

SILVANA MOSSANO

Eternit Bis trial, September the 20th 2021 hearing

A DETAILED ACCOUNT ON REMEDIATION, THE MAYOR OF CASALE AND THE STORY OF THE BAKER'S DAUGHTER

1) REMEDICATION

A few years ago, the Municipality of Casale advertised a position for the head of the town's technical department. In the end, the candidate who was selected did not accept the position despite it being permanent and secure, for fear of moving to the city of asbestos. We will never stop saying Casale Monferrato is not the city of asbestos, it is the city that has fought and reacted against asbestos; it has done so for itself and for all those other cities in the world that have been unjustly and unknowingly intoxicated by the carcinogenic fiber. There is no place in the world more aware than Casale, and where more reclamations have been carried out: fear, however, lingers on.

The fact was mentioned at the hearing of the Eternit Bis trial on Friday, September 20th, which is being held in the Court of Assizes (Chief Judge Dr Gianfranco Pezzone, with Judge Manuela Massino and *popular judges* or Jury), against the defendant Stephan Schmidheiny, accused of having deliberately caused (voluntary or willful homicide) the death of 392 people in Casale. The asbestos used in the manufacturing of sheets and pipes at the Eternit plant - overlooking via Oggero al Ronzone and that the Swiss entrepreneur managed directly from 1976 to 1986 – is the object of the trial.

"The remediation program in Casale started in 1997 with the arrival of the special fund," stated architect Piercarla Coggiola, who since then has been in charge of the project, and since 2010 is manager of the *Ufficio Ambiente Ecologia* (Environment Ecology Office). Mayor Federico Riboldi, also a witness at the trial, also stressed that "the creation of an autonomous Environment Department devoted primarily to remediation is a peculiarity of Casale and there is no equivalent in medium-sized municipalities comparable to ours".

Extremely precise and accurate, and above all with the kind of knowledge those who actually worked in the field have, Architect Coggiola described the phases chronologically, the milestones of the path to freedom from asbestos. "Asbestos free" is what the community of Casale yearns for. And the town is getting there. The reclamation plan started in 1997, "but, already before, the administration had purchased the former Eternit Warehouses of Piazza d'Armi with its own funds, reclaimed it and transformed into a multiplex cinema and exhibition centre". Moreover, with the approval of the Eternit bankruptcy judge and administrator, the town of Casale purchased the main body of the former manufacturing plant in Via Oggero (abandoned in 1986) and the so-called "Ex Piemontese" area.

"By 1994 – specified architect Coggiola – we had developed the *Urban Plan* and participated in a European call for bids to obtain funds for reclamation, air monitoring and a dedicated asbestos landfill. Unfortunately, however, it was not approved". Useless? Not at all: "It was later used to apply for funds from the so-called Seveso Plan, in 1997". A perimeter of 48 municipalities was drawn, corresponding to the health area of the former health district 76, with Casale as the leader (in

2000 it became "SIN", i.e. Site of National Interest), covering an area of 740 square kilometers. "Overall, in all these years, 120 million € have been allocated for diversified remediation interventions, of which 64 million came from the National Government in 2015" after the disappointment of the Cassation ruling of the Eternit One trial.

a) The Eternit Plant

The City purchased the plant in 1995 and immediately investigated what remediation work was required. As soon as news of the assignment of funds reached the municipality in October 1997, the executive project was approved and the tender was launched, but it was blocked because the Decam Company that came 2nd in the tender appealed. In the end it won the appeal, but then came across too many difficulties. As a result "Arpa (the regional environmental agency) and the health authority divided the area into different sectors, and a specific plan was prepared ". Did everything go smoothly from then on? No, because we found more asbestos than had been foreseen, which lengthened time and red tape. In the end the plant was reclaimed and demolished, buried under a concrete bed that the Casalesi called the "*esplanade*". "Total cost of the intervention is around 7 to 8 million €".

b) "Eternot" Park

Above the esplanade, the Eternot Park (i.e. No Eternit) was built costing between 4 and 5 million Euros - inaugurated on September 10, 2016, "very important for the community of Casale so much so that, we celebrate the birthday of this symbolic place every year". The building of the park was also littered by disputes with the Coutenza of the Lanza and Mellana Canals, because they found asbestos in the slush on the bottom and on the banks of the Lanza Canal (the 1st lot, reclaimed in October, and in autumn 2002 the third was concluded) . Then scrap and dust were discovered in some sheds that Eternit had sold privately (which was reclaimed in a very approximate manner).

c) Former office building

The town council, then led by Mayor Riccardo Coppo, stated it would re-zone the area if an agreement was not found, bought the plant from the Eternit bankruptcy with the specific intention of cleaning it up as it was estimated that no person or private company ever would. The office building was excluded, assigned to another creditor, who then went bankrupt. A new hurdle. Years and administrations went by, until the Municipality purchased it for 63,000 €, and reclaimed the area making it safe. "We found a lot of dust in there, everywhere, even on a desk, on sheets of paper and abandoned pens," recalled the architect Coggiola. There are still tests to be completed before the building can be used as a multipurpose center for museum, youth and teaching activities. Coggiola also spoke about the serious pollution identified in the area of Ex Piemontese, where the crushing of waste took place. A part is asbestos-free and the Verdeblu nursery school has been built there. Another area, further away, has yet to be reclaimed.

