

VareseNews

“Riva, Legion of Honour, or house arrest”?

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Clemente Ballerio and Cesare Corti write about the human and professional story of the owner of ILVA, who is under arrest at his house in Malnate, near Varese.

We thought long and hard before writing this letter. We were shaken and surprised when we heard the news about Emilio Riva and his company.

For over forty years, our professional lives have been intertwined with his Group's activities, and for us, over the last sixty years, he has been one of the most important and useful people in this country, because of his activities in the worlds of economics and employment.

We have worked alongside his companies, and when he set out to save the iron and steel plant in Taranto, we followed him. We have never wanted to appear, because our job is one that requires great discretion. In 1995, we began reorganising ILVA's complete computerised administration system. We personally go and manage the work, and we have eighty collaborators who follow the Riva company, of whom, 25-30 are dedicated to Taranto.

Living in such close contact with a company and its top management for so many years has allowed us to get to know the people and the activities well. Emilio Riva is a man of extraordinary energy. He was always the first to arrive at work. He would walk around the departments and he knew how to build relationships with the people he worked with. It is only natural that such a man should have a particular character and tenacity. He would always have something to say when we chatted with him.

From the professional point of view, the desire to innovate and to take risks has been a specific characteristic of his. In 1964, he was the very first every to install and set up curved continuous casting, which was such a revolution in the world of iron and steel that he received an honorary degree from the Polytechnic of Milan. And this was not the only acknowledgements; from France, he received the Legion of Honour, and Germany awarded him for redeveloping two important iron and steel works in the former GDR.

His redeveloping work continued, with ILVA in Taranto. Let's not forget that, in the hands of the State, this company was going bankrupt. Riva restructured it, and over the last few years, has invested almost €5 billion, of which, over €1 billion has been to solve a number of serious environmental problems.

Over the last few days, a lot has been written and said against Emilio Riva and his children, but little has been told of his story, to inform the general public of him, and not just of what he is accused of.

The reasons for our letter are not dictated by a need to defend him, he will know how best to do this. We should remember that companies are made up of people and not merely of functions. Because of the affection we feel for him, we would like to make a consideration.

We don't want to go into the reasons that led to the intervention by the courts, but we wonder whether it is right to apply such restrictive measures to the personal freedom of an 86-year-old man of such stature, preventing him from seeing his daughter, except for a few hours, not allowing him to phone or chat with friends and family.

This type of justice both puzzles and saddens us.

It will be difficult to give Emilio Riva and the many people who have suffered, or who are suffering, back the serenity they once felt, but at least human respect and sensitivity should be foremost when we act.

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