

## The Institute tied to PD investigated by the American Congress

by Claudio Antonelli

The Ramazzini Institute – cancer research institute, strongly tied to the management of the Italian Democratic Party (PD), has been investigated by the American Congress. The Board of Directors of the Bolognese Institute includes former PD politicians and councillors of the cooperatives. The Institute was accused of having received money of US taxpayers with no adequate guarantees on the scientific standards. The investigation is due to the restriction on the donation of public funds declared by Donald Trump. The watchdog asked the operative branch of the Health Department to provide it with the documentation, starting from 2009, regarding the research contracts entrusted to the Ramazzini Institute. The investigation concerns 13 research contracts, of which seven were paid USD1 million of public money. However, the Health Department itself fell under the spotlight and now it will have to explain why it run other funds (private funds, in this case) for researches conducted directly or indirectly by the Ramazzini Institute, for overall USD92 million.

### The research institute tied to PD is under investigation at the American Congress

*Washington investigates «on public funds granted to the Ramazzini Institute with no adequate guarantees on scientific standards». The Board of Directors of the Bolognese Institute – dealing with cancer – includes former PD politicians and councillors of the cooperatives.*

The cancer research institute, strongly tied to the management of the Italian Democratic Party (PD), has been investigated by the American Congress. The Institute was accused of having received money of US taxpayers with no adequate guarantees on scientific standards. The investigation – summarized by a letter the Congress sent to the Health Minister Thomas Price – is due to the restrictions on the donation of public funds proclaimed by Donald Trump.

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, the supervisory body of the Congress asked the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) – i.e. the operative branch of the Health Department – to provide it with the documentation, starting from 2009, regarding the research contracts entrusted to the Ramazzini Institute. The investigation concerns 13 research contracts, of which seven were paid USD1 million of public money. The NIEHS itself was included in the investigation and now it will have to explain why in just 8 years it run other funds (private funds, in this case) for researches conducted directly by the Ramazzini Institute – or indirectly by the affiliated US institute – for overall USD92 million. Even Bloomberg wrote about the scandal. So far, Istituto Ramazzini let just one comment leak in the US, in which it limited itself to explaining that the capital it received in the same period was significantly lower. No details. Retracing the flows is extremely complicated. Indeed, the institute has numerous links and affiliated branches.

The most delicate issue does not include USD92 million, but USD1 billion coming from public coffers. On this issue, Americans do not joke. You better bet that in the future the inquiry will have a result, which might have serious consequences on Italy and Europe.

The Ramazzini Institute is indeed a non-profit organization with more than 27,000 members. It derives its name from the inventor of occupational health and it carried on the activities of Cesare Maltoni – an Emilian oncologist well-known all over the world. But on top of that, last year Fiorella Belpoggi – the Manager of the research centre – was suggested by the European Parliament to choose the names of the EFSA (The European Food Safety Authority) members. This choice resulted

in some controversies for the connections among the Ramazzini Institute, the local PD and the Cooperatives. Such controversies raised doubts on the opportunity to express scientific and food opinions (degeneration of cells, due to food-related causas) when we have such tight contacts with the lobbies of meat: the Cooperatives. The Chairman Simone Gasperini was PD mayor of Casalecchio di Reno, the Director General Rino Ruggeri was a PD city councillor, even Mrs Belpoggi was an advisor of Lega Coop Bologna and other members of the Board have worked for cooperatives expert in managing supermarkets. More than 10 years ago, the Ramazzini Institute signed a research according to which aspartame would be carcinogenic. The same European Food Safety Authority intervened. According to EFSA, there was no evidence. Moreover, the Ramazzini Institute was doubted of not having used international standards. Disappointed, researchers focus on sucrose. Further critics follow and according to Forbes, all the doubts raised «made the Ramazzini Institute a sort of joke in the international scientific community». Such a harsh judgement did not stop the research activity. The target is the only thing that changed. Recently, the Ramazzini Institute focused on «glyphosate», a widespread herbicide. The aim would be to offer support to EFSA, in order to put a ban on it, even though now the relationships between the Institute and the European Agency are not that idyllic anymore. In addition, the primary interest of the authority is nutrients and their regulation. The controversy of the last ten years has not destroyed the Institute's reputation.

This time the US Congress will have to express its view and have its say. A US rejection would be extremely difficult to overcome. Even if there are eminent precedents, as the sensationalist leaks of the World Health Organization (WHO), which attacked red meat. It was proven wrong and then moved past, as if nothing had happened.