

*Open Letter to Beppe Grillo from Professor Paul Connett and Rossano Ercolini, dated Nov 4, 2016*

Dear Beppe,

I hope this finds you well in health and spirits.

Rossano Ercolini and I are writing to you today because we have been very concerned about the disturbing information emanating from Rome and Turin where newly elected Five Star Movement mayors are making statements - and worse - making appointments, which appear to suggest that they are turning their backs on a genuine zero waste strategy and instead indicate they favor the discredited use of landfills and incinerators. The purpose of this letter is the hope that you will use your good offices to get one of the key planks of many 5 star activists back on track.

As you know Paul has been to Italy many times working pro bono with Rossano and others fighting against incineration and also promoting a Zero Waste strategy. This has involved working many times with members of both Amici di Beppe Grillo and the Movimento Cinque Stelle.

One story Paul loves re-telling in public is how a few years ago a delegation from the Amici di Beppe Grillo (there were about 600 groups at that time) went to you and said that "they loved what you were saying but what did you want them to do?" Your reply "Go home to your communities and improve them." In our opinion this advice changed Italian politics from a lot of "talking" at the top to "doing" at the grass roots level. One result was that many pushed for Zero Waste in their communities. This with other positive efforts, including fighting corruption eventually led to the formation of the Movimento Cinque Stelle. Remarkably this movement put about 140 grass roots activists into parliament and the election of several Cinque Stelle mayors in very prominent cities like Parma, Turin and Rome. Even the NY Times noted the vote for the new mayor of Rome.

Paul excitedly told all his friends in the USA (and in many of the other countries, and most recently in Indonesia where he is right now) about these happenings about which many (most) people outside Italy were unaware. We really hoped that this notion of energizing young people to improve their communities would catch on in other countries and that it would lead to more grass roots activists moving into positions where they could influence both local and national politics for the better. We hoped that there would be more opportunities for prominent leaders to work closely with citizens to forge together policies which put the interests of people, the community and the planet above the special interests of powerful corporations (especially the non-sustainable incinerator industry) and the insidious cancer of organized crime.

As far as Rome is concerned we thought the appointment of the new mayor was going to be a great victory for the Zero Waste movement, however appointments have been made which appear to have re-introduced the possibilities of waste burning in Lazio region and/or the opening of new landfills. This latter would give the discredited owner of Malagrotta landfill, Mr. Cerroni, a new role to play, when in our view he should be sitting in prison for the damage he has done to that community and the environment. But more worrying even than this is the rift that is likely to occur

between the administration and the activists who helped to put that administration into power.

Similar things are happening in Turin, where the “five stars” mayor has appointed a known supporter of incineration to chair the local incineration management company, TRM.

As we have said many times the waste crisis will not be solved by better machines but with better organization, better education and better industrial design. We need grass roots activists in Rome and Turin— along with design specialists in Rome’s universities and Design schools like ISIA - to help those newly-elected officials to achieve these goals. In short, we fear the current developments are going to alienate the very people who are needed to solve the waste problems in both Rome and Turin. We are writing to you at this critical juncture in the hope that you can help keep your - and our – Zero Waste dream alive.

We offer these suggestions (most of which Paul has discussed in more detail in the book, *The Zero Waste Solution: Untrashing the Planet One Community at a Time*, Chelsea Green, 2013) because we believe that Rome and Turin need to use the energy and enthusiasm of grass roots activists to solve their waste crises in a sustainable way and move their cities (and others by example) towards a circular economy.

We know that the Zero Waste approach (source separation; door-to-door collection; composting; recycling; community reuse and repair centers; zero waste research; “Save as You Throw” incentives; residual separation and biological stabilization of the dirty organic fraction) works best in small communities – so we need Rome and Turin for waste purposes to be broken up into many small communities so that door-to-door collection (so critical for collecting clean organics which can be used in agriculture) can be better organized. Grass roots activists can play a critical role here. Rome and Turin's leadership needs to be encouraged to set up community reuse and repair centers to facilitate the development of such communities. These can act as centers for education and outreach (i.e. activists could explain to citizens in a personal way the details and importance of Rome and Turin’s overall plan); can harness the energy of grass roots organizers to encourage such things as community composting and community gardens and other community job creating and training activities.

In addition, in our view, Rome and Turin’s administrators need to negotiate with farmers - located as close to their cities as possible – to help to make and use the clean compost that can be generated from the organic fraction of the city’s discard stream. Like San Francisco (that has successfully done this) they should work with restaurants and hotels to organize their kitchen staff to help generate the bulk of this clean organic stream, using both education and economic incentives (i.e. cheaper disposal costs for clean organics compared to mixed waste). All of these negotiations can be helped by using a team combining administrative staff and grass roots activists.

Once the organics have been removed even large cities can handle the recyclables simply and cost effectively.

But such grand ideas will fall by the wayside if the new “five star” mayors in Rome and Turin take short-cuts by opting for highly expensive and polluting waste

destruction facilities rather than organizing resource conservation for community development and sustainability.

Beppe, please help to keep your dream alive in Rome and Turin (and by example for the rest of Italy) by encouraging the new Rome and Turin mayors to make their top priority the involvement of people (especially the young) to help solve their waste crises. This is not the time to squander the good will that got them elected.

With appreciation for your inspiration.

*Paul Connett and Rossano Ercolini*