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Italy: We Partisans

Resisting the Wave of Fascism, Spring 2018

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dous momentum towards fascist solutions while the institutional forces of the right and left mutually collude to block the emergence of alternative methods of self-organization and autonomy.

Contents

Anti-Fascism in Italy from World War II to Today	7
Immigration in Italy	12
Timeline: Events during the 2018 Election Campaign . . .	13
Account: Piacenza	15
Account: When in Rome...	17
“Siamo Tutti Antifascisti”	19
Account: A Demonstration in Torpignattara, Rome	20
After Macerata, No Turning Back	21
Postscript: Has the Global Fascist Wave Crested?	24

As ecological catastrophes increase in frequency and the maneuvers of the wealthy plunge billions deeper into poverty and alienation, new revolts are bound to break out. These revolts will adopt the means and discourses available to them. Millions of people do not often flood the streets in the service of abstract ideals, but they will gladly appropriate discourses as a tool for understanding their suffering and the struggles they find themselves in. Anti-authoritarians need to participate in the movements to come to connect with the increasingly diverse constellations of actors in these movements, to learn from them and to offer our unique methods and convictions in the context of the movements: not just so that others can employ them, but so that we can test them together. As the world continues to fracture, more and more people will be compelled to join the fray. We should be right there with them, offering different solutions, rather than criticizing them from afar or abstaining from involvement because these movements have not yet discovered our brand of politics.

To give a single example—if in United States, the statist left is able to resuscitate itself in the movement against school shootings, the countervailing forces in the far right will be perfectly positioned to overcome their temporary disorganization by addressing everyone who sees the contradiction in appealing to the arms of the state to defend us against gun violence. We have to be present in these movements, offering a point of departure for a more thoroughgoing critique and more radical solutions.

The interventions of the coming period will have to accomplish many things. Above all, they must reveal the complicity of the far right with the powerful architects of the present order, on the one hand, and on the other, the fundamental failure of the left to address the complex problems of the world rather than reducing them to mere recruitment opportunities. If we are unable to accomplish those tasks, we may find ourselves in the same situation that anarchists and militant anti-fascists face in many former Soviet bloc countries, where the aftermath of the USSR has created a tremen-

in recruitment go far beyond simple discourse and propaganda. Nobody knows what to do next, but comrades are organizing in every area of the country.

Postscript: Has the Global Fascist Wave Crested?

In the United States, a large-scale militant resistance to Donald Trump's presidential campaign and electoral victory was followed by a widely-supported movement to oppose his most dedicated followers on the far right. After a year of organizing, clashes, and doxxing, the alt-right is now in shambles, consolidating itself into a few organizations and a smattering of spree shootings and terrorist attacks. These forces will continue to be a problem for many years, as they have carried out a large-scale and protracted intervention in rural white enclaves for decades uncontested, but it may be the case that their current moment in the spotlight as a massive street-ready movement has reached its end.

Similarly, after success in the Greek elections of 2012, Golden Dawn members and ranking officers overextended themselves by murdering anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas. This killing simultaneously initiated a wave of anarchist-initiated riots and attacks and bogged down their party in a criminal investigation. For the Greeks, this was their "Charlottesville moment."

In Brazil, the right-wing reaction succeeded in overthrowing the left-wing Workers Party, but the resulting conflicts have brought millions into the streets. The tyrannical regime of Turkish PM Tayyip Erdogan has already helped to spark two insurrections in five years, in both Istanbul and then in Kurdistan. More and more, the far right is coming to be associated with the rich and powerful, just as the left has become associated with corruption, neoliberalism, and the failures of social democracy.

In February and March, during the run-up to the elections, Italy experienced a period of intense conflict between fascists and anti-fascists analogous to the period in the United States that culminated with the struggle in Charlottesville in August 2017. In hopes of learning from how these conflicts are playing out in different parts of the world, we reached out to our comrades in Italy to learn about the history of fascism on the Italian peninsula, the current state of the autonomous movements resisting it, and the possibilities and obstacles ahead.

Across the world, reactionary movements have emerged promoting nationalist and racist values. The global rebellions of 2011–2014 produced formidable enemies, as many hastened to defend the inequalities and indignities that autonomous struggles were fighting to abolish.

