

Italy Pays Tribute To Amelia Boynton Robinson

by Liliana Gorini and Paolo Raimondi

In Milan and Rome, she was received as a head of state—in Milan by the President of the Lombardy region, and in Rome by the Human Rights Committee of the Italian Senate. It's what she really deserves: Amelia Boynton Robinson, 91 years old and a 60-year heroine of the civil rights movement and close collaborator of Dr. Martin Luther King, is now vice chairwoman of the Schiller Institute. She came to Italy with an urgent mission to help stop an Iraq war; but also to tell the story of her life's fight against discrimination and for the right to vote of black people. It led in 1965 to the historic "Bloody Sunday" march from Selma, Alabama to the state capital, Montgomery; there she was beaten and left for dead because she led the march at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, when the mounted police of Gov. George Wallace attacked the demonstrators. The Voting Rights Act was the result of that fight, which she had led in Alabama with her husband Samuel W. Boynton, for 35 years before Martin Luther King came to Alabama.

As she told official meetings, public conferences, and press and TV interviews, today she continues this fight with Lyndon LaRouche, whose movement inherited Martin Luther's King dream "encompassing, this time, peace and development for the whole world." This means stopping not only



Amelia Boynton Robinson speaks to a meeting of 1,000 in Rome, one of many meetings and press interviews in late September, in which she urged Italy to help stop an Iraq war. Mrs. Robinson was honored by the Lombardy region, and led a discussion of the war policy in the Senate Committee on Human Rights.

the war on Iraq, but also the other wars being planned by "those financial interests which are behind Bush" as she said, since "today it is Iraq, then it will be Iran, North Korea, but tomorrow it could be your country." She called on all European countries, starting with Italy, to prevent this war by sending a clear message to Washington: We will not support the war, we will not offer our bases, or our financial support, because this war "is in the hands of the whole world."

Honored by Lombardy Region

Mrs. Robinson's Italian tour, organized by the Italian Solidarity Movement, started on Sept. 24 in Milan, where she was officially received by the President of the Lombardy region, Roberto Formigoni. He awarded her a medal in memory of her fight for civil rights and in memory of Martin Luther King, "who is to this day a strong reference point for each one of us." The presentation ceremony was covered the next day with an official picture, by the Italian dailies *Corriere della Sera* and *Libero*. The official press release of the meeting, picked up by the papers and by the Italian news agency ANSA, also emphasized the agreement between Formigoni and Amelia Robinson on the urgent need to stop the Iraq war, "which would have disastrous consequences for the whole world."

In the evening she met students of various Milan universities, a group of young people from Bologna, Catholic priests, nuns, and some journalists at a meeting organized by the university group of the Solidarity Movement in Santa Maria Liberatrice parish, during which she was also interviewed by the main Catholic magazine, *Famiglia Cristiana*.

Sept. 26 saw the first of three public meetings in Rome, at the Sala delle Letterature, organized by the City of Rome, and announced that morning by many Rome dailies with Mrs. Robinson's picture. She was introduced by the director of the center, Maria Ida Gaeta, who brought the greetings of Rome Mayor Walter Veltroni and of the City Commissioner for Cultural Policy. The meeting was attended by journalists of various dailies and magazines, and by Hon. Tullio Grimaldi, who had been in the United States in 1995 as member of the Judiciary Committee of the Italian Parliament, to lobby for LaRouche's exoneration.

In answer to Grimaldi's opening question on the war in Iraq, Mrs. Robinson said, "I am against that war, and have called on all governments and parliaments, including yours, to stop it by all means. President Bush thinks that by killing Saddam Hussein he will prevent terrorism, but does this not remind you of somebody? Already in Afghanistan, we killed children, women, old people, in order to find one man. This reminds



While Mrs. Robinson was in Italy, Lyndon LaRouche's leading associate in France, Jacques Cheminade, led rallies against the war in Paris; the sign warns President Bush to recognize that attacking Iraq will not save the banks in the current economic collapse.

me of Herod, who killed all newborn babies under two years of age to find one child." To a second question, she answered, "We do not know yet who really did Sept. 11. We should look first of all inside the United States. I am against terrorism, because I know terrorism very well, I experienced it on my own skin: the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, the terrorism of discrimination and hate. I am an American, and I love my country, and was horrified by Sept. 11 as everybody else. But . . . you do not undo a wrongdoing with another one, and vengeance is only God's."

Italian Senate Committee 'Meets History'

In the afternoon, Mrs. Robinson was received by the Human Rights Committee at the Italian Senate. The President of the committee, Sen. Enrico Pianetta, and the vice chairwoman, Sen. Patrizia Toia, who had met Amelia Robinson as Minister of Relations with the Parliament in the previous Italian government, thanked her for the "honor" she was giving to the Italian Senate by addressing their committee. Senator Pianetta also welcomed Paolo Raimondi and Liliana Gorini, president and vice president of the Italian Solidarity Movement, referring to a short memorandum distributed to the whole committee which explained Mrs. Robinson's collaboration with LaRouche and his movement in Italy.

After she had spoken on her lifelong fight for human and civil rights, some women Senators expressed their appreciation that Mrs. Robinson is a very good example for women in politics, who fight for human rights but "under totally different conditions, since you risked your life in your time," as Sen. Patrizia Toia said. Another Senator interjected: "When I go home today, I will tell my 19-year-old daughter that I met history this afternoon, and that young people should do the same."

