

CALABRIA/3

Dear editor, may I ask you...? Four questions to Piero Sansonetti

By Roberto S. Rossi

For obvious reasons of thoroughness and journalistic accuracy, we believed we had to ask some questions to Piero Sansonetti, editor in chief of *Calabria Ora*, and we decided to do it in a separate article to give significance to his answers. We sent him four questions by e-mail. Sansonetti, very kindly, answered promptly, and made the following premise:

I believed this was an interview, now I realise it's an interrogation... Well, I knew that sooner or later I would have been subjected to questioning. I could refuse to talk unless my lawyer is present! Ok, this time I will accept it and I will not contain myself (and I'm glad that I proved my old idea that journalists and public prosecutors lately have exchanged their roles: the former doing the investigations and the the latter issuing press releases...).

On 22 June Pietro Citrigno, one of the publishers of *Calabria Ora*, was sentenced to 4 years and eight months' imprisonment for usury. On 24 May he was remanded to a court for trial, along with the other publisher Fausto Aquini, charged with extortion. How is it that you, with your past, decided to keep on working with them?

Are you asking why I didn't abandon the newspaper when Citrigno was sentenced? Look, I could give you several answers, but I'll give you the simplest and most sincere one: because I am convinced that Citrigno is innocent. I studied the case, I checked the documents, I listened to a lot of people informed of the facts – as my predecessor did and, aware of Citrigno's innocence, he didn't have any problem working with him and leading the newspaper – and I truly convinced myself that the accusations against Citrigno have no foundation. And the public prosecutor, who had charged him and then requested his acquittal to the Appeal Court, shares my conviction. I got persuaded that the judges decided to convict Citrigno – and arrogantly despite of the request of acquittal presented by the public prosecutor – had something to do with some internal fights between judicial authorities. You'll tell me: «A sentence is a sentence, it cannot be contested. Laws are laws!». Yes, of course, I've heard that so many times... But, you know, I don't believe it. I actually do contest sentences. Quite often. You mentioned my past. Well, I have always considered lawfulness as a value – a highly respectable one, naturally – that belongs to conservatives. I like other values, absolutely unlawful. Rebellion, social equity, freedom, guarantism. To me, lawfulness means defence – very honest defence – of the status quo. Citrigno is an excellent publisher, I can assure it to you. He grants full freedom to his editors. I am the one who decides the newspaper policy. I work very well with him.

On 13 October 2010, a story comes out saying that the *pentito* Paolo Iannò, questioned by the prosecutors about the connection between the '*ndrangheta* and politics, stated: «People said that Giuseppe Scopelliti was supported by the '*ndrangheta*». The news was published by some newspapers, causing great sensation. *Calabria Ora*, instead, did not publish a line of it.

So, you justified that by writing in several lead articles that you do not agree with the prosecutors using the *pentiti* for investigations. But then, on 26 April you published the letter of a “*pentita*”, Giuseppina Pesce, accusing the prosecutors of compelling her to collaborate with them. You put that news on the front page for two days and wrote a lead article in which you asked public prosecutor Giuseppe Pignatone to explain himself.

Isn't there a contradiction? Would you explain your reasons?

I can't recall how my newspaper gave the news about Iannò's declarations. Maybe we missed the news, even if it seldom happens – usually we're the first with the news – and obviously, should that be the case, we didn't miss it for ideological reasons. That said, I consider that the news – apparently spread by some prosecutors for some purposes that I don't want to know – that a not very reliable pentito states that he “had heard” that someone was connected to mafia, has very little importance. You obviously understand that valuable journalism is not based on “hearsay”, the “hearsay” of people accused of mafia crimes, and, moreover, the “hearsay” reported by some judges for their own purposes. I think you'll agree with me on this, won't you? Mrs. Pesce's testimony was a different story. There was no “hearsay”, it was a direct and dramatic testimony, reported in a letter officially written and signed by her. Everyone could have published it, it wasn't a scoop. The woman informed us about her decision to collaborate with justice – “her” decision, not anyone else's – criticising the prosecutors' behaviour. As we are serious journalists, we had the duty to publish that remarkable news! Now, you tell me: why did no other newspaper publish it? I frankly don't know, maybe, in that case, they shamefully missed the news. I obviously don't believe the voices saying that they didn't publish it because they were afraid to bother the Public Prosecutor's office, thinking that it was better for them to have the prosecutors on their side, since the prosecutors are those who give (or do not give) the news to newspapers. I frankly don't believe such slander.

Why did you dismiss Lucio Musolino?

I did not dismiss Lucio Musolino. There is no letter of dismissal. There is no request of dismissal. Despite Musolino having a very bad relationship with the staff, I did my best to avoid a definitive break between him and the newspaper. If someone said that I dismissed Lucio Musolino, I will sue him or her. (Well, if I sue I'll have to rely on the prosecutors, whom I don't really trust, and I should ask that lawfulness is respected, and I don't like lawfulness... well, I'll think about it!).

Last October, during a City Council session of Reggio Calabria, the cameramen of three local TV networks were thrown out of the hall and a journalist who was protesting was asked to identify himself by the police. Governor Giuseppe Scopelliti has repeatedly and publicly insulted journalists of local and national newspapers. How do you judge this behaviour?

To criticise journalists is legal. To insult and kick them out and prevent them from doing their job is not legal. In fact, that day one of my journalists wrote an article about it and harshly criticised Scopelliti's behaviour, calling it intolerable. So I actually don't understand why are you asking me that question. I suspect you think that my newspaper is protecting Scopelliti. It's not so, really. I can assure you

that. We don't call him a mafioso, because we really think that is not true. We know that prosecutor Pignatone – whom I believe you appreciate – always ruled out the possibility that Scopelliti could be accused or suspected of any offences. Categorically. What should I do? Should I think – considering I believe in guarantism – that the Public Prosecutor's office of Reggio Calabria is protecting Scopelliti for some shameful reasons? Frankly, my dear friend, I don't think that. I could criticised Pignatone about so many things, but I absolutely cannot question his honesty.