Even today, at the nadir of the reaction, these struggles have only continued to gain momentum. Last year, anti-fascist struggles exploded across the United States in the wake of Trump's electoral victory. A protracted struggle against misogynists, the alt-right, and full-fledged neo-Nazis brought tens of thousands of people into the street to support confrontational tactics and anti-authoritarian values.

The same process of polarization and escalation is playing out in Italy. On February 3, 2018, 28-year-old Luca Traini shot six African immigrants in the small town of Macerata. Traini is an ideological fascist and one-time politician associated with the Lega Nord, Forza Nuova, and CasaPound. In the wake of the shooting, few organized unions and political parties rose to condemn the murders. With elections fast approaching, it was unclear how the public perceived even the most vile attacks. No one from any party was prepared to condemn the killings in a way that might jeopardize their electoral strategies.

On February 9, thousands of autonomous protesters and working class Romans marched in the Tor Pignattara district, denouncing the fascists. Two days later, a huge crowd marched in the small village of Macerata, and hundreds of protesters clashed with riot police in the small northern village of Piacenza, where fascist group CasaPound hoped to host a celebration at their local social center on the one-year anniversary of its opening. The images from Macerata and Piacenza spread virally on the Internet, and footage of a *carabiniere* being beaten with his own shield played on television screens in train stations and coffee bars across the peninsula. Clashes between anti-fascist protesters and police and the extreme right broke out in other parts of Italy, including Pavia, Trento, Bologna, Napoli, Torino, and Rovereto.

The right-wing party Lega Nord won a plurality in the elections of March 4, 2018 and Steve Bannon was there to bear witness. Ideological fascists and authoritarians of several stripes are concealing themselves behind the farcical populism of Lega Nord, which officially promotes an “Italians first” policy. Like fascists in the US, these movements hope to gain ground in the wake of the elections.

When the stakes are this high, only those with nothing to gain from compromising with fascists can be trusted to resist the tyrannical brand of capitalism that is sweeping across the globe under the banners of nationalism and supposed “anti-globalism.” Here, we take a closer look at anti-fascism in Italy in order to gain perspective on our situation in the US. North American fascists draw inspiration from European fascist groups such as CasaPound, Generation Identity, the Golden Dawn, and the Nordic Resistance Movement, not to mention PEGIDA and the “Brexit” campaign. We would do well to continue studying our comrades’ efforts against them, to better understand our own options here.

Meanwhile, millions of workers are supporting reactionary solutions. During the electoral campaign, the leading candidate of the right coalition for regional presidency in Lombardia even claimed that “the white race is in danger of being destroyed by blacks.” He is considered a moderate.

Autonomous groups and movements, both anarchist and communist, have always been anti-fascist. They have overcome political differences when the need has been urgent to make a strong response to fascist attacks. After Macerata, it is likely that many people will join our movements in order to fight fascism. For the moment, though, it is difficult to say whether there will be a new anti-fascist movement on a larger scale or if this will remain a short sequence of events in reaction to the shooting. But it is clear that a decisive polarization is taking place between those who openly advocate for fascism and everyone else.

In every city, the walls of the *zone popolari* are decorated with graffiti. Amid the colorful fills and hand styles of the graffiti crews, you can still see the slogans from the past. “Tutto il potere della classe operaia!”—signed Lotta Continua, 1976. The legacy of the revolutionary struggles is present everywhere. Autonomists, anarchists, anti-fascists, and even some communist organizations squat with all of the other workers in the peripheries of the cities; they open mechanic shops, they develop anti-eviction networks, they maintain self-organized “popular gyms.” There are neighborhoods in Rome, Milan, and Naples in which tens of thousands of people are squatting their apartments. In many neighborhoods and areas, the poor join the comrades on the basis of shared needs, and also because their parents or their grandparents were communists once. And this is also why CasaPound feeds the hungry Italians, adorns the walls of the universities with their well-designed posters, and organizes music nights and movie screenings. The decisive factors

of a fascist coup (as well as at the beginning of a communist insurrection) and any political force had to prove their formal adhesion to democratic principles—with the exception of the fascists, of course.