An opposition Senator picked up Mrs. Robinson's call to

stop the Iraq war, saying that just the day before, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi had addressed the Parliament, with an unclear position on what Italy will do, and that they would make sure the position becomes a clear "no," as Mrs. Robinson demanded. Finally, a proposal was made that the Human Rights Committee issue a press release on that meeting, so that all members of Senate could be briefed on her proposal to send an Italian delegation to President Bush demanding he put a stop to the war.

Public Meetings

A public meeting was held at the Libreria Paesi Nuovi, in front of the Italian Parliament, where Nino Galloni, economist and director of the Labor Ministry; Marguerite Lottin, a journalist and politician from Cameroon; Lucio d'Ubaldo, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Nuova Fase*; and Paolo Raimondi spoke along with Mrs. Robinson. Galloni and D'Ubaldo commented that Mrs. Robinson has a long way to reach to today's politicians, who instead of having a great project, a "dream," and then overcoming problems which arise in its realization, tend to see only the problems, and give up the project before they start fighting for it. She had likened Martin Luther King's "dream" to a "volcano" which erupted 35 years after she and her husband Mr. Boynton had started their fight for the right to vote, preparing for that volcano. Lottin, as an African in Rome taking care of immigrants, said Mrs. Robinson's attitude is also needed today, in fighting against racism and discrimination against immigrants, as expressed by the recent legislation to stop immigration into Italy.

In the audience of 80 people, there were a number of important politicians, including Hon. Giovanni Galloni, former minister during the 1970s Christian Democratic governments, and Tommaso Fulfaro, leader of the Association for the Left. Father Ulisse Frascali, founder and director of the Nuovo Villaggio del Fanciullo in Rimini, was the first to intervene from the audience on his personal experience working with and for marginalized youth. At the end of the conference, Mrs. Robinson and her associates were invited for dinner to a famous ancient restaurant near the Parliament.

On Sept. 28, Mrs. Robinson embodied the dialogue of cultures at a mass meeting of 1,000 at the Soka Gokkai Buddhist Cultural Center near Rome, which had just inaugurated an exhibition on "Three Men of Peace: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Daisaku Ikeda"—the last being the leader of the Buddhist Center. Before the meeting, the civil rights heroine received a number of publications of the Center, including a picture of the meeting between Daisaku Ikeda and Rosa Parks in Japan. All 1,000 people gave her a ovation as she walked to the podium. She was introduced by Donatella Pavone, president of the Cultural Center, who summarized the principles of the Center, including the fight for peace and non-violence. After a brief introduction from Marguerite Lottin and Paolo Raimondi, Mrs. Robinson read the speech which she had prepared, adding a final emphasis on the danger

of war and the urgent need to act against it; it was received by another standing ovation.

She concluded with a story: A man had a bird in his hands, and two boys came up and asked him, "Is the bird dead or alive?" The man answered, "What do you think?" He had decided that if they told him it was dead, he would crush it, but if they told him it was alive, he would let it fly to its nest. "It's as you wish," he told the boys. One answered, "It is alive," and the man let the bird fly high into the sky. "It's the same with the war on Iraq: You can either watch and see, or decide to mobilize to stop this war, call on your representatives, on your elected officials, to send a delegation to Washington and stop this war. It's as you wish." Mrs. Robinson was given an ancient print of a monument in Rome, the Titus Arch (a victory arch), and also offered a special Japanese dance with drums. Dozens of people lined up to get an autograph from Mrs. Robinson before she could move on to an exhibition and a reception.

In the course of her five days in Italy, Mrs. Robinson was interviewed by many daily newspapers, magazines, and radio and television. On Sept. 25, *Corriere della Sera* and *Liberio*, publishing the picture of her meeting with President Formigoni of Lombardy, noted that he "shared her total opposition to the Iraq war," and reported the substance of the Catholic parish meeting in Milan as well. A full-page interview was published on Sept. 27 by the Italian daily *Il Manifesto*, under the headline "But America Is Not Bush," accompanied by many pictures of her and of Bloody Sunday in Selma.

"Her biography encompasses a century of American history," *Il Manifesto* wrote. "Amelia Boynton Robinson, an energetic 91-year-old lady who, with her mother first and Martin Luther King later, fought for black rights. Today, for the rights of Latinos, Chicanos, and white people who expose the responsibility of U.S. banks in recycling dirty money and drug money. Among the white people she supports, there is Lyndon LaRouche. And of President Bush she says 'in Afghanistan he acted like Herod.'"

The same day she was interviewed live by Radio 24, a national station, in its evening transmission "Helzapoppin," hosted by Giancarlo Saltamassi. There, she had the opportunity to answer questions coming from listeners all over Italy, and to sing "We Shall Overcome," moving her host to tears. Saltamassi had asked her to sing, despite the fact that the tear gas used against her on Bloody Sunday damaged her vocal chords, changing her from the lyric soprano she was when she sang in her church choir, to an all the more moving, dark voice. Her singing was so beautiful that Saltamassi recorded it in order to play it every time a civil rights issue comes up on that radio program. Besides Mrs. Robinson's voice, listeners had the opportunity to listen also to important quotes from Dr. King's speech "I Have a Dream."

Mrs. Robinson had a one-hour interview on Sept. 26 with a Rome TV station, Tele Ambiente, which had interviewed Lyndon LaRouche after one of his recent Rome conferences.