d) The "little beach"

"The beach was created by the waste expelled from the Eternit drainage channel, which ended up in the Po, on the right bank," explained the witness. "It was one of the most dangerous areas, very exposed and extensive: 6,500 square meters with a depth of 5 meters. The reclamation project began in 1998 and was completed in 2000. "We could not remove the material, so a sarcophagus

was built using an innovative technique based on injections of liquid concrete into the ground." Coggiola recalled that "very shortly after the completion, in October 2000 we had a flood; well, it was a sort of test: the building held." Afterwards, it was wilded or re-naturalized and you can't see the difference with the rest of the landscape anymore.

e) The Bagna Landfill

"We used to think of this area along the shore of the Po, left bank, as a polluted site for spilling different types of chemical waste and, as such, we thought of reclaiming it. However, after the 2000 flood, when excavations were made to extend the bridge over the River Po, asbestos was also found in the Bagna landfill" explained the manager. And we had to reclaim that, too.

f) Holiday Huts along the River

Throughout time people had build little holiday huts along the river. However, they often used asbestos sheets to build them. "We are monitoring the shacks, trying to identify their owners or understand whether they are still in use." One, in particular, the so-called "Radames' shack", named after its owner, required immediate remediation: "It was dilapidated, with walls made of asbestos and dust in the basement. It was reclaimed, demolished and, in its place, a small raised belvedere was created with a view on the river Po River".

g) "Eternit" Roofs

Over the course of more than two decades, a census, in fact several were carried out. The asbestos roofs of public buildings in the 48 municipalities of the "SIN" area have been almost all removed and replaced. Examples: former Eternit warehouses, schools, fruit and vegetable market (which has recently been demolished), library, Natal Palli stadium, Santo Spirito Hospital, Surgeries in Via Palestro, the barracks and others in the villages. Many private citizens, encouraged by the funds made available for the removal and, with the strength of a widespread and massive awareness campaign (not unrelated to the magnitude of the health problems), have reclaimed houses, sheds and small areas such as chicken coops and sheds. "You can still make requests for contributions - explained the manager -: we will reclaim asbestos while there is still any."

h) Dust

This is the most damning. Production waste that has been found in the most disparate places: in the square of Ticineto ("where a 'wet' method was tested that we had to invent here"), in the driveways of the cemetery of the same town, at the former palace Cova Adaglio now Media Trevigi, in the courtyard of the castle Paleologo, at the Ecomuseum Pietra da Cantoni in Cella Monte, in the churchyard of Odalengo Grande, in bowling greens, in the courtyards of apartment buildings, in the foundations of squares and private roads, in the basement of the retirement home and in the basement of the Leardi High School (the latter was taken over by the Province).

i) Dedicated Landfill

"The Municipality of Casale has given up selling desirable lots (value one million and 400,000 €) in the industrial area of Valenza street to allocate them to the realization of a specific landfill for asbestos, with diversified tanks for disused slabs and powder. The landfill was built in 2001 and is

directly managed by the public body: it is a rare case, usually private companies manage them" explained architect Coggiola, who is the technical manager of the plant. "A fundamental tool" - she pointed out – "that allowed to carry out, speed up, incentivize and contain the costs of asbestos reclamations". The regional Arpa (Environmental Agency) performs spot inspections, to monitor the management.

2. MAYOR RIBOLDI

Federico Riboldi, mayor of Casale since 2019, was born in 1986, the same year the Eternit factory was closed, or rather abandoned after the bankruptcy requested by the same company, after 80 years of activity. Continuing in the wake of the administrations that preceded it, the Riboldi administration is still facing the consequences of that industrial activity. The mayor testified to this at the Assize hearing on Friday, September 20, highlighting "the great effort of the community of Casale and the administrations that have followed, making this city a symbol in the world and an example for asbestos abatement. Prosecutor Gianfranco Colace asked the Mayor for an account of the costs that the community has had to bear. "The first great price, incalculable, is undoubtedly that of the victims, with the wake of immense pain and an impoverished population." Riboldi then recalled the expenses incurred even with resources drawn from municipal budgets, "both for acquisitions and for legal disputes" as well as for the renunciation of collecting adequate sums from the sale of industrial lots that were instead chosen to be used for the construction of the landfill for asbestos. Riboldi also dwelt on the "damage to the town's image caused by asbestos with strong negative effects that have blocked some developments, have discouraged the establishment of businesses and new families because of fears generated by asbestos pollution, have affected school and sports activities and, very much, the tourist attraction". The mayor then pointed out how the administrative practices of various kinds in support of the reclamation have slowed down the activity of the municipal machine in several areas. "The most terrifying thing - he insisted - is that they left an ecological time bomb of this type near homes, schools, in the midst of people." And did Schmidheiny, or anyone connected to companies in his group, ever offer to help with the cleanup, inquired prosecutor Colace. "Not to my knowledge, no." However, a somewhat unusual bargaining there was, "in November 2017, when I was vice- president of the Province, the representative of a company in the health sector, knowing that I am from Casale, approached me proposing an unspecified job on the image of the territory of Casale." And how did it go? "I spoke informally with Dr. Daniela Degiovanni, and she suggested that before starting any discussion, I should tell this person that, he should put in writing that he had no connection with Schmidheiny or Eternit. I followed the advice and sent him a whatsapp. Then he never contacted me again."

