted environmental justice actions and practised various forms of ostracism toward members who supported them. Like the one taking place in Taranto today, those struggles have incorporated all the dilemmas and contradictions typical of the work–environment relationship in industrial societies, which makes them all the more interesting (Allen, 2012; Allen and Kazan-Allen, 2012; Barca, 2012b).

Broadly speaking, environmental injustices involve communities through complex intersections between labour and social conflicts, production and reproduction struggles, in the local space. Consequently, what most weakens and impairs working-class struggles for environmental justice is the division between labour and environmental movements at the grassroots level as well as at national level. With the aim of countering such divisive politics, an original framework for theorising the relationship between working-class communities and environmental justice is offered here.

### Working class community ecology

In what terms can we speak of working-class communities as an environmental subject, and how can we understand their ecologies? How does the concept of working-class community help us to advance

our understanding of ecological crises and of environmentalism? J.K. Gibson-Graham's (2006) concept of 'community economy' in a post-capitalist perspective is utilised here to answer these questions, and is extended to the ecological dimension in order to develop what a Working-Class Community Ecology (WCCE) framework. In *A Post-Capitalist Politics*, Gibson-Graham elaborated an extended and revised conception of 'class' as something that can be used to foster self-recognition in terms of interpersonal connection and interdependency (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This idea of class – extended to a human community – is employed to counter the market / capitalist logic of individualisation and competition, which may not eradicate community and interdependence entirely but can nonetheless dismiss them as marginal and irrelevant: 'Making them visible again is a step toward rendering them objects of politics and ethics ... the keystone of our counterhegemonic project of 'differently politicizing' the economy' (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.84). In other words, 'class' can be an important starting point for negotiating a 'community economy' based on an ethic of solidarity and interconnection.

Our Working-Class Community Ecology framework extends this approach to the working-class community's environment as a crucial dimension in which to find the coordinates of such interconnection. In doing so, it applies a view of ecology as interdependence among humans and non-human nature, advocating for an ethics of partnership; that is, of mutual support and co-evolution (Merchant, 2010 [1990]). In other words, community wellbeing cannot be thought of outside of its interdependencies with the physical and biological environment and the non-human world. The WCCE therefore extends the concept of 'class' to include workers' families and all those who share with them the space that they inhabit (the air that they breathe, the ecosystem in which they reproduce, the living and non-living world with which they share the local space). Sharing Gibson-Graham's understanding of community as 'being-with' or 'being-in-common' (2006, p.81), WCCE looks at the working-class community as a web of interconnections between production and reproduction in place.

In this framework, community is understood as a relationship of solidarity and interdependence centred on the different forms of labour that sustain the local economy and society – whether the work is salaried or unsalaried, productive or reproductive and care-giving, material or immaterial. In this sense, the WCCE pays due attention to what is (re)produced by the community, who (re)produces it, how, and at what social cost – primarily in terms of occupational, environmental

and public health. Further, it gives special importance to mapping the alternatives that are available for community livelihood and wellbeing.

The WCCE not only includes ecological interrelations within the community economy sphere, but also includes working-class ecological consciousness and environmental activism. 'Working-class ecological consciousness' refers to the experience of nature, the environment and environmental politics made by working-class communities. Such ecological consciousness is profoundly shaped by positionality; working-class communities typically experience nature from subordinate social positions as those most affected by pollution and other industrial hazard, and by different kinds of 'differential vulnerabilities' (Bullard, 2008). Such positionality tends to produce a self-perception of working-class communities and other marginalised groups as 'the real endangered species' (Peña and Pulido, 1998; Barca, 2014b), threatened in their very survival by a kind of industrial development that is premised on the production of sacrifice zones and disposable bodies. However, the opposite is also true: working-class communities do struggle to reshape the local and national environment through their active involvement in politics by way of grassroots / union organising, for example in campaigning for pollution regulation and prevention measures, public health monitoring and environmental clean-up and prosecution of environmental crimes. This is the essence of environmental justice struggles, whether or not they recognised under this label.

Environmental justice struggles expose the essential weakness of the capitalist productive system by demanding its compatibility with the reproduction of life in the local space. The potentially disruptive character of such a demand should not be underestimated: the full compliance of industrial plants with environmental and public health regulation, and the internalisation of environmental clean-up and reparation activities on the part of polluting entities imply a fundamental rejection of the profit-maximising principle that drives private enterprise, with its inevitable production of social cost. In other words, EJ struggles open the possibility for post-capitalist political economy scenarios of compatibility between the production of surplus and community / ecosystem wellbeing.

