Italian police attack children protesting Gaza genocide

Allison Smith
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Last Friday, students in Pisa, Italy protesting the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza were violently attacked with truncheons and kettled into a narrow lane by riot police, sparking widespread public outrage.

The children included many from Russoli high school near where the demonstration took place. Teachers who cared for the injured students released a statement:

"We are teachers at the Liceo artistico Russoli high school in Pisa, and today we were bewildered by what happened in Via San Frediano, in front of our school. Students, mostly minors, were truncheoned for no reason because the procession, calling for a ceasefire in Palestine, which was absolutely peaceful, who knows why, was not supposed to parade in Piazza Cavalieri. Officers in riot gear had closed off the street and were waiting for the youths with shields and batons, while on the opposite side, the police forces closed off the street by Piazza Dante. On Via Tavoleria, [they deployed] another team with shields and batons."

According to the teachers who witnessed the violent attack in front of the school, the police made several charges against the students while they held their hands raised. The teachers reported "scenes of unprecedented violence," as many of the youth trembled, were traumatized, with some reporting injuries like a broken finger and pain in their shoulder or back from batons.

The educators were appalled and have demanded that "someone must be held accountable for the degree of unprecedented and unjustifiable violence to which one hundred to two hundred students who took to the streets peacefully were subjected."

Questions were raised by the teachers: Why was it decided to kettle the youth and then beat them up? Who decided on this barbaric deployment of forces, never seen since the decades of fascism?

The same day, Italian police in full riot gear violently prevented pro-Palestinian protesters from making their way to the US Consulate in Florence, where they intended to demand that the US stop backing the Israeli genocide. Several protesters sustained head injuries from police truncheons.

A similar scene played out in Catania, where heavily armed police forcefully prevented the students from continuing their peaceful protest beyond University Square.

The day after the beatings in Pisa and excessive use of force in other parts of Italy, demonstrators overflowed the main piazzas all over the country.

In Pisa, an estimated 5,000 demonstrated against police violence and demanded that the police officers and the state be held accountable for their actions against innocent children and protesters exercising their basic democratic rights.

In Rome, a local student network galvanized the support of dozens of students and youth for a sit-in at the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior, calling for the resignation of Matteo Piantedosi, Minister of the Interior, whom they blame for a policy of anti-democratic responses to peaceful protests.

In Naples, on February 13, police charged protesters at a rally in support of the Palestinians, injuring five. The protest was held in front of the local headquarters of RAI, the Italian state broadcaster, in response to a RAI statement of solidarity with the Israeli people on the subject of the massacres of October 7, 2023.

Piantedosi, who is politically close to the fascist Lega party, said the matter of excessive police force "would be investigated" but threatened that [police response] is up to "the cooperation of the demonstrators themselves"—insinuating it was the children who provoked the police to beat them. He continued that he hopes the investigation "won't be prejudicially

oriented to discredit the action of the government or the police forces because, out of "13,000 demonstrations, there was a prevalence of injuries among the police compared to the demonstrators."

This turns reality on its head. It also begs the question: what is so rotten in a society that provokes 13,000 demonstrations? And what are the social forces driving state violence? None of these questions can be separated from those world events—imperialist wars, genocide, climate change, a crippling pandemic—that are producing resentment and disgust among the majority of the population.

In January, Piantedosi ordered police to ban pro-Palestinian groups from rallying on Holocaust Remembrance Day in Milan and Rome. The order was backed by the mayors of both cities, who portray themselves as "progressives."

It should be remembered that Piantedosi cynically blamed the victims of the refugee boat tragedy in Crotone, Italy, where 74 people drowned, saying that desperation did not justify "putting your own children in danger."

Matteo Salvini, leader of the Lega party and current Minister of Infrastructure and Transport in the fascist government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, reacted to the demands for justice by unequivocally supporting the police, saying, "Hands off the police! It is right to make analyses to see if they did what they had to do… or if someone went too far, but they are women and men, not robots, and they should not be drawn into a political row."

State agencies are being placed above the law so that they can do what they have to do, that is repress the democratic rights of a population that is increasingly opposed to the policies of imperialist governments.

Elly Schlein, leader of the center-left Democratic Party—who just months ago spoke unreservedly in support of Israel and Ukraine—tried in vain to differentiate herself and her party from the far right and fascists by calling the unprovoked police attack 'unacceptable" and demanding the police investigate themselves!

Police have heavily cracked down on demonstrators to silence and intimidate anyone who is against the Gaza genocide. By so doing, the state is rehearsing its response to growing discontent in the working class due to unprecedented levels of social inequality.

predictions in The November 2022 WSWS are vindicated: "Barely in office, the Meloni government also made its first preparations for the violent repression of political and social resistance. By decree, it created a new criminal offense. Anyone who organises or participates in an 'assembly' of more than fifty people by 'invading the space of other people's public and private properties or buildings' can be punished with imprisonment of between three and six years and a fine of up to 10,000 euros if the event 'may result in a threat to public order, security or health.'"

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