

“Sic Vos Non Vobis” (For You, But Not Yours) *The Struggle for Public Water in Italy*

ANDREAS BIELER

Prologue

Sic Vos Non Vobis (“For You, But Not Yours”) were the words Vergil wrote on the wall when Bathyllus, another poet, had plagiarized his work. The use of the words as the title of this paper was inspired by an exhibition in the Parco Arte Vivente on water as a commons in Torino, Italy in spring 2014.¹ *Sic Vos Non Vobis* reflects well the dynamics behind the struggle for public water: water is there for everyone to enjoy, but nobody should own and make a profit from it.

Introduction

Against the background of global and Eurozone financial crises, as well as the austerity sweeping across Europe, the pressure for governments to privatize public services is immense. Efforts to combat this are ever more necessary. This article examines one such effort, the Italian Water Movements Forum (also called just “the Forum”), a broad alliance of trade unions, social movements, development NGOs and environmental groups, and its successful 2011 mobilization supporting a referendum against water privatization. The article seeks to answer two questions. First, how was the Forum able to bring together such a wide range of different groups into a successful campaign? Second, why, despite the overwhelming success in the referendum, was there only a partial implementation of the results?

ANDREAS BIELER is Professor of Political Economy and Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) in the School of Politics and IR at Nottingham University.

The author would like to thank Chiara Carrozza, Margherita Ciervo, and Emanuele Fantini, as well as seminar participants of the Department of Political Economy at Sydney University, for comments on earlier drafts. He is also grateful to colleagues from the Transnational Labor Project at the Centre of Advanced Study in Oslo (see <http://transnationallabour.wordpress.com>) for comments and the necessary time and space to complete this piece, which is part of his contribution to the collective project.

Conceptually, this article focuses on class struggle, understood in a broad sense. Reflecting on the growth of this struggle in the late 1960s and '70s, sociologist Harry Cleaver wrote that "the reproduction of the working class involves not only work in the factory but also work in the home and in the community of homes...; the working class had to be redefined to include nonfactory analysis."² Hence, the analysis of class struggle has to cover the whole "social factory," not just the workplace. Access to water is precisely such an issue.

To what extent then, was the Forum an agent of class struggle? And to the extent that it was, in what structural conditions did it operate and how did these affect both the initial victory and the subsequent problem of converting victory in the referendum to implementation of a new water policy? To answer these questions, this paper will also analyze the agency of the Forum, from its emergence in the early 2000s until the establishment of the Forum as a coherent alliance, and then from the 2011 referendum to the still ongoing struggle over its implementation. The third section will assess the agency of the Forum within the wider structuring conditions of global capitalism, which appear to have severely impeded the achievement of the final goal. The Forum and its struggle against water privatization will be looked at through the lens of a historical materialist perspective, with an emphasis on the dynamics of class struggle within the wider structure of global capitalism.³

The Road to Victory

The Emergence of the Forum

Against the background of the economic and political crisis at the beginning of the 1990s, public services were restructured in Italy. The private sector was regarded as a source of capital investment, and public-private partnerships appeared as a good way forward.⁴ Water privatization in Italy began in the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially in the region of Tuscany but also in other locations in central Italy. The French multinational corporation Suez came to Arezzo in 1998 and to Firenze in 2001. In 1999, the multinational Veolia bought a stake in the water company in Aprilia in the region of Lazio.⁵ Promises made by supporters of water privatization included the usual claims: lower prices for consumers, an increase in investment in infrastructure, and improvements in services.⁶ Reality turned out quite differently. Almost immediately, privatization led to a drastic increase in water prices by 50 to 330 percent. In response, a range of local committees emerged and the first actions of civil disobedience were undertaken. In Aprilia, for example, citizens continued to

pay their water bills—but according to the old rates, and paid to the local municipality rather than the new public-private provider.⁷ Privatization, however, did not only result in public-private partnerships. Some public companies under public law were transformed into “Società per azioni” or “joint-stock companies,” which were fully owned by the public but operated according to market principles.⁸

Yet, the initial impetus for a wider movement was only partially the result of these local developments. Members of the CICMA (Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua), established in late 2000, had already participated in a 1998 meeting in Lisbon where the first anti-privatization water manifesto was agreed upon, which stated that water is a human right, not a commodity to be sold on a market.⁹ The initial focus of the movement was at the international level, and was inspired by the struggles for access to water by Latin American indigenous people. Development NGOs were mainly behind this movement, bringing an international dimension to the Forum from the very beginning.¹⁰ A second international influence resulted from what is sometimes referred to as the No Global movements, including ATTAC Italia. In Italy, it was the experiences with the G8 meeting in Genova in 2001, in particular, which brought fresh impetus and focus on resisting water privatization as an international goal.¹¹

A crucial moment in the formation of the Forum was the first Alternative World Water Forum in Firenze in 2003, itself inspired by the first European Social Forum held in the same city in November 2002.¹² The objective of the Alternative Forum is ultimately to de-marketize water and to democratize the governance of water as a resource.¹³ A first major success was the adoption of a resolution by the UN in 2010 recognizing water as a human right.¹⁴ While the focus of the Alternative World Water Forum was the right to access to water at the global level, experiences from water privatization in Latin American countries, where multinational corporations reaped huge profits, made Italian participants in Firenze in 2003 aware of similarities with their own situation. The flowing together of local and international experiences resulted first in the establishment of the Tuscan Water Forum. Then, the Forum was established at the national level in 2006 as a broad network with a national secretariat in Rome.¹⁵

Initially, it had been ATTAC Italia, Cobas (a rank-and-file trade union), and CICMA that were key in starting the water movement.¹⁶ In the years between the establishment of the Forum in 2006 and the referendum campaign in 2010–2011, membership of the Forum was broadened. On the trade union side, Funzione Pubblica-CGIL (FP-CGIL), the largest Italian

trade union federation organizing public sector workers, was the most important actor, joining the process from about 2004–2005 onwards.¹⁷ A second rank-and-file union, *Unione Sindacale di Base* (USB), also became actively involved. Dealing with social labor issues, the left-oriented network of social centers, *ARCI* (*Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana*), as well as the Catholic network of social centres, *ACLI* (*Associazioni cristiane dei lavoratori italiani*), also signed up when the referendum committee was established in 2010, as did various environmental groups including the *World Wildlife Fund Italia* and *Legambiente*. Moreover, the consumer group *Federconsumatori* joined along with various precursors of the *Cinque Stelle* movement, which is today a party in parliament.¹⁸ Importantly, in addition to *ACLI*, a large range of Catholic organizations and individuals supported the water movement including the Catholic scout movement *AGESCI*, the Christian pacifist group *Beati I costruttori di pace*, the *Diocese of Termoli-Larino*, and the well-known missionary *Alex Zanotelli*.¹⁹ In short, it was an enormously broad movement built over the years in the run-up to the referendum.

Tensions Within the Forum

Tensions in alliances within and between trade unions and social movements are normal, and the Italian water movement was no exception.²⁰ First, there were tensions inside *CGIL*, the largest Italian trade union confederation. While *FP-CGIL* strongly supported the movement against privatization from 2004–2005 onwards, the smaller federation *FILCTEM* (*Chimica, Tessile, energia, manifatture*), which actually organizes workers in privatized water companies, played no role.²¹ Having a much more narrow vision of its tasks as a trade union, it argued that it does not matter whether a company is private or public, as long as the workers of these companies have good salaries and working conditions negotiated by their union. In the end, *CGIL* as a confederation came down on the side of *FP-CGIL* during the referendum campaign. Nevertheless, there had been genuine concerns about unsettling the balance between forces on the right of the union, focusing on social partnership and social dialogue with employers and the government, and forces on the left and their emphasis on broader alliances and wider struggles. This is closely related to concerns about cooperation with so-called alter-globalization groups, which were outside the control of trade unions.²²

Many social movement activists were worried about cooperating with established trade unions such as *FP-CGIL*, which they perceived to be conformist and part of the establishment. They accused them, for example, of overlooking the plight of the increasingly large number of precarious

workers. CICMA too was slightly critical of the involvement of trade unions, which it considered a special interest group. People would be citizens first with a human right to water, and workers second. The campaign could not really incorporate issues such as workers' pay and working conditions and remain broad and inclusive at the same time, it was argued. Cooperation with Cobas and USB was considered by some to be easier, as these unions themselves have more of a movement character.²³

Moreover, some trade unions had initially believed that privatization may actually be a way of modernizing water companies. Just because water companies were owned by the state did not mean they were run well. Even more narrowly, there were tensions over how to evaluate companies, which were fully owned by the public but which operated according to market principles. Some in FP-CGIL argued that such a company was a public company and that this type of company should therefore be the goal, while others in the water movement pointed out that only if a public company operates outside the market, without the objective of making profit, can it actually be considered a proper public company. A joint research project by FP-CGIL, ARCI, Associazione Rete Nuovo Municipio, and ATTAC Italia resulted in the book *15 anni dopo: il pubblico è meglio* (15 Years After: The Public is Better) in March 2007. This helped provide the argument for trade unions, especially FP-CGIL, to accept that the public—and not the market—is the better provider of services, and it helped ensure an organic connection between the various members of the movement.²⁴

