

# Lessons of the L'Aquila Earthquake Sentence

by Claudio Celani

On Oct. 23, 2012, six Italian scientists and one government official were sentenced to six years imprisonment, a ban from holding public office, and a fine of 7.8 million euros plus trial expenses, for second-degree murder in the context of the earthquake that hit the Italian city of L'Aquila on April 6, 2009. The court ruled that the seven members of the Commissione Grandi Rischi (CGR) caused the deaths of 37 inhabitants and injuries to 5 others, by their issuing of an official statement one week prior to the earthquake, stating that a major earthquake was to be excluded from consideration.

World media have jumped on the juicy story, and banalized the intricate issue into a simple version: scientists have been sentenced by a court *because they have not forecast the earthquake*. Such a sensationalist report is factually untrue: the experts have been sentenced because *they did make a forecast*—the wrong one. The issue, however, becomes more intricate because of the peculiar political situation which Italy is going through, which sees a generalized collapse of political and government power, which is being replaced by a judiciary often out of control.

Another example of this is the case involving the largest steel plant in Europe, the ILVA plant in the southern Italian city of Taranto, where a court has seized the plant, arrested the management and attempted to shut down production on the basis of dubious reports on the correlation between cancer sicknesses and the steel plant emissions. The court action has jeopardized jobs for 20,000 families and threatened to shut down one-third of the entire Italian steel production, with catastrophic consequenc-



Alessandro Giangiulio / Flickr.

*After the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake in Italy, a collapsed house covers a car.*

es, and was stopped only when the government issued an executive order which superseded previous provisions of law, allowing the ILVA management to restore production and fulfill a strict investment plan in environmentalist measures.

The Taranto and L'Aquila cases are only two among a large pattern of a dual power, which is tearing the country apart and which is exploited by foreign interests. On one side are a government and a parliament which, under the rule of the EU Commission and a regime of a foreign currency, the euro, have ceased to govern; on the other side, a radical faction in the judiciary exploits the justified popular rage to overthrow the representative system altogether. In the case of Taranto, this "revolutionary" mob is led by the WWF, Prince Philip's worldwide organization for deindustrialization and depopulation.

As for the L'Aquila trial as such, it was based on such shaky legal grounds that it will most probably be reversed on appeal. In fact, to sentence someone for murder, solid evidence is needed. Instead, the court accepted hearsay evidence from rela-

tives of earthquake victims, who claim that their relatives were influenced by the CGR statement in the decision to stay at home or go back home despite the seismic wave which had been going on for months.

True, the CGR should never have made that statement. This is a matter, though, of political and scientific responsibility which demands immediate action, but which cannot effectively be addressed by court rulings. The action demanded is of the type requested by a whole group of scientists who are researching earthquake precursors, and insist that earthquakes can indeed be forecast. For instance, Prof. Pier Francesco Biagi of the Bari University, has told *Executive Intelligence Review* (EIR) that a system of two dozen satellites would be enough for a multi-parameter system to monitor earthquake precursors throughout Europe.

Unfortunately, those researchers are ostracized by the official scientific community, which claims that earthquakes cannot be forecast. They get no money while the others receive public funds. That "no forecast is possible," is the view of the six expert members of

the CGR, the “top” of the Italian scientific community: Franco Barberi (a volcanologist who has had several government jobs), Enzo Boschi (in 2009, chairman of the National Institute of Geophysics and Vulcanology), Mauro Dolce (head of the Seismic Risk Desk of the government Department of Civilian Protection), Giulio Selvaggi (director of the National Earthquake Center), Claudio Eva (professor of Geophysics at the Genua University, and Gianmichele Calvi (director of Eucentre). And yet, the “anti-forecasters” made a forecast!

The complication is that when L’Aquila was being hit by a seismic wave in the months preceding the large shock, a maverick researcher named Giampaolo Giuliani was running around announcing a major earthquake on the basis of his monitoring of radon gas emissions. The March 31 meeting of the Commissione Grandi Rischi was apparently organized by its secretary, Giampaolo De Berardinis, with the aim of issuing a “reassuring” statement. The CGR experts acted corruptly in supporting that statement.

As for Giuliani, he had correctly monitored one precursor, but that is not sufficient. In fact, he had calculated that the epicenter of the earthquake would be the city of Sulmona. Had the government followed his advice and evacuated the population of Sulmona, they would have relocated to... L’Aquila!

Radon emissions are important, but not sufficient for a forecast. A forecast with a 90% probability in the case of an earthquake of magnitude 6 or greater needs a “multiparameter” approach: i.e. underground, ground and near-space precursors which include radon but also electromagnetic and other types of activities. Such parameters must be collected and evaluated by a centralized institution which can eventually decide and coordinate measures such as evacuations. Such an institution is missing and the lesson of the L’Aquila earthquake is that its creation is urgently needed.

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