

State violence at 2001 G8 summit in Genoa goes unpunished

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Last week the judgement was handed down in Genoa in the Bolzaneto trial. The trial is one of four examining the orgy of brutality employed by Italian security forces during the G8 summit held in Genoa in 2001. The Bolzaneto judgement amounts to a virtual acquittal for the state, although the trial made clear that the Italian police had viciously abused and tortured G8 protesters seven years ago.

On trial were 45 police officers and guards who were on active duty at the prison of Bolzaneto during the Genoa conference. They were accused of a range of offences, including abuse of office, assault, intimidation and giving false information. The central police authority maintained it was not possible to definitely identify many of the officers involved or their precise whereabouts during the police action. As a result only high-level personnel were subject to prosecution.

Due to "lack of evidence," 30 of the total of 45 accused were acquitted and the remaining judgements are so mild that none of those convicted is likely to go to prison.

Those convicted have declared their intention to appeal the court decision. Their aim is to delay any final judgement long enough for the latest amnesty law passed by the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi to become effective. From next January the so-called "Lex Berlusconi" rules that all offences committed before 2002, which involve possible sentences of up to three years in prison, are debarred by statute of limitation. In addition the court was not able to judge on the charge of torture by police officers because Italy is not a signatory to the anti-torture convention of the United Nations.

Nobody has seriously questioned the fact that on the nights of July 21 and 22, 2001 gross abuses of basic democratic rights took place in the barracks of Bolzaneto. In fact, throughout the G8 summit the Italian security forces acted in a manner which is more usually associated with military dictatorships.

During the course of the summit protesters who had been arrested by police and transported to the Bolzaneto barracks were subjected to a reign of violence. Detainees suffered fractured ribs, concussion, head injuries and damage to their testicles. They were tormented with running the gauntlet between rows of guards swinging clubs, sleep withdrawal and torture with burning cigarettes. They were forced to strip naked, remain standing for up to 18 hours and denied access to toilets. Detainees were also forced to call out "Viva Mussolini," sing fascist songs and kneel down before portraits of the "Il Duce" by armed guards.

The maximum penalty imposed in Genoa was given to Antonio Biagio Gugliotta, who was the police inspector of Genoa at that time. Gugliotta was sentenced to five years detention, because, among other things, he had introduced the so-called "swan position" to the Bolzaneto prison, in which prisoners were forced to stand with spread legs and raised arms before a wall for hours at a time. Gugliotta's deputy, Alessandro Perugini, was sentenced to two years and four months.

Many of the demonstrators transported to the barracks were injured. They were then either denied any sort of medical attention or were

subjected to further abuse by sadistic army doctors. The prison doctor Giacomo Toccafondi was convicted to one year and two months. A number of witnesses described him as a brutal sadist in military uniform. Toccafondi had insisted on sewing up the open wounds of young people without giving any anaesthetic. He also forced girls and women to undress before him before he sexually abused them.

The co-plaintiffs at the trial were mainly victims of the police action or their relatives. Around half of them had travelled to the trial from abroad. While the judges awarded them damages of between €2,500 to as high as €15,000 (in only a few cases), most expressed their great disappointment over the judgements, which remained far below the sentences called for by prosecuting attorneys.

July 20-22, 2001, a quarter million demonstrators from across the globe carried out largely peaceful protests against the G8 summit held in the north Italian port of Genoa. The situation at the summit escalated when the police, Carabinieri and notorious paramilitary DIGOS units intervened with enormous brutality against the demonstrators. Police used clubs and teargas against protesters in scenes that increasingly resembled those of civil war.

At the end of the police action one young protester, Carlo Giuliani, 23, had been shot dead by police. Over 500 had been injured and over 300 arrested, including nearly 100 demonstrators from abroad. Damage to property was estimated to total €40 million.

The pretext for the police violence was the activity of the dubious so-called "black bloc," which has since been proven to have been heavily infiltrated by police provocateurs and fascists. Photographs show figures garbed in black in discussion with policemen. These same individuals then go on to throw stones at shop windows and police, while setting cars on fire. A number of witnesses reported on the close cooperation between the police and the "black bloc."

In October 2002, Italian state lawyers confirmed that the security concept for the G8 summit had been deliberately drawn up by the state authorities to include the use of plainclothes police rabble-rousers and members of fascist groups. Disguised as violent anarchists, their job was to discredit peaceful demonstrators and create a pretext for the state to intervene with excessive force. The police were given a free hand by the highest authorities for three days of violence with the aim of making an example of the globalisation protesters.

The Bolzaneto prison was part of this strategy. It functioned as a provisional transit prison set up in a section of the Carabinieri barracks at Bolzaneto. All arrested demonstrators were taken there to check their identification documents and take their fingerprints. A nearby building was converted for the period of the summit to serve as a final detention centre.

Those arrested were denied the right to an attorney and contact with their family. After three days they were either transferred to another prison or released, if a judge found no basis for their detention. Nearly all of the arrested globalisation protesters from abroad were immediately

deported and received a ban on re-entry for five years.