Water as the Rallying Point on the Road to Victory

It was the single issue of water that made the large alliance possible. There had been many concrete examples which showed that privatization had not resulted in more efficiency, lower prices, or higher water quality. The necessary investment in infrastructure had not been made, and prices had gone up.²⁵ While CGIL federations are in disagreement with USB and Cobas on all trade union issues, water privatization and its negative implications for workers and users allowed them to come together in a joint campaign. Moreover, the theme of water also included symbolic power, as water is understood as a fundamental source of life, a human right, and part of the commons. This discourse resonated with Catholic Social Doctrine, which facilitated “the mobilisation of Catholic groups, particularly during the referenda, and contributed to highlight the moral, symbolic and cultural aspects of the contention, consolidating a broad popular consensus over the principles of social justice and universality that should inspire water management.” Underlying the success in the referendum was the success of the campaign to dominate

public discourse, i.e., winning the public debate. Hence, “the 2011 referenda marked the success of the Italian water movement in framing the issue of water services management in terms of human right, the commons and democracy, against competing frames referring to the technical aspects or to the governance of the water sector.”²⁶

Beyond the theme of water, however, the water movement had made a number of key strategic decisions, facilitating the positive outcome. First, although clearly coming from the left and No Global movement, the traditional dichotomy between left and right was abandoned by the movement. The Forum consciously decided not to portray the referendum as a left-wing campaign, in order to give it a broader appeal. Hence, political parties were relegated to a secondary, supportive committee.²⁷ Second, the adoption of the inclusive discourse around “common goods” helped reimagining the “public” as the best organizer of water services. Third, the movement rejected charismatic leaders. While some persons are clearly identifiable with the movement, nobody within the movement is irreplaceable. The water movement was clearly open to the active participation by interested people and to a large extent organized horizontally, rather than vertically.²⁸

Moreover, all organizations agreed on the three necessary legs of the campaign: (1) the workers in the water sector, hence trade unions; (2) citizens as the consumers of water, hence social movements; and (3) municipalities, which are responsible ultimately for the provision of water. The first network of local municipalities in favor of the re-municipalization of water services led by the city of Bari was formed in the region of Puglia in 2007. On the basis of this experience, a similar network, the Associazione Rete Nuovo Municipio, was then established at the national level in November 2008. This group of over 200 municipalities participated in the Forum and worked towards the public provision of water services. Many of the municipalities felt disempowered, disenfranchised, and expropriated in regards to an important local function, because of the pressures towards a marketized water service.²⁹

Essential, too, was the double structure of the movement’s organization brought together in the national Coordinating Committee. On the one hand, the Forum included a number of well-known national organizations, including, for example, FP-CGIL, ATTAC Italia, Legambiente, and WWF Italia. On the other, the movement was organizationally present in all Italian regions, often also including the provincial and local level. Here, the members were not the well-known national organizations, but more individual citizens from a large range of different backgrounds who had become actively involved in the water campaign.³⁰

Finally, a general learning process transpired for everyone involved. The Italian constitution provides citizens with the opportunity to propose a law by popular initiative. If enough supporting signatures are collected, these laws have to be dealt with by parliament. The drafting of such legislation specifically requesting the re-municipalization of water services and the collection of enough signatures was first accomplished at the regional level in Tuscany in 2005—unsurprisingly, considering that privatization had started in this region. This was successfully repeated at the national level in 2007, when a record number of 400,000 signatures were collected within only a few months.³¹ It was in the concrete process of collective struggles that the water movement developed into a homogenous actor and became more than simply the sum of the participating organizations. As one interviewee pointed out, the drafting of the law in 2007 was a genuine collective effort. About 200 people participated in the actual process of writing, and various drafts had been discussed by around 10,000 people across Italy. While time-consuming and cumbersome, this long process allowed the water movement to mature.

Another example of concrete struggle is the development within Publiacqua, the public-private water company in Firenze. In response to privatization, a worker committee was formed, bringing together members of different trade unions and working closely with user organizations. It was here that the first notions of a new model of democracy based on demands for participation by workers and consumers in the running of water companies were developed, with trade unions working together with other organizations, demonstrating what can be possible at the national level. Many activists had entered the movement on the basis of their particular organizational background, but as a result of the struggle they started to broaden their approach and were transformed into water activists, leading to a more homogenous organization.³²

The Referendum and its Aftermath: La Lotta Continua

The main impetus for the 2011 referendum was actually a law passed by the Berlusconi government in 2009, the so-called “Decreto Ronchi.” It enforced privatization by requiring municipalities to put water contracts out for tender and to establish public-private partnerships with a private participation of at least 40 percent.³³ In response, the water movement first collected a record number of 1.4 million signatures in support of three referendum questions against water privatization, and then campaigned for the referendum itself.³⁴ (Referenda in Italy, provided they are based on an electoral turnout of at least 50 percent plus one person of the electorate, acquire immediate legal status, but can only repeal laws.) The

third question, which would have prevented the participation of private providers in the running of water services, was deemed unconstitutional and, therefore, not admitted by the Constitutional Court with the argument that the European Union had already decided that water was a market commodity.³⁵ Hence, the eventual referendum on water included two questions. “The first question cancelled the legal obligation to privatise the management of water services,” that is, the Berlusconi government’s 2009 law.³⁶ The second question removed the legal right of private investors to make a 7 percent profit on their running of water services. Together, both questions removed the rationale for private involvement in water distribution.

