

Talking About the Italian Vote Abroad...

Rodrigo Praino (April 08, 2008)



The John D. Calandra Italian/American Institute hosted a conference presenting the book "Altreitalie: Cittadinanza e Diritto al Voto", in an evening of discussion about the Italian vote abroad



On Wednesday, April 2, 2008, the John D. Calandra Italian/American Institute hosted a conference presenting the book *Altreitalie: Cittadinanza e Diritto al Voto*, edited by Mario B. Mignone, Director of the Center for Italian Studies at SUNY Stony Brook. The book was compiled very quickly as soon as news of the general elections in Italy was announced, and it includes an introduction by the Italian Consul General in New York, Francesco Maria Talò. It brings together a number of presentations given at a symposium organized by Prof. Mignone in the fall of 2007 with an additional essay by Stefano Lucconi presented during a conference at the Calandra Institute held in the spring of 2007.

The evening was hosted by Anthony J. Tamburri, Dean of the Calandra Institute. Tamburri presented the speakers and made an extremely important plea to save the AP Italian program. His words were the final authoritative appeal after a number of outstanding requests for help to save this landmark achievement by the Italian/American community that is in now in jeopardy.

Stefano Vaccara of Oggi7 was the first speaker. He attacked the electoral system used by Italy abroad, a system that makes all Italians living abroad "lions in a cage." Vaccara was followed by Rocco Caporale from St. John's University, who defined Italian emigration as "Italy's Great Revolution," akin to the American, French, and Russian Revolutions. According to Caporale there are unresolved problems with the exact number of Italian citizens living abroad who have the right to vote.

The third speaker of the evening was Vincenzo Pascale from Rutgers University. Pascale spoke about disinformation and right of citizenship, followed by Mario Mignone. Mignone brought the discussion about citizenship to a more complex level, attacking the Italian electoral system at large – which is referred in Italy as the *porcellum* system, where *porcellum* stands for the irreverent Latinization of the Italian word for "pig."

After the official presentation, a very interesting debate began with a number of pointed comments by a diverse audience. Prof. Robert Viscusi inspired a second speech by Rocco Caporale about the idea of an extra-territorial concept of a new "global Italian citizenship." Domenico Mignone, brother of Prof. Mignone and the Christian Democratic Union (UDC) candidate for the 2006 Italian general election, along with the Emilia Vitale, candidate for the Chamber of Deputies with the Democratic Party (PD), and Deputy Salvatore Ferrigno (ex- Forza Italia, now UDC) brought the audience right into the current political debate.

Towards the end of the evening Gianluca Galletto, coordinator of the PD's electoral efforts in New York, raised what I would characterize as the most interesting discussion point of the evening: the problems between hosting countries and Italian – or other nation's – politicians and political campaigns taking place within their borders. This problematic relation is already taking place in Canada where Italian candidates and political activists may not gather at public meetings or engage in any political advertisement. Unfortunately, Mr. Galletto's preoccupations were not addressed by the speakers.

Another interesting remark was made by Mary Ann Re, Executive Director of the New Jersey Italian American Heritage Commission. Dr. Re expressed concern that her office receives a great number of telephone calls from Italian citizens asking for technical instructions on how to vote in the Italian elections.



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