



Grillo. The Italian Talking Cricket

Gianluca Taraborelli (October 01, 2007)



Imagine Michael Moore leading a national protest against the corrupted political class. Beppe Grillo is an unconventional comedian turned to political activism. He has been producing controversial shows for almost 20 years, making people laugh and sigh with his sharp humor.

Banned from the national television after attacking the socialist leader Bettino Craxi, he became popular as a public accuser through his shows and his web blog, one of the most actives in Europe and amazingly popular in Italy, which ranked among the 10 most visited blogs in the world, according to the blog search engine Technorati.

Grillo's V-Day has nothing to do with "Vagina Day" or any other feminist rally. The "V" stands for



"Vaffanculo", the Italian equivalent of the F-Word. "It's half way between the D-day of the Normandy landings and V for Vendetta", explains, ironically, Grillo.

Organized to ban convicted felons from holding office, as well as to set a two terms limit for elected officials, the V-Day met with huge success on September 8th, so that Grillo still continues to mobilize a grassroots movement of Italians fed up by Italy's corrupt and ineffective political class. Italians lined up in more than 200 cities and towns to sign Grillo's petition to "Clean Up Parliament", a proposal that, if brought before Parliament and adopted, would ban convicted felons from seeking public office, set a two legislatures term limit for Parliament members and modify Italy's electoral system.

On September 8, 2007, more than 330,000 people signed their names to his proposed reforms. The V-Day took place in 200 cities, including San Francisco, Chicago, Denver and New York, where a huge number of people met in Union Square blocking the traffic. Most of them were scientists, engineers, students and businessmen, the so called "Brains on the Run" (cervelli in fuga) that are suffering because of the stagnant Italian political situation. The event was streamed in every corner of the world, attracting the attention of the media.

Even if many politicians and intellectuals are dismissing Grillo's initiative as "shallow demagoguery" and warned of "populist tendencies", the debate is now on. The dissatisfaction of most Italians - 68 percent, according to the most recent poll - from both the center-left and center-right, has found an outlet for expression in Beppe Grillo's political satire and with his development of a democratic mechanism to construct and propose viable alternatives to the political establishment. The recent success of Gian Antonio Stella's and Sergio Rizzo's summer bestseller "La Casta" (The Caste: How Italian Politicians Became Untouchable) is just one more example of a growing dissatisfaction among Italians with the current state of politics. This seems to be a second wave of discontent after the one that shook the country in the early '90s after the "Tangentopoli" corruption scandals. People now want to participate again, to play an active part in the role of change, even from abroad.

The next Beppe Grillo's "New York Meet Up" will take place in October 20, at the General Theological Seminary of New York.

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