During the referendum campaign there was sustained activity based on a mixture of initiatives online via social media and offline in a concrete presence on the streets. Activities included political encounters, demonstrations, rallies, assemblies, flags specifically devised for the referendum campaign, and imaginative advertisements. Catholic commitment to water as a human right discourse “translated into grassroots information campaigns and educational activities targeting schools, associations, and parishes, which heavily drew on the expertise and on the social capital of development NGOs.” The fact that a new cultural approach to water as a human right was developed over a ten year period ultimately paid off.³⁷

The referendum on June 12 and 13, 2011, was an overwhelming victory for the water movement. For the first time in sixteen years, it had again been possible to secure the quorum of at least 50 percent plus one voter. In fact, just over 57 percent of the electorate—more than 26 million Italians—cast their vote.³⁸ The majorities in relation to the two questions on water were even more impressive: “95.35% yes (4.65% no) on the first question; 95.80% yes (4.20% no) on the second.”³⁹ The victory could not have been more decisive. Nevertheless, was it enough to ensure that water services would either remain public or be transferred back into public hands?

Undermining Popular Will

It needs to be remembered that the first moves by the Italian water movement had already been blocked at the political level. The draft 2005 law by popular initiative against water privatization was submitted to the regional parliament of Tuscany, but never debated. The draft 2007 law by popular initiative against water privatization was received by the national parliament, but never debated either. These laws were simply put in a drawer. The referendum encountered similar obstructions.

Almost immediately after the referendum, the Italian government took action to subvert the outcome. First, it disempowered municipalities, by entrusting an independent national regulatory agency AEEG (l'Autorità per l'Energia Elettrica e il Gas) with the task of setting water tariffs. A complex mathematical equation was put forward, which municipalities have to translate into their particular situation. Second, the principle of the EU Stability Pact of balanced budgets was transferred to the level of Italian municipalities. With their financial possibilities constrained, those municipalities where water services had already been privatized would find it difficult, if not impossible, to buy back private shares, especially against the background of the Eurozone crisis.⁴⁰

Moreover, the second question of the referendum, which repealed the right of private companies to a guaranteed profit of 7 percent, has never really been implemented. In the latest twist, the formula, calculated in exactly the same way but under a different name, has been reintroduced at the slightly lower level of 6.4 percent. The Forum unsuccessfully challenged this at the Administrative Tribunal of Milano in March 2014.⁴¹

Taking Stock

Despite these setbacks, it would be wrong to argue that nothing positive resulted from the referendum victory. First—and as many of the interviewees pointed out, perhaps most importantly—the 2009 law of the Berlusconi government which enforced water privatization on all municipalities, has been repealed. This was confirmed on July 20, 2012, by the Constitutional Court, when the principle was challenged.⁴² Hence, many water companies such as in Torino and Milano are still fully owned by local government, even though they may operate like a private company in their status as joint-stock companies. Further privatization has been stopped. Second, the city of Napoli has re-municipalized water services. A group of lawyers had worked closely with the water movement and one of them, Alberto Lucarelli, was given the task by the mayor of Napoli to organize this step, including also forms of direct citizen/consumer and worker participation in the company.⁴³ Third, the Italian region of Lazio unanimously passed a law on March 20, 2014, that is intended to facilitate the return of water management to local authorities.⁴⁴

Moreover, when it became clear after the referendum that attempts were made to block the implementation of the outcome, the movement as a whole adopted the campaign of civil obedience, devised by the Arezzo water committee. It was related to the second question of the referendum against the guaranteed profit of 7 percent and was called “civil obedience” rather than “civil disobedience,” because the initiators argued

that by withholding the 7 percent of their water charges when paying the bills, they actually complied with national law resulting from the referendum. On the basis of this experience, and against the background of having been blocked again and again in the political sphere, the water committee in Arezzo is now among those local committees that strongly advocate direct political action based on the self-organization of citizens. These committees are no longer prepared to engage in political initiatives such as collecting signatures. Furthermore, others in the Forum have revived the national law initiative against water privatization of 2007 and formed close ties with an inter-parliamentary group of more than 200 Members of Parliament (MPs) including all MPs of the parties Cinque Stelle and Sinistra Ecologia Libertà, as well as a few members of the Partito Democratico. This group is in the process of putting forward a revised and updated version of the draft 2007 law by popular initiative. Finally, activists point out that the very fact that the movement has now existed for over ten years, despite the problems with the implementation of the referendum results, should be regarded as a success.⁴⁵

It is important to analyze social movements through the lens of class struggle. And related, it is equally important to take into account the structuring conditions of global capitalism, especially when analyzing the problem of non-implementation of the referendum results.