3. THE BAKER'S DAUGHTER

"My Mom was diagnosed with mesothelioma in November 2001. And she immediately said: 'There's nothing to say, we know everything'". The daughter of Giovanna Patrucco, who lived in Ronzone, at number 61 of via Oggero (and still lives there a few numbers away), graduated in Chemistry, worked as manager first at the Mauriziano Hospital in Turin and then at the Sant'Andrea Hospital in Vercelli, spoke about the Eternit district during the decades in which her parents managed the food store not far from the factory. "We used to live in the backroom, at that time, that was how it was for those who had a food store. Many workers were our customers and they bought bread, cheese, salami, ham. We knew them well by name and a degree of friendship developed".

Her mother was very scrupulous in trying to keep the food clean, especially the loaves of bread displayed in baskets, and used a broom to brush off the dust from her customers' overalls, brushing away some of the dust before letting them into the store. "The dust," she explained, pressed by questions from Prosecutor Mariagiovanna Compare, "was like a front door in Ronzone. It was everywhere. When the shutters had to be repainted, my mom said, 'Let's make them gray, so you can't see the dust!'" The witness's memory is clear : "I remember everything. The courtyards were covered in dust, and so were the sidewalks and the slats of the shutters; the streets were buried in it, the dust even hid the tracks of the "*tramvajan*" (the trolleybus) and my parents told me to be careful when I rode my bicycle so I wouldn't end up on the tracks. The shoes, too, "how angry I was that they were dusty before I got to school!" And the former Piemonte District ? "There the waste was crushed and flew up in clouds. Many people used the waste; at my house, for example, they bordered the flowerbed. Instead, the courtyard of the neighbor, Bruno Besso, who later died of mesothelioma, had been leveled with the dust. Then there was the "little beach": "Oh, yes, when we were children we used to go swimming, and when we were teenagers we used to sunbathe. And on Sundays we'd have barbecues. For us it was a little Riviera." Dust, dust and announcements of deaths. "In my house you could sense that something was wrong; there was a sense of alertness."

Her mother's mesothelioma diagnosis was a shock, but not really a surprise-"we know everything anyway..." "My mother was aware of what awaited her and wanted to personally sign the complaint against Eternit. She was so angry because she felt that what had befallen her was a great injustice, for herself and for all those who had died, and whom she knew personally. Not only workers, but also citizens. After 1980, an elementary school teacher had died. And then there was the Piercarlo Busto, a very dear relative of my family." Giovanna Patrucco stops, gathers her thoughts, tries to order her thoughts: "Maybe it is paradoxical what I am saying - she stops, takes a breath -: my mother suffered more for the injustice she suffered than for the physical pain of the disease".

4) CONCLUDING REMARKS by Silvana Mossano

Mayor Federico Riboldi is convinced, and said so on Friday to the Assize Judges, that "the journalistic campaign contributed to diminishing the city's appeal" (ref to Casale's image). The many newspaper articles dedicated, over the years, to the various union and environmental battles, to the various judicial phases, the reclamation, to the calls to search for a cure and also to the tragic documentation of the deaths, with the individual painful stories of the victims, all this would have spread a not very nice image of Casale, obscuring the beauties, real and uncontested, of art and landscape, that distinguish this area listed as a World Heritage Unesco site.

I do not question his testimony, but a comment is indispensable. I respect Mayor Riboldi's point of view, but while I share many of the observations he has made, I strongly disagree with him on this one. I say that if the city of Casale Monferrato has become, as Riboldi proudly pointed out in the courtroom, "a symbol in the world," it is thanks to the tireless voice that newspapers and journalists have given to its intrepid battle and dignified resilience. This was the only way to let the whole world know that, in this evocative territory rich in natural and architectural beauty, there lives a proud and courageous people that keeps its head up and its back straight. With bitterness and indignation, I remember that there have been many initiatives and many attempts to silence us, relegating them at most to an annoying rumor, as it was written in the famous "Handbook or Manual " of Eternit that sought to mystify the damage of asbestos. The newspapers and the media

of this land were not silenced and, perhaps, this is the most annoying sting for those who - more or less knowingly, the judges will decide - have caused so much pain.

NEXT HEARING

At the next hearing, on Monday, September 27, Paolo Rivella, the prosecutor's financial consultant, will be examined.

<https://www.silmos.it/il-sindaco-al-processo-eternit-bis-lamianto-ha-bloccato-lo-sviluppo-della-citta/>