

Growing international condemnation of police violence in Genoa

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Mounting evidence of police provocations and brutality against protesters during the G-8 summit held July 20-22 in Genoa has provoked growing international condemnation.

Eyewitness testimony and television footage are providing damning accounts of police torture, civil rights abuses and collusion between police and right-wing activists. Some 200 people were injured and 301 people were arrested or detained, including 100 foreign nationals, during protests involving up to 100,000 demonstrators outside the G-8 summit. Under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Genoa was turned into a virtual armed fortress, with sections of the city ringed by a five-metre-high steel fence and guarded by 20,000 security police.

As world leaders met in the Palazzo Ducale, TV footage from outside the proceedings captured the final moments of one unarmed demonstrator, Carlo Giuliani, who was shot dead by the *Carabinieri* (paramilitary police). There were also unconfirmed reports that a French woman was killed the same day at the Ventemiglia border crossing, as police sought to prevent her and others from entering the country.

Approximately 49 people remain in jail. Reports have surfaced of indiscriminate beatings and scores of detainees having been deprived of their right to a lawyer or to contact with family members. Among those still imprisoned is Susanna Thomas, an American student who was observing the summit as part of her research into how the current protest movement compares with the Quaker tradition of non-violent resistance.

The human rights group Amnesty International has launched its own investigation into the behaviour of the Italian police. The organisation has said that the head of its Greek section was among those assaulted by the *Carabinieri*. In a separate statement, a group of lawyers from Milan who witnessed the events in Genoa have accused the Italian authorities of riding roughshod over civil liberties. "It all looked like an attempt to substitute the current order with a police state," the lawyers declared.

Only six weeks before the summit, Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) entered government in a coalition with the neo-fascist Alleanza Nazionale (NA—National Alliance) and the separatist Lega Nord (Northern League). But as reports have mounted of police beating and urinating on detained protesters, forcing some to shout "Viva Mussolini", even those governments supportive of the right-wing coalition have felt obliged to express dissatisfaction with the actions of the police.

Pressure has mounted in Spain, Britain and the US for those governments to follow the lead of Germany and France and make official complaints over the treatment of their nationals. The Austrian government expressed "outrage" at the continued detention of 25

people belonging to the VolxTheater-Karawane theatre group.

The Berlusconi government has sought to blame the protesters for the violence. These efforts have been undermined by the fact that all but one of ninety-three people detained in a police raid on a secondary school used to house protesters and the offices of the Genoa Social Forum have been cleared of any violence and released without charges.

The accounts of police violence have intensified criticism of the government within Italy. Berlusconi's own television station, Canale 5, carried graphic scenes of the secondary school raid, showing puddles of protesters' blood on hallway floors, and newspapers have published detailed accounts of human rights abuses.

The daily *La Repubblica* carried the disclosures of one anonymous officer involved in the school raid. According to his account, the police lined protesters "up against the wall". Continuing the account, *La Repubblica* writes: "They urinated on one person. They beat people up if they didn't sing Facetta Nera [a fascist song]. One girl was vomiting blood, but the chief of the squad just looked on. They threatened to rape girls with their batons." The officer further said that right-wing thugs within the police had been assured they could brutalise detained protesters with impunity.

Another police raid, on the offices of the independent media group Indymedia, has also become a focus of allegations of civil rights abuses. The late night raid, which involved 13 police commanders and 70 officers, saw police vehicles ram the gates of the school that housed the media centre, where protesters were sleeping. In the ensuing attack, 90 people were arrested and at least 66 people injured.

Journalists hid under desks as police stormed through the building, seizing computers and documents.

Eyewitness accounts report that 30 ambulances were required to treat the battered protesters, many of whom had to be carried out of the building. Dr. Roberto Papparo, head of the emergency department at Ospedale San Martino, Genoa's biggest hospital, which treated more than 50 of those injured in the raid, said, "If these people weren't brought to the hospital, there is no doubt that some of them wouldn't be alive."

The brutality continued at the Bolzaneto detention centre, a former gymnasium specially prepared for the interrogation of alleged "ringleaders". Protesters transferred from the school allege they were subjected to hours of physical and psychological torture. Prisoners, including those with broken limbs, were spread-eagled against a wall while they were verbally abused and beaten.

The newspaper *La Stampa* has called for judicial authorities to get to the bottom of eyewitness accounts that accuse the police of violating "the rules of a democratic state".

Francisco Martone, a Green Party senator, said that fascists had infiltrated the police, whilst Massimo D'Alema, head of the Democratic Left (the reformed Italian Communist Party), called for the resignation of Interior Minister Claudio Scajola, who is considered to be Berlusconi's right-hand man. Scajola and Gianni De Gennaro, Italy's national police chief, have been at each other's throats, De Gennaro insisting that his force acted in accordance with the minister's own instructions, whilst Scajola denies any responsibility.

