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The Wind from over the Alps

November 14, 2005

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The Wind from over the Alps

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A wind of revolt is blowing. Blowing from France over the Alps.

There is much that divides the revolt in the suburbs of Paris from the revolt in the Val di Susa in northern Italy.

On the one hand young, desperate people with no future, armed with their anger and without a clear identity. French, according to their birth certificates, but not recognized as such by either the cops who, every day, stop them to see their papers, or by personnel managers who won't take them on because they look too Arab to be trusted even as a porter.

On the other hand, families, public officials and militants desperately trying to stop their valley being invaded by the bulldozers and the high-speed railway. Who realize that, despite all the talk of participation and local autonomy, their view is worth nothing when it comes to the market and to priorities decided in Strasbourg by those who sell themselves at home.

The instinctive violence of someone who feels they're being hunted and the determination of those who think they have a fair chance at beating the arrogance of those in power do have something in common.

The determination not to give in to the status quo, not to put up with what is thrown at us by those who for years now have thought only about profit, leaving to others the costs. Human, economic and environmental.

We haven't forgotten the hostel fires, the poor housing; we haven't forgotten the unemployment and desperation that rings Paris.

Just as we understand the rage of those who have done all that was suggested they do by bureaucracy, only to find their wishes trampled on by an outside power that decides on priorities (theirs) and the acceptability of risks (ours).

The right to manage one's own territory, to demand a say, to imagine a different world, a different life, one based on the principles of solidarity and justice: this is what links the events on both sides of the Alps.

More importantly, there is the class element of each struggle. In the case of the Parisian suburbs, it is still looking for a political outlet — those involved need to break out of the mould of the gang, created by years of misgovernment by the right and left alike. They need self-organization and autonomy to emerge so that they can achieve a grassroots-built citizenship that can repair the social fabric and ensure the re-distribution of society's wealth and equality for rights.

In the valleys of Piedmont, there is a greater awareness of the enemy nature of central and regional governments and also that the plan to facilitate the high-speed movement of the privileged few places the lives, jobs and land of the many at great risk.

It is a coalition with a much wider range of participation, established over a longer period of time and, thanks also to the involvement of a great many anarchist and libertarian militants, has gradually become a mass movement.

Borders are not created by a line on a map or by mountains.

It is power, wielded on behalf of economic interests, which seeks to contain and impede this visceral revolt against domination and abuse of power.

Let us hope that the participation of the people (not the institutions) and the widespread solidarity that these struggles have attracted, will lay the basis for new forms of autonomy which can stand up to Capital's plans.