

Fascism in Genoa

by Starhawk

I was there when the carabinieri raided the IndyMedia Center and the Diaz school, in Genoa, at the end of the protest against the G8 meeting. We heard the shouts and screams, couldn't get out the door, ran upstairs and hid, fearing for our lives. Eventually the cops found us, but we were the lucky ones. A Member of Parliament was in our building; lawyers and media arrived. There was some obscure Italian legal reason why the police could be deterred. They withdrew.

But nothing could save our friends across the street, at the school where people were sleeping and where another section of the Independent Media were located. The police entered: the media and the politicians were kept out. And they beat people. They beat people who had been sleeping, who held up their hands in a gesture of innocence and cried out, "Pacifisti! Pacifisti!" They beat the men and the women. They broke bones, smashed teeth, shattered skulls. They left blood on the walls, on the windows, a pool of it in every spot where people had been sleeping. When they had finished their work, they brought in the ambulances. All night long we watched from across the street as the stretchers were carried out, as people were taken to the jail ward of the hospital, or simply to jail. And in the jail, many of them were tortured again, in rooms with pictures of Mussolini on the wall.

This really happened. Not back in the nineteen thirties, but on the night of July 21 and the morning of July 22, 2001. Not in some third world country, but in Italy: prosperous, civilized, sunny Italy. And most of the victims are still in the hospital or in jail, as I write this four days later.

I can't adequately describe the shock and the horror of that night. But as terrifying as it was to live through it, what is more frightening still are its implications:

- That the police could carry out such a brutal act openly, in the face of lawyers, politicians and the media means that they do not expect to be held accountable for their actions. Which means that they had support from higher up, from more powerful politicians. According to a report published in La Repubblica from a policeman who took part in the raid, when the more democratic factions within the police complained that the Constitution was being violated, they were told, "We don't have anything to be worried about, we're covered."

- That those politicians also do not expect to be condemned or driven from office means that they too have support from higher up, ultimately, from Berlusconi, Italy's Prime Minister, himself.
- That they could beat, torture, and falsely arrest Italians means that they do not expect to be held accountable by their own people.
- That they could beat, torture and imprison internationals shows that they do not expect to be held accountable by the international community. And indeed, who is going to hold them accountable? George Bush, the unelected, unmandated heir of a coup? Sweden, which just used live ammunition on protestors? Canada, builders of the Wall of Shame?
- That Berlusconi could support such acts means that he must be certain of support from other international powers, and that these overtly fascist actions are linked to the growing international escalation of repression against protestors.
- That the Italian government used tactics learned from Quebec: the wall, the massive use of tear gas, and that the RCMP had observers in Genoa in preparation for next year's meeting in Calgary, means that police repression is also a global network. As we learn from each action, so do they.
- That the Italian government are now targeting the organizers of the Genoa Social Forum shows where their agenda was heading all along: the discrediting of the antiglobalization network, the discouraging of peaceful and legal protest as well as direct action. The leader of the Forum has lost his job. Others are fearing for their freedom and safety.

It's hard to make sense of all that happened in Genoa. So much happened so fast, and in the middle of it it was hard to know what was going on. The Black Bloc suddenly appear in the midst of a square that is supposed to be a safe space for peaceful gatherings: the police gas and beat the women and the pacifists and let the Bloc escape. We are having a quiet lunch in the convergence center by the sea, when suddenly tear gas cannisters are flying into the eating area and a pitched battle begins directly outside, not a hundred yards away from the main march. Prisoners report being tortured until they agree to shout "Viva il Duce!" The police rationale for the attack on the school was the supposed presence of members of the Black Bloc-but they never attacked the actual Black Bloc encampment, and by the night of the attack most of the Black Bloc had left the city.

I'm not an investigative reporter-I'm an activist and once upon a time when life was not so overwhelming I was a novelist. I don't like conspiracy theories but I make sense of the world through stories. Genoa makes sense to me if this is the plot:

"Memo: Italian Security to Italian Government/U.S. and International Advisors:

"Subject: Covert Security Plan for Genova

"Top Secret!

"The overt Security Plan for the Genova G8 meeting has been covered in a separate memo. The subject of this memo is the covert plan.

"Phase One: Lead up to the action: This phase is characterized by two major aspects: the creation of a climate of fear and anticipated violence by the stockpiling of body bags, deployment of missiles, etc. And second, a concerted effort to undermine the popularity of the stronger, radical groups such as the 'Tute Bianca' or White Overalls through smear campaigns, accusations that they cooperate with the police etc. If necessary, we will plant actual bombs to increase the climate of fear.