The prisoners came from Italy, Germany, France, England, Spain, Austria, the US and a number of other countries. They included journalists, students, artists and representatives of organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Indymedia. Twenty-five members of the Austrian theatre group VolxTheater remained in detention for three weeks.

For 20-year-old Luca Arrigoni, Genoa was his first big demonstration. Together with a friend he attended the demonstration rally at the Piazzale Kennedy where the pair were encircled by police, arrested and taken to Bolzaneto. Luca succeeded in quickly phoning his mother by mobile: "I told her I was okay and that I had been arrested, although I had not done anything."

His mother came immediately to Genoa and found out that her son had been taken to Bolzaneto. As she arrived at the barracks at nighttime two policemen intercepted her. She told the newspaper *Il Manifesto*, that the police assured her everything was okay and that a van was in the course of delivering blankets for the detainees and she should go home and wait calmly. She told the newspaper that she was satisfied by the explanation, and told herself that, after all, one did not live in a country like Chile.

Inside the barracks police officers began an orgy of violence that they themselves described as their "Chilean night." Police savagely herded together the young detainees and forced them to shout: "One, two three ... long live Pinochet"—a reference to the Chilean dictator. Anyone who refused was beaten. Luca Arrigoni was stomped on his back so violently that he required operations three years later. He still suffers today from the psychological trauma of his experiences in the prison.

In July 2001 the Italian daily paper *La Repubblica* published a report by an anonymous police officer on duty in Bolzaneto at the time. His statement confirmed the testimony of prisoners regarding the excessive acts of violence. "Unfortunately everything is true. And it is even worse," he is quoted telling the paper. One week before the G8 summit about 100 members of the mobile operations unit GOM [special-purpose police force used against organized crime] were drafted to Bolzaneto and given an assurance by the highest authorities that they would not be held accountable for their actions. According to the article in *La Repubblica*, the police officer tried to speak to his colleagues about the excesses of violence in the prison but was met with the answer: "Do not be so afraid, we are all covered."

He reported that new detainees were forced to stand before a wall. Their heads were then slammed against the wall. Police officers urinated on some of the detainees and others were beaten for refusing to sing fascist songs. One girl vomited blood while police stood on and watched. Young female prisoners were threatened by police with rape.

The events at the Bolzaneto prison were not unique. A further trial is being held to investigate events that took place at the Diaz school, where some of the worst forms of violence took place.

The Diaz school was the place of residence for the Genoa Social Forum, which had coordinated the demonstrations. After midnight the school was raided by 150 heavily armed and disguised police officers, who proceeded to systematically assault the hundreds of sleeping youth. They were beaten for hours by clubs, with many later requiring hospital treatment. The group's computers were destroyed, hard disks confiscated and many arrests were made. The actions of the police at the school have long since been confirmed by testimonies from a number of sources.

The police justified the assault on the school with the discovery of an alleged cache of weapons, which they claimed indicated the work of "violent extremists" in the school. In fact, the "cache" turned out to be a collection of hammers, nails and other tools that originated from a tool chest kept at the school and had been broken open by police. Two petrol bombs found at the school proved to have been the same ones presented to the press by police earlier in the day—in other words, they were police

plants.

Journalists and technicians working at the nearby Indymedia information centre were also attacked in their sleep and had their computers destroyed.

Mark Covell, a journalist for the BBC and Indymedia, was on his way back to the building when he was stopped and attacked by policemen. Although he showed him his press credentials and sought to explain in Italian that he was a journalist, he was assaulted and beaten by five policemen. They beat him with their clubs, forcing him to the ground where they proceeded to kick him until he lost consciousness.

In the hospital doctors identified several fractured ribs, an injury to his left lung, a backbone injury, a fracture of his left hand and the loss of 12 teeth.

In 2005, one year after the start of the Bolzaneto trial, the government of Romano Prodi took power. One of the most important "left" participants in his government was the organisation Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista). This so-called "left-centre" government and Communist Refoundation did nothing to facilitate the prosecution of those responsible for the violence in Genoa and thereby prevent any repetition of such police abuses in the future.

Immediately after the events of 2001, Communist Refoundation alongside several social forums, the Greens and a number of civil liberty groups called for the setting up of an international independent commission of inquiry. It was to have had powers to interview witnesses across Europe and enable a precise reconstruction of what took place. Immediately after taking power Rifondazione dropped the demand for such an inquiry. Under the Prodi government, Italy failed as well to join the anti-torture convention of the UN.

At the same time the notorious national head of police, Gianni de Gennaro, was allowed to remain in office until the end of 2007. After his replacement he was not forced to appear in court. Instead he was appointed special commissioner for the garbage crisis in Naples. He used this latter post to put pressure on the Prodi government and following the recent change of power earlier this year was appointed coordinator of the Italian secret services by the new prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi.

It is this cowardly servility on the part of the so-called Italian "left" that has strengthened and encouraged the most right-wing elements in the government. Having received virtual absolution for the actions of its state forces, the Italian government has once again been assigned responsibility for the G8 summit due to be held in 2009, scheduled to take place on the small island and luxury resort of La Maddalena, north of Sardinia.



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