

# After the battle of Genoa

Sat, 01/10/2005 - 17:00

The anti-G8 protest in Genoa was the biggest summit protest yet. Between 150,000-200,000 participated on the final day (J21). This included large numbers of trade unionists from all the major Italian union confederations and masses of supporters of Rifondazione Comunista. It was also the most violent yet with the police, carabinieri and anti-terrorist squads conducting a campaign of terror not seen since the days of Mussolini. Unarmed protester Carlo Giuliani was shot dead. Mass, peaceful marches were deliberately attacked with batons and teargas. During the post-demonstration 'sweep' by police, systematic use of extreme violence and even torture took place.

Against this premeditated brutalisation, protesters have every right to fight back. Those in the movement who have focused condemnation on the 'black bloc' are wrong: the police raid on the Genoa Solcial Fourm (GSF), the deliberate police tactic of pushing of the black bloc into the non-violent demo, the appearance of police agents dressed as block blockers...all these show that terror on a mass scale is targeted at the non-violent protesters too. It is aimed at breaking up the movement precisely at the point where it threatens to sink roots into the population.

50,000 marched to defend immigrant rights on J19, 70,000 marched to besiege the 'red zone' on J20 and 200,000 people marched in Genoa on J21 - all in defiance of incredible harassment and violation of their democratic rights. These huge numbers are what Blair, Chirac and Berlusconi are really frightened of. They are terrified that the slum dwellers of the cities and the bullied and regimented workers will unite with our 'travelling circus' of anticapitalists. That is why they pressed the 'start' button for a repression that, reportedly, even shocked hardened murderers like Bush and Putin.

For all these reasons Genoa represents a crossroads for the movement. It can become - as the radical movements of the late 1960s did - a detonator for mass working class resistance. Or it can suffer the fate of the US Black Panthers, who were systematically hunted down and imprisoned in order to strangle a potential mass revolutionary movement. The chorus of the media blaming all the violence on 'handfuls of anarchists' or 'the black block' indicates that the forces of order are pursuing this latter strategy for all it is worth.

The capitalists' aim is to split the movement:

- ? to drive the mild-mannered NGO leaders back into futile negotiations behind closed doors;
- ? to demoralise the NVDA 'fluffy' protestors with the argument that, sadly, violence is inevitable if you dare to 'disobey' the state;
- ? and to isolate and crush the anarchist and socialist left.

Genoa saw significant mobilisations of the rank and file of the main Italian trade unions plus the radical syndicalist federations like Cobas. In this sense it is a great step forward from Prague and Gothenburg. It also saw delegations of trade unionists from other European countries. However the main workers' leaders seem to have succeeded in keeping the demonstration as an isolated event and heading off more

extensive national strike action. The world's rulers hope that by ensuring that violence was inevitable the union bureaucrats will take the excuse to stand aside.

This would be a terrible mistake, especially for Italian workers today. Berlusconi and the state forces were clearly giving the entire working class a serious warning. The brutality of the repression was meant to say: we are not your 'normal' post-war Italian government. We are coming for your social gains and we have the force to impose our will. Of course this is a piece of incredible arrogance. If the Italian working class were to rise up in a militant and well protected general strike, the carabinieri and their gas grenades and water cannon would be smashed.

But that's a big 'if'. Berlusconi's only hope is that he can, with the aid of the cowardice of the union leaders, 'salami' the workers, taking them on and defeating them section by section. But the size and support of Genoa, on the streets of the city too, indicates that ordinary working class people are waking up to the danger that the crooked billionaire and his coalition of criminals, racists, crypto-fascists and open fascists represents. Can the radical forces in the unions, in Rifondazione, in the socialist and anarchist youth give a lead without losing touch with the masses? There is good hope that they can if they learn the lessons of Genoa. If they do then another hot autumn may be approaching in Italy.

For the worldwide anticapitalist movement the task of putting down roots has become more possible...but also far more urgent. The rulers of the world have upped the stakes. No matter how brave and determined, better fighting tactics will not solve the problem. At Genoa we implemented a mass direct action/organised self-defence strategy. That is, we organised for non-violent civil disobedience on a huge scale but prepared organised self-defence groups: these were intended to defend the demo from the police and to minimise disruption to the agreed non-violent actions from futile black bloc actions or deliberate police provocations. In the end this strategy was overwhelmed because too few people adopted it-because it lacked sufficient co-ordination, or because it was only improvised it on the spot.

The Genoa Social Forum leaders adopted a pure non-violent strategy, which did not work. The black bloc, a small minority however vigorous, were once again diverted into the futile activity of smashing up property, which is guaranteed to alienate not only the working class inhabitants and bystanders but also to drive pacifist and reformist workers away from the movement.

This mass direct action/organised self-defence strategy remains the only way to deal with police violence. Since the police will resort to brutal violence-even against the most self-controlled pacifists there should always be enough street fighting to occupy the most combative members of the black block. What is needed is the conscious co-ordination of these forces so that the police cannot use us against one another, so they cannot infiltrate agents provocateurs, so that we do not alienate those we wish to win over. Indeed we want them to join us in the streets so that we overwhelm the forces of order. But on its own even this strategy of direct action and self-defence is not enough.