Over the past 20 years, this has changed. Xenophobia, increased desire for security, the reduction of everything to an economic function—all of these have created a situation in which fascism is a more acceptable possibility than it has been in living memory. For this reason, we have to understand this moment as a critical point. For sure, the neo-fascist groups have gained power and legitimacy. They work in the neighborhoods, give free food to the poorest Italians, fight evictions, form local patrols against “criminality,” and so on. But on a broader level, the general discourse surrounding the so-called “migrant crisis” is creating a culture of explicit racism, security solutions, and the desire for a strong national-ethnic identity and politics among both the left and the right.

The left parties especially seem to be experiencing the strongest crisis now in terms of identity and legitimacy. This phenomenon isn’t just Italian; it seems global. The poorest and the working class have abandoned these parties in mass to support the most radical right-wing parties. From one side, the left has led the neoliberal process that has abolished the rights of workers, social protections, and the welfare state; on the other hand, they have adopted the policing agenda of the far right in order to gain political favor. Matteo Renzi, the former leader of *Partito Democratico*, confirmed this when he supported the campaign to block incoming refugees from Libya, saying “we need to help them in their home,” a kind of neo-colonialist motto very popular in the right movements.

The end of the left is both an opportunity and a problem. Right now, those who are open to anti-racist and anti-fascist slogans are for the most part middle-class students and liberals. “Institutional” anti-fascism condemns both racist attacks and antifa struggles in the neighborhoods; this perspective defines all violence as a problem, even when it takes place in defense against the vilest attacks.

Anti-Fascism in Italy from World War II to Today

1945 – At the end of World War II, Italy is officially re-organized as a democracy by Allied forces. The Communist and Catholic parties (PCI and DC) are integrated into the government because both participated, in their own ways, in the Italian Liberation War in which partisans fought to depose fascists and drive out the German Nazi occupying armies. The parties of the institutional left promote a moderate reading of the Resistenza and the anti-fascist movement. For them, the end of the War represented a moment of national unity, not a insurrectional or revolutionary movement.

Between Italian fascism and democracy, there is a strict *continuità dello stato* (“continuity of the state”): every effort was made to prevent a purge of state structures within the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and the army. An ad hoc commission was convened to ensure that Italian war criminals retained impunity for their imperialist activities in the Balkans and Africa. This process was called the “*amnistia Togliatti*.” While it emptied prisons and closed trials for the heirs of Salò, fascist-era magistrates initiated the judicial persecution of thousands of anti-fascist partisans, chiefly communists and anarchists, who had illegally combatted fascism for a quarter of a century.

Continuity of the state enabled figures of the fascist regime to assume key roles in the nascent republican state in the name of anti-Communism, with the blessing of the US government. Italy has not exorcised the specters that linger from its fascist and colonial past. The average Italian citizen does not know that Italy used gas on the African population; he thinks that the racial laws of the Third Reich were horrible but that Mussolini, by comparison, was not so bad. Thanks to this continuity, even today, laws such as the Rocco Code remain in force from the fascist regime.

In every significant outburst of revolt since the transition to democracy, combative protesters, such as those who mobilized in 2001 against the G8 summit in Genova, have been charged with Fascist-era crimes such as *devestazione e saccheggio* (“devastation and sacking”).

December 26, 1946 – The Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) is founded by former exponents of the fascist regime. The party is inspired by the Repubblica Sociale Italiana. In 1948, the MSI participated in national political elections.

1947 – The Communist Party is expelled from the government.

July 1960 – Fernando Tambroni of the Christian Democratic Party seeks to form a government with the participation of the MSI. This is the first example of Left parties being openly complicit with the far right after the war. Clashes between proletarians, police, and fascists erupt all over Italy, especially in Genova and Rome. For the first time after the war, the clashes were not controlled by left unions or parties.

April 27, 1966 – Paolo Rossi, a university student, is murdered by a fascist in the first widely known politically motivated post-War homicide of an anti-fascist.

December 12, 1969 – A bomb explodes in a bank in the Piazza Fontana, killing many people and injuring dozens more in the northern industrial city of Milano. Police arrest several anarchists—one of whom, Giuseppe Pinelli, dies after “falling” from the window of the police station during his interrogation by police Superintendent Luigi Calabresi.¹ Years later, it came out that fascists were responsible for the bombing, quite possibly with the collusion of state actors. Following the massacre, a massive and radical anti-fascist movement spread throughout Italy.

