

G8 summit: Brutal policing in Genoa leaves one dead and hundreds injured

Chris Marsden
23 July 2001

Saturday's raid on the headquarters of the Genoa Social Forum, the umbrella group of 700 organisations leading the demonstrations against the G8 summit was the culmination of a policing operation of unprecedented brutality that has left one protestor dead and many more seriously injured.

At the end of the weekend's events, around 300 people have been injured, including one woman said to be in a coma after being hit in the head. More than a hundred have been arrested, with some reportedly facing charges as serious as attempted murder.

At midnight on Saturday, a police van rammed the gate of a local school where the Genoa Social Forum leaders were located. Radio reports talked of the police indiscriminately beating all those inside the building. Some of the 10 people arrested, said to include activists from Spain, France and Britain, were taken away covered in blood, with one being carried on a stretcher.

Police are said to have seized computer disks, raising the possibility of further arrests being made on the basis of any personal details they may contain.

This latest attack on democratic rights will fuel the widespread anger internationally that has been provoked by the militaristic stance of "zero tolerance" adopted by the Italian paramilitary police, the *Carabinieri*.

The killing of 23-year-old Genoa resident Carlo Giuliani on Friday was the first death in over two years of anti-capitalist or anti-globalisation protests. Tensions between demonstrators and police at the summit were already running high before the death occurred, but nothing that had occurred served to justify what was in effect a summary execution.

There were tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators in Genoa, as well as a few thousand members of various anarchist and Maoist groups, who

fought with the police and engaged in sporadic arson attacks on businesses and cars. The 20,000 heavily armed riot police tasked with keeping all protests outside the so-called "red zone" surrounding the Palazzo Ducale where the G8 leaders were meeting, were equipped with teargas, water cannon, armoured cars, automatic rifles and batons. They massively outnumbered the so-called "black block" (anarchist) protesters, making a nonsense of the claim by the police that the officer who shot Giuliani had acted in self-defence.

Unfortunately for the police, Reuters photographer Dylan Martinez captured the incident on film. Around 30 protestors had attacked a heavily armoured paramilitary police van with stones and iron bars, but the officers inside were never in any physical danger. Giuliani had lifted a fire extinguisher over his head to throw at the police van, when an officer inside was photographed shooting him in the head. Giuliani was hit twice and fell to the ground. The police van then reversed over his body before driving off. Police officers prevented demonstrators from coming to Giuliani's aid, and took charge of his corpse.

Judicial sources have confirmed that legal proceedings have been launched against the officer, to determine whether he will face manslaughter charges, but they also stressed that he may be found to have acted in self-defence. The officer was supposedly being treated in a Genoa hospital for injuries he had sustained. A Genoa police spokeswoman took pains to stress that Giuliani had a police record and faced a series of pending charges, including illegal arms possession.

The killing of Giuliani was almost a grim inevitability, given the scale of state repression that met the protestors. In the run up to the summit, the right to

move freely throughout Europe was arbitrarily suspended and Genoa was transformed into a city that resembled a cross between a military base and a maximum-security prison. Ultimate responsibility for the assault on democratic rights that took place in Genoa rests with the assembled world leaders and their entourage, who met behind a four-metre-high steel fence surrounding the “red zone,” just two kilometres from where the fatal shooting took place. It was they who sanctioned the repressive actions taken against the protestors and who legitimised them with their repeated denunciation of the anti-capitalist demonstrations.

Italy’s Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi made no public statement of regret for the death, leaving that formality to President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. Berlusconi’s newspaper *Il Giornale* was less restrained, blaming “a generation of genetically-modified young people, who have been misled by what their fathers in centre-left governments wickedly sought to teach them: that Western democracy is... the cause of all the world’s suffering”.

All the G8 heads of state endorsed a joint statement immediately following Giuliani’s death, in which they condemned the “violence overflowing into anarchy” of a minority of the demonstrators. Italy’s Interior Minister Claudio Scajola issued a brief statement that Giuliani had been “hit by a shot from a gun,” which had been fired “in self-defence by one of the police.”

Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair reiterated his hardline stance against the anti-capitalist protestors. He told *BBC Radio Four* that there was a tiny minority of people “hell bent on violence” and refused to criticise the Italian police for their security operations. Prior to the summit, Blair denounced, “Small groups of anarchists and hooligans... using legitimate protest as a vehicle for causing chaos and mayhem.”

For his part, President George Bush said he was determined hardcore troublemakers would not win and stop international leaders having legitimate discussions. The G8 leaders had the right to leave Genoa with their heads held high, Bush said.

The official reaction to the death was to step up repression, in anticipation of an angry response from demonstrators. Saturday’s raid on the Genoa Social Forum was only the most high profile action taken by the police. It occurred despite Social Forum leader Vittorio Agnoletti deploring the violence by anarchist

groups as well as the use of firearms by the police to combat them.

Police chased some anarchist demonstrators who broke away from Saturday’s main march into a cafe filled with customers, lobbing tear gas into the bar. Police, who were seen viciously beating demonstrators, also admitted that they had sent in plainclothes police officers to mingle with the demonstrators. This was reported as a change in operating procedures, although there have been repeated allegations that the anarchist groups involved in the disturbances have been heavily infiltrated by police provocateurs intent on creating a pretext for repressing all forms of protest and political dissent.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact