

Italy. Everybody Is Crazy For Obama

Maria Rita Latta (November 05, 2008)



Day after day, Italian center-left and center-right supporters of the democratic candidate are increasing. So, the question is: to whom does Obama belong?



In the last two weeks of protests against the Italian government in Rome, such as the one held at the Circus Maximus, it was impossible not to notice among the masses signs that apparently don't have a connection with what is happening here in Italy. Three in particular really impressed me. The first one was very direct: "Forza Obama." The second one, written in the Roman dialect, appeared as an exhortation: "Obama facce sognà" (Obama makes us dream). And the third one sounded like a sort of a prayer, again in the Roman dialect, coming directly from the heart of a desperate Italian having lost all hope: "Obama pensace tu" (Obama, you look after it).

They express a diffused feeling in the Italian center-left, a passion shared from the start by the leader of the Democratic Party, Walter Veltroni. He wrote the preface to the Italian edition of Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope*. In almost all of his public speeches in the last few months, Veltroni has supported Obama's victory and viewed him as a model for Italian politics. He also took the slogan "Yes We Can" and translated it into the Italian "Si Può Fare" and even the Roman dialect "Se pò ffà."

Over the past few days, members of the center-left, included the former Prime Minister Romano Prodi, have come out as Obama's supporters, indeed giving everyone the idea that they need a revitalizing cure, represented by the American Democratic candidate. A massive dose of Obama could revive the Italian Democratic Party, which after the defeat in the last election resembles a boxer unable to recover from a lethal punch. All the center-left members showing their love for Obama are following this idea, imagining that once Obama arrives at the White House, the new Democratic President will immediately behave according to their wishes. Their "ideal" Obama would create a less domineering America in the world. He would also be attentive to the redistribution of wealth. He would also, of course, stop the war in Iraq, and while he's at it, he could become a real icon and demonstrate a cold attitude towards the "hateful" Silvio Berlusconi. It's too good to be true, especially if in reality Obama does not appear to be as similar to his "ideal twin" as in the Italian center-left's imagination. For example, could they really believe that he made this statement: "I am not in favor of homosexual weddings because of my Christian faith?" Or would they think that this sentiment belongs to a center-right character such as Rocco Buttiglione, whose similar attitude towards gays cost him an important seat in the European Parliament?

The behavior of the Italian center-right, though, is not so different. Day after day, Barack Obama's admirers in the People of Freedom Party have quickly increased. Its members view the American candidate as a younger Silvio Berlusconi. Ministers Sandro Bondi and Franco Frattini stated that both Obama and Berlusconi have something in common, such as charisma, no ideological attitudes, and the ability to communicate in short speeches "based on so many ideals." But these seem to be general, vague arguments...

In the panorama of weird statements made by center-right last-hour supporters, Maria Stella Gelmini, the Minister of Public Instruction, stands out. She said that Obama is proposing a series of reforms for American schools similar to the ones she proposed and that are now stirring up so many protests in the Italian cities. She seems to ignore the fact that, in its program, the American Democratic Party allocated 14 million dollars for schools. Renata Polverini, the leader of the UGL, the right-wing labor union, stated that she likes Obama because "he can change the international scene and also because he is black." A group of center-right parliamentary members, such as Chiara Moroni, Lucio Malan, Marcello De Angelis, even created a website supporting him, www.pdlperobama.com [2].

So, to whom does Obama belong? Does he belong to the Italian center-right or to the center-left? If he will be the new American president, will he behave according to their "ideal image" or will he take his decision according to the needs of his nation, the United States of America? Apparently we can just hope, and keep repeating: "Obama facce sognà! Obama pensace tu!"



(Edited by Giulia Prestia)

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