

Italy: Judgement in G8 police raid trial

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24 November 2008

The second trial dealing with the outbreaks of severe police violence at the G8 summit of 2001 has ended, once again with acquittals and mild judgements for those involved.

On November 13—and after three years of deliberations—judgement was finally delivered at the trial called to deal with the police raid on the Armando Diaz School. In July 2001 in the course of the G8 summit in Genoa, 150 police charged the school, surprised sleeping globalisation protesters and clubbed over 60 of them so brutally they had to be treated in hospital.

More than half of the 29 accused have now been acquitted, including all the high-ranking officers originally charged. Those behind the violence in 2001, many of whom occupy high government posts today, were able to leave the court as free men.

The remaining 13 accused—policemen and squad leaders, who were directly involved in the raid, as well as two policemen, who had falsified evidence—were given prison sentences of between one month and four years. None of them will have to serve out their sentence. Most of the judgements have been “suspended on probation,” and any remaining sentences will be rendered invalid as soon as the new amnesty law of the Berlusconi government comes into force in January 2009. The public prosecutor’s office had demanded a total of 108 years detention for the 28 accused.

The victims and their relatives who stood as co-plaintiffs, together with many observers of the trial, cried out “shame, shame,” as the judgements were announced. Many of the plaintiffs declared their intention to appeal the judgements to the European Court of Justice.

The raid at the Diaz school was one particularly brutal incident in a series of clashes between police and protesters at the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa hosted by Silvio Berlusconi shortly after he had taken office. A quarter of a million people had travelled to the north Italian port in order to protest against the policies of the assembled heads of state.

Clashes at the fringe of the three days of protests resembled civil war following the intervention of a dubious “black bloc,” which invaded the demonstration, shattered shop windows, set fire to cars indiscriminately, and left behind a trail of destruction. Those responsible for the violence were evidently operating in collusion with state forces, which did little to intervene and remained remarkably passive. The only real intervention came when police moved against peaceful demonstrators in a military-style deployment involving the use of batons, tear gas, and water cannons. The balance sheet of casualties: one young person dead, 500 injured, and over 300 arrests.

The events at that time have been meticulously reconstructed based on numerous eyewitness reports, photographs and evidence. (See video: “Die blutigen Tage von Genua” (The bloody days of Genoa))

The circumstances surrounding the police raid at the Diaz school are widely acknowledged. The police conducted an unprovoked assault against a group of completely defenceless protesters. The subsequent

orgy of violence was the culmination of a campaign by state forces in Genoa. Attempts by the police to justify their intervention have since been completely discredited. Police initially claimed that they had found two petrol bombs at the school, a discovery which they claimed proved the violent intentions of its residents. In fact, it later emerged that the two bombs had been planted by two police provocateurs prior to their “discovery.”

The police raided two adjoining school buildings, the Pertini and the Pascoli Schools, which were part of the Armando Diaz complex and had been placed at the disposal of globalisation protesters by the city administration. Media offices and a medical centre were located at the Pascoli School, while the Pertini School housed around 100 demonstrators on the final evening of the days of protest.

Virtually all of the group were already in their sleeping bags when 150 police with their faces covered and wearing helmets charged into the building. The police immediately began beating and clubbing everyone in the building. One witness, an older man, later told the court: “When I heard the noise I thought it must be the so-called “black bloc.” It was in fact our state police.” The 60-year-old suffered a broken leg and arm and 10 broken ribs. Sixty-one people were injured, many of them severely; 93 were arrested, but all later released because they had committed no offence.

The Pascoli School was also raided, with police smashing computers and removing the hard drives of lawyers who had previously collected the statements of demonstrators. Reporters and medics were herded together and held captive. When they were finally able to free themselves they were able to inspect the destruction in the adjoining building. Nobody could be found in the Pertini School—only pools of blood and many traces of violence.

A Genoa doctor told the court he had seen police transport the injured away on stretchers. When he was finally able to enter the school, it was empty. “Naturally I am not affected by the sight of blood,” the doctor said. “However the carpet of blood-soaked items of everyday life—sleeping bags, toothbrushes, underwear, paper, etc.—nevertheless left me shocked.”

