

Italian Politics and Politics for Italians Abroad. Democratic Party Leader Bersani Meets the NY Community

Marina Melchionda (July 17, 2010)



“The Democratic Party must become the party of the people, of a united people, of common people who embrace modern ideas and progress. You Italians living abroad are among our greatest assets and we are willing to support your requests” The leader of the Democratic Party, Pierluigi Bersani,



meets the Italian community in New York at the San Cono club in Williamsburg, Brooklyn

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It's Friday July 16, 7 pm when we get to the [Democratic Party](#) [3] Club "San Cono" in Williamsburg, Brooklyn to attend [Pierluigi Bersani](#) [4]'s meeting with the Italian community in New York. He is concluding his first institutional visit to the US as General Secretary of the Italian Democratic Party.

It is an unusual venue for such an important meeting. The participants have been called to confront their opinions with those of Hon. Bersani on the theme "Italian politics and politics for Italians abroad". In fact, as PD New York Club member Elena Luongo stated when giving her welcoming speech, "it was chosen to get away from the spotlights of Manhattan and reach the small community of Williamsburg, a community made of people, stories, to whom we wanted to give the chance to express themselves and present the issues they most care about to the Secretary. It was a choice that fully respects the principles on which the Democratic Party is based".

Many members of the local community responded to the invitation to attend the meeting. The hall of the club was fully packed and all around you could hear voices of women, of old and young people... many young people. Old and new generation immigrants were sitting side by side in the long rows arranged in front of the central stage where the guest of honor and other representatives of the community were about to take their places.

Upon his arrival, Hon. Bersani was welcomed by a large group of people who were waiting for him right next to the door. They all shook his hand, somebody also asked him to pose for a picture together...these gestures not only showed the deep respect and esteem they feel for him as a person but it was also clear that they felt very close to the party and to the leader that they themselves elected last October.

The Secretary has always distinguished himself for his great support of the Italian communities abroad. Ms. Luongo commented, "We really appreciated the way you exposed yourself by backing the Italian communities in Frankfurt, Vancouver and Buenos Aires when they were protesting to defend their rights. Your words made us feel less lonely and confirmed in our eyes that, as you have said once, "in Rome there is somebody who places his ear near the ground to listen to what the people have to say".

Transforming this phrase into a true philosophy, Hon. Bersani accepted the invitation to attend the meeting in New York, in a "venue where one feels like being surrounded by family", as the moderator of the debate and Director of the Democratic Party in the US [Gianluca Galletto](#) [5] said. He accompanied the Secretary during his entire visit to the US. "I was very happy with the way he was welcomed in Washington. Here in the US people remember that, before becoming leader of the PD, he had first been a great minister, and the laws which were passed under his name have contributed in a significant way to the general growth of Italy. Being here Hon. Bersani has also laid down the basis for a further strengthening of the relationships between Italy and the Italians abroad.

[Renato Turano](#), [6] former senator and entrepreneur, opened the debate. In his speech he denounced a growing marginalization of the Italians living abroad from the political life in Italy: "During the period in which Hon. Bersani was minister and the left-wing coalition was the ruling one, we members of Parliament who were voted abroad worked hard to reach certain goals, and we finally made it. We obtained an increase in the funds destined for teaching the Italian language abroad, for the publishing industry and for the consular networks with the other Italian institutional organizations located throughout the world. Under Berlusconi's governments such funds have either been cut in half or eliminated, thus nullifying all our efforts, and this cannot leave us indifferent. The risk is to break the transatlantic bridge that we have built with great sacrifices"

Italy cannot afford to lose the great contribution that the Italian community abroad can offer to the country in terms of economic, social, and cultural development, the Vice Secretary of the [Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero- CGIE](#) [7] (General Council of the Italians Abroad) and Director of the Democratic Party in the US Silvana Mangione suggested. "In this hall there is a valid example

of Italian emigration. There are people who immigrated here dozens of years ago, others that were born here and are the first generation of Italian-Americans, and others still that have just arrived in the US and have quickly become professionals, contributing in various ways to the growth of this country with the skills they acquired in Italy. We are a single nation coming from the same background and are here to work together for the rise of the Democratic Party, to start thinking of new ways to help our country flourish again”.

Mrs. Mangione also took this opportunity to present the Secretary and the rest of the public with a petition promoted by the CGIE and the [Com.It.Es.](#) [8](Committees of the Italians Living Abroad) operating in Anglophone countries that touches some of the issues about which the Italian community abroad most deeply cares. “We ask for an increase in the funding destined for teaching the Italian language and culture; for the publishing industry and in particular for the press agencies and newspapers that have recently suffered from a 50% financial cut; to the Consulates that are very small in number if compared to the population they are called to represent, and are destined to become even fewer. I heard in fact that the one in Detroit, a city that has seen a doubling of the Italian population living in the area since Fiat bought Chrysler, is going to close together with the one in Philadelphia. These are requests that we are not doing exclusively for our own interests, but for the good of Italy. Only if we obtain what we ask for shall we be able to defend our origins and become standard-bearers of the internationalization of Italy.”

Mrs. Mangione also brought up two other issues of extreme importance: the possibility of re-obtaining Italian citizenship for all of those who were born in Italy but had to renounce it when they moved abroad; the necessity to make the government respect the principle of representation which is at the base of every modern democracy. It is in fact urgent to renovate the representative organs of both the CGIE and the Com.It.Es. postponing to a future date the reform of their institutional statutes.

