

Will Bunga Bunga Finally Make Berlusconi's Personal Political?

Judith Harris (October 31, 2010)



Wanna dodge prison in Italy? Just be a young hot belly-dancer with disputable ethics, become friends with the Premier (a fairly straightforward consequence to the previous requirement), and you've pulled the trick

ROME - The most Twittered word in Italy today is bunga bunga. But the big question is not what "bunga bunga" means or even whether 17-year-old Ruby, a slightly disturbed but seriously sexy belly-dancer cum alleged thief, really became best buddies with Mr. B at a Valentine's Day party last February at his sprawling residence at Arcore. No, it is whether or not it matters to anyone, and, if so, exactly what matters and how much. Emulating Swarzenegger, many Italian voters may continue to say, "This time it's personal." And yet the personal—those scandals that went from the teenaged Noemi to the veteran escort Patrizia and beyond—shows signs of finally becoming political.

Let's take it from the top. Last May 15 this Moroccan teenager spent the night with two young women she'd just met in a discotheque. In the morning, when the roommates who'd generously given her a bed woke up, she seemed to be asleep so, without disturbing Ruby, they went out for a



cappuccino and corneto. When they returned, Ruby was gone, reportedly taking with her E. 3,000, a couple of snappy sweaters and a bit of jewelry.

In a shop several days later one of

the irate girls who'd given Ruby a bed happened to see Ruby herself. The girl immediately phoned the police and reported seeing the alleged thief. Police came; Ruby was picked up and that afternoon was in the central police headquarters in Milan, the Questura. A judge for minors was asked to decide what was to be done with her. The choice was simple: either jail or consignment to a home for wayward girls. In either case she would have been under institutional control.

Exactly what transpired then is anybody's guess. In some magical way Ruby's being picked up by the police in Milan became known at the Prime Minister's office at Palazzo Chigi in Rome.

By then it was almost midnight.

At that point—as is confirmed by the police—a phone call was made to the chief of staff of the Milan Questura. The caller was Premier Silvio Berlusconi himself, suggesting that Ruby—described in that phone conversation as the niece of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak—be released on diplomatic grounds. Instead of jail or a home for girls, the Premier advised that a female political ally of Berlusconi would pop around. Within hours Ruby was released to her.

But then the Egyptian foreign office denied that Ruby is any relation to their president or that she is Egyptian; saying so was a diplomaic faux pas.

Secondly, whoever at police headquarters released an alleged thief to the care of a friend of the Premier ignored proper procedures concerning a minor. This means trouble within the [Interior Ministry](#) [2], headed by Roberto Maroni of the Northern League. The anti-immigrant League is known to be restless anyway.

Aggravating Premier's problems is that deputies continue to flee Berlusconi's Partito della Libertà (PDL) to ally themselves with rightist Gianfranco Fini, Mr. B's bedfellow for years, but now an arch-rival.

A formal judiciary inquiry has been opened. Although Berlusconi himself is not under investigation, investigators found that in fact jewelry objects in Ruby's possession had indeed been purchased by the Premier.

Ruby, while contradicting herself, has implicated TV personality Emilio Fede and the powerful show biz agent who places pretty girls on stages all over Italy, Lele Mora. Ruby claimed that both men, who risk judiciary action for favoring prostitution, brought party girls, including Ruby, to Mr. Berlusconi's home.

When asked about Ruby by journalists at a meeting of the Council of Europe Oct. 28, Mr. Berlusconi made no denial. Instead he grinned as if the question were foolish and responded, "I'm a person with a heart and I always try to help people in need..... I leave it to you all to deal with media rubbish," he added. Berlusconi's defenders also brush off the inquiry, alleging that the whole story is an attempt to blackmail the Premier. Berlusconi himself says that the scandal will be a boomerang hurting his political enemies, not him.

On the other hand, Emma Marcegaglia, president of the [Confindustria](#) [3] association of manufacturers, complained Saturday that the country is "paralyzed," "abandoned to itself" and "lacking in dignity." Some Catholic leaders are (finally) openly dismayed. Many in the opposition do not ignore that the so-called Lodo Alfano, which would give the Premier extensive protection from legal actions, is sinking like a stone. Already, a proposed media gag bill has been dropped. And Mario Draghi, who heads the Bank of Italy, says that Italy has lost nine years.



As a result, the [Northern League](#) [4]’s Umberto Bossi is speaking about the possibility of a babysitter government—a “technical government”—while others in his party prefer early elections in the Spring of 2010. At this point, early elections seem likely. A good deal is at stake, for Berlusconi’s chances to become president of Italy when Giorgio Napolitano’s seven years end may finally be compromised.

Ah, yes, bunga bunga. Well—it originally seems to have meant African gang rape but is being used these days in Italy in headlines, on TV and—above all—on Twitter .to mean cheerful parties of old geezers surrounded by numerous young wannabe showgirls. If you want to know more - look on the Internet.

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