The Italian Water Movement in the Structural Conditions of Global Capitalism

Due to the way in which the capitalist social relations of production are organized, capitalism is characterized by a set of key dynamics.⁴⁶ First, capitalist social relations of production, organized around wage labor and the private ownership of the means of production, are enormously dynamic, because both labor and capital have to reproduce themselves through the market. While workers compete with each other to sell their labor “freely,” capitalists are in constant competition with each other over profitability and market share. Hence, capitalism is characterized by a constant drive towards further innovation in order that each capitalist entity can outcompete its competitors. Yet despite capitalism’s dynamism, it is also crisis-prone, giving us a second structural dynamic. The more goods are produced and the more profits are generated in the ceaseless search for further profitable investment opportunities, the more difficult it becomes to bring together excess labor and excess capital in a fruitful way, which gives rise to a “state of overaccumulation.”⁴⁷ Third, Rosa Luxemburg had already pointed to “the inherent contradiction between the unlimited expansive capacity of the productive forces and the limited

expansive capacity of social consumption under conditions of capitalist distribution.”⁴⁸ Hence, capitalism constantly has to expand outward and incorporate new, non-capitalist space in order to overcome crises.

This outward expansion can be geographical in that new areas are integrated or reintegrated along novel lines into capitalism, or it can be inward expansion in that decommmodified areas are re-commmodified for profit making. It is here that the privatization of public services becomes important. The guaranteed demand for services such as water makes the privatization of these services an attractive investment opportunity for capital, as activists have realized themselves.⁴⁹ At times, when the global economy is in crisis and other investment opportunities have dried up, investing in the provision of services ultimately guaranteed by the state promises super profits.

As recent reports confirm, international banks and investment institutions have identified water as an excellent, profitable investment opportunity. Yang Jo-Shing writes that, “The new ‘water barons’—the Wall Street banks and elitist multibillionaires—are buying up water all over the world at unprecedented pace.” Slogans such as “water is the petroleum for the next century” (Goldman Sachs) or “the water market will soon eclipse oil, agriculture, and precious metals” (Citigroup) drive this new investment fever.⁵⁰ Private equity funds are playing an increasingly dominant role in the British water sector. “Of the 10 large water and sewerage companies, four—Anglian, Southern, Thames and Yorkshire—are already owned by private equity or financial groups. Three large companies are still part of groups quoted on the London stock exchange—Severn Trent, South West and United Utilities: of these, Pennon Group, owners of South-West Water, is 46% owned by 6 major financial shareholders.”⁵¹

A key strategy to generate profits is leveraging debt. As Aditya Chakraborty reported in the *Guardian*, between 2007 and 2012 there was only one year in which the consortium of shareholders of Thames Water in the United Kingdom took out less money from the company than it had made in post-tax profits, thereby doubling the company’s debt to £7.8 billion.⁵² And profits are not only made through an increase in prices, a decrease in infrastructure investment, and a reduction in workers’ pay and working conditions. As water activists from the committee in Arezzo explained, when it comes to infrastructural maintenance work, these lucrative contracts are often awarded to companies linked to members of the public-private water consortium.⁵³ In short, the very structural dynamics of capitalism implied that a full implementation of the referendum results was always going to be a difficult struggle.

This struggle was made even more difficult by the global financial crisis of 2007–2009, its aftermath, and the closely related Eurozone crisis which started in 2010. Indebted peripheral EU countries—especially Greece, Ireland, and Portugal—were bailed out by the Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the IMF in exchange for imposed restructuring including labor market deregulation, cutting public sector employment, and privatizing public companies.⁵⁴ Water privatization has been pushed especially in Greece and Portugal.⁵⁵ It was precisely in the second half of 2011, shortly after the referendum, that Italy too increasingly ran into difficulties with refinancing state debt on the financial markets. In turn, the European Union and ECB put heavy pressure on Italy towards privatization. In August 2011 Jean-Claude Trichet, then president of the ECB, and Mario Draghi, who succeeded him in November 2011, urged “the full liberalisation of local public services...through large scale privatizations,’ ignoring the fact that 95.5 percent of Italian voters had rejected the privatization of local water services in a valid national referendum less than eight weeks earlier.”⁵⁶ The European Commission added further pressure in terms of water privatization and liberalization in a report for the Eurogroup on November 29, 2011. It argued that “Italy needs enhancing competition in key network industries,” while “other sectors, such as telecommunications, postal services, water and transport, are also significantly shielded from full competition pressures.”⁵⁷ Eventually, a Constitutional Court ruling blocked outright water liberalization.

