

When “Mr Ignis” paid no attention to the lake fishermen

Pubblicato: Mercoledì 28 Maggio 2014

✘ A few days ago, a film commemorating the great man, **Giovanni Borghi**, was shown on television, as a rightful tribute to the courageous founder of the most important company to be created in our province after the Second World War, the famous *Ignis*, in Cassinetta di Biandronno. They were heroic times; Italy had just come out of the war, shattered, the people were struggling to survive and, above all, to free themselves eventually from the extreme endemic poverty they had inherited from the past.

What was needed was leaders that could tackle the situation, rare men driven by great ideas, who would dare to do what very few people born in these parts had ever been able to do. In his day, there was Giovanni Borghi, a man who was not bound to small, accommodating ideas, not held back by the hesitation of those not particularly gifted by nature. His vision was one that went well beyond our local interests, one that set its sights on the markets of the whole world.

Some people got rich through his business, and a whole lot of people found wellbeing; the large number of houses and cottages that appeared, as if by magic, around his factory, are clear evidence of this. The film seems to have been very successful and greatly admired by local people, with enthusiastic comments in the newspapers. It all seems fair to me, and the appreciation of a man of rare qualities, like Giovanni Borghi, is correct. **Please do not think that I want to spread doubts about the legendary figure of this hero**, also because I know that people love a “quiet life” and do not want to bring their inviolable certainties into question.

Well, **my job as a fisherman on Lake Varese**, and my faith in the real measure of things, allow me to criticise, without seeking to offend. During those years of reconstruction, **we fishermen experienced a painful turning point in fishing traditions and in the very history of the lake**. Pollution came down upon us like another plague of Egypt, and threatened our work and our futures as young people who had just begun this demanding profession of fishing. We even went so far as to take **legal action against the companies and councils** that were responsible for the deterioration of the waters, in which the numbers of edible fish fell visibly. The concern about the pollution led regular consumers to stop eating the fish that the lake was still, in part, producing. **Our profession suffered serious and irreversible damage**. Many in our Fishing Association were forced to change jobs, others (including me, alas) deceived themselves that common sense and reason would soon return. We even turned to Giovanni Borghi, begging him to support our good cause and to start the necessary work of repair, before we were forced to take legal action in order to be heard. **He replied, through an eminent lawyer from Milan, in his brisk way** (a quality seen in him in other matters and situations), **that for us fisherman to sue him would be the same as for him to sue FIAT**. For the admirers who rightly glorify his courageous and praiseworthy work indisputably, please do not hold it against me. You can always find in a precious fabric (Confucius, if I am not mistaken).

Maybe the great leader did not realise that the battle for existence that our small group of

fishermen were fighting against giants would have brought more honour to his already respectable figure. **And it would not have cost him anything.** Of course, not more than those few pennies that the company, which was first sold to Philips, then to Whirlpool, eventually had to pay out after the court had found against them. And he was willing to pay much greater sums in fees to the lawyers that followed the civil lawsuit through the years.

And then, irony of ironies. **Eventually, Philips, and then Whirlpool, set about to obtain a purification system which worked perfectly;** at the output, there were shoals of fish that no one ever expected would return to swim in such clear and pure water. Well, it was a luxury that company directors and councillors did not like. This lovely water was channelled, against my angry protests, into the main sewer which was already unfortunately inadequate to contain the inflow of the drains. **The result can be seen by everyone whenever there is a heavy downpour:** from the floodway on the River Brabbia, all the sludge that the main sewer is forced to reject spews out. The lake has to take millions of cubic metres in a year of average rainfall. Clean water in the main sewer, dirty water in the lake. Is this really how they want to clean the lake? Good luck! When I say these true things, no one believes me. **But I too admired Giovanni Borghi, for the good things he generally brought to the community.**

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