¹ The police murder of Pinelli is explored in Dario Fo’s classic play, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. The judicial apparatus of the Italian state repeatedly found that no one was responsible for Pinelli’s murder. Happily, Luigi Calabresi was shot and killed on his way to work on May 17, 1972, as Alfredo Bonanno discusses in his text, “I know who killed Chief Superintendent Luigi Calabresi.”

are so many people who want to join us in shouting no to fascism with their hearts in the silence of the city.

Today we take back our roads. This is what is shouted into the microphone, among other things. We say no to fascism with our daily choices, with the solidarity we express in our actions, with the way of living that we have chosen. And apparently we are not the only ones who feel this way.

The procession winds through the streets that we cross every day, filling them with life, which is always the irreducible enemy of every form of abuse. The procession proclaims a non-fascist form of life that expresses itself daily in dozens of initiatives that create bonds and solidarity in the neighborhood.

It is 9 pm and the procession is about to end. The police deployment is impressive, but today there will be no confrontations. We have a different goal. This is not the moment to repay the enemy with the violence that has been inflicted on every one of us. Today, it’s time to scare him. To show him that we are many. The faces of everyone, comrades and others, remain sad for the memory of what has happened but also serene because today we have experienced that in this neighborhood, there is a solidarity that could turn into a very powerful weapon.

After Macerata, No Turning Back

Macerata represents a point of no return. It changes the narrative of what is going on in Italy.

We were raised in a country in which fascism and racism have gained more legitimacy that they had in the last half century. Anti-fascism was a kind of minimum common denominator of all the political forces in all the years following the Second World War. During the so-called *anni di piombo*,³ we were always on the edge

³ The “years of lead,” the period of open class conflict and violent struggle in Italy from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s.

fascists accused of the attack. The two young comrades' charges were dropped to simple battery, a misdemeanor unlikely to carry a prison sentence. Clashes continued to break out in Pisa, in Torino, across the country.

When the election frenzy concluded, Lega Nord, the right party, came away with a strong minority. CasaPound Italia won 1.5%. The protests and actions cycled down. For now, the streets have returned to an uneasy calm.

Account: A Demonstration in Torpignattara, Rome

We meet up at our social center to organize the last minute preparations. In a couple of hours, we will go down the streets to shout out loud that we will not stand for the fascists' presence in our neighborhoods. After Macerata, a demonstration is the least we could do.

We are a bit worried and the tension is palpable. We are sure that the comrades from the entire city will be there, but how will the neighborhood respond? In the lead-up, we have received positive reactions to our posters and fliers, but we are still apprehensive.

Now we are in the square. Comrades and friends arrive first and start to help us with the practical organization of the march. Around 7 pm, the square is full. Just a few minutes and the demonstration begins.

The speeches began to follow from the sound system positioned on the car that opens the demo. The microphone is open and everyone can talk. We will not be playing music this time. From the sidewalks, windows, and balconies, we hear shouts of support; we respond with applause and invitations to join the march. Many migrants, children, and families from the neighborhood are at the front. Further back, young and old follow. We are amazed. There

1969–1979: – Alongside the essentially national-revolutionary organizations that hope to subvert the democratic order of the republican state by armed struggle (such as the *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*, NAR), other groups take shape (including *Ordine Nuovo*, *Avanguardia Nazionale*, and *Ordine Nero*) that wish to pursue similar objectives through a strategic compromise with the right-wing and dark sides of the state, including elements belonging to the secret services and the secretive P2 organization. The right wing, both inside the state and in extreme right groups and criminal syndicates, implements a program now known as the *strategy of tension*, carrying out a series of terrorist acts to create an atmosphere of tension and widespread fear in the population. The goal is to justify a return to authoritarian state control and send warnings to left-leaning and Communist elements.

In the 1970s, a new account of the Resistenza as a betrayed revolution spread in extra-parliamentary groups. Historians drew the conclusion that the resistance had been betrayed by the leaders of the Communist party who chose not to continue the insurrection of April 25, 1945 (when Mussolini was captured and later executed in the streets by partisans), but preferred to form a government with the conservative forces. They understood the final years of Fascism as a civil war.

