

Massive police operation at G8 summit in Genoa

By Stefan Steinberg
20 July 2001

Those protesting at the G8 conference in Genoa confront a massive police and army presence.

The conference, which opens today and concludes July 22, brings together the heads of the seven leading industrial countries plus Russia. It is expected that US President George W. Bush will use the meeting in an attempt to secure support for the proposed American missile defence system.

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the Italian authorities have approved an enormous security operation with up to 16,000 police and 3,000 soldiers being mobilised to clamp down on all protests.

At the June European Union (EU) summit in Gothenburg, Sweden, two demonstrators were shot and wounded by police. Pitched battles took place in the city between the police and a small number of the estimated 30,000 protestors. British premier Tony Blair and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer warned against the possibility of violent demonstrations in Genoa, with Blair criticising “small groups of anarchists and hooligans” for “using legitimate protest as a vehicle for causing chaos and mayhem.”

On the pretext of clamping down on “hooligans”, the Italian and European police have made a frontal assault on the democratic right to protest and the right to free speech. The mobilisation of state forces is aimed at preventing the free movement of those deemed by the authorities to be undesirable or dangerous, setting yet another precedent in the erosion of fundamental democratic rights.

Last weekend, in order to vet those entering the country, the Italian government suspended the Schengen Treaty, which allows free passage between those EU countries that have signed the pact. Police and customs officials worked with a list of 3,000 names of potentially “violent anti-capitalist protestors”, who

are to be prevented at all costs from entering Italy. The police are paying particular attention to protestors from France and Germany. At the start of the week, delays and harassment by police at the French-Italian crossing point of Ventimiglia lead to protests in favour of the right of free passage by those affected.

The French national railway, SNCF, cancelled a train chartered by British anti-capitalist activists organised within Globalise Resistance to transport them to the G8 summit. Flights to the city have also been cancelled. Genoa’s motorway junctions and the port itself will be sealed this evening. The airport and the city’s two main railway stations (Principe and Brignoli) have been closed.

Inside Italy, police and intelligence forces have been conducting raids and house searches since the start of the month. Raids have been carried out as far afield as Milan, Florence and Naples. In the course of the searches, police have confiscated such mundane household objects as hammers, screwdrivers and bricks. A journalist employed by the *il manifesto* newspaper and Luca Casarini, spokesman of the *Centri Sociali Autogestiti* in North-eastern Italy, were both victims of such house searches.

Despite these measures, thousands of anti-G8 protestors poured into Genoa yesterday in order to beat the closure of the city. Around 800 organisations have constituted the so-called “Genoa Social Forum” and are planning to conduct a series of alternative meetings, conferences and protests in the city against the consequences of capitalist globalisation. Estimates of the number of protestors planning to attend meetings and take part in demonstrations in Genoa vary between 50,000 and 150,000. The Italian rank-and-file organisation *Comitati Uniti di Base* has called for a national general strike on Friday, but it is unlikely that

many of Italy's main trade unions will actually take part in anti-G8 demonstrations.

Those who have made it to Genoa will find a city that resembles a fortress. The summit is planned to open Friday in Genoa's splendid Palazzo Ducale. For security reasons, however, some G8 delegates will stay on the luxury liner "European Vision" berthed in the harbour and which will provide the venue for many of the conference meetings. It is anticipated that American delegates will be accommodated on their own ship. According to Italian Defence Minister Antonio Martini, 2,700 soldiers will be employed to protect and secure the docks and airport. Minesweepers will patrol the adjacent waters and two Spada-type rocket launchers have been stationed to deter any possible air attack on the conference. Experts in bio-chemical weapons will also be in attendance to assist in security operations.

A three metre high wall has been erected in the historic centre of the city. Police patrolling the city are determined that no demonstrations take place within this walled area, the so-called "red zone". Inside the city as a whole there is a ban on the distribution of printed material and leaflets. Some newspapers have reported that the authorities are planning to deactivate the telecommunications network in and around the city to prevent cell phone calls between the demonstrators. Police and plain-clothes intelligence officers have the power to stop and search every inhabitant and visitor to the city.

Parts of the city have been sealed off during the past week, following two bomb explosions and a much higher number of "false alarms". Organisers of the Social Forum expressed their concern that state intelligence forces could be involved in such provocations, intent on a "strategy of tension" to justify using severely repressive measures against demonstrators. After two bombs went off in Genoa, Social Forum spokesman Vittorio Agnoletto declared on Tuesday: "It is unbelievable that two bombs could go off in one day in a city where one cannot proceed more than five paces without being controlled by the combined secret police of seven states." The human rights organisation Amnesty International felt it necessary to warn the Italian authorities to respect international standards of law.

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