Berlusconi's suggestion that future summits planned for Italy be moved elsewhere has provoked opposition from those within the Italian establishment who see any such move as a blow to the country's efforts to play a leading role on the world stage. Romano Prodi, president of the European Union Commission, warned the prime minister that such a decision would be "a blow, a real defeat" for his government.

Berlusconi has acquiesced to demands for a series of limited judicial inquiries into the violence, in exchange for the opposition's pledge to drop its call for Scajola's resignation. In what was described as an "ashen faced" and "visibly shaken" address to the Senate, the prime minister acknowledged the growing international outrage and promised, "If there were abuses, excesses and violence ... there will be no cover-up for those who have violated the law."

The convening of six judicial inquiries enabled Scajola to survive a no-confidence motion presented August 1 by the opposition, by 180 votes to 106 with 1 abstention. Almost immediately, Scajola ordered the removal of three top law enforcement officials: Ansoino Andreassi, the deputy chief of police in charge of the G-8, Arnaldo La Barbera, head of the anti-terrorism department, and Francesco Colucci, the police superintendent of Genoa. A statement said they were being moved to "other posts", but did not specify where.

Later, in a televised statement, Berlusconi urged the opposition to support his government in a "common front against terror".

The inquiries have a strictly limited remit. It has already been stated that it will not be possible to identify many of the police officers involved.

These largely token measures have done little to quell public anger at the violent actions of the police. They are clearly aimed at political damage control, acknowledging at most individual "excesses" while clearing the government itself of any responsibility.

In the first of the parliamentary investigations, National Police Chief De Gennaro admitted there might have been some "excesses in using force", but he presented these as the result of individual errors rather than any conscious plan.

However, the evidence indicates that such a plan was indeed involved, and leading members of Berlusconi's government are directly implicated.

Berlusconi and Fini, the deputy prime minister and neo-fascist NA leader, both visited Genoa in the run-up to the summit. Fini boasted that he had personally finalised the security plans, even though his office has no responsibility for policing. In the Senate, opposition members openly charged Fini—whose NA has its origins in the fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI)—with encouraging his followers in the police and security forces to "crack heads".

Their charges were backed up by an article in the August 6 issue of the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. Under the headline "Viva Pinochet", the magazine alleged: "On the very Saturday afternoon when the street battles raged in Genoa, a small group of politicians sat in Forte San Giuliano, the headquarters of the *Carabinieri*: parliamentarians of Alleanza Nazionale led by their chairman, Fini."

The close connections between the fascists and the security apparatus date back to the 1960s, when they collaborated in a terror campaign aimed at destabilising the Italian state and paving the way for a coup. The "strategy of tension" included using agents provocateurs and detonating bombs, causing significant fatalities, which were blamed on the left.

Many charge that these methods are now being revived. In the weeks prior to the summit, "anti-globalisation extremists" were blamed for bombings in Milan, Bologna, Treviso and Genoa. Berlusconi subsequently claimed to have received death threats.

Attention has particularly focused on the role during the protests of the "Black Bloc", an ad hoc group of anarchists. It is generally believed, with good reason, that the Black Bloc were heavily infiltrated by the state, and essentially functioned under the direction of the police and security forces to provide a pretext for the attack on otherwise peaceful demonstrators. "The Black Blocs were an instrument of the police, it was a clear strategy," Luca Casarini, one of the leaders of the Tute Bianche (White Overalls) group, told the press.

Some 35 of Italy's most talented film directors, led by veteran director Francesco Maselli, were in Genoa to document the protests. Several reported witnessing a close working relationship between police and numerous Black Bloc members. The latter were seen moving freely in and out of police stations. David Ferrio, one of the directors in the city to film the events, recorded the image of what at first appeared to be a protester, handkerchief over his mouth, moving towards police as if to attack. Later Ferrio videoed the same individual, now wearing a police badge, giving directions to a couple on a moped.

Allegations are also emerging that the Black Bloc were involved in helping set up the police raid on the school complex that served as headquarters for the Genoa Social Forum. The *Wall Street Journal* of August 9 cited the account of Marta Vincenzi, governor of the Genoa province. In the article Ms. Vincenzi alleged that 200 to 300 Black Bloc militants "kicked non-violent demonstrators out of a gym next to the Martin Luther King High School on the evening of July 19". This forced some of the demonstrators to move into the Genoa Social Forum complex, where they were later attacked in the police sweep of the facility.

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