

How governments, bankers, secret services, Masonic lodges, the Vatican and the Mafia impacted international politics in the 1970s and 1980s

By Marc Wells
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I Banchieri Di Dio: Il Caso Calvi (God's Bankers: The Calvi Case), written by Armenia Balducci and Giuseppe Ferrara, directed by Giuseppe Ferrara.

Italian filmmaker Giuseppe Ferrara's name may not be well known to an international audience. It should be, as he is a courageous filmmaker who has consistently exposed the reality behind the official version of events. He has repeatedly been the target of political boycotts and commercial sabotage aimed at concealing the truth that his films and documentaries bring out.

His works have been explicit indictments of the highest authorities, from political rulers to financial elites, from environment-destructive industries to organized crime. *Sasso In Bocca (Stone In Mouth, 1970)*, *Faccia Di Spia (Spy Face, 1975)*, *La Salute Non Si Vende (Health Is Not For Sale, 1977)*, *Il Caso Moro (The Moro Case, 1986)* and *Contradiction (1987)*, to name a few, expose and explain the machinations behind coups, terrorist acts, Mafia activity and industrial negligence.

In *I Banchieri Di Dio: Il Caso Calvi (God's Bankers: The Calvi Case)*, Ferrara sets himself the ambitious goal of reconstructing the events that led to the assassination (not suicide, as officials originally claimed) of Italian financier Roberto Calvi on June 18, 1982. Behind Calvi's death lay a reactionary and powerful network involving the Vatican, the Mafia and extreme right-wing forces that dominated the 1970s. These forces had conspired against the rights of the international working class and the Italian and international left, and led Italy to the brink of a military coup. Calvi, chairman and managing director of Banco Ambrosiano in Milan, was a pivotal figure who served as the financial front man.

The engine of this conspiratorial operation was a right-wing Italian and ultimately international Masonic unit known as Loggia Propaganda 2, or P2, composed of 962 (some claim far more) politicians, ministers, industrialists, journalists, judges, high-ranking military officers and secret service agents from various countries, whose common aim (the "Plan for Democratic Rebirth") was the creation of two safe political buffer zones in the guise of "democracy": a bourgeois, controllable "left" prop and a so-called "democratic" right, with the specific purpose of suffocating any genuine political mobilization of the working class in Western Europe and South America.

"Democracy" was merely a code word for capitalism, for this sinister organization was more than willing to give its support to authoritarian and fascist regimes. P2 Grand Master Licio Gelli, a former Italian fascist, SS officer during World War II and friend of both Benito Mussolini and Juan Perón, had connections to ultra-right forces in Europe and Latin America. In the event of a Communist Party electoral victory in Italy, P2 allegedly

planned a coup d'état and had a parallel government in waiting.

As Ferrara explains in his film, with the cooperation of the CIA the P2 actively pursued strategies of political destabilization and repression in Italy, Uruguay, and Brazil, and in Argentina's "Dirty War," supporting the installation of several dictators across the globe (for example, the film makes a subtle reference to the lodge's participation in financing Argentina's Falklands War). Such strategies included operating *agents provocateurs* and organizing terrorist attacks aimed at countering left-wing influence, in addition to controlling and repressing basic democratic rights, such as the right to strike and free assembly. In relation to the Italian judicial system, the lodge pursued a strategy aimed at limiting the power of judges and increasing the participation of politicians affiliated to P2 in the Supreme Judicial Council, which selects, promotes and assigns judges.

(In 2004, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, former member of P2, pushed for a reform of the judicial system that would have implemented such a program. Italy's president refused to sign the measure. (See "Italian President Ciampi blocks Berlusconi's justice 'reforms'"))

Finally, the P2 program laid out specific tactical measures for establishing press and media control, particularly by installing friendly journalists in crucial positions, as Ferrara documents in relation to the lodge's acquisition and control of the *Corriere Della Sera*, the most influential newspaper in Italy.

The director carefully depicts Calvi's role at the Banco Ambrosiano, the financial arm of the P2 organization. The significance of this bank's intervention in world politics cannot be fully appreciated in one article or one documentary. Its impact continues to reverberate. Moreover, to this day, many of the lodge's former members occupy prominent governmental positions, despite the fact that P2 and similar organizations were made illegal—Italy's current government, for example, hosts several former members, besides the prime minister.