Anti-fascism increasingly shows two souls: “institutional antifascism” and so-called “militant anti-fascism.”

February 1977 – Clashes take place at the University of Bologna between the fascists of the FUAN group and anti-fascist students of the autonomous collectives. The Communist Party elaborates the theory of opposing extremisms and the violence of anti-fascist extra-parliamentary groups as “squadrist.” A deep rift divides left parties and autonomous groups.

The theory of opposing extremisms has become a normal reflex in Italian politics. It is based in a political theory that aims to group the centrist forces in order to isolate and marginalize right and left “extremism,” which are considered equal but opposite, two sides

of the same coin. The goal is to depoliticize the ongoing conflict, framing it as a problem of public order. This framing is still employed today. Media and politicians, whether right or left, always interpret murders carried out by fascists or clashes between fascists and anti-fascists as gang violence between opposing “squads” with no political motivation or weight.

1989 – Lega Nord is founded by Umberto Bossi. At the beginning, the party openly declares itself to be regionalist and ethno-nationalist, defending the interests of northern Italy against the rest of the peninsula. Despite declarations of hatred towards Rome, the national state, and the regions of southern Italy, Lega Nord participates in the Berlusconi governments of the 1990s. The Lega combines a fanatical right-wing populism with liberal economic and anti-federalist policies, as well as racism against immigrants and fervent defense of “traditional families.”

1992 – Fini, secretary of the MSI, is a candidate for mayor of Rome supported by the businessman Berlusconi.

January 27, 1995 – The MSI is dissolved and *Alleanza Nazionale* is born: a more European conservative party lacking the typical Italian extremism and fascist dog whistles. The disappointed leave the party and form new neo-fascist parties. This is the end of unity in the neo-fascist galaxy.

1997 – Forza Nuova is born thanks to two prominent figures of the radical Roman right, Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello, who are close to the 1970s groups Third Position and the NAR, respectively.

Shortly after the Bologna massacre in 1980, Fiore and Morsello were accused of subversive association and took refuge in London to escape arrest. As soon as the waters calmed, the two neo-fascists immediately returned to Italy and put the party into action, founding it on September 29, the day of the cult of St. Michael the Archangel, protector of the Romanian para-fascist movement, the “Guardia di Ferro.” The ideology of this movement is a mix of neo-fascism, nationalism, xenophobia, homophobia, and Catholic tradi-

“Siamo Tutti Antifascisti”

Following the events in Macerata, Rome, and Piacenza, a whirlwind of news articles began circulating about the new wave of militant anti-fascism. Demonstrations were organized across the peninsula. The clashes in Piacenza and mass militancy in Macerata demonstrated that the movement could even take root in small villages and towns, as the *Resistenza* had one hundred years ago.

Protestors began to shut down Salvini campaign events in places like Rovereto and Livorno, just as anti-Trump protestors had done in Costa Mesa and Chicago. Then, on February 16, clashes between anti-fascists and *carabinieri* in Bologna put the movement in international headlines, with police resorting to tear gas and water cannons in the historic university center as they had done 40 years earlier.

In Italy, the palette for political violence is thoroughly developed on the left and the right. In contrast to the US, violence alone is not usually enough to discredit a movement, although it might damage its reputation among moderates. The fact that Italian society is polarized in this way means that neither anarchists nor fascists are forced to appeal to the center to have mass support and influence.

Following the events in Piacenza, Bologna, and elsewhere, the intensity of the conflict picked up. Fascists had beaten young anti-fascists in Genoa a month earlier, but now they were stabbing activists and torching social centers. In the chaotic southern city of Naples, hooligans and antifascists clashing with police were viciously beaten, methodically rounded up, and humiliated on live broadcast by being forced to their knees in a plaza and arrested one by one.

In response, a fascist leader from Forza Nuova, the only organization to defend and applaud the shooting in Macerata, was kidnapped outside of his office in Palermo. He was bound with duct tape and beaten with sticks before being left in a ditch at the side of the road. 1000 people marched to defend the actions of the two anti-

works of mutual aid, anti-eviction struggles, and a free food program coordinated with a Bangladeshi association and other political groups of citizens. We believe that this is the best way to push back the fascists, preventing their political action whenever they show up in public, even when that means facing repression. In our zone, CasaPound was beaten strongly when they attempted to set up a propaganda booth.

Build the urban commune, that's our aim: make space for solidarity, which is the only force that could ease the pressure of surviving under capitalism. Forget all the ideology, but spreading ideas through the population as a part of it, we try our best to dissolve our "militant identity," our identity as militants, and confront the real problems of the barrio from a horizontal perspective. Anti-fascist struggles and anti-racist positions should avoid any moralistic point of view, any attitude of judging from above. When we organized the February 9 demonstration in response of Macerata's shooting, we felt this responsibility to call a day of struggle in solidarity with the victims as a part of our class, the exploited, while directing the blame towards political parties and institutions (both left and right).

To be ready when the time is ripe for action, we have to maintain a daily struggle against resignation. "*Nunc est delendum*" is a Latin motto that could be translated "Now it's time to destroy"—we too are heirs of the Roman tradition, but the tradition of the oppressed, of rebel slaves like Spartacus and the Plebs who always shook Rome with the threat of riots. We have to destroy all the relations of power between us and attack the world that surrounds us, starting from our barrio poisoned by the capitalistic way of life. Alongside this motto that forms the name of our group, there is the sentence *Punto Solidale Marranella*, point of solidarity, because in a world of empty words, the most revolutionary act is to go straight to the point. The crowd that supports the fascist scum is having a hard time in Marranella's barrio.

tionalism. Forza Nuova draws its ranks from the young, fishing in the sea of skinheads and football hooligans. Its platform is based on some principles of Catholicism (anti-abortion), social policies to preserve traditional family structures, and opposition to immigration. It is the smallest party of the far right and the only one that has professed open support for the shooting in Macerata.

December 27, 2003 – CasaPound is founded. Some young fascists decided to occupy a large building at 8 Via Napoleone III in the Esquilino neighborhood in Rome: the CasaPound. Leading the occupants was Gianluca Iannone, leader of an alternative rock band with right-wing lyrics. The name of the social center is in honor of Ezra Pound, the reactionary poet who became an idol of young neo-fascists in Italy.

The political style of CasaPound is characterized by "young and new" communication and the use of social networks. They call themselves "fascists of the third millennium."

2013 – The "CasaPound Italia" party is born, nominating Simone di Stefano as their premier. The electoral talking-points include the right to housing for Italians (the party logo is a turtle), opposition to immigration and EU policies, and monetary sovereignty from the Euro.

2014 – The new Secretary of Lega Nord, Matteo Salvini, moves the Lega to the right, collaborating with Fratelli d'Italia and CasaPound as well as the French far-right group Front National (FN). Later, he abandons the alliance with CasaPound in favor of center-right parties.

2017 – Salvini explicitly defines the current line of the Lega Nord secretariat as federalist and nationalist, without the independentist and secessionist program, replacing the slogan "first the North," with "first the Italians." The discourse of the Lega electoral campaign, like that of the entire right wing, is based around the supposed invasion of Italy by foreigners, the poverty of Italians compared to the supposed "privileges" of immigrants, and the so-called "clash of civilizations" between Italy and political Islam.

Today – CasaPound boasts six thousand members, one hundred offices, a trade union (BLU), a youth organization (Blocco studentesco), a network of associations (sport, environment, solidarity), a web radio (Radio Bandiera Nera), and multiple magazines. CasaPound is the most influential neo-fascist party in Italy and has a “European commissioner,” Sebastian Manificat, who owns the bar “Carrè Monti” in Rome, and has close ties with the ultranationalists of Greece, Poland, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine (CasaPound is connected to the Azov Battalion deployed in the Ukrainian civil war of 2014). In the administrative elections of June 11, the Turtles made the ballot in 13 municipalities with over 15 thousand inhabitants by placing councilors in centers such as Lucca and Todi (winning their organization 7.84% and 4.81%, respectively, and becoming the third most powerful political party in Lucca). Presenting themselves as a new and incorruptible political force, they managed to win 1.5% in the national elections.

In recent years, CasaPound has tried to take root in the neighborhoods by organizing committees that conceal their fascist agenda. They make anti-eviction pickets, distribute food to the Italian poor, and organize patrols against violence against (Italian) women.

