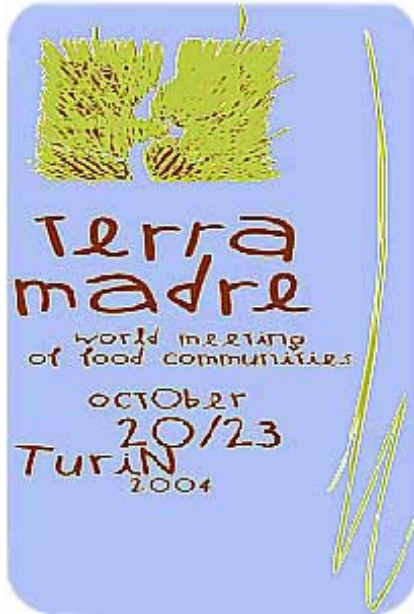


TERRA MADRE – THE MOTHER OF ALL MOVEMENTS



The imposing buildings reaching across the Lingotto site in Turin combine a memory of the City's industrial past with the invitation to a different future.

Lingotto was once the biggest car production plant in Europe ; Fiat's first mass production factory, providing jobs for over 30,000 workers. Today it is the centrepiece of a global celebration of diversity rather than standardisation; a new mode of production rooted in biodiversity rather than sameness.

Farmers, fishermen, cheese makers and nomadic herdsman were turning up for a conference on sustainable food and farming that seemed more like the United Nations as it was meant to be.

For the last 5 years the Slow Food Movement has used the Turin site for an international food festival, the Salone del Gusto. It is a celebration of how farmers and food producers have been reclaiming

the place of traditional seed and livestock varieties to produce food in ways that are sensitive to the environment and accountable to the consumer.

This year, however, the radical journalist (and founder of the Slow Food Movement), Carlo Petrini, had a much bigger plan. It was to link the Salone with a summit on the future of farming itself. That was the origin of what was to become the Terra Madre (Mother Earth) conference; the start point of a global search for peasant and farming communities, food producers and local food systems that are rooted in their own (and the planet's) survival.

What emerged was not an expression of the angry, legitimate movement that confronts the rapacious power of globalisation. Instead, we were offered a taste of the stronger, quieter, more irresistible movement that will replace globalisation.

How the conference was organised still seems something of a minor miracle. Some 5,000 people, from 132 different countries, were invited to Terra Madre. Many had no identity documents let alone passports. Arranging these and the travel visas was a nightmare. At least one group of indigenous people refused to have passport photos because the pictures would steal their souls. But in the end it all got sorted.

Russian fisherwomen mixed with shepherds from Chad . Farmers from Afghanistan and Colombia talked, not about drugs, but about raisin growing in Herat and savanna vegetables from Bogota . Beekeepers from Twickenham and Nepal hovered around fruit growers from Tajikistan , cheese makers from Somerset , Laguiole (in France) and the Norwegian Fjords.

The conference buzzed with the exchange of information...and not a single official of the IMF or the WTO was allowed to intervene, demanding that markets should be liberalised, seeds patented, or land drenched in chemicals to support the sort of production that multinationals love to dominate. It was a

conference to inspire and inform the post-globalisation debate. But don't assume that it leaves us without awkward issues that every one of us has to face.

A week before Terra Madre, the European Social Forum converged on London for an equally important conference on globalisation. Some of the themes were the same; social solidarity, community self-organisation, the need to challenge corporate and global power, the insanity of neo-liberalism. The difference between the two is that Terra Madre was unambiguously propositionalist and inclusive whilst the anti-globalisation movement struggles to move on to the same ground.

A session in the Social Forum that was planned to bring together European politicians opposed to globalisation had to be cancelled because the interpreters threatened to strike if we were allowed to be part of things. When Ken Livingstone spoke there was an attempt to storm the platform to disrupt his comments. For some in the anti-globalisation movement, any contact with formal politics, or its institutions, undermines the purity of the movement. Chasing purity into sterility will not, though, turn the world into a better place.

The connection between movements and institutions is always messy, always compromising. But the failure to engage only leaves the left in a marginalised, lost and often embarrassing position.

In Italy, there was rapturous applause when Enzo Ghigo, the governor of Piedmont, spoke about his decision to order the destruction of all GM crops planted in his region. No less enthusiastic was the support given to Agriculture Minister, Giovanni Alemanno, whose plans are to make future planting of GM crops virtually impossible....and who wants Europe to repeal laws (and WTO agreements) that allow the patenting of seeds and biodiversity.

The left in Britain would be ecstatic if we could get Labour to commit to such policies in our next manifesto. But consider this: Mayor Ghigo is a member of Berlusconi's Forza Italia movement. Minister Alemanno is a member of the post-fascist, Alleanza Nazionale. Both were at ease alongside visionary figures of the left such as Vandana Shiva and Petrini himself. None were at odds with the farmers and peasants movements looking to build (or grow) a different future.

Terra Madre simply opened an agenda that invited us all to think and act differently in the pursuit of more profound solidarities. Farmers from North America were at one with those from Brazil or Burkina Faso. Their agenda was to reclaim agriculture from the suffocating grip of agribusiness. Food communities wanted to address their own food needs first (in sustainable ways) and then look at supportive systems of distributing surpluses. Americans wanted to challenge Bush's insane agriculture that builds up huge grain surpluses, but leaves US farmers abjectly poor and its citizens abjectly undernourished. In solidarity with the South, they wanted an end to the dumping of Northern surpluses on Southern communities in order to destroy their domestic agriculture.

These solidarities would lead us into a very different internationalism. The construction of new tariff systems that allow countries to produce to meet their own food security needs (and to protect their own environmental resources) would scare the hell out of corporate lobbyists that surround the WTO. So too would suggestions that World Bank / IMF programmes be based on entirely different conditionalities. Make 'sustainable production' a condition of debt relief rather than 'open markets' and the farmers across the planet would celebrate. Tax-favour the local food systems promoted by the Slow Food

movement (and tax global transshipment of produce for the full cost of environmental pollution involved) and food communities will find that food accountability comes back onto the agenda of democratic choices they can make.

In many parts of Europe, the revival of such accountable and sustainable food systems is already under way. It isn't based on middle class, 'food faddism', but on the belief that the poor also have the right to better food choices. These are the same rights being sought by the poor in the South.

At Terra Madre, food communities had every right to celebrate the work being done to re-introduce varieties of crops and livestock more compatible with their climate and environment. They rightly hold this up as a strengthening of biodiversity; an antidote to the insecure monocultures that agribusiness would drive us into. What the Slow Food movement has yet to realise is that the reclaiming of traditional seeds and breeds may find its true place within a quite different geo-political landscape.

Climate change may do a lot more than force us to revisit our own traditions. Across vast areas of the planet we are seeing the emergence of quite different climatic systems. Seasons are changing, weather patterns becoming more erratic. We are living within a revolution of small changes with huge implications. Some of our seed base of today will be unsuited to the weather conditions of tomorrow.

The good news is that, across the planet, farmers have seeds and breeds we can exchange to meet our differing climate demands. The key is to see this as part of our global commons not as the purchasing ground for global monopolies.

The farmers at Terra Madre are the custodians of our future. When Carlo Petrini set out with the idea of Terra Madre, people told him it was a crazy dream. His response was to say he had always believed that "he who sows utopias, harvests realities". These realities may be even bigger than the original dream. Set against the challenges that climate change will throw at us, Petrini might just have brought into being the mother of all social movements.