

30.9.2016. Major demo for an amnesty

On Saturday 24 September the issue of political prisoners brought many people out onto the streets of Aiacciu. Leaving aside fruitless arguments between police and organisers, the bar of five thousand demonstrators was amply cleared, and, at the high point of the march, between seven and eight thousand people stood shoulder to shoulder to demand commitment to a political process to settle this issue, which is central to the consolidation of the peace process under way in Corsica since the FLNC's announcement of its decision to renounce violence in June 2014.

There can be no doubt that the French State heard this wave rising. In the days leading up to the event, releases of prisoners scheduled in the following months were brought forward. Not without a certain amount of coming and going and vacillation by the French leadership, between the "hard" line of the anti-terrorist court and a current which was clearly more open to dialogue. By coming out onto the streets in huge numbers, the Corsican people weakened the hard-liners' position, and certainly made it possible to move ahead on certain cases. Until now, the State has imposed harsh conditions of imprisonment on top of a judicial crackdown to arbitrarily penalise convicted Corsican militants. This process is antidemocratic, in conflict with the very concept of the rule of law.

It will now be more difficult for overzealous judges and prosecutors to act this way. They are now in the spotlight, and they must be held to account because Corsicans consider that peace on the island is too important to gamble with. Where can such vindictiveness lead, other than a return to violence? And could that actually be their aim?

Because, at the political level, there has been no progress, with nonsensical statements by Manuel Valls to the effect that "there are no Corsican political prisoners". Whether or not you like them, how can you deny they exist? What does such a position mean, in complete denial of a flagrantly obvious fact?

So we need to keep up the mobilisation and push back against this approach that the State has taken. It cannot maintain this position in the long term if it is obliged to act in the clear light of day. And a demonstration as big as this, with the whole of the executive and other members of the Corsican Assembly standing shoulder to shoulder immediately behind the families who led the march, marks a decisive blow to get things moving at last. There will have to be others, most certainly, but this one was the key because of what it showed.

Firstly: on this issue, the French State simply has no supporters in Corsica! Not a single voice was raised in support of the attitude taken by the authorities in this case, not even from the most hard-line who have not hitherto minced their words. They are so isolated they can no longer even find a place to speak.

Secondly: the nationalists are not isolated - quite the opposite. The crowds who answered the call of Sulidarità were joined on the march by high-profile figures including non-nationalist elected representatives like Jean Charles Orsucci, Alexandre Sàrrola and Jean Baptiste Luccioni. Some support is starting to be heard from the other side of the Mediterranean, with José Bové and Christian Troadec taking up positions that showed their unambiguous support.

All those involved had the same concern: to make the peace process under way on the island into a definitive reality.

At the end of this process there must be an amnesty, incorporated into a reshaped relationship between Corsica and the French State, with recognition of the Corsican people and the definition of an autonomous status suited to the expectations and constraints of Corsica's specific situation.

So we know what the objective is. We know that the path will still be long and that the ability of the nationalist movement, particularly Femu a Corsica, to restructure itself quickly and expand will be vital to a successful conclusion.

À pòpulu fattu, bisogn' à marchjà !