Immigration in Italy

Historically, Italy has been a country of emigration. Significant immigration began only thirty years ago. There are few second- and third-generation immigrants, because Italy never possessed vast colonial holdings like France or England. Consequently, most foreigners recognize themselves in the values and traditions of their communities of origin. Many speak Italian badly, relying predominantly on the church, television, or autonomous initiatives for classes.

Furthermore, as a country of arrival, it has a special role in the EU reception system: the Dublin Convention, launched by the EU

Later, 20,000 people march in the small streets of Macerata, as several thousand had days before in Rome and a week earlier in Genova. Something decisive is developing.

Account: When in Rome...

Rome is a difficult city. It’s the only real metropolis in Italy. Its area, about 496 square miles, represents a huge territory which can be divided into the North side (more bourgeois) and South side (more poor), setting aside some exceptions. It is almost impossible for an anti-fascist movement to cover all the areas and zones, so there has always been a struggle between different *quartieri* (districts). Historically, some of them belong to fascists, while others are clearly antifa zones. Fascist propaganda and aesthetics are usually based on the myth of the Roman empire; Rome has always been a strong electoral base for the far right.

Growing up in a city like this, as a young comrade or antifa, you always have to face fascists in front of your school and in public spaces. There have been several stabbings and one comrade murdered: Renato Biagetti, in 2006, *requiescat in pace*.

In a way, the movement is responsible for not responding more effectively from the beginning in 2003 when CasaPound opened their first squat, their headquarters near the central train station.

We notice that every time our movement grows—for example, during the student protests of 2008, the student riots of December 2010, or the big riot of October 2011—the fascists are always pushed back for a while and silenced. When our movement is at a low ebb, the fascists gain momentum.

As a small group (20 people), we decided to set our sights on a defined territory, our neighborhood: Marranella/Torpignattara. Here, among a mixture of immigrants (Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Chinese, Latinos) and local proletarians (and sub-proletarians), we feel that we can build solidarity. We have participated in building net-

exchange blows with the police. The whole crowd is chanting and clapping. Fireworks explode at the feet of the *carabinieri*. To the side, *digos*² are filming everything. When the fighting subsides, few have left the zone. A tense standoff ensues as organizers from Piacenza argue with the commanding officers. They finally reach an agreement that the entire crowd will be permitted to pass.

Now we are winding through the cobblestone streets of this town, passing local shops filled with confused or worried patrons. Piacenza is one of the places in the north that did not experience widespread resistance to fascism at the beginning of the 20th century. Perhaps that explains why it has welcomed authoritarians like CasaPound intent on opening fascist social centers. It is not long before we reach another impasse with the police.

On a small road near the center of the village, large police trucks are surrounded by *carabinieri* and municipal police. Our crowd is absolutely unmoved by their threats and intimidation. They begin clubbing the *cordoni*, who respond in kind with sticks and PVC pipes. A gust of stones, bricks, and glass bottles fly from behind the banners, striking officers and police vehicles. Suddenly, a cop falls to the ground. Together, union workers and black bloc anarchists snatch his shield and club from him. He is kicked and beaten with the weapons he was just using against us. His armor preserves him from injury, unlike our hoodies and helmets, but over the following 48 hours he will become a disgrace and laughingstock along the entire peninsula. In the cafés and train stations from Torino to Lecce, the videos from Piacenza will play on permanent loop.

² *Digos* refers to *Divisione Investigazioni Generali e Operazioni Speciali*: a special police force dedicated solely to investigating terrorism, organized crime, and political extremism. Unlike the FBI, the DIGOS are well-known local officers who are constantly engaging radicals of various ideologies—harassing them at home, at work, and in public, frequently addressing their targets by nicknames and seeking to learn their intimate life details in order to disrupt movements and groups.

in 1997, stipulates that the Member State responsible for examining the asylum application will be the state where the asylum seeker entered the European Union. This means that many foreigners who are headed to different European countries are forced by law to stay in Italy pending the bureaucratic process evaluating their request for accommodation. The evaluation can last two or even three years. In 2002, the government criminalized illegal immigration and identification and created expulsion centers in which to lock up undocumented persons. Some of the immigrants locked up in the centers are then deported to their countries of origin.