### Labour and the environment in Taranto

The case of the Ilva steel plant in Taranto can be considered as a paradigmatic example of environmental injustice in its specifically industrial form. Established in 1960, the plant was publicly managed (under the name of Italsider) until 1995, when it was included in



the wave of privatisations set in motion by the Italian government and hence sold to the holding company owned by the Riva family (Riva Fire). Originally met with enthusiasm by the local population and institutions alike (Battafarano, 2011), the steel plant did not take long to show the nefarious side of its vast industrial scale. Taranto is today a 'sacrifice zone' created not only by Ilva's facilities but also by other polluting activities variously linked to them: a refinery, waste landfills and illegal dumping sites. In other words, the symbiotic – if contradictory – relationship between Taranto and Ilva accounts for the combined effect of economic relevance and environmental impact (Petrarulo and De Angelis, 2013). In turn, this explains how Ilva has progressively become a paradigmatic example of job blackmail: quite simply, the steel plant can be defined as an industrial machine, producing death in its different shapes: chemical poisoning (Curcio, 2013; 2014), fatal injuries (Campetti, 2013) and socially induced suicides (Ferraro, 2014). As a consequence, the surrounding community suffers constant discrimination as its right to a healthy environment is disregarded and subordinated to politico-economic imperatives.

Environmental injustices such as those perpetrated in Taranto are premised on various forms of symbolic violence; first and foremost, that of silencing critical voices and disregarding social and scientific evidence that would challenge the dominant view that, without Italsider / Ilva, Taranto would face mass unemployment and socioeconomic marginalisation (Barca, 2014b). Even more problematic, however, is a second form of symbolic violence; that is, intentional denial that producing the inexpressibility of environmental injustice implies a widespread internalisation of the official narrative on the part of its very victims. Whereas the former narrative indicates the sedimentation of an institutional arrangement that prevents social change, the second highlights a mental attitude of closure towards the possibility of even imagining economic alternatives to the centrality of the steel plant. In Foucauldian terms, a cognitively dissonant worker was the subjective outcome of the specific form of industrial / environmental governmentality deployed in Taranto. In that sense it could be said that, in bodily experiencing the separation between his<sup>3</sup> social status (the working class) and his spatio-temporal situatedness (the surrounding environment), such a worker was split between occupational euphoria (Ilva guarantees jobs and development) and communitarian fear (Ilva is undermining Taranto's basic livability).

Although directly focused on the Ilva workforce, it could also be argued that such governmental apparatus extends to the Taranto population as a whole. By internalising the job blackmail as an

inevitable horizon, communities tacitly accept a situation in which they depend materially and symbolically on the wealth created by the steel plant. This tight identification between local community and company may in fact take the shape of loyalty and thus entail a reduction of social conflicts and – at least potentially – an increase in productivity (Wheatley, 2005). Such a contradictory – and ultimately passivising – position is nicely captured by local journalist Tonio Attino:

We, the people, had witnessed and participated in the demolition of our coast, our fields and our history. We joyfully cheered that monster which only half a century later we would begin to hate. Hatred spurred from the sudden discovery of something that we were not able to see beforehand, which was hidden under the illusion of wealth. This something is the fact that the monster pollutes and kills and – sadly – it has been polluting and killing for a long time. (Attino, 2013: 165–66)

The 'sudden discovery' to which Attino refers can be easily recognised: it is the awareness, brought about by the 2012 sequestration of Ilva's heat treatment lines, that one's own health and wellbeing have been the bargaining chip in the economy–environment tradeoff. The disruptive effect of the confiscation is perhaps better illustrated in a telling interview collected for the film documentary *Pulmões de aço: Resistências locais frente a injustiças globais* (Lungs of steel: local resistance against global injustices),<sup>4</sup> in which an Ilva steelworker recounts how he and his workmates were suddenly struck by the discovery that their 'sacrifice' – as breadwinners and workers in a risky job – had been meaningless, because industrial toxins had in any case escaped the factory gates and got into their children's bodies through their mother's milk. In other words, the confiscation tore aside the veil of collective illusion into which the Taranto community had been lured for half a century, making it clear that the damage had extended far beyond what was reputed to be acceptable.

