

The “Costs of Capitalism” Crisis and the role for Critical Political Economy

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The NOTAV battle in the Susa Valley: a European front of struggle¹

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"For almost 30 years, the No TAV Movement has been promoting the reasons for opposing the Turin-Lyon high-speed rail project through demonstrations, acts of resistance, studies and documentation, books, and public conferences. From the beginning, the movement has called for a technical discussion that, free from prejudice and vested interests, could be based on data and consider the "zero option" among the various possible outcomes. However, successive governments in our country over the past thirty years, regardless of their political affiliation, have never allowed such a discussion. On the contrary, when our reasons were not heard, they decided to impose the project by force, disregarding the concerns of tens of thousands of people

¹ Additional material for the presentation "Panopticon reloaded - A critical analysis of performance management systems in the Trans-European Transport Network policy" (by Esposito G. and Terlizzi A.) presented at the CPERN mid-term workshop held from Thursday 8th to Saturday 10th June 2023 at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", Naples, Italy.

in the Susa Valley," write the representatives of the No TAV Movement in a 2019 statement. Thirty years of struggle were commemorated in 2019 on December 8th, a historic and significant date for the NOTAV movement, which celebrates, on one hand, the liberation of Venaus – with the rallying cry 'A sarà dura' (tr. 'It will be hard') – from the first attempt to start construction in 2005 by the Italo-French company Lyon-Turin Ferroviaria (LTF), and on the other hand, the 10th International Day against Large Useless and Imposed Projects and in defense of the planet. On a date so filled with meaning, it is important to remember why the NOTAV movement is still fighting and why the NOTAV struggle is not just an Italian fight, but a European one.

It is important to remember that if we still talk about the TAV (acronym for "Treno ad Alta Velocità", tr. High-Speed Rail) today, it's because, as several Italian politicians say, "Europe asks us to do it". But what exactly does Europe ask of us and why? To answer this question, we need to go back in time, about 50 years, and understand the historical conditions that led to the emergence of the Lyon-Turin high-speed rail project, which is ultimately the result of the profound neoliberal restructuring of railway services designed and implemented at the European level.

Starting from the late 1970s, neoliberal reforms in the public sector have encouraged deregulation and dismantling of public enterprises, seeking to reduce the role of the state in the economy by liberalizing and privatizing public services (Esposito, Ferlie, & Gaeta, 2018). As explained by the United Nations (2001: 32), the emphasis of these reforms has been "on maintaining macroeconomic stability, lowering inflation, cutting spending on deficits, and reducing the scope and costs of the state."

In Europe, many state-owned enterprises have undergone a profound process of restructuring in response to liberalization reforms promoted at the supranational level by the European Union (EU). As explained by Florio (2013: 5-8), network industries - in the transport, energy, and telecommunications sectors - have been at the forefront of change: "Elsewhere, in the United States, Latin America, Asia, and previously planned economies, similar reforms have taken place.

However, perhaps nowhere have these reforms been implemented as consistently as in the EU. In the past two decades - first in the United Kingdom and subsequently in all other EU member

states - governments have increasingly moved away from direct provision of public services, ownership of enterprises, and monopolies. Ministries and independent regulatory authorities have shown greater reliance on market mechanisms and now consider network service providers as market actors [...]. The critical point of political change was reached in the 1980s, following the social and political upheavals of the 1970s and the severe oil shocks that destabilized public finances."

Regarding the railway sector, it is important to remember that in the post-war period, the traditional organization of most European railways was that of a vertically integrated state-owned monopoly. During this period, railway services were operated as a natural monopoly due to the high fixed costs associated with infrastructure provision and the importance of providing accessible public transportation across income levels (Drew & Ludewig, 2011). Things began to change in the mid-1980s when the new European Commission led by Jacques Delors took office on January 7, 1985.