Nevertheless, the post-referendum requirement for Italian municipalities to observe balanced budgets can be regarded as part of this overall European development. Importantly, if a local water company is a joint stock company, albeit completely owned by the public, it does not appear on this municipality’s budget. However, if the water company was re-municipalized and directly owned, then it would appear. This makes local municipalities think twice about whether re-municipalization is actually financially feasible.⁵⁸

Water management has developed into big business. Unsurprisingly, powerful economic interests are behind the push for privatization. David Hall says, “The private water sector is dominated globally by two French multinationals, Suez and Veolia, who hold over two-thirds of global private water operations.”⁵⁹ They lobby hard and apply their structural power on governments to achieve privatization policies.⁶⁰ Both were involved in the initial steps of water privatization in Italy towards the end of the 1990s, together with Italian partner companies. In relation to the latter, Acea has emerged as the major private Italian water operator. Hall and Emanuele Lobina say, “In 2012, Acea owned dominant stakes in

the water operators of Rome and Frosinone, Gori, Pisa, Firenze, Perugia, Arezzo and Siena.”⁶¹ These multinationals are involved in making profits through the management of water services and strongly work against re-municipalization. Interestingly, when activists of the Arezzo water committee spoke with the “independent” agency in charge of setting water tariffs, they suddenly noticed a thick file entitled “Meetings with Suez” on the shelf behind the agency official. Clearly, there are close ties between private companies and this supposedly independent regulatory agency in administering the sector.⁶²

The push by the European Commission in favor of privatizing water services should not come as a surprise. On the basis of their structural power, large European multinational corporations have lobbied strongly for neoliberal restructuring. Lobbying groups, especially in the services industry, have become increasingly stronger over the last decade. The European Services Forum (ESF) has been closely involved in advising the Commission on further liberalization and privatization of the public sector. Corporate Europe Observatory writes that, “In 2012, the Commission accepted just one meeting with trade unions on the issue of services trade. In contrast, it met more than 20 times with the ESF.”⁶³ In October 2005, Aquafed was established, a lobbying group representing mainly the interests of Suez, Veolia, and their various subsidiaries with a specific focus on EU policy-making.⁶⁴ As Olivier Hoedeman from Corporate Europe Observatory concludes, “the EU’s response to the crisis fits hand in glove with the corporate agenda of these lobby groups. The Commission’s use of its new economic governance powers will reshape societies in exactly the way that these lobby groups have demanded for many years.”⁶⁵

Conclusion: Lasting Legacies of the Italian Water Movement?

It would be incorrect to argue that the Italian water movement has ultimately failed due to the incomplete implementation of the referendum outcomes. The Forum’s success in the 2011 referendum is arguably the most important example of a successful anti-neoliberal campaign in Europe over the last decade. The broad alliance, wide mobilization across Italian society, and emphatic endorsement of over 95 percent of voters is without comparison. Nevertheless, the victory came at an unfortunate time. Considering the structuring conditions of global capitalism characterized by the global financial and the Eurozone crises, it was difficult to push implementation through. Despite these difficulties, however, there are clearly lasting legacies of the Italian water movement.

First, the underlying discourse around water as a commons, understood as “elements that we maintain or reproduce together, according

to rules established by the community: an area to be rescued from the decision-making of the post-democratic elite and which needs to be self-governed through forms of participative democracy," is crucial.⁶⁶ It directly challenges the capitalist focus on commodifying ever more areas and submitting them to the profit logic of the market, implying a move towards a new economic model.⁶⁷ This focus is combined with a new, participatory form of democracy in the running of water services. Precisely in a situation perceived by some within the Forum as post-democratic, the focus on a new form of democracy proved attractive. As Emanuele Fantini points out, "the mobilisation for public water acquired the role of a paradigmatic battle in defence of democracy and against the commodification of life, powerfully synthetized in the movement's motto: 'It is written water, it is read democracy.'"⁶⁸ In other words, it is a new understanding of democracy and a new way of how to run the economy and, importantly, of how these two dimensions are closely and internally related, which brings with it a transformative dimension.

Moreover, the successful referendum in Italy inspired the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) at the end of 2011 to make the final decision and move ahead with a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) on water as a human right. Similar to Italy, a large alliance of trade unions, social movements, and environmental NGOs was established at the European levels, but also at the national level of the various EU member states, in support of the ECI. Between May 2012 and September 2013 the initiative collected close to 1.9 million signatures and forced the Commission into an official position on water. In turn, when activists organized a successful referendum against water privatization in the Greek city of Thessaloniki on May 18, 2014, EPSU as well as the Italian water movement sent monitors in support. In other words, the Italian referendum continues to have international implications for struggles elsewhere.⁶⁹

Notes

1. "Sic Vos Non Vobis, 15 marzo-4 maggio," <http://parcoartevente.it>.

2. Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, second edition (Leeds: Anti/Theses, 2000), 70.

3. Andreas Bieler, "Transnational Labor Solidarity in (the) Crisis," *Global Labor Journal* 5, no. 2 (2014): 114-33, <https://escarpmentpress.org>.

4. Chiara Carrozza and Emanuele Fantini, "Acqua paradigma dei beni comuni: tra epica e pratica," in Chiara Carrozza and Emanuele Fantini, eds., *Si scrive acqua... Attori, pratiche e discorsi nel movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune*

(Torino: aAccademia University Press, 2013), 7-8.