There had been instances of social mobilisation in Taranto prior to 2012; For example, during the 1970s, a vocal minority of Italsider workers openly raised the issue of workplace health and safety. The overall outcomes of their protests were the introduction of small improvements in the organisation of work shifts and the installation of filters, though not in adequate numbers. In the course of the 1980s, the Italian League for the Environment (Legambiente) – a left-wing organisation that was assuming the leadership of the anti-nuclear

movement in the area – took a more prominent role in mobilising for anti-pollution regulation. In 1988 and 1989 a few demonstrations called by Legambiente attracted significant participation by workers, raising legitimate hopes for a common front for sustainability inside and outside the factory (Corvace, 2011). Nevertheless, such potentialities for united political action did not materialise and, during the 1990s, the global steel crisis dramatically reduced the workers' space for manoeuvre. Moreover, the 1995 privatisation profoundly modified the workforce structure: older, unionised labourers joined pre-retirement programmes and were replaced by young workers with no experience in confrontational industrial relations. This shift entailed a massive process of employment casualisation, the main implication of which was a further weakening of the unions (Nistri, 2013), leading them to embrace non-confrontational bargaining and surrender to the job blackmail. The 2000s quite simply ratified the divergence between workers and environmentalists: a coalition of community and environmental groups called High Tide (Altamarea) formed in 2008, but it conducted its campaigns in marked isolation from organised labour (Ruscio, 2015). To sum up, the work / environment opposition – as epitomised by job blackmailing – continued to dominate social life, despite the hopeful scenario glimpsed in the late 1980s.

However, a novel element emerged in 2012: the confiscation represented a crucial rupture concerning the internal solidity of the cognitively dissonant worker as the subjective figure (in Foucauldian terms) of job blackmailing. The abrupt realisation that the steel plant was not the eternal, indisputable destiny of Taranto and that the judiciary could actually block production – by appealing to the superior social value of the reproduction of life – entailed a twofold reaction: the first epitomised by employees' protests against the court decision, demanding to keep Ilva in operation, and the second a massive contestation of the job blackmail itself. Crucially, while the first reaction is progressively losing ground due to new legal investigations and a proliferation of alternative imaginaries, the second is gaining consensus and catalysing the impulse of participation, which has been growing in the local community since the confiscation was ordered. One example of this process is the emergence of the grassroots organisation Comitato Cittadini e Lavoratori Liberi e Pensanti (CCLLP) (Committee<sup>5</sup> of Free and Reflective Citizens and Workers) in the context of the disorientation that followed the fractural moment of confiscation, when the job blackmail showed its first cracks. As their manifesto makes clear:

We are FREE because we decided to break the chain of a miserable blackmail which forced us to choose between health and work. Now we choose them both. Now we choose not to be aider and abettor of those who are culpable of environmental disaster and of poisoning Taranto. We are REFLECTIVE because we no longer accept others to think for us, after they have brought us to environmental devastation, financial turmoil and unemployment. We no longer accept to be used as bargaining chips by institutions and corporations which manage a corrupted and disastrous capitalistic system. We want to participate, to re-appropriate our rights without delegating anything to anybody.<sup>6</sup>

The Committee was born in the midst of the social conflict sparked by the confiscation. On 2 August 2012, a national demonstration was organised in Taranto by the trades unions' confederation to protest against the legal judgment. In front of a crowd, at first astonished but progressively attentive, a large and vociferous group of rank and file workers made its way to the stage and interrupted the official talks, manifesting open support for the magistrates' authority in revealing violations of environmental and public health law and openly denouncing the unions' complicity in the tradeoff.

Significantly, CCLLP members referred to themselves as citizens and workers. This explains why, after two years of campaigning, the social composition of the movement was a profoundly mixed one; its original core was made up of Ilva workers who were formerly involved in union activities and had now become self-organising. Around it, a nebulous ensemble of different subjects has been gravitating: non-Ilva – often precarious – workers; the impoverished middle class; the unemployed; inhabitants of particularly affected neighborhoods, students and engaged civil society (such as paediatricians, physicians and academics). In short, the movement seems to mirror that class extension along community and ecological interrelations that defines our understanding of a WCCE.

Another element seems to support the possibility of reading the Committee through the lenses provided by WCCE: its relationship with local communities and environmental advocates has been thoroughly positive, as have been its connections with different struggles for sustainable community development taking place all over Italy, such as the No TAV movement in the Susa Valley (Leonardi, 2013) and the Zero Waste platform in Campania (Armiero and D'Alisa, 2012). This constitutive openness towards similar experiences

has allowed the movement to develop a line of thought in which the relationship between labour and the environment transcends capitalistic compatibilities: first and foremost, the primacy of profit-making over social and ecological wellbeing. For example, the Committee's most recent campaign has been advocating state intervention: not immediately to make Ilva's production 'greener' (a goal that may be considered at a subsequent stage) but rather to grant full employment for the current Ilva workforce in the clean-up of the local environment. These activists argue that the costs of restoring decent environmental conditions must not be paid for (again) by the victims of 50 years of industrial growth, but by those who have profited from it, namely the Italian state and the Riva family. It is highly significant that such a strategy of recovering the local environment and economy through the clean-up operations represents the very reversal of job blackmail.

