

Beppe Grillo agitates against immigrants

Marianne Arens**22 May 2013**

On May 14, Beppe Grillo published a patently racist blog aimed at appealing to extreme right-wing tendencies.

Under the title “Italy Kabobo,” Grillo exploited the tragic case of a 21-year-old black youth whose rampage with a pickaxe on May 11 in Milan left three persons dead. Grillo uses the case of Mada Kabobo to make a blanket denunciation of all black immigrants, blaming them for violent crime and demanding more effective measures for their deportation.

He cites three examples of violence committed by young people of African descent and then poses the question: “How many people are there like Italy’s Kabobo? Hundreds? Thousands? Where do they live? No one knows.”

Grillo writes: “Who is responsible? Not the Police that can do nothing but risk their lives to arrest them, but cannot do that. Not the magistracy that is subject to the law. Not Parliament, that on the topic of security has done a voting exchange deal between the right and the left.”

Grillo cynically dismisses the social causes of violence, writing: “Kabobo, without a home, without a job, has been wandering around Italy undisturbed for some time. (...) although he’s not got permission to stay he couldn’t be deported.” At the end of the blog, he concludes: “No one is to blame, perhaps not even Kabobo. If they accept that he has mental health problems, he will soon be a free person once again.”

With this sarcastic blog entry, Grillo is publicly joining the ranks of right-wing racists who unceasingly agitate for stricter laws, more powers for the police, and a government capable of imposing dictatorial measures on the most vulnerable layer of society: undocumented immigrants.

Grillo does not mention the dramatic fate of the many Africans who lose their lives seeking to flee their countries, or the problems survivors face in a new

country without accommodation, work, or medical care. Instead, he adopts the language associated in the past with neo-fascists on the right wing of the Berlusconi camp or the racist Northern League. In this context, Grillo’s main demand in the recent election campaign—“Send them all home”—originally directed against politicians, acquires a new, terrifying meaning.

For those who adopted a class-conscious attitude to his movement, Grillo’s racist tirade comes as no surprise. From the beginning, the program of Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement (M5S) had nothing to do with the interests of the working class.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted several months ago, Grillo’s tirades against corruption, all-powerful monopolies and state bureaucracy was a program aimed at dismantling the welfare state and historic social gains of the working class. In the name of the fight against waste, Grillo demands the elimination of hundreds of thousands of public service jobs and measures to accelerate the privatization of universities, hospitals and other institutions.

His economic program reflects the interests of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs who are being squeezed by big capital. Defending the beleaguered middle class without questioning the profit system inevitably leads to attacks on the working class, however. Grillo’s attack on the weakest layer of this class—that is, immigrants—is the inevitable result.

The fact that the right-wing character of Grillo’s policy has not been fully grasped is due to the role played by pseudo-left groups such as Attac, the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) and Nichi Vendola’s SEL (Left, Ecology, Freedom). For years, they have expressed their admiration for Grillo and continue to co-operate with him up today.

Just last Saturday, the metalworkers’ union FIOM and SEL invited the presidential candidate of Grillo’s party, Stefano Rodotà, to speak at a mass rally in

Rome. FIOM and SEL had previously supported Rodotà in the presidential election; he, in turn, stressed his long association with the FIOM.

The pseudo-left groups' cooperation with Grillo was already evident in June 2011. At that time, the Italian population overwhelmingly rejected nuclear power and the privatization of drinking water in a referendum. Attac, Greenpeace and PRC joined up with Grillo to prevent the opposition adopting a socialist orientation. The Italian Pabloites asserted at the time that the victory of the referendum demonstrated the necessity to ditch political parties in favour of single-issue initiatives and "networks," such as that formed by Grillo in 2009.

As a consequence, Grillo profited from the political bankruptcy of PRC and other pseudo-left organizations which, in the course of two decades, repeatedly supported centre-left governments who carried out sharp social attacks on the working class.

In May 2012, the previously unknown bank official Federico Pizzarotti, a M5S member, was elected mayor of Parma. Since then Pizzarotti has pursued the same policies as former Italian premier Mario Monti at a federal level: increased taxes and health and welfare contributions, to force pensioners and workers to pay for the crisis.

In the recent parliamentary elections in February, the M5S won a quarter of the vote in the House of Representatives and was the strongest single party. Its rise to prominence is clearly due to the fact that workers and members of the lower middle class regarded the party as the only outlet to express their anger over the austerity policies of the Monti government and the widespread corruption of the established parties.

The political situation has deteriorated further since the elections. In blatant disregard of the will of voters, the Democratic Party (PD) has formed a coalition with Berlusconi's People of Freedom (PdL) in order to continue Monti's austerity policies.

Meanwhile, Grillo's movement has also suffered a defeat in regional elections in Friuli Venetia Giulia. From its 27 percent high in the national elections, it fell to 14 percent with turnout at an all-time low of 50 percent. Grillo has reacted to this defeat with a xenophobic blog obviously aimed at former supporters of the Northern League.

Above all Grillo's tirade is a response to rapidly growing social tensions, which are exacerbated by the politics of the new government.

Grillo is now openly demonstrating reactionary, xenophobic traits. He is seeking to split workers on the basis of nationalist criteria in order to prevent them uniting, regardless of their background or skin colour, in a joint struggle against the government, and the bourgeoisie and finance interests which stand behind it.



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