19 January 2009

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â€œNo Godâ€• Bus Ads Banned in Genoa, Italy

Atheists lose battle to make their voices heard

Atheists take a hit in Genoa, Italy, as â€œNo Godâ€• ads are banned
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Last year, a somewhat out of the ordinary initiative was launched, consisting of a series of ads displayed on public transportation buses. Its aim was to make the voices of countless atheists heard, by sending off the message that "there is no God." Whereas such ads can still be seen in London, Barcelona and Washington, in Genoa, Italy they have just been banned, following opposition from conservative political parties.

Reuters reports that the contract with an advertising agency to run the ads had already been signed when complaints were so many that there was no other way out than for the agency to back out of the deal. Therefore, the atheists' message will no longer appear on city buses, in what is deemed by the Union of Atheists and Rationalist Agnostics (UAAR) a direct and very serious infringement of the freedom of speech.

"Right-wing politicians criticized us ferociously. It's strange that in a country where ads depicting […] women wearing skimpy lingerie is permitted on buses that we can't run ads about atheism," Giorgio Villella of the Italian UAAR told Reuters. He also stated that, following the waves of criticism, at least one driver said he would not get behind the wheel of a "No God" bus.

The message that was supposed to be displayed on buses said that "The bad news is that God doesn't exist. The good news is that you don't need him," in a similar manner to those in the aforementioned cities, where it simply said "There is no God. Now stop worrying and live your life." Not surprisingly, though, here too atheists met with public disapproval. However, Villella said that the group would appeal the decision in court and that, sooner or later, the ads would be on the buses as planned.

"Ours is a fun and light-hearted message but it does have a serious point to it: that atheists want a secular country, we want a secular school and a secular government. The strength of feeling has been shown with so many people willing to pay for this campaign." said Ariane Sherine, The Guardian writer and also one of the most active supporters of the campaign, as to the goal of the campaign, back in October 2008.

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