The film documents the Banco Ambrosiano's strong and deep ties with the Vatican's own bank, IOR (the Institute for Religious Works). It was Calvi who, at the request of the pope, financed and helped transform the Polish Solidarnosc movement into a pro-capitalist movement, aimed at defusing the possibility of a left-wing alternative developing to Stalinism, thereby helping to inflict a grave defeat on the Polish working class.

Concurrently, Calvi's involvement with the Mafia by way of intricate money-laundering schemes provided a steady cash flow. The cash was funneled through the many subsidiaries that constituted the intricate and nearly impenetrable web of financial institutions, offshore corporations, banks and accounting alchemies through which the Ambrosiano carried

out significant financial transactions. The Vatican is accurately shown in the movie as the co-owner of some of these banking organizations. The collapse of Ambrosiano revealed that high officials in the Vatican and the bank had conspired to build up a network of phony offshore companies, into which hundreds of millions of dollars had been poured (perhaps as much as \$1 billion). Moreover, immense financial resources were utilized to finance the electoral campaigns of those parties supported by the lodge.

When, in 1981, the Italian financial police exposed the list of P2 members and its connection to the Italian and American secret services, a political and financial crisis shook the entire establishment. The Christian Democratic (DC) government fell as a result of its opposition to publishing the P2 members list, which incriminated substantial sections of the ruling elite.

Arrested on charges of illicit capital transference and eventually released on parole, Calvi, aided by his wife, as well as secret service agent and Mason Francesco Pazienza, attempted to play a Machiavellian game with the various institutions that he had served, in a desperate attempt to salvage his bank, which by now had a deficit of \$1 billion.

Archbishop Marcinkus and the Vatican Bank stepped forward to help Calvi. In September 1981, they provided him with a series of documents that are known as "letters of patronage." They acknowledge the Vatican's co-ownership of 11 Panamanian ghost-corporations being investigated as part of the Ambrosiano scheme and guarantee all their debts, in addition to indirectly admitting responsibility for all the operations behind Calvi's bank. Bizarrely and menacingly, however, the Vatican put an expiration date on the papers! Their support for Calvi had its time limit.

Later, through Pazienza, Calvi befriended Flavio Carboni, a Sardinian entrepreneur with close ties to the Christian Democrats, the Mafia and the Vatican's ultra-orthodox Opus Dei. The latter was instrumental in sacking Calvi. Hoping that John Paul II would offer him assistance, he agreed to sign an agreement with Opus Dei that in essence would absolve the Vatican of all wrongdoing and void Marcinkus's previous commitment.

Meanwhile, Calvi pursued efforts to cash in on old favors such as the illegal financing of political parties' campaigns, or, to put it more bluntly, he attempted to blackmail members of the establishment. The intrigue is so thick and complicated it occasionally becomes difficult to follow. For example, Calvi, under pressure from the Mafia and the Christian Democrats, paid the ransom for the release of a shady politician kidnapped by the terrorist Red Brigades, while in exchange the Mafia distributed a flyer denouncing giant Mediobanca's fraudulent activities and the Bank of Italy's complicity, in an attempt to discredit his accusers. More directly, Calvi's wife asked the Socialist Party for help in blackmailing its secretary using her knowledge about the party's illicit financing.

After a suicide attempt, Calvi decided to accept help from Carboni's Mafia connections and in a final and desperate act fled Italy on a false passport, with the purpose of collecting finances and documents that would vindicate him and indict others. He traveled through Europe for a few days and finally reached London, where on the night of June 17, 1982, he was picked up by two Mafiosi and killed by the Thames. He was found the following morning hanging from the Blackfriars Bridge, with bricks and £15,000 in cash in his pockets.

Carboni, along with P2 Grand Master Gelli and members of the Neapolitan and Roman Mafia were indicted only last year, after more than 20 years of judicial procrastination undoubtedly organized by those whose interest lay in protecting the highest echelons of the Italian political and financial elite and the Church hierarchy.

