

Repression of Italian student protests: The specter of a police-state

Marc Wells

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Protests against education “reform” and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s government last Tuesday in Rome were met with brutal force by Italian police and paramilitary units.

The protest was part of broad opposition that has arisen to the right-wing policies of the Berlusconi government, which the same day managed to survive, by a small margin, a vote of confidence in Italy’s parliament. The latter result surprised and frustrated those who had taken to the streets to celebrate the unpopular government’s demise.

Rome became the scene Tuesday of tension, anger and violent confrontations. A striking aspect of the events was the overwhelming use of force against youth (see videos below). This was not the result of the actions of a few “bad apples” among the police, but the product of policies that have characterized the last two decades, as Italy has entered an intense stage of socio-economic crisis.

In a few hours, 100 people were hurt and 41 held, 23 of whom were arrested. The prosecutor’s office has scheduled against those detained what is known as a “processo per direttissima”—an extraordinary criminal trial procedure used in case of arrest for a flagrant crime or confession, which consists of an accelerated procedure. Certain preliminary stages (such as aspects of investigation) are skipped over, justified by what is considered powerful evidence. Often, a judge decides upon a sentence and penalty almost immediately.

The use of this speeded-up type of criminal procedure against protesters is an attack on democratic rights and a step toward making political opposition illegal.

All but one of those arrested in Rome were released two days later under various probationary conditions. Mario Miliucci remains under house arrest. According to the defense, he was charged with having spray-

painted a bank window and carrying two large rocks, an accusation he denies.

Significantly, the reaction from the political establishment points toward more and more repressive methods. Rome’s mayor, neo-fascist Gianni Alemanno, expressed explicit contempt for the “timid” court’s handling of the arrests, stating: “I am protesting on behalf of the city of Rome against this decision, there is a profound sense of injustice because what happened required another type of firmness.”

Another extreme right-wing figure, Gianfranco Fini, Berlusconi’s new political “rival,” declared the protests on Tuesday to be “criminal.”

Maurizio Sacconi, Minister of Labor and Social Policies and a member of Berlusconi’s party, was even blunter: “There is a ‘red’ [left-wing] thread that leads from threatening acts to more extreme forms that Italy has already known.” The target for political persecution will be the vast majority of the population, which is shifting to the left, opposing the policies of the government.

A confirmation that the police tactics are part of a well-orchestrated policy came from Interior Minister Roberto Maroni, of the racist Lega Nord (Northern League). He expressed “appreciation for the balance and the attentive handling shown [by the authorities] at every stage of the demonstration.”

The role of the so-called Italian “left” is worth considering.

The center-left Democratic Party (PD) is essentially in agreement with the call for further repressive measures. Pier Luigi Bersani, PD secretary, complained that “It’s intolerable and incredible that hooligans, violent elements and Black Bloc [anarchist elements] found a place within the demonstration.” He then expressed “solidarity with the police who were

assaulted and injured.”

A further clarification of the position of the official “left” was provided by Nichi Vendola, president of the Apulia region and leader of *Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà* (Left, Ecology and Freedom Party—SEL). On the day police forces were brutally beating protesters, he declared that “there’s no doubt the center-right no longer exists. Today there’s a miniature of it and part of it runs toward the center pole.”

This is a self-serving lie in anticipation of new elections. Contrary to this position, the entire political establishment, including Vendola’s own group and his administration in Apulia, is moving to the right in defense of capitalist relations.

As one looks further to the so-called “radical left”, the political bankruptcy is equally pronounced. Paolo Ferrero, secretary of the nearly defunct Rifondazione Comunista, crowns himself as the leader of a new “left that sets as [its] main objective the removal of Berlusconi and Berlusconism.” In other words, for this former minister in the bourgeois Prodi government, the problems of Italy would have been solved if the Italian parliament had passed a no-confidence motion.

Social reaction comes in all shapes and forms. FIOM, the metal workers union, which recently posed as the defender of FIAT workers (see: “Unprecedented attacks on Fiat workers”), pronounced its judgment on the episode in Rome. Its general secretary Maurizio Landini complained that “violent episodes are in any case unacceptable.” For him, such conflicts “must be condemned.”

The day after the clashes in Rome, the Italian Senate approved a security decree that provides mayors with unprecedented executive powers, such as the implementation of arrests and judicial procedures carried out against students. The bill passed by an overwhelming majority.

Students and workers must draw serious lessons from these experiences. The logical evolution of the economic crisis that engulfs Italy, as well as the rest of the world, will see an intensification of the class conflict. On one side, the bourgeoisie will resort to extreme and repressive measures to suffocate political threats to its class interests. On the other, the working class will inevitably resist and oppose the attacks.

But a break from the agents and representatives of the bourgeoisie, whether right or “left,” becomes a

prerequisite for taking the struggle forward. Mass mobilizations can succeed only if based upon a genuine proletarian, socialist perspective that recognizes the need to unite workers and students under attack in every other country, to overthrow not only Berlusconi, but the entire Italian political establishment. The establishment of a workers’ government must be the objective of such mobilization.

YouTube videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pu42KFs8WZw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21GZTFRLvyk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2hx5oDXnCY>

Corriere della Sera videos:

<http://video.corriere.it/scontri-roma/03b95d2e-08ff-11e0-a831-00144f02aabc>



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