

23.3.2015 Lusatia/Lausitz/Lužyca: Lost Land, lost People

Persa a Terra, persu u Pòpulu!

Un pòpulu, una tarra, una cultura (one people, one land, one culture) : it is the attachment we feel for these three fundamental principles which expresses the love of one's nation. Together they serve as the motto for every movement fighting for national emancipation, in Corsica as elsewhere in Europe and around the world. The General Assembly of the European Free Alliance is to take place in a month's time in Lusatia, the land of the Sorbs in eastern Germany, a territory and a people who are being sacrificed at the heart of Europe. The Sorbs are actually seeing their cultural, environmental and social heritage devastated by the economic imperatives of multinationals who are acting in full complicity with the nation states

The centre page feature in *Arritti* bears eloquent witness to the ravages that lignite mining operations are causing in Lusatia. Lignite is a "low-grade" form of coal which is mined using opencast methods, over tens of square kilometres, thousands of hectares. Lignite is excavated using gargantuan machines, then taken to the furnaces of some of the worst polluting power stations that supply electricity for all of Germany. The vast scars that this operation leaves on the landscape have destroyed forests, farmland and farm buildings, and even whole villages which have been expropriated, emptied of their inhabitants and then purely and simply wiped off the map. 136 villages have been affected, and 80 of them have completely vanished.

These villages are home to an original culture of Eastern Europe, a Slavic population who form a national minority as defined by the European charter of human rights. This minority is now represented by a party, the Lausitzer Allianz, which is a member of the EFA and which is calling for a halt to the mining operations which are ravaging its land. They stand in opposition to a well-meaning local establishment that the German authorities are showering with gifts, officially to support a folklore tradition in decline, but in fact intended to snuff out a national feeling that rejects the eradication of their land and their culture. The multinational group operating the mines, Vattenfall, the Swedish equivalent of EDF, is also showering benevolence upon the local economic fabric, to the point that the EFA was obliged to change the location originally selected for its General Assembly because the hotel chain feared that fallout from our meeting might have an adverse impact on its business!

At the preparatory meeting held in Brussels in the presence of a number of MEPS on 26 February, the leaders of the Lausitzer Allianz and associations for the protection of the Sorbs' heritage in Lusatia were finally able to give vent to their anger at the European indifference to an environmental disaster without equal. But who could expect such an aberration by Germany, at the heart of Europe, a country that wants to be a model for all, and by a state-owned company established in Sweden, a country with a claim to being Europe's best environmental performer? The Swedish permanent representative to the European Union, the official representative of Vattenfall, have tried to put on a brave face in response to the protests we started in Brussels, which will be continuing during our General Assembly, and which we will be pursuing until this scandal finally breaks all over Europe. Because when the European public is faced with this case, German and Swedish officials will have a hard time arguing against it! But we are also well aware that the economic interests involved are colossal, and that the media will do their best to stifle it. But how can it be possible that no voices have been raised against such a situation before? Culture is inextricably bound up with the land. What Lusatia and the Sorb people are going through is an extreme form of a system which damages an identity by attacking the land lived on by the people who are to pass on that identity.

Persa a Tarra, persa a Lingua, persu u Pòpulu! (Land lost, Language lost, People lost).

This trinity is tightly linked. In Corsica, it is "residentialisation" which is threatening our people, our language, our culture and our land. The assault is less violent, the landscape is less devastated, although it can be badly disfigured, but the result is the same: interests from outside Corsica, strengthened by their economic imperatives and with the complicity of the centralised State, are coming to take over the territory and deprive the Corsican people of the space they need to establish their own economic and cultural life.

We fought this “residentialisation” when the right drew up a sustainable development plan for Corsica based on this economic mirage of tourism and construction as the only paths towards economic development. The new sustainable development plan, which was passed by the Corsican Assembly by a large majority including all the nationalist votes, is the polar opposite of this model. It preserves 105,000 hectares of arable land, protects spaces close to the coast and sites of special interest, and opens up prospects of some other future than total reliance on tourism, with a large place for the Corsican people, their culture and their rights.

At this point where campaigning is getting under way for the next Corsican Assembly, we must of course keep in mind this achievement, which protects the land, and thus the Corsican people and their culture.