

Italy: state attorneys expose police provocation at Genoa G-8 summit

Peter Schwarz
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In July of 2001, film clips of violent unrest on the fringes of the G-8 summit in Genoa, Italy were flashed all around the world. The port city witnessed violent conflicts between demonstrators and the Italian security forces. One demonstrator was killed, 600 injured, some seriously, and hundreds were arrested and held for several days.

At the time, those affected and their lawyers reported widespread police provocation and denounced the brutal methods of the security forces. Many of those arrested reported beatings and instances of torture. They complained that evidence had been manipulated and that statements had been extorted from prisoners under duress.

Reporters had observed and filmed supposed anarchists from the so-called “black bloc” engaging in discussions with the police, and then running amok without interference, thereby providing the pretext for attacks on peaceful demonstrators.

The government of right-wing media magnate Silvio Berlusconi was obliged to establish several committees of inquiry, all of which whitewashed the role of the state and security forces. This came as no surprise, since they were dominated either directly by the Interior Ministry or by the government majority in parliament. The official inquiries established only that some individual “errors and omissions” had been made and recommended the transfer of a few officials.

Now, state attorneys are substantiating the criticisms raised one year ago. Although their investigations are still far from over, it has already become clear that the security forces acted in a manner usually associated with military dictatorships. Meanwhile, the public prosecutor’s office has halted numerous proceedings against demonstrators and has instead opened eight new investigations against 148 police officers.

The September 2 edition of the German newsweekly *Der Spiegel* reported on the state attorneys’ findings, comparing the actions of the Italian police with the methods of “thugs of a third world dictator.” The magazine reported, for example, that the security forces utilised large numbers of provocateurs and known right-wing extremists who, camouflaged as anarchists, destroyed hundreds of shop windows and set fire to automobiles.

“Mixed in with the allegedly left-wing gangs of hooligans,” *Der Spiegel* writes, “were dozens of right-wing extremists. The police knew everything that was to happen beforehand. In an internal document, published later in the newspapers, the security authorities describe, in advance of the G-8 summit, how members of the neo-Nazi groups *Forza Nuova* and *Fronte Nazionale* mingled with gangs of anarchists and sought to start a riot in order to discredit the ‘left’.”

Right-wing extremists from other European countries were also invited to Genoa by their Italian comrades. *Der Spiegel* quotes a “Nazi from Birmingham” who says fascists were lured to Genoa with the promise that “We could do anything we wanted.”

At the time of the summit, the Italian media published many photos and film clips showing members of the black bloc, wearing balaclavas and scarves to hide their faces, chatting peacefully with police officers before throwing themselves into the fighting. Observers noted that the police left these rioters relatively undisturbed and did not arrest them even when they committed criminal offences right under their noses.

Interior Minister Claudio Scajola of Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party justified the harsh police actions at the time with the argument that the security forces confronted an army of 5,000 rioters from the black bloc. But investigations conducted by the public

prosecutor's office have shown that the hard core consisted of barely 200 rioters—of which a large section were police provocateurs and right-wing extremists.

The security forces themselves fabricated the pretext with which they justified their repression. An example was to be made of the 300,000 demonstrators who had travelled to Genoa from around the world. That this was the calculated aim of the government can be seen from the incidents that took place at the Pascoli School the night after the demonstration.

Hundreds of demonstrators were asleep when police raided the school and unleashed an orgy of beatings. Ninety-three of those present were arrested and 62 were injured, some so seriously they had to be taken to intensive care. At a subsequent press conference, the police justified the action by claiming to have found weapons inside the school: Molotov cocktails, pick-axes and metal tubing.

The state attorneys have now established that the metal tubes and pick-axes were tools belonging to building workers renovating the school. They were stored in a locked room, which was only broken open by the police. As far as the Molotov cocktails were concerned, the police had brought them along themselves. A senior police officer acknowledged that he had found them in bushes the day before. A video exists showing leading members of the security forces being shown the petrol bombs before the raid on the school.

The existence of this video underscores that the police provocations in Genoa were not isolated cases. The police leadership would hardly have acted so carelessly and permitted filming if such practices were not widespread and sanctioned by their superiors.

High-ranking government officials were in close contact with the police throughout this period. Deputy Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini was at the police operations centre during the raid, although he is officially not responsible for the police.

Finis is leader of the National Alliance, which emerged from the fascist MSI. As the protégé of MSI founder Giorgio Almirante, he is no stranger to the use of provocation. In the 1960s and 1970s, the MSI was implicated in a right-wing terror network that sought to create the conditions for a coup. The network had connections with the highest levels of the security apparatus.

The events in Genoa expose Fini's claims to have broken with his fascist past.

In view of the events in Genoa, the permanent campaign that Berlusconi is conducting against the judiciary and state attorneys can be seen in a new light. Up to now his attacks on the independence of the judicial system were generally considered an attempt to block investigations into himself and his company, Fininvest. Now a more fundamental dimension becomes clear: the aggressive attacks on the judiciary are meant to eliminate all legal checks on an increasingly authoritarian state apparatus.



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