The public attending was also very active as many of them stepped into the discussion sharing their points of view with the rest of us and Hon. Bersani. They started a long debate in which they showed how far they feel from contemporary Italian politics, a detachment that they probably never felt in the preceding years (and legislature) but which they would like to contrast with a great sense of unity and national affiliation. “It is a dream come true to have the leader of one of the major Italian parties here with us to listen to our opinions and criticisms and welcome the contributions we came here to offer”, somebody said. Others seemed to be very resentful towards Italy, a country that “only knows when to ask but that never gives” and is ruled by a government that is turning away from the problems of its citizens. Bersani was asked if he has a strategy to invert this trend, almost as if they wanted him to promise them that things would go better. The majority of them, however, expressed words of encouragement for this leader that is working together with and for the people, demonstrating that he would like to embody in the PD the old traditional values of Italy’s left wing.

Hon. Bersani took the platform inspired by the comments made by the public and offered them an insight into contemporary politics in Italy. He talked about the current economic crisis, the dangers that the Italian democracy is facing under Berlusconi’s government, and the questions of immigration and unemployment.

i-Italy had the opportunity to further discuss some of these issues with the Secretary after the conference ended. In order to offer our readers a clearer and more consistent account of what was said about each one of these questions, we chose to divide them into separate topics and just quote extracts of what Bersani said.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

“Berlusconi has never accepted the idea that Italy is facing an economic crisis, he defined it just as a 'state of mind' and invited consumers to spend more. Italy is the only country where in the last two years there has never been a debate in Parliament on how to face the current contingencies and as a result our leading classes have just conformed the positions of our Prime Minister. This year’s budget is being approved in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies with a vote of confidence, that leaves no space for debate. It is a 24 billion euro austerity package whose effects will mainly fall on the lower classes and that does not feature any strategy for development of the country which could



lead us out of the crisis. It is an extremist law that foresees cuts in every sector... economy, healthcare, education... with no distinction at all and which will ultimately lower the investments in the productive sector. We are not going anywhere with this"

ITALIAN POLITICS

There are important fractures within Berlusconi's coalition, principally the one involving the President of the Chamber of Deputies Fini and his group. If the government should fall before 2013, the one that will be elected after it will find the country in a disastrous situation, worsened even more by this new austerity package. The internal disputes in the government distract it from ruling the country, as my party has been pointing out for a long time. The population is distraught by the many scandals involving its representatives, episodes of corruption, immorality, and disrespectful behavior towards our democratic system and ideals.

Berlusconi is ruling Italy by creating a Middle Age political structure in which he is the emperor and the rest of the ruling class is there just at his service. The growing indignation towards this state of things will soon bring about a change. In the mean time, we of the PD are open to dialogue with all the forces that oppose the Premier"

NEW GENERATIONS

Working conditions in Italy are very precarious, especially for young people. Today about 30% of the people under 25 are unemployed, a figure that has grown by 8% in the last 2 years. In Sardinia, it goes up to 50%.

If I look at these young Italian representatives that are with us tonight, I just can't tell them to come back and help me rebuild Italy. But I feel a responsibility towards them because they deserve the right to "choose" in which country they want to live. Talents should never be forced to emigrate to accomplish their objectives. Today Italy needs them but they do not need Italy. I will act so that things will change soon.

IMMIGRATION

Today we have about 840,000 immigrant minors in Italy. Every year 45,000 children are born into foreign families living in our country and in a few years they will become about 30% of the total number of our underage population. According to the Bossi-Fini law, however, when these children, who are not considered Italian, will reach the age of 18, they will acquire the status of illegal immigrants and will be forced to leave the country in which they grew up. The Democratic Party will start a campaign of awareness in their favor and next October we will request that the current law be amended. It is an unfair law that was promoted 8 years ago by the same man who now proclaims himself to be "a friend of immigrants", Gianfranco Fini."

ITALIANS ABROAD

"The cuts contained in this austerity package and the government policies adopted to ward off the current economic crisis are dramatically affecting the lives of the Italians abroad. Promoting a retroactive measure that cuts financings to the local Italian press and media by 50% means condemning them to certain death. Furthermore, the closure of some of the Consulates and other institutional offices operating outside the Italian borders may imply the risk to destroy the virtual bridge that we have built between Italy and its citizens abroad over a very long time.

One day we will need the descendents of those who are emigrating today as ambassadors of a new international Italy. To have them involved, however, we have to start building in them a sense of national affiliation and we can do it only if we invest in promoting Italian culture abroad.

Such a feeling can also be enhanced if we keep giving our co-citizens the possibility to elect their own representatives to the Italian parliament. This is why the Democratic Party has prepared a proposal to reform the methods for voting abroad and will bring it up in Parliament next autumn."

The Secretary's speech, that was often interrupted by loud applause, ended with a brief description of the aims and activities carried on by the Party, among which is the improvement of the relationship with the Italians abroad and the enrichment of the dialogue between the ruling class and the electoral base: "We have to become the progressive party of the new century. We were born from the gathering of different political currents, and now I want to make them become a one single entity... like a food made of many ingredients: you can tell them apart but you cannot separate them anymore

The Democratic Party must become the party of the people, of a united people, of common persons



who embrace progress and modern ideas. You Italians living abroad are among our greatest assets and we are willing to support your requests. My visit to the United States has been an important trip for me but the meeting we had this evening was certainly the most interesting one that I have had lately.”

[9]

To sign the Petition [click here](#)

[10]

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[4] <http://www.bersanisegretario.it>

[5] <http://www.gianlucagalletto.org>

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