"Phase Two: Recruitment and infiltration: We will concentrate on infiltrating the Black Bloc and strategically placing provocateurs who will be in positions to instigate attacks, violence, and destruction of private property which will turn the population against the protestors. In addition, we will encourage Fascist groups to run as segments of the Bloc which will then give us an excuse to attack the main body of protestors.

"Phase Three: Friday, 20 July. We arm the police and carabinieri with live ammunition rather than rubber or plastic bullets. With luck, deaths will result. Our 'Bloc' can appear strategically near any group we wish to attack, giving us the excuse to gas and beat the 'nonviolent' demonstrators. Protestors should be severely beaten and arrested protestors tortured to deter them from further demonstrations. In addition, our Bloc will instigate the destruction of property, particularly small shops, private cars, and will attack and beat other demonstrators, perhaps even a nun or two, further discrediting the anarchists. A high level of violence and destruction should lessen the numbers expected for Saturday's march.

"Phase Four: Saturday, 21 July. Our strategy here is directed to undermine, divide, and disperse the march. We instigate more property damage and police battles in the morning near the assembly point of the march. One of our factions will attack the Tute Bianca during the march itself. Shortly after noon, we begin a battle just outside the convergence center, near the corner

where the march turns north, giving us the excuse to gas the convergence center. We attempt to drive the battle into the march, splitting or disrupting it, and providing the rationale to attack the march with tear gas and other dispersal agents.

"Phase Five: Post-march. We continue the climate of fear with a midnight raid on the main communications center and sleeping quarters of the protestors. Severe force is justified by rumors of Black bloc presence. We uncover 'evidence' of connections between the Genova Social Forum and the bloc, thereby discrediting them. Beatings, arrests and torture will discourage future involvement with protests.

"Phase Six: Sunday, 22 July and beyond: We continue harrassment and random arrests of foreigners and suspected protestors. We begin a campaign of accusations against the Genoa Social Forum, connecting them with the Black Bloc, moving against their employment, their credibility, and possibly taking legal action against them. This will also force them to disavow the Black Bloc, further splitting the movement.

This memo is fiction, but I believe it's essentially true. Like a mathematical proof, it has a simple internal consistency that makes sense of the known facts. And there is more and more mounting evidence that the 'black bloc' in Genoa was significantly composed of organized fascist groups working in collaboration with the police.

If it is true, even partly true, what does it mean to us?

It means that the response to the events in Genoa will determine what level of force can be used against future demonstrations, whether we will see smashed skulls and more deaths in Calgary, and blowtorches in the armpits in the third world.

There are signs, however, that their strategy may backfire. On Monday all over Italy 250,000 people took to the streets. The pressure is on for the Minister of the Interior to resign; Berlusconi's government is threatened. There were demonstrations at Italian embassies all over the world.

We need to keep the pressure on, to make sure the issue doesn't fade away. Keep calling and writing the embassies. Get your political organization, union, workplace or group of best friends to write and call. Ask your local news media why they are not telling this story. Now is not the moment to be ideological and purist; now is the moment to call in all our allies, set aside our differences, and act in solidarity. For if this level of repression goes unchallenged, no one is safe, not the most legal NGO, not the most reformist

organization with the mildest demands. If we don't act now, when a political space remains open to us, we may lose the space to act at all.

Continue to organize and mobilize for the next one. Fear is their most powerful weapon. The fact that they must resort to fascist violence shows that we are a serious threat.

If we want to continue to be a threat, we also need to look critically at our own movement, to identify what we do that leaves us wide open to infiltration and manipulation. And we need both better preparation and better networks of support for these actions.

The Genoa Social Forum needs support. They've sent out the following call -- please answer it.

-- *Starhawk*

Genoa Social Forum -- Urgent Call to Action

Ministry of Interior and on Tuesday demonstrations in thirty Italian cities are held, with more than 250,000 people participating.

We ask your help for denouncing these threats to democracy and justice.

You could act in one or more of the following ways:

1. Write a short statement (or a brief article) in support of the right to protest against the G8, in solidarity with the Genoa Social Forum and the peaceful demonstrators. Please state clearly your affiliation. The texts will be published by the Left daily *Il Manifesto*, and by other media around the world.

2. Send formal messages of support on behalf of associations, NGOs, media organisations, Universities, etc.

3. Write/sign an international appeal for democracy, justice, respect of

human and civil rights. If many of you are interested, we can work together on a text in the next days.

Please send your articles and messages to:
redazione@ilmanifesto.it

and to the

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