Following a complaint from the European Parliament (supported by the Delors Commission), on May 22, 1985, a ruling by the European Court of Justice urged the governments of EU member states to intervene in European transport policy and initiate the liberalization of public transport services within national borders. The Court insisted that (national and international) passenger and freight services should be open to competition. The following year, between February 17 and 28, 1986, the governments of 12 member states signed the Single European Act (SEA), thus establishing the objective of creating a single market by December 31, 1992. To achieve this, the European Commission adopted approximately 300 directives to dismantle the physical, political, and fiscal barriers that hinder the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people (the so-called "four fundamental freedoms" in reformist rhetoric). Passenger and freight railway services were part of this ambitious reform plan, which was further reinforced in 1992 with the approval of the Maastricht Treaty, aiming to create a single transport market in Europe.

In this context, from the early 1990s onwards, the EU embarked on intensive regulatory production aimed at creating a single, efficient, and competitive European market for railway services. The objective of this legislation was to: (1) separate the management of infrastructure from the operation of transport services; (2) open national railway markets to international competition; and (3) promote interoperability and technical harmonization of national

infrastructure networks to encourage the development of an integrated railway system capable of serving as the physical foundation for a single European railway market.

To contribute to the realization of point (3), Article 129B of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 introduces a new policy of infrastructure investment aimed at creating a Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). Through the TEN-T policy, the EU provides financial resources to the governments of member states for the creation of a single European railway space without internal borders. In particular, this funding aims to contribute to the removal of physical and technical barriers between EU member states, enabling trains to travel at high speed and without obstacles across different national infrastructure networks.

In the past, due to differences between national infrastructure networks, it often happened that with international trains, the locomotive had to be changed at the border station. In particularly challenging cases, passengers and/or goods had to change trains. Furthermore, different track gauges, electrification standards, or safety and signaling systems made it more difficult and costly for trains to cross from one country to another. All these logistical difficulties necessitated the harmonization of national infrastructure systems; otherwise, the European transport market remained fragmented, and no ongoing liberalization initiative could be truly effective since each national transport network could only be used by those national operators who had rolling stock compliant with the standards of the national market.

In this context of railway infrastructure restructuring, in 1996, the European Commission established the TEN-T investment program. Through this program, the EU makes billions of euros available to national governments to implement hundreds of new infrastructure projects that allow goods and people to travel faster and without obstacles across the continent and through our territories. Despite the persistent and motivated opposition of the Valsusa population, the Turin-Lyon project has been included in the list of infrastructure financed by the EU since its inception and will never be removed. Similar fates await the Stuttgart 21 project in Germany, Basque-Y in Spain, and High-Speed2 in the United Kingdom.

All these projects, planned and financed by the EU in collaboration with national governments, are now vehemently opposed by local populations who, since December 8, 2010, have decided to join forces, giving birth to the International Forum against Large Useless and Imposed Projects. That is why every December 8 it is not only the celebration of the NOTAV victory of

2005 in Venaus but also the celebration of the European resistance against those neoliberal policies of railway reform that are trying in every way to shape the world - and the territories we daily inhabit and live in - in the image and likeness of capital, which paradoxically increasingly needs the State - its financial resources and its armies (as the experience of the Valsusa resistance teaches us) - to continue its reproductive cycle.

The battle against the TAV project in the Susa Valley therefore represents a broader struggle against the prioritization of profit and economic growth over social and environmental considerations. It highlights the need to reevaluate the models of development and infrastructure planning, ensuring they align with sustainability, participatory decision-making, and the protection of local communities and ecosystems.

The No TAV movement has inspired and influenced other anti-mega-infrastructure movements across Europe, fostering networks of resistance and exchange of knowledge and experiences. It demonstrates the interconnectedness of struggles and the potential for collective action against projects perceived as imposed and detrimental to the well-being of people and the environment.

In summary, the No TAV battle in the Susa Valley has transcended its local context to become a European front of resistance, sparking dialogue and collaboration among diverse communities and reinforcing the shared values of sustainability, democracy, and social justice.

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