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Beware of the State's Anarchists

Felix Frost

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In the end of December 2003, various European Union (EU) institutions received a number of letter bombs. One of them is said to have exploded in the hands of the president of the EU Commission, Romani Prodi, but without causing any injuries. The press was quick to announce that this was the work of anarchists. The proof of this was a letter sent to the paper *La Repubblica*, where a so far unknown group with the name *Informal Anarchist Federation* claimed responsibility for two earlier bombs left near Prodi's home in Italy. Italian anarchists, however, take a very different view of whom are to blame: This was a provocation, they are convinced, meant to put Italy's anarchist in disrepute, and to give an excuse for increased repression against the country's strong extra-parliamentary left.

While no one had heard about the *Federazione Anarchica Informale* before the mysterious letter surfaced, there exists in Italy an established anarchist group with a similar name: *Federazione Anarchica Italiana* (FAI). FAI was established in 1968, and is active in above ground activities such as organizing public meetings and

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demonstrations, and publishing newspapers and journals. In a statement, the organization's coordinating committee states that FAI "asserts once more its condemnation of bombs, exploding parcels and such devices, that may strike without discrimination, and in any way look — at best — to be functional to logic of provocation and criminalization of dissent through the media, in a moment in which anarchists are among the protagonists of social conflicts — from strikes, to initiatives against war, etc."

In its statement FAI also points to the contradiction in speaking of an "informal federation," and claims that an organization must always be formal in order to guarantee "a libertarian and egalitarian method of assuming decisions." Other parts of the anarchist movement in Italy believe in informal organizing, but these groups do not use the word federation. The name therefore seems picked for its similarity to FAI's, and thereby associate this organization with bombs and terror. And FAI believes that "whoever points out a group of comrades to repression is a police or one that cooperates with them."¹

If these letter bombs actually were sent by provocateurs, this would not be the first time in Italy's history. On the 12th of December 1969, a bomb exploded at Piazza Fontana in Milan, which killed 16 people and wounded more than a hundred. Then too, the anarchists were blamed, and several local anarchists were arrested. Three days after the explosion, one of the arrested, Giuseppe Pinelli, died from falling from a window of the fifth floor of the city's police headquarters — while five police officers were present in the room. The police first announced that it was a suicide, then quickly changed their story and claimed it was an accident. This event was later immortalized in Nobel laureate Dario Fo's burlesque theater play, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*.

¹ The statement can be found on FAI's website: www.federazioneanarchica.org

last time Italian prosecutors tried to crack down on this milieu. This was in the late 90s, after some anarchists were caught robbing a bank. 58 anarchists were then accused of being members of a subversive, paramilitary organization, a group called ORAI (*Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica Insurrezionalista*). However, there was no evidence that this organization actually existed, and after a long and farce like court case, these accusations had to be dropped. (Although a number of the accused anarchists were convicted of other criminal offenses.)

There are signs that a new crackdown on the insurrectionalists is being planned. This time it seems that the authorities are trying to link the insurrectional anarchists with the remnants of the Marxist-Leninist armed groups of the 70's, such as the Red Brigades. The latest example of this came in August 2004 when someone placed a bomb in a Sardinian village, near a villa where the Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi were entertaining his British counterpart Tony Blair. An anonymous caller who claimed to represent the *Proletarian Nuclei for Communism*, a local Marxist separatist group, warned the police about the device. Despite this, interior minister Giuseppe Pisanu did his best to implicate anarchists, claiming that "the Sardinian terrorist milieu has now brought together remnants of the Red Brigades, separatists and anarchist-insurrectionists."⁵

⁵ Associated Press, 18 August 2004

Another anarchist, Pietro Valpreda, was convicted of the bombing, and sat several years in prison before his conviction was overturned in a new trial. It has been proven that it wasn't Milan's anarchists who were responsible for the bomb plot, but a group of neo-fascists. The bomb plot was the beginning of the so-called "strategy of tension" put into action by Italian fascists in consort with the CIA and Italy's intelligence services. At the end of the 60's, it looked as if the Italian Communist Party might be admitted into the government for the first time. At the same time, a new and more radical left emerged, who rejected the whole parliamentary game. A campaign of destabilization was therefore started, where fascists conducted terrorist acts, which were then blamed on the left. In the span of 15 years, 150 individuals were killed in eight bomb explosions; the worst of which was the massacre at the railway station in Bologna in August 1980, where 85 was killed and 200 wounded. Fascists and intelligence agents also infiltrated small communist and anarchist groups where they tried to incite violent acts, at the same time as they were helpful in procuring weapons and explosives. During this time, there were hatched several plots where the fascists, together with their allies in the military and police, would take power in a coup d'etat. It was assumed that the Italian people would accept a "state of emergency," in order to save the country from chaos and to "reestablish law and order." However, as the political situation in the country stabilized during the 70's, a fascist coup ceased to be an option.