A nurse, who was one of the first to enter the Pertini building after the raid, confirmed his report: “There was blood everywhere, so much blood. I immediately noticed a smell of blood mixed with excrement and urine,” she said. The nurse, who voluntarily took part in the Social Forum, reported that in Genoa the medics had expected they “would mainly have to deal with heat-related problems.... However, events took a completely different turn. The medical personnel had to deal with a large number of injuries: above all, injuries to the lower arms and broken fingers, injuries incurred by victims attempting to protect themselves from violent blows.”

There are hundreds of eyewitness reports to be found on the Internet. One very credible statement to the court was made by a police officer. Michelangelo Fournier was head of a rapid deployment

commando unit in the school at the time head, and later a co-defendant in the trial. Fournier described the behaviour of the state forces as a “raid run amok,” which left in its wake a terrifying “massacre.” Fournier was sentenced to two years detention.

Police in front of the school complex attacked Mark Covell, a journalist who works for the BBC and Indymedia. Although he had shown them his press credentials, Covell was struck by five policemen, thrown to the ground and kicked until he lost consciousness. He suffered several fractured ribs, an injury to his left lung, an injury to his spine, a fracture of his left hand, and the loss of 12 teeth.

The judgements handed down in connection with the events in Genoa in July 2001 have nothing in common with normal jurisprudence. Instead they bear the marks of police-state justice. The trial against the policeman who had shot 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani on July 20, 2001 was abandoned in 2003. One year ago, a trial against 24 juvenile demonstrators ended with long prison terms (up to 11 years of detention).

Another trial dealing with the excesses in the Bolzaneto police barracks ended in July 2008 with acquittals and very mild punishments for the responsible officials.

Lessons of the Genoa trial

The trials amount to a blank cheque for state violence and fundamental questions still remain unanswered. Who was actually responsible for the excesses of violence? And what conclusions should be drawn today?

Silvio Berlusconi, Italy’s current head of state is the same man who functioned as the head of government in 2001. Today he is confronted with a growing protest movement of school pupils and students, who have won the support of significant layers of workers. Next year, the prime minister of Italy is once again due to host a G8 summit.

With regard to the demonstrating pupils and students, Berlusconi declared a few days ago that he would give “exact instructions to the Interior Minister on how he should intervene with the security forces to ensure that such things do not happen again.” Another influential statesman, Christian Democrat Francesco Cossiga, was even clearer in addressing the issue.

Cossiga is a lifetime senator and former interior minister, prime minister and president. In an interview with the right-wing *Quotidiano Nazionale*, he commented on Berlusconi’s statement as follows: “I only regret that no action followed his words.” Cossiga advised the government to do what he did when he was interior minister: “Withdraw the police from the streets and universities, infiltrate the movement with agent provocateurs, who are prepared to go to any extreme and give the demonstrators free rein for about 10 days to smash up shop windows, set cars on fire and devastate the city.”

By so doing, he advised, one can win public sympathy and then proceed “without compassion” against the demonstrators. One must beat them badly, including the young teachers, because they encouraged the children to demonstrate in the first place, and that is “criminal.” Such a plan does not involve a return to fascism in Italy, according to Cossiga, but is “the democratic way: One has to stamp

out the fire before it spreads.”

When one considers the content of Cossiga’s statement in light of the events at the G8 summit in 2001, it is clear that the strategy he put forward in his latest interview was precisely that pursued by the state forces in Genoa.

At the same time, none of the political parties in Italy—including the nominal opposition of Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista, PRC) or the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) led by Walter Veltroni—is warning and preparing young people and workers for such a violent response by the state.

Shortly before the start of the Genoa trials of 2005, the centre-left government of Romano Prodi took power—a coalition of parties that included Communist Refoundation. Prodi’s government, however, did nothing to clarify what took place in 2001 and to thereby prevent any repetition of such state violence in the future.

The national head of police in 2001, Gianni di Gennaro, remained in his post until the end of 2007, when he took over as Berlusconi’s commissioner for garbage in Naples. Di Gennaro never appeared before a court; under the Prodi government, Italy even refused to join the anti-torture convention of the UN.

In 2001, Communist Refoundation demanded an independent commission of inquiry together with the Social Forum, the Greens and human rights groups. The role of such a commission was to call for witnesses from across Europe and organise a thorough investigation into the events in Genoa. As soon as Communist Refoundation entered the government, and was in a position to put the project into practice, it dropped the demand for a commission.

Such cowardly retreats by so-called lefts have played a major role in emboldening the most right-wing elements in the Italian state and government. They underline the urgency of founding a new workers party in Italy that functions independently of all the established political parties.



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