

interview

## **Gino Strada: «I am for public health. If I were a minister, no agreements with private individuals »**

by Vittorio Zincone

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**On the train, the founding doctor of Emergency tells his many no to politics, from Veltroni to Renzi. The last one? To the Five Stars: «I pointed out that ours is one of the associations they have defined as 'sea taxis'». The alliance with Salvini? "It will decree the end of the M5S." "Stop smoking? Every now and then, in the evening, I do a joint"**

**GINO STRADA PLACES IN THE PLACE NEXT TO THE WINDOW.** She speaks slowly, her gaze towards the fast-flowing landscape. In front of the photographer's lens he is quite uncomfortable. Double track on the Milan-Rome with the founder of Emergency, a globe-trotter doctor. He says: "Surgery is my passion. I turned seventy, but as long as I can do it, I work ». There are those who consider him a secular saint and those who cannot stand his ultra-left pacifist radicalism.

Emergency has about sixty offices around the world. "Since we were born we have treated about 9 million people." In 2016 it was one of the NGOs present in the Mediterranean to help migrants in difficulty. Strada explains: «We stopped the activities because we didn't have funds. If I had a ship, I would immediately get back into the sea ».

**The government has closed Italian ports to NGOs.**

"It is a very serious decision. Rockets-fascism. A racist fascism. Matteo Salvini produces hatred, violence, indifference and cruelty ».

**The Italians voted for it. And the polls show the League on the rise. Have we become a racist people?**

"I do not believe. The rocket-fascist wave is an international phenomenon. I hope for a movement of resistance on the part of the Italians to build a civilized country. Even if now it is difficult to see positive signs: human beings are allowed to die of neglect and battle against those who try to help the desperate ».



Gino Strada by train from Milan to Rome

**Salvini says the invasion of migrants must be stopped.**

"But what invasion? The very idea of Europe ends if we raise walls. Also because there is no migrant problem, there is a humanitarian emergency. We are talking about human beings who need help, more than us, because they have been through all sorts of things ».

**You make no great distinction between political migrants, refugees and economic migrants.**

"It's a hypocritical distinction. How long would ministers Matteo Salvini and Danilo Toninelli resist with a dollar a day? For millions of people the question is not "what am I eating tonight?" But "am I eating tonight?". European politicians have no idea what starvation means. Salvini tells lies all the time. He should take a tour of the Rosarno slum to understand the godsend of those who collect our citrus fruits. And then the arrivals have already decreased, but it does not seem to me that the jobs in Italy have increased accordingly ».

**What do you suggest to do with the hundreds of thousands of migrants ready to embark for Europe?**

"I don't have a recipe. But any discussion should start from a basic principle: we cannot condemn human beings to death ».

**It would be in favor of the creation of humanitarian corridors ...**

«It would be the first thing to do. But seriously, sure. I don't like to talk about people as if they were sacks of potatoes, but if the flow were managed legally we could be even better prepared to welcome them ».

**Before Salvini, you also criticized the previous interior minister, Marco Minniti.**

«Salvini is in clear continuity with Minniti. If he ignores the fact that a measure will cause deaths, then everything is worth it. In recent decades, a system of values has been dismantled and we have come to question the fundamental principle of "do not kill". Now he kills himself, tortures himself and makes himself die. it is the logic of indifference. Of the war between "us and them". A war logic ».

Strada is an extremist pacifist: «To those who ask me how it is possible not to make war, I answer: 'Just don't do it'». He adds: "I would give my vote and my availability to the first party that planned the drastic reduction or elimination of military expenses and the return of all Italians from missions."

**Italy produces weapons.**

"Matteo Renzi has claimed and applauded the dizzying increase in military exports during his government."

**Is it true that Renzi proposed that she be a minister?**

"This rumor has circulated, but it is not. The Five Stars, on the other hand, contacted me before the last government was formed ».

**What did they offer you?**

«A ministry. I pointed out that Emergency is one of the associations that they defined as "sea taxis" ».

**In 2013 she finished second in the Quirinarie of the M5S, immediately after Milena Gabanelli.**

«I believe that the alliance with Salvini will decree the end of the M5S. Their reference values are

the Casaleggio Associati statements. The others, the kids, don't even know what they're saying. In any case, Walter Veltroni also asked me to be the Minister of Health ».

**She also declined with him.**

"Yup. I tell everyone: if I were to be a minister, I would reintroduce the words Ministry of Public Health. With me there would be no agreements with private individuals. Not one euro. I am for public health, high quality and totally free. Not even other investments would be needed to rebuild it. We should stop stealing. At least thirty billion a year ends up in profit. When a health facility that should be hospitable to those who suffer becomes a company where one plays with reimbursements and payment for benefits, a social crime is enacted ”.