Not until 2001 was a group of fascists brought to trial for the bombing in Milan over 30 years ago. In this trial, a former chief in the Italian military intelligence agency SID gave testimony. General Gianadelio Maletti explained that SID had discovered that right wing terrorists in the 70s had been equipped with military explosives from Germany, possibly with the help of American intelligence agents. "The CIA, following the directives of its government, wanted to create an Italian nationalism capable of halting what it saw as a slide to the left and, for this purpose, it may have made

use of right-wing terrorism,” Maletti explained.² Maletti himself needed a temporary court amnesty in order to testify, as he for the last 20 years have been living in South Africa as a fugitive from Italian justice. He had been convicted in absentia for obstructing the investigation of an attack on the Italian Minister of the Interior in 1973. Four people were killed and 45 injured when the “anarchist” Gianfranco Bertoli threw a bomb at group of people outside the police headquarters in Milan. Bertoli actually had right-wing sympathies, and was a long time informer for SID. SID supposedly knew about the plot against the minister in advance, but did nothing to warn him, and neglected to tell investigators what they knew after the crime was committed.

Before the protests against the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, Dario Fo published an article called Beware of the State’s Anarchists, where he warned that the strategy of tension was about to be revived. In the article he wrote: “What we are witnessing is an incredible repetition of what happened back then. In the face of the growth of a deeply peaceful world protest movement, the system replies by trying to drag it into a spiral of violence. Therefore we get bombs, and people look for excuses to beat up and arrest demonstrators, hoping that some young people will engage in violent confrontations. And to make sure that this happens, you can bet your bottom dollar that agents provocateurs are already at work.”³

Fo was to see his dark premonitions come true, and during the summit protests, one could find extensive evidence of both provocations and excessive police violence. The most tragic event was when the young activist Carlo Giuliani died after first being shot and then run over by an armed police vehicle. The next night, the police raided a school that was used to house some of the demonstrators. Dozens of sleeping activists were brutally beaten by the

² The Guardian, 26 March 2001

³ Quoted in Socialist Worker, 4 August 2001

police, and several of them needed to be sent to the hospital. It has later been proved that the cops themselves planted the Molotov cocktails they showed to the press to justify raiding the school.

There were also several instances of homemade bombs going off in Italy in the days before the Genoa summit. One of these was claimed by a group calling themselves *Cooperativa Artigiana Fuoco e Affini (Occasionalmente Spettacolare)*. This is one of the groups who, according to the anonymous letter to La Repubblica, have joined together to form the Informal Anarchist Federation. Another of the four groups mentioned in the letter, *Brigata XX luglio*, claimed responsibility for two explosive devices set off in the vicinity of the police headquarters in Genoa in December 2002. Again, many Italian anarchists and leftists are convinced that all these incidents were the work of agents provocateurs.

Whoever is behind these letter bombs: fascists, intelligence services, anarchists, or perhaps lone individuals — one thing is sure: The Italian police and prosecutors are itching to use these events as an opportunity to crack down on a troublesome oppositional element. While the rest of Italy have never heard of the mysterious Informal Anarchist Federation, and are even questioning whether it actually exists, the Italian prosecutors claim to have full knowledge of the organization’s structure and ideology. The city prosecutor of Bologna, Enrico Di Nicola, has told the press that this is an “insurrectionist anarchist organization” which consists of “individualists who don’t accept any type of organization, structure or centralization of decision-making.” Di Nicola further claimed that membership of the organization “may be about 350 in all of Italy.”⁴ The question that naturally arises, is why these shady individuals would establish a federation, considering that they don’t accept any type of organization?

To be fair, there actually does exist an insurrectional anarchist milieu in Italy. In issue one of *The Nihilist*, we wrote about the

⁴ The Guardian, 9 January 2004