

How to Fight the Mafia? Serve a Mean Fried Rice Ball

Eleonora Mazzucchi (March 28, 2008)



In an expanded effort to counter the Mafia's extortionist activities in Sicily, a food fair goes on tour to major Italian cities. The outdoor stands, which will feature Sicilian specialty foods, are run by those businesses that have refused to pay a notorious illegal tax, the "pizzo". The organizers eventually hope to bring the gastronomic fair overseas.

It takes only one figure to make any skeptics see that the anti-Mafia food tour is a necessary development: 80 million euros. That's how much the Mafia extorts every day from shopkeepers alone in Italy. The Mafia's earnings more than double to 200 million euros a day when you factor in loansharking and other crimes.



The food tour, scheduled to travel through major Italian cities starting next week, is an expanded version of the anti-“pizzo” (term for the money the Mafia unlawfully collects from business-owners) street market already popular in Palermo, Sicily. The street market features food exclusively produced by businesses who have refused to pay the pizzo and is sponsored by Italy’s Anti-Racket Federation and the Addiopizzo (“Goodbye Pizzo”) Association.

The aim of the country-wide tour, which will sell Sicilian specialities like fried rice balls, wines, and octopus, is to raise money for anti-pizzo organizations (14% of proceeds are to that end) and to show that businesses can come out in the open against the mob rackets that have oppressed them for decades. The silence and compliance of those victimized by the Mafia are precisely what Addiopizzo is trying to combat, an attitude that has permitted the Mafia’s activities to persist.

So far Addiopizzo has had definitive measures of success. It started out as a secret campaign plastering Palermo with anti-racketeering stickers and then went public, to find that many wanted to join in their effort. Its crowning achievement was the publication of a list of businesses that pledged to stand up to mobsters. It was one of the only public, vocal stands that any businesses in Sicily had taken against the Mafia—overdue and welcome seeing as six out of 10 Sicilian shopkeepers still pay a pizzo.

Now Addiopizzo can make a large-scale impact with its food tour taking off from Rome and going on to 22 more Italian cities, including Milan, Turin, Bologna, Rimini, Bari and Naples. It is in talks to launch similar tours internationally, possibly in New York, Chicago, Moscow and Barcelona.

A look at the anti-pizzo food stands in Palermo, Sicily

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