We pass Florence. it's coffee time. Strada confesses that she would like a cigarette. When I ask him if he has ever tried to quit, she misunderstands the question and says, “In the evening, I get a joint from time to time. He's in the tobacconist's anyway ». A brief conversation follows on marijuana which is now practically legalized and on the increase in heroin use by Afghans since US soldiers have been in the country. As soon as he can, Strada goes back to talking about peace and war: «Does he know what's in the Five Star program on war?».

**What?**

"They cite Article 11 of the Constitution."

**"Italy repudiates war."**

«But do you think that an article of the Constitution can enter an electoral program? They don't even know this stuff. '

**You have often protested against the violation of that article.**

"Of course. The governments have violated it by bombing the former Yugoslavia, and intervening in Iraq, in Afghanistan ... Those who decide to go to war are generally people of incredible mediocrity ».

**Military missions are defined as peace or humanitarian missions.**

«Yeah, but if you want to go to Afghanistan to treat the children, can you send us an armored vehicle with four soldiers inside or a pediatrician? Among other things, do you know that I organized the first meeting between an Italian politician and a Taliban in Afghanistan? ».

**Who was the politician?**

«Ugo Intini. Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, with Lamberto Dini as minister. At the time, the Farnesina dossier consisted of two skimpy pages. Many parliamentarians did not even know where Afghanistan was. I asked: “But do you have relations with the Northern Alliance? Are any of you talking to Massoud? ”».

**Ahmad Shah Massoud, the "Lion of Panshir".**

"An official told me: 'Massoud is an unreachable ghost.' So I picked up the phone and called him. Massoud was a great friend of mine, he often came to have tea at my house ».

**The Italians are still in Afghanistan.**

“We are subjected to covenants. International pacts thus become slavery. A few years ago I talked about it with Romano Prodi. He asked me what in my opinion was a good exit strategy for Afghanistan ».



Gino

Strada at the station in Milan

**What did he answer?**

“That he should have ordered our soldiers to line up, form a column and start walking west. Straight ahead. That way they would get out of Afghanistan. I met him recently. He proved me right. But there is little to be right. If today in Italy there were one hundred thousand soldiers of any nation X, free to torture, kill, bomb, how would the Italians react? ».

Strada was in Afghanistan also two months ago. He says: «I am tired of reporting a new record of injuries every month. There are attacks every day. The Americans are wondering if they have to shoot the Taliban again, given that they too are fighting ISIS ».

**The first few times he was in Kabul he was still working for the International Red Cross.**

**When did he decide to start Emergency?**

«In 1994, together with a group of doctors and nurses. We knew the war zones. We wanted to help out ».

**The first garrison?**

'In Rwanda. The genocide had just broken out. We left for Kigali and settled in the main hospital, which had been devastated. '

**Is it true that you never charged a medical service?**

"Yup. I am very proud of it. I have only ever lived on my salary ».

**He studied Medicine in Milan in the sixties.**

«Let's say that, after my experience in the Student Movement, I started studying seriously. Politics then engulfed you: every Saturday there was a procession to organize ».

**You were born in Sesto San Giovanni, the Stalingrad of Italy.**

“My father and mother were workers. But as a kid I never took part in Sesto's political-cultural life. The commitment was born at the University of Milan. Before, I thought about doing well in school, playing football and taking a few looks at the girls. When I was fifteen I met Teresa, whom I then married in 1971 ».

**Teresa is Teresa Sarti, co-founder of Emergency.**

“She was two years older than me. she was for a long time president, the soul of the organization. Without her I don't think Emergency would have developed ».

**She passed away in 2009.**

«She was extraordinary in her ability to involve people. Our group was born wherever he went to give a conference ».

**Who are your lenders?**

“Most of them are small donors. So many ».

**Have you ever refused loan offers?**

"Of course. We do not accept aid from companies or institutions that have to do with war ».

**A year ago an article was published in l'Espresso in which it was hypothesized that his daughter Cecilia's exit from Emergency was due precisely to the choice to accept money from companies such as Eni and Impregilo.**

«A slander. I'm pissed and sued whoever wrote it. The judge dismissed the case without even consulting us and so I will appeal. The truth is that we have never taken money from Eni and we will never take it. The story was artfully edited to impress me ».

Strada begins to list all the times he has received attacks from the political side that in reality should be close to him: the left. He says: "When Emergency opened a cardio-surgery department in Sudan, they cut us off".

**Are those from the left the criticisms that hurt the most?**

"I am used to. In Italy there are those who try to do something, those who don't do shit and then there are the worst ones ».

**Who would they be?**

"Those who don't do shit and want to tell others what to do and how to do it."

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