

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 40 (2013)
Heft: 4

Artikel: "He changed Ticino without ever having governed it"
Autor: Alippi, Veronica
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906655>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 17.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

their dissatisfaction with traditional politics and still do. It also won support among voters who sought change because they believed it was necessary to overcome economic, social and personal challenges.

Bignasca's policies were often discredited as being populist and politically naïve. However, as a "political animal" he had a keen instinct for common concerns and the needs



of the inhabitants of Ticino, whom he called "la gente" (the people). He often came up with simple, even trivial, ideas but they proved effective. The "Mattino", which was practically the official party mouthpiece, publicised its slogans and maxims, highlighted who its enemies were, and mocked and insulted its victims. It often used pejorative language and photo montages that provoked outrage. Bignasca was accused in many quarters of making politics more savage. He was denounced on countless occasions for slander and libel. He was subjected to several court judgements, which he tended to ignore. The remarks made by the Lega's representatives are usually crude, often disrespectful and frequently xenophobic. This may have contributed to the movement's success. It is certainly true that Bignasca had a good instinct for identifying which issues concerned the people of Ticino and what they felt threatened by, such as the phenomenal rise in the number of cross-border workers.

An inseparable pair

Genuinely democratic structures have never existed within the Lega. Bignasca made decisions and announced them in the "Mattino" without involving his members

of government or parliamentarians. This also led to rows that were soon followed by impassioned reconciliations. The life president had an ambivalent relationship with his main supporters. His most important ally was Marco Borradori, a member of the cantonal council for 18 years and today mayor of the city of Lugano. Bignasca and Borradori complemented one another wonderfully.

One stood for bawdy politics, personal attacks and ultimatums, and the other for dialogue, compromise and respectful conduct. One was quick-tempered and uncouth, the other always composed and polite. There were also issues on which they could never agree, most notably concerning the environment and the canton's finances. However, they never

aired their differences in the media. They were an inseparable political pair right up until Giuliano Bignasca's death.

Bignasca's political views were contradictory and at times incoherent. So, too, was his private life. He was shy and suddenly found himself thrust into the spotlight. He was a self-confessed cocaine user but was certainly not proud of his vice. The reaction to the news of his death on 7 March 2013 showed that he was highly respected not just by his friends but also by his enemies, if not on a political level at least on a personal one. "The dwarf" had also been extremely generous, unable to turn away anyone who asked for his help. His willingness to help people surprised those who essentially saw him as a braggart and a provocative figure. His appearances in judge's robes at one of his trials or with a cane and wooden shoes in the National Council will live long in the memory.

He played a rather macabre role in the election of Lugano's city government on 14 April this year. He passed away after the official electoral lists had been submitted, and the Lega decided to leave his name on the list in light of the wave of emotion that had taken hold of the city. Bignasca was therefore re-elected. From

beyond the grave he helped the Lega to become the strongest party in the city government and contributed to the election of Borradori as city president.

Who will take over Bignasca's role?

What does the future hold for the Lega now? Does victory in Lugano represent the ultimate breakthrough or a final uprising before its demise? How will politics in Ticino change without Giuliano Bignasca? The party suddenly left leaderless went through a challenging few weeks. Despite calls for unity, there has been no shortage of controversy and internal conflict. The "Mattino", the great propaganda machine, has already moderated its language. The question is whether the party can continue Bignasca's recipe for success and maintain the balance between right and left. Much of the Lega's social understanding may also have disappeared with Bignasca. It is uncertain who will now take over the reins within the party. For the moment, it has decided upon collective leadership. However, Borradori is clearly the only person everyone trusts to replace the powerful figure of Bignasca.

The other parties have changed their attitude significantly during the 22-year period in which Giuliano Bignasca turned Ticino's political landscape upside down. They initially ignored Bignasca, then realised that they had underestimated him and began to fear him. They occasionally attempted to imitate him by adopting an even more aggressive tone than him. When they recognised the Lega's ability to anticipate major political issues, they began to cooperate and ally themselves with it. However, they have still not come to terms with the shock result at the election in April 2011. The traditional parties are adopting a cautious, hesitant approach and are puzzling over whether the Lega's success will be maintained. One of Bignasca's obituaries read: "He changed Ticino without ever having governed it." It remains to be seen whether this will continue after his death.