

Execution of Mayor Angelo Vassallo. Italy Mourns Another Camorra Victim

Anna Di Lellio (September 10, 2010)



The mayor of the small town of Pollica Angelo Vassallo was gunned down execution style on Sunday night. He had strongly opposed the camorra's interests in big public contracts related to the harbor and other tourist infrastructures. There are no witnesses, no suspects. It is very likely that nobody will be apprehended for his murder

Sunday night, in the small coastal town of Pollica, province of Salerno, the mayor Angelo Vassallo was gunned down execution style. The killer sprayed his body with nine bullets. They found Angelo in his car, the cell phone in his hand, though he had not been able to call anybody before dying. There are no witnesses, no suspects. It is very likely that nobody will be apprehended for his murder, or that the identity of those who commissioned the murder will be never known.



Vassallo was a fisherman turned mayor who stood up to local organized crime. He had strongly opposed the camorra's interests in big public contracts related to the harbor and other tourist infrastructures. Not a man to be bought off, he had become an obstacle to the shady business of organized crime. Or he had just become another anomaly in an Italian system that has long married the state with the mafia.

He fought his fight alone, without the protection of law enforcement, which he thought was in collusion with the camorra. When he spoke out against the criminals, he was not heard by those fellow politicians on the left who reside in the big cities and in Rome. They are too preoccupied with their own petty power struggles to recognize the vitality and the civility of a society that is moving farther away from them. They give impassioned talks against mafia. They rarely walk the talk.

Angelo Vassallo's funeral took place this morning, in front of a crowd gathered from all over Italy to testify not only grief, but also anger. I felt anger for days after having heard the news of his death. I did not know Vassallo. In this past week I have learned that he was a progressive, an environmentalist, and a very much loved representative of his local community. I could not speak about him, but I believe it is appropriate here to remember him by some of his own words, which I translate from an article he penned for L'Unita', and published on September 7 2010.

"Vassallo: Our wealth is the land where we live."

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This morning I was at sea since 5am. I caught two lobsters, I'm taking them to my son, who has a restaurant here in town. We feel close to our land... we understand that it is our greatest wealth. Look at our harbor: we restructured and fixed it ourselves, yet, at the end, the government will own it. We took a 40 years mortgage to invest in the harbor, develop it, and many of our youth now work there. What has the government done in return? In the assignment of contracts to develop the wharf it has favored private businessmen, who will make money, without leaving us a cent. The municipality instead would use revenues from the concessions both for maintenance and other public services.

We established a literary cafe' in the smallest village. We built a pedestrian area in the wharf of Pioppi, where people did not know where else to meet. We are building a boat club to be managed by disabled youth.

By next summer we will refurbish the square in front of the harbor. Obtaining the concession of this structure cost us a lot. We had to sue the government. It's maddening. We are one of the few local governments in Italy that makes the national government richer. They instead profit on us.

Mine is a left administration, but we are "leghisti." And we hope that the Northern League will solve such problems as decentralization and the reform of local governments. We trust that the local level is where the interests of the citizens are better understood and served. Italy is the sum of its municipalities, and the most damning issue of national politics today is that it does not know the land and is not able to listen to the people.

We don't want anything from the government, and the least the government can do for us is to leave us our things."

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