5. Interview with the president of the Acqua Pubblico committee in Arezzo, Firenze, April 2, 2014.

6. Margherita Ciervo, *Geopolitica dell'Acqua*, new edition (Rome: Carocci editore, 2010), 161.

7. Emanuele Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," in Carrozza and Fantini, eds., *Si scrive acqua...*, 27-28; interview with the president of the Acqua Pubblico committee in Arezzo; interview with a researcher on water movement,

Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso, Rome, March 31, 2014.

8. Chiara Carrozza, "Riforme, attori e conflitti nelle politiche dei servizi idrici italiani," in Carrozza and Fantini, eds., *Si scrive acqua*, 13.

9. Interview with the president of Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus; Riccardo Petrella, *The Water Manifesto: Arguments for a World Water Contract* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

10. Interview with a researcher on water movement, University of Torino; Torino, April 7, 2014.

11. Ibid; Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," 24.
12. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL, Rome/Italy, March 26, 2014; interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia, Rome/Italy, March 27, 2014; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua, Firenze, April 2, 2014.
13. Interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua.
14. Interview 13; Tommaso Fattori, "The European Citizens' Initiative on Water and 'Austeritarian' Post-Democracy," *transform!*, no.13 (2013), <http://transformnetwork.net>.
15. Interview with two representatives of the Secretariat, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua, Rome/Italy, March 25, 2014; interview with the president of the Acqua Publico committee in Arezzo; interview with a researcher on water movement, University of Torino.
16. Interview with the co-ordinator for wider networks, Cobas, Rome/Italy, March 26, 2014; interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia; interview with the president of Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus, Milano, April 8, 2014.
17. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL.
18. Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," 32.
19. Emanuele Fantini, "Catholics in the Making of the Italian Water Movement: A Moral Economy," *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 7, no.1 (2014): 35-57; <http://sibaese.unisalento.it>.
20. Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, "Another Europe is Possible? Labor and Social Movements at the European Social Forum," *Globalizations* 1, no. 2 (2004): 303-25.
21. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL.
22. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; interview with a researcher on water movement, Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with the co-ordinator of the Water Committee in Torino, Torino, April 7, 2014; and interview with the president of Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus.
23. Interview with a member of the National Co-ordination Group, USB; interview with a researcher on water movement, Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with the president of Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus.
24. Interview with the co-ordinator for wider networks, Cobas; interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia; interview with a researcher on water movement, Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso.
25. Interview with two representatives of the Secretariat, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua.
26. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; Interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia. The two quotations in the paragraph are from Fantini, "Catholics in the Making of the Italian Water Movement," 37, 42.
27. Interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia.
28. Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," "Catholics in the Making of the Italian Water Movement," 50.
29. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; interview with the co-ordinator in Tuscany for questions related to water, Legambiente Toscana, Firenze, April 3, 2014; interview with a researcher on water movement, University of Torino; and interview, via Skype, with the referent of Water Committee of the region of Puglia/Italy, June 6, 2014; Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," 29; Carrozza and Fantini, "Acqua paradigma dei beni comuni," 86-88; Ciervo, *Geopolitica dell'Acqua*, 166.
30. Interview with two representatives of the Secretariat, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with the members of the Arezzo Water Committee; interview with the co-ordinator of the Water Committee in Torino.
31. Ciervo, *Geopolitica dell'Acqua*, 163; Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," 31.
32. Interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia; interview with a researcher on water movement, Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with a researcher on water movement, University of Torino.
33. Ciervo, *Geopolitica dell'Acqua*, 162.
34. Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," 33.
35. Interview with the president of Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus; Ciervo, *Geopolitica dell'Acqua*, 170.
36. Tommaso Fattori, "Fluid Democracy: The Italian Water Revolution," *transform!*, no.9 (2011), <http://transform-network.net>.
37. Ibid; Matteo Cernison, "La comunicazione e i referendum sull'acqua. Nuove strategie tra rete e territori," in Carrozza and Fantini, *Si scrive acqua*, 57-74; interview with the co-ordinator in Tuscany for questions related to water, Legambiente Toscana; Fantini, "Catholics in the Making of the Italian Water Movement," 46.
38. There were four referendum questions on these days. In addition to the two on water, there was one on repealing the impediment of the President of the Council of Ministers and one on rejecting nuclear energy. The nuclear disaster at Fukushima in March 2011 may have aided the large turnout, considering that the fourth question was precisely in this area. I am grateful to Emanuele Fantini for pointing this out to me.
39. Fattori, "Fluid Democracy."
40. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; interview with the members of the Arezzo Water Committee; interview with the president of Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus; Fantini, "Gli attori e il percorso storico del movimento italiano per l'acqua bene comune," 18.
41. Interview with two representatives of the Secretariat, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia.
42. Interview with a member of the National Co-ordination Group; Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), Rome, March 27, 2014; see also "The Italian Constitutional Court Blocks the Privatization of Water," July 20, 2012, <http://fame2012.org>.
43. Carrozza and Fantini, "Acqua paradigma dei beni comuni," 95; interview with a researcher on water movement, University of Torino.
44. "Under Pressure from Citizens, Lazio Regional Government Approves Law on Public Management of Water," *Water is a Human Right*, March 20, 2014; <http://right2water.eu>.
45. Interview with the co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; interview with a member of National Council, ATTAC Italia; interview with the president of the Acqua Publico committee in Arezzo; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua.
46. Bieler, "Transnational Labor Solidarity in (the) Crisis," 116-19.
47. David Harvey, "The Geopolitics of Capitalism," in Derek Gregory and John

Urry, eds., *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 132.

48. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003; originally 1913), 323.

49. Interview with the members of the Arezzo Water Committee.

50. Yang Jo-Shing, "The New 'Water Barons': Wall Street Mega-Banks Are Buying Up the World's Water," December 21, 2012, <http://marketoracle.co.uk>.

51. David Hall and Emanuele Lobina, *Water Companies and Trends in Europe 2012* (London: Public Services International Research Unit, 2012), 20, <http://psiru.org>.

52. Aditya Chakraborty, "Thames Water: The Drip, Drip, Drip of Discontent," *Guardian* (Comment is Free), June 15, 2014, <http://theguardian.com>.

53. Interview with the members of the Arezzo Water Committee.

54. Costas Lapavistas, et al., *Crisis in the Eurozone* (London/New York: Verso, 2012).

55. Hall and Lobina, *Water Companies and Trends in Europe 2012*, 28.

56. Roland Erne, "European Industrial Relations after the Crisis. A Postscript,"

in Stijn Smismans, ed., *The European Union and Industrial Relations—New Procedures, New Context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 229.

57. "Italian Water Movement Forces Monti to Respect the Results of the Referendum," European Federation of Public Service Unions, <http://epsu.org>.

58. Interview with a researcher on water movement, University of Torino.

59. David Hall, "Corporate Actors: A Global Review of Multinational Corporations in the Water and Electricity Sectors," in Daniel Chavez, ed., *Beyond the Market: The Future of Public Services, Public Services Yearbook* (London: TNI / Public Services International Research Unit, 2006), 179.

60. Ciervo, *Geopolitica dell'Acqua*, 17.

61. Hall and Lobina, *Water Companies and Trends in Europe 2012*, 22.

62. Interview with the president of the Acqua Pubblico committee in Arezzo; interview with the members of the Arezzo Water Committee.

63. "At Your Service: The European Services Forum's Privileged Access to the EU Commission," *Corporate Europe Observatory*, 2013, <http://corporateeurope.org>.

64. David Hall and Olivier Hoedeman,

AquaFed—Another Pressure Group for Private Water (London: Public Services International Research Unit, 2006), <http://psiru.org>.

65. Olivier Hoedeman, "Europe Inc. in Crisis—The EU's Alliance with Big Business Is a Dead-end," *Corporate Europe Observatory*, 2012, <http://corporateeurope.org>.

66. Fattori, "Fluid Democracy."

67. Interview with the president of the Acqua Pubblico committee in Arezzo; see also Carrozza and Fantini, "Acqua paradigma dei beni comuni," 77–88.

68. Fantini, "Catholics in the Making of the Italian Water Movement, 42; interview with the members of the Arezzo Water Committee, Arezzo, April 4, 2014.

69. Interview with two representatives of the Secretariat, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with a researcher on water movement, Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso; interview with the co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; interview with the deputy general secretary of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU), Brussels, May 6, 2014; Fattori, "The European Citizens' Initiative on Water and 'Austertarian' Post-Democracy." See also <http://right2water.eu/supporting-organisations>.

MONTHLY REVIEW *Fifty Years Ago*

Any one who examines with care the reports of what happened [in the Watts riots] in Los Angeles can hardly help being struck by the extent to which the struggle there resembles the struggle of the native against colonialism as described and analyzed by Frantz Fanon [in *The Wretched of the Earth*]. There was no indiscriminate fighting between Negroes and whites (as in the native sections of colonial cities, there are very few white residents of Watts, and for obvious reasons whites kept out during the fighting) and none at all among Negroes. A report by Walter Rugaber in the *New York Times* of August 17 quotes an employed Negro worker as saying that he "had been afraid—'Yes, sir, afraid'—while they [the disturbances] were in progress. But he was afraid of the white Los Angeles police, not his fellow Negroes in the street." Available casualty figures, still very sketchy at the time of writing, reveal the basis for this pattern of fear. According to *Newsweek* (August 30), "Twenty-nine of 36 fatalities were Negro. Most were shot by guardsmen and police during their drive to restore order." And the evidence is overwhelming that all Negroes regardless of their degree of involvement were regarded as enemies by the police.

—LEO HUBERMAN & PAUL SWEETZ, "Decolonization at Home,"
Monthly Review, October 1965

Copyright of Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine is the property of Monthly Review Foundation and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.