The crisis around migration intensified in 2015. Crackdowns following the Arab Spring, the war in Afghanistan, and the civil wars in Libya and Syria have caused a mass flight to Europe. Right-wing Italians describe this as an invasion. This racist discourse is completely legitimized in Italy, while the legacy of the fascist and colonial past is concealed. Racism is not identified with fascism: you can say you hate black people and vote left. The fear of foreigners has found fertile ground especially with the economic crisis that has impoverished the middle class since 2009.

Today, the immigration issue monopolizes political discourse. A member of the Lega said: “We must make choices: decide whether our ethnicity, our white race, our society must continue to exist or our society must be canceled: it is a choice.”

Timeline: Events during the 2018 Election Campaign

January 12 – Young anti-fascist stabbed while hanging posters.

January 20 – Anti-fascist demonstration in Genoa attended by several thousand.

February 3 – Luca Traini, a member of Lega Nord, shoots blindly at a group of African immigrants in Macerata, wounding 6. Luca Traini wanted to go to court to kill Innocent Oseghale, a Nige-

rian alleged to have murdered a girl named Pamela Mastropietro, but decided to shoot every black person he encountered along the way. This is what Traini himself reported in the spontaneous declarations he made to the *carabinieri* after the arrest.

February 4 – Pavia: 25 fascists attack a group of 5 boys, some Italian and some immigrants.

February 5 – Piacenza: Clashes at an anti-fascist parade against CasaPound. Videos spread virally across the peninsula of a *carabiniere* being beaten with his shield.

February 9 – Rome: Anti-fascist demonstration in Torpignattara in solidarity with victims in Macerata. Several thousand attend.

February 9 – Trento: Anti-fascist demo against CasaPound.

February 10 – Macerata: Anti-fascist autonomous demonstration draws 25,000.

February 11 – Rovereto: Anti-fascist gathering against a speech by Salvini.

February 16 – Bologna: Clashes as anti-fascists gather to block the rally of Roberto Fiore (FN). Police use water cannons and tear gas.

February 17 – Livorno: Insults screamed at Meloni (Fratelli d'Italia); her car was surrounded and kicked as she left.

February 18 – Naples: Clashes and arrests as anti-fascists disrupt CasaPound rally.

February 21 – Palermo: A local leader of Forza Nuova is found bound with adhesive tape in front of his office. Two anti-fascists are arrested for attempted murder, then released. Solidarity demonstrations openly defend the actions of the accused. Their charges are reduced to simple battery.

February 21 – Perugia: Fascists stab an activist of Potere al Popolo (a new left party).

February 22 – Torino: Police charge an anti-fascist demonstration that is disrupting a CasaPound demonstration.

February 23 – Brescia: The library of the social center Magazzino 47 is set on fire by fascists.

February 23 – Pisa: Police charges and clashes at a protest against Salvini.

March 1 – Conclusion of the election campaign. In Rome, anti-fascists demonstrate in Argentina square.

March 3 – Pavia: Anti-fascist houses are “marked” with a sticker reading “Here lives an anti-fascist.”

March 4 – The Lega receives a lot of votes in the elections: 17.37% in the Chamber of Deputies (5,691,921 votes) and 17.32% in the Senate (5,317,803).

March 6 – Florence: An Italian man shoots and kills a man from Senegal.

March 7 – Trento: The office of CasaPound is bombed by anti-fascists.

Account: Piacenza

The crowd is moving together, but slowly. Up front, locals are urging the crowd to come to the front to join the *cordoni*.

In the *cordoni*, perhaps three or four rows of comrades about 20 abreast, arms are linked to prevent police or fascist attacks. Most of this crowd is masked. Behind them, perhaps ten feet of empty space. And then the banners with many more people in masks and the larger crowd behind this entire arrangement. The empty space between the *cordoni* and the banners ensures that the crowd does not stampede in the event of clashes, because those up front have a place to fall back without crashing into others.

The chanting is concussive and precise. I am surrounded by hundreds of people chanting “champagne Molotov, champagne Molotov...” at the police. When the first cluster of *carabinieri* block the crowd, the *cordoni* push into them without hesitation. Stones and bottles are thrown from behind, while young people with sticks