I Banchieri Di Dio: Il Caso Calvi avoids certain crucial issues, perhaps due to the intricacy of the conspiracies, particularly the fate of the working class and the role of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The only reference to the PCI in the film is a mention of its perfunctory support for

an official investigation into the P2 list.

In 1976, the PCI achieved the highest electoral results in its history (34.4 percent of the national vote), threatening to overthrow the rule of the Christian Democrats, who had reigned since 1946. After a long period of slavish subservience to the Kremlin, the Stalinist PCI sought to distance itself on tactical details (remaining faithful to the strategy of "socialism in one country") and to redefine itself along the lines of "Eurocommunism," in fact, as an even more thoroughly integrated element of the Italian bourgeois order. It now presided over a mélange of diverse tendencies, including identity politics, eco-politics, petty-bourgeois radicalism and middle-class liberalism.

The PCI's attempt to enter a bourgeois government through an alliance with the Christian Democrats failed following the kidnapping and assassination of DC leader Aldo Moro. Regardless of the outcome, it had now become clear that the Communist Party had dropped even its pretense of being a Marxist or anti-capitalist party, and this reduced the fear of "communism" among the members of the P2.

This setting explains the lack of a significant response by the PCI to the political crisis that the Calvi affair caused: a Marxist leadership would have intervened in the situation, with all its potentially revolutionary implications, and sharply warned the working class about the grave dangers to its democratic rights represented by the renewed fascist threat. The activity of the PCI, on the contrary, deepened the disorientation of the Italian working class and dealt a further blow to its emergence as an independent political force.

In 1991, following the demise of the USSR, the PCI broke up into a series of left opportunist groups, none of which offered a Marxist perspective or bothered to explain what had happened to the first workers' state in the Soviet Union or to the mass Communist parties themselves.

At times, the film displays a tendency to romanticize Calvi, presenting him as a man genuinely convinced of his innocence, or depicting the emotional distress that the events caused for his family members. Undoubtedly, people who find themselves in such extreme and ominous circumstances may have redeeming characteristics; after all, these are human beings too who have been drawn into events that overwhelm them.

However, this type of portrayal can also subtract from the far more important issues that the film exposes. Calvi was in fact a leading member of the Italian ruling elite who willingly and consciously financed some of the politically most decisive and sinister events over the course of two decades. He was not an innocent. The aims and means of the entire reactionary operation were well known inside P2, the Vatican, the Mafia and, undoubtedly, within the Banco Ambrosiano.

One must ask: What's the relevance of all this today?

Mr. Ferrara has accomplished something important and enduring: he has been able to shed light on one of the most obscure episodes of the second half of the twentieth century and its far-ranging implications.

Italian politics have not fundamentally changed course since the corrupt and conspiratorial 1970s; on the contrary, social and economic conditions have driven the entire elite to the right. The country is presided over by the most right-wing figure in postwar history, an individual who has almost complete control over the media (as the head of the executive, Berlusconi oversees the public RAI radio-TV network, in addition to owning the largest private network). Moreover, Berlusconi has obtained a carte blanche from the legislature, where his majority alliance with the neo-fascist Alleanza Nazionale, the backward secessionist Lega Nord and the reshuffled Christian Democrats ensures his legal protection despite countless charges of corruption and fraud brought against him.

If significant sections of the Italian ruling elite were prepared to dispense with bourgeois democracy in the 1970s, when the postwar economic boom had not yet collapsed, what can be their attitude today, under the far more intense conditions of cutthroat global economic

competition?

The assembly of illustrious individuals in the Italian parliament has launched continuous attacks on the democratic rights and living standards of workers, students, immigrants and retirees and joined wholeheartedly in Bush's "war on terrorism," in hope of gaining some crumbs for Italian imperialism. Moreover, the Italian political elite has rejected rationalism and science in favor of religious bigotry, false morality and the promotion of a backward and hypocritical propaganda that does not hesitate to condemn Islam as "barbaric."

Ferrara's work in this respect undoubtedly raises key issues—the corruption and anti-democratic ruthlessness of the Italian ruling class. His documentaries fill a vacuum, in a film world often dominated by sensationalism and special effects. Whatever its limitations, *I Banchieri Di Dio: Il Caso Calvi* is proof that art and intelligence offer powerful means of aiding the international proletariat on its path from capitalism to socialism.

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