

Dear Friends in GAIA and ZWIA,

Just back from my 29th visit to Italy. I traveled from one end of the country to the other. Speaking engagements in Ivrea (near Turin), Bilea, Cremona, Padova, Verona, Arezzo, Montemaggiore, Rimini, Gioia Tauro (in Calabria), Adrano near Catania in Sicily and finally Naples. While most of my trip was very positive, with many Italian cities making good progress with innovative door to door (porta a porta) collection systems, the news from Naples is sickening.

In Naples the political leadership (Mr. Basolino) has frittered away about 2 billion dollars over 13 years and got nowhere with waste management. Too lazy (or too corrupt) to do the obvious thing of getting the citizens of Naples to source separate their organic waste and get it out of the city for composting, they have spent most of their time trying to dump their unsorted waste on other communities. When they run into the predictable impasse (most communities do not like receiving truckloads of other people's waste) they let the trash pile in the streets leading to stench, chaos, the threat of disease and fires from frustrated people setting fire to the stinking garbage. Equally predictably, this wins for them enormous nationwide TV coverage and allows them to force through "emergency" measures.

These have included:

The last Naples "trash crisis" was used to build an incinerator in Acera (home of Pulcinella – the Punch of Punch and Judy shows) which no one wants, including successive mayors, successive councils, the people and the Bishop ("God Recycles the Devil Burns"). People have demonstrated and been arrested and sat in on the site for months but all to no avail. The province (Mr. Basolino's kingdom) is much larger than they are and they are getting this incinerator come hell or high water. Now 39,000 tons of trash from the latest Naples crisis is piled up outside the incinerator waiting for it to open.

The present Naples "trash crisis" is being used to push for a new landfill in a pristine forest area near Salerno. Again the local people don't want this but this crisis is being used to push it through anyway.

During my visit I was taken by distraught local activists in Guiliana to a "heaven and hell" sight. Heaven was the many acres of peach orchards; hell were the sites - nestled among these orchards - used to dump waste. This scheme involves shredding the waste, and putting it into large plastic bails and then building mountains out of these bails. Huge profits of course, but a nightmare for everyone else. Pyramids of waste. They probably won't stop until these waste mountains are as high as Vesuvius. Nice juicy peach anyone?

A few weeks ago (May 19), citizens from across Italy staged a demonstration in Naples to protest the government's lack of a rational waste policy. This involved about 15,000 people.

Now for some good news. One of Italy's creative geniuses is a former TV comedian called Beppe Grillo. He said the wrong things on TV and this popular personality has now turned his attention to

grass roots rallies. In these he mixes his humor with invited commentary from one or two scientists, depending on the local issue. Beppe has a huge following throughout Italy and beyond. His blog gets about 400,000 hits a day making it number 15 in the world! He has also generated “Friends of Beppe Grillo” around the country and increasingly these groups, working with Rossano Ercolini of Ambiente Futuro, have been sponsoring my meetings in various towns.

I was invited to participate in Beppe’s Naples meeting. It was held in a huge amphitheater, called the Arena. About 7000 people watched this show, and close to midnight I gave a 10 minute talk on Zero Waste (with Rossano Ercolini translating). If you would like to view this video you can do so by going to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRFWqagYoIA&NR=1>

Meanwhile, please do whatever you can to let people know that the leadership of Naples on this matter is a disgrace to the whole of Italy. Which is so sad because elsewhere they are doing so much to pursue the alternatives (over 600 communities are getting 50% diversion with “porta a porta” and some communities are over 80%. Write to anyone you know in Italy – if you don’t know anyone write to Mr Proddi the Primeminister. Try Mr. Proddy, Rome, Italy.

Thanks for your help.

Paul Connett