A further important aspect of the 2012 rupture concerns a possible new relationship between the CCLLP and the metalworkers' unions. As the legal judgment marked the end of workers' unconditional trust in the unions' confederation (Leogrande, 2013), this fracture has had a twofold effect: on the one hand it sparked disorientation fuelled by the haunting spectre of unemployment, but on the other it provoked the collapse of unionisation (from over 80% unionisation in 1993 to around 45% – and declining – in 2013). In other words the confiscation opened up a new scenario of political loyalties and social identification, which is still in a very fluid state. In this complex context, the Committee's initial rejection of the unions as interlocutors has been developing into a more nuanced approach, especially since the left-wing section of the Metalworkers' Confederation has started to incorporate several of the Committee's arguments. In fact, after having supported protests against the confiscation in 2012, the union's secretary, Maurizio Landini, eventually acknowledged the fundamental importance of the judicial investigations and stated that designing a sustainable economic policy for the Italian steel sector represents a challenge that both political parties and trades unions organisations should take on (Landini, 2013; Comito and Colombo, 2013). Against this background a new radicalism for the union can be imagined and enacted precisely with regard to the possibility that such a sustainable economic policy be informed by a post-capitalist mindset. For this to happen, however, a profound transformation of union practices is required. Such transformation is being prefigured in Taranto by the CCLLP through the development of what might be termed community unionism. As one activist compellingly put it:

The political division here is not that between workers and environmentalists, but that between capital and labour, which creates the job blackmail and also an extreme individualisation of struggles. But Taranto people want to reclaim their city and their destiny. We want a different economy, not an industrial one. We all need to become unionists. (Ranieri, 2013)

## Conclusion

The cultural and political reframing process in Taranto is highly complex and still in progress at the time of writing; as such, the following conclusions should be regarded as strictly provisional. Moreover, further research is certainly needed in order to more explicitly articulate the theoretical hypotheses advanced here. Nonetheless, based on the available evidence, some first inferences can be made about the possibilities opened up by the 2012 confiscation of the Ilva plant.

First, it is the authors' conviction that the CCLLP represents a good example of what the Working-Class Community Ecology framework aims to make visible, namely the specifically ecological dimension of the working-class community, in terms of both ecological consciousness and environmental / social mobilisation. The rupture constituted by the confiscation has allowed at least a section of the Taranto working class to address environmental concerns beyond the straitjacket of the jobs blackmail. Like so many other working-class communities, Ilva workers have been forced to perceive the environmental discourse as something alien to their world. In fact, their democratic options and the exercise of their citizenship rights have been limited by the position that they occupied within the industrial order. In short, they did not seem to have a right to be environmentalists. Yet this social perception – which finds expression in the cognitively dissonant worker – has been thoroughly shaken by the confiscation, allowing for the emergence of a working-class ecological consciousness, as exemplified by the Committee.

Second, the Committee's advocacy opens the possibility for developing a new, post-Ilva social pact for Taranto, working towards a post-capitalist scenario of compatibility between the production of surplus and community / ecosystem wellbeing. Such a pact, however, will not be sealed in aseptic governmental meeting rooms. On the contrary, it needs to be fuelled by new conflict lines from below and by new modalities of social mediation at the institutional level. This is why the emergence of community unionism in the area is so

interesting. What can be witnessed at the moment is only an embryo of an expanded notion of class and the first steps of its ecological self-organisation. Nevertheless, this remarkable link between class and ecology at the local level can be related to recent discourses of just transition: a global strategy advocated by the International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and already adopted by a variety of trades unions and grassroots labour movements worldwide. Perhaps the answer to the work / environment dilemma – in Taranto and elsewhere – will require new forms of community unionism, able to reconnect labour and environmental justice struggles in order to negotiate the local particularities of such politics of just transition and to build national and international solidarities around it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The term ‘confiscation’ is used here in the sense of ‘seized by authority’ as a temporary penalty for environmental wrongdoing. See [www.thefreedictionary.com/confiscation](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/confiscation)

<sup>2</sup>The term is used in environmental justice literature to designate ‘a geographic area that has been permanently impaired by environmental damage or economic disinvestment’. These areas are typically inhabited by minority and/or low-income communities. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice\\_zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice_zone)

<sup>3</sup>Over 99% of the Ilva workforce is male (De Palma, 2013).

<sup>4</sup>See the Facebook page of the movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNK7br4nlYE>

<sup>5</sup>To keep the English translation closer to the Italian original, the word ‘committee’ has been chosen here. It must be noted, however, that in the context of social movements it refers to self-governed grassroots organisations that refuse traditional channels of political representation.

<sup>6</sup>See the Facebook page of the movement: [www.facebook.com/CittadiniELavoratoriLiberiEPensanti/info?tab=page\\_info](http://www.facebook.com/CittadiniELavoratoriLiberiEPensanti/info?tab=page_info)

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