When faced with repression on this scale - the effective suspension of civil liberties across Italy; the suspension of free movement under the Schengen treaty; suspension of the right to consult a lawyer; and a fascist-style 'night and fog' round up - a militant minority cannot defend itself. Better fighting tactics, intelligence and appeals to the world for solidarity are not enough. That is why we say: after Genoa...to the factories, to the offices, to the working class and immigrant communities, to the schools. The only way to sustain the movement's momentum now is through the tens of thousands who demonstrated, the tens of thousands more who are in active solidarity, to turn to the working class and take anti-capitalist politics and methods into the workers' organisations.

The NGOs, the 'fluffy' leaders and the ageing pop stars have an opposite solution. When Naomi Klein

called for the movement to 'put down roots' after May Day 2001 she had in mind a complete break from militant confrontation and an appeal to the enlightened middle classes. Read also a break from socialist and anarchist anti-capitalism, towards a liberal reformist critique of the system. [Against this it must be said that José Bové, the radical farmers leader and vice president of ATTAC put the blame for the violence fairly and squarely on the state.]

In their own way, the leaders of the 'radical reformist' wing are going through the same trauma as every middle-class leadership of a revolutionary movement in the last two centuries. They summoned us onto the streets to aid their reform project, as a threat to the powers-that-be to negotiate seriously. To keep control of a broad alliance they have to suppress the working class, revolutionary wing. When it is not suppressed 'or when the momentum of the struggle puts them outside bourgeois legality' they walk away from the movement. Since Gothenburg and Mayday 2001 we have seen the beginnings of this response 'and it will gain momentum in the days after Genoa.

But the NGO and reformist leaders are one thing, the activists who follow their lead are another. Today, that layer of activists 'which forms the bulk of the protest movement' is faced with some searching questions.

'After Genoa, do you really think the capitalist state could be reformed? Do you really believe it is a neutral instrument that can be won to defending our rights and social gains? Or will we need a revolution to save the world from eco-meltdown, starvation and war?

'After Genoa, has 'disorganisation' proved effective? Should it be celebrated as an antidote to bureaucracy? Or were the decisive forces the organised forces 'the police, the black bloc, the socialists, the unions?

'After Genoa, can you carry on going alone into the hell of teargas, batons and bullets? Or will you go next time as part of an organised political force 'a revolutionary party? The police have helicopters 'our only force-multiplier is solidarity.

The first two years of our movement have been 'as Susan George put it 'the most beautiful hope for thirty years?. The coming months will not be beautiful. Because, to use a term from post-modernism, the capitalists can 'otherise' us, they can isolate us: make us look strange and alien to ordinary workers. They can treat us as 'extremists?', 'terrorists?'. Their police can treat us as sub-humans. Not even prisoners of war; not even 'war criminals' at The Hague get treated this way. Despite the exhilaration and freedom that being part of this movement brings, to the mass of working class people we may be heroes 'but distant ones. 'They did well,? millions of workers across the world will say on Monday. But until 'they? becomes 'we? the movement will not break through the mounting repression.

The media lies, the union leaders sabotage all attempts at solidarity, the social-democratic politicians queue up to demand ever tougher police responses. But after Genoa, denouncing them is not enough. Individual terrorism and revenge would be the worst of all dead ends. The Italian and German radical left was tempted into this by the state in the 1970s. We should reject that path decisively. We need new tactics 'based on the working class.

After Genoa the nearest workplace is more important than the next summit. 'Your town? is more important than Qatar or Washington. The multi-millioned working class movement has the power to stop society. If it had chosen to use that power, Genoa would be a police free zone today and the G8 summit venue a smoking ruin. But to mobilise that power takes more than gestures: it takes relentless, work to build and energise resistance in workplaces and communities. And as well as bold offensives like Genoa, Seattle

and Prague it needs hard defensive struggles ? against the growth of fascism in depressed communities; against the death-penalty genocide on US blacks; against the austerity packages that the IMF/World Bank is imposing on countries like Argentina today.

With the workers who don't accept the need for self defence, or who call for state repression of the black bloc, or who think civil disobedience threatens hard won democratic rights, we need a hard but patient argument. We need to show them in action they are wrong. We need unity in action ? the united front tactic that has always guided revolutionaries in their fight to convince the majority of a socialist alternative. Individuals cannot operate tactics ? only organisations can. Individuals cannot assess the mood of millions ? only organisations with tens of thousands can.

That is why we say, with the gas of Genoa still in our lungs and our blood still on the pavements: unite with us to build a new kind of party. It will not be a bureaucratic monster if its members are clear as to their goals and methods, if they can control and replace their leaders, if they operate the fullest democracy when it comes to policy and the maximum unity when it comes to action. A revolutionary working class party born out of the Seattle generation can be free of all the filth of Stalinism.

The storm clouds are gathering: debt crisis looms in the big emerging nations; banks are in ?white knuckle? fear that the telecoms giants will collapse, dragging the finance system with them; deeper recession is on the way. The struggle will get harder and nastier. The Nazi posters on the walls of Genoa?s police cells point in one direction. So do the Star Wars rockets and the death camps of Chechnya. In the other direction lies human freedom, and the end of poverty, ignorance and war. In the global South the struggle against corporate capitalism is on the march ? from New Guinea to Argentina. We have to link up with these struggles directly. The ?Endless Summer? phase of the movement is over. It?s now a struggle for survival: we face either marginalisation and repression or a mass breakout that can transform the political situation in Europe.

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