

Getting Rid of Totò

N. L. (August 11, 2011)



A small town's mayor, Roberto Avogadro, is getting rid of the statue of one of Italy's greatest actor simply because he was from a different part (the south) of the country. The decision has provoked many who see this as a threat to the unity of the peninsula.

It is made of bronze... just like many other busts... busts of important people, people we have admired, cherished, supported. The bust of one of Italy's eternal actors, the Neapolitan comedian Totò, that has been held at the gardens of Piazza Stalla in Alassio (in the province of Savona) for the past three years is leaving its home because the town's mayor has suddenly decided to get rid of it. What exactly is the story? Simple, the town's mayor, Roberto Avogadro, who has ties to Italy's Lega Nord (literally the Northern League, a political party that wants the independence of the north) has stated that he wants to let go of it and "substitute it with the bust of a really illustrious man." Meaning who? Who could this really illustrious man be? It doesn't really seem to matter as long as he is from a certain part of the country... but let's not assume and just stick to the facts.



The statement has, obviously, bothered many and the association based in Cuneo called “Uomini di Mondo” (Men of the World) has launched a campaign to buy the statue of the great comedian, as many other cities and towns have. “Totò was from Naples,” the mayor affirms as he continues to dig his grave “so what is the connection with Alassio?”

Avogadro, also known as being the mayor who twenty years ago forbade people from wearing bikinis around town, has opened Pandora's box and the reactions are never ending. It is now the turn of one of the Board Members of the independent cultural center, Centro Pannunzio, Pier Franco Quaglieni, who accuses the mayor of Alassio of “being a threat and an offense to the Unity of Italy.” He supports his accusations by reminding people of the mayor's past in the Lega Nord and the activities he promoted when he first started, including posters written in the local dialect (thus incomprehensible to people from any other area). Furious, he almost quoted Totò but unfortunately his renown sentences cannot be translated here as they lose their soul and humor in translation...

The fate of Totò's bust has shaken many but it is still unknown. Liguria's tourism commissioner, Angelo Berlangieri promises that the statue “will not remain in a burlap bag in the basement for long. This is a piece of news that does not help the promotion of Liguria, a region that welcomes many cultural events during the summer and that loves the film industry.” So Barligieri promised he and his office will fight to find the statue a new home, within the region.

As we said earlier, many want it: first and foremost Finale Ligure (Savona), then Florence and Portici. But having Avogadro done his military service in Cuneo, Alassio's mayor hopes that the statue will end up in the Piedmontese town. He has said “they are interested, so I really hope it will end up there.” (Why, I wonder, would he care considering that Totò had no ties to Cuneo either?). Indeed, Cuneo's mayor, Alberto Valmaggia has publicly replied: “If they give it to us free of charge we are more than happy to take it.”

The people's reaction is of disgust, for a gesture that at times seems just a desperate cry for attention. Diana De Curtis, Totò's niece, has justly said that Totò belongs to everybody as his art has graced and still is entertaining Italians, no matter if they are in the north or south. Richard Peña, director of the Film Society at Lincoln Center, during a retrospective dedicated to the great comedian, said that “he was the one and only person who was able to overcome the distinction of left and right in Italy.” Laura Caparrotti, representative of the De Curtis family in the US, thinks that “this is just a silly move, that will only end up being a waste of money for a township that could use it for something really important. Also, whether you love him or not, Totò really is a symbol of Italy, a piece of its culture, of its history, of us all. His art knows no boundaries, it is not a region that can stop it. This man, this mayor I mean, will soon be forgotten, while Totò will continue to live in the hearts of all Italians.”

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