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# Anarchism in Italy

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## References And Suggested Readings

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collectives have joined their anti-organizational and individualist strategies and started campaigns of armed propaganda with sabotage, explosive attacks, and arson. Since 2003, ten acronyms have claimed to be part of an Informal Anarchist Federation (Federazione Anarchica Informale, also sharing the acronym FAI) and have claimed responsibility for more than 30 low-intensity bombings aimed at European Commission president Romano Prodi, military and police stations, detention centers, and tribunals. Responsibility for several other acts of sabotage against productive infrastructure was not directly claimed. It has been suggested that this group may be provocateurs, the initials FAI chosen for their similarity to those of the Federazione Anarchica Italiana.

Anarchists are today present nationwide and are involved in all the principal social and political conflicts, with more than 60 active spaces and an articulated presence on the Internet and in the militant press. Centri Sociali, libraries, and USI union sections are divided into the two main historical tendencies: unions and federated associations maintain open, public activity, while the anti-organizational and individualist tendency refuses any kind of formalization, stressing the importance of direct action and underground organizing.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism, Argentina ; Anarchism, Spain ; Anarchism in the United States to 1945 ; Anarchosyndicalism ; Autonomism ; Bakunin, Mikhail Alexandrovich (1814–1876) ; Fanelli, Giuseppe (1826–1877) ; Fascism, Protest and Revolution ; G8 Protests, Genoa, 2001 ; Galleani, Luigi (1861–1931) ; Gori, Pietro (1865–1911) ; Gramsci, Antonio (1891–1937) ; Infoshops ; Internationals ; Italian Labor Movement ; Italy, Centri Sociali ; Italy, from the Anti-Fascist Resistance to the New Left (1945–1960) ; Italy, from the New Left to the Great Repression (1962–1981) ; Malatesta, Errico (1853–1932) ; Pisacane, Carlo (1818–1857)

Anarchism in Italy has its origins in the second half of the nineteenth century in the context of the political radicalism of intellectuals and popular leaders who struggled for national liberation and a republican government, such as Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882) and Carlo Pisacane (1818–1857). From 1864 on, the influence of Mikhail Bakunin was decisive in the creation of a radical and autonomous political doctrine. Together with initial industrialization in the urban centers of the center and north of the country, there was an important growth in workers' associations (*società operaie*), often organized by profession, in which anarchism found supporters. In the south of the country, the majority of workers were landless peasants who, led by an enlightened elite, had engaged in several failed insurrections. This activity was soon channeled into continuous guerilla actions often mixing brigandage with social protest. In 1869, under the influence of Bakunin, Carlo Gambuzzi and Stefano Caporosso founded the first anarchist journal, *Eguaglianza* (Equality), in Naples, edited by Michelangelo Statuti. The first Italian anarchist organizations, such as the Federazione Operaia Napoletana (1874), emerged in the south. There, Bakunin found important supporters and natural leaders such as Carlo Cafiero (1846–1892) and Errico Malatesta (1853–1932). When anarchist tendencies spread to the north, from Rome to the eastern region of Marche and Romagna, Tuscany, and the industrial centers of Milan, Turin, and Genoa, they gained supporters among the working class, artisans, and the urban underclasses. Italian anarchist organizations and groups were part of the First International Workingmen's Association, and at the first meeting of the Italian section of the International, held in Rimini from August 4 to 6, 1872, Cafiero and Andrea Costa (1851–1910) supported the anarchist position against the Marxist currents that would soon drive the anarchists out of the International.

From 1870 to 1880, Italian anarchism defined itself as autonomous from socialism and republicanism, and with the lead-

ership of Costa and Malatesta, tried to find a common organization as a revolutionary party. Anarchists supported and participated in several popular revolts until their important insurrectionary plans were frustrated by the police: in August 1874 near Bologna and Castel del Monte in the southeast, and in 1877 in the northwest of Campania in the Matese region, where after several guerilla actions the rebels were defeated. The crisis of a common organizing project and harsh repression by the state provoked by individualist terrorist practices escalated across Europe, as acts of “propaganda by the deed” were often performed by the hands of Italian anarchists. In 1887, the Italian anarchist Michele Angiolillo (1871–97) killed the prime minister of Spain, Antonio Canovas; in 1894, Sante Caserio (1873–94) stabbed French president Sadi Carnot to death; and in 1898, Luigi Luccheni (1873–1910) stabbed and killed Princess Elisabeth of Austria. Malatesta criticized this individualist tendency and promoted instead participation in popular organizations and trade unions. An anarchist-led, nationwide protest for “food and work” started in Ancona in January 1898, ending with barricades and bloody military repression in Milan in May. The repression was also enforced by an international anti-anarchist conference of European police forces in Rome from November 24 to December 21 of that year. In this context, Gaetano Bresci (1869–1901), an Italian immigrant to the United States, shot and killed King Umberto I in Monza on July 29, 1900 as a revenge for the victims of the military repression of 1898.

## **From the Rise of Syndicalism to the Rise of Fascism**

At the turn of the century, Costa broke with Malatesta and joined the Italian Socialist Party together with a section of the trade union movement that chose the liberal democratic

ing public hysteria toward the Italian left (Censor 1975/1997; Sanguinetti 1979/1982). Nevertheless, many anarchists participated actively in local organizations and collectives, and several were imprisoned or killed, such as Giuseppe Pinelli, killed in police custody in 1969 in Milan (the subject of Dario Fo’s famous play, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*), or Franco Serantini, killed by the police in Pisa in 1973. When armed struggle was on the rise, anarchists Gianfranco Faina and Salvatore Cinieri formed their own armed initiative with the small affinity group-based organization *Azione Rivoluzionaria* (1976–80). In the 1980s, a part of the movement took on board the discourses and practices of radical ecology, experimented with the creation of autonomous local communities, or practiced individual forms of expropriation.

The 1990s were characterized by a strong repressive turn against anarchists that followed the hegemony of the insurrectionary and anti-organizational tendency. On November 16, 1995, the police launched a major operation involving hundreds of activists. Alfredo Maria Bonanno (b. 1937) and 53 others were accused by the public prosecutor Antonio Marini of many offenses, including forming a terrorist organization. Many were convicted, but their tendency was not defeated and it experienced a strong revival with the start of the anti-globalization movement. In 1998, due to several acts of sabotage against the high-speed train (TAV) project in Piemonte, a number of anarchists were arrested, two of whom, Edoardo Massari and Maria Soledad Rosa, committed suicide in custody. While the FAI and USI maintained a national presence, they did not play a major role in the anti-globalization movement, and by the end of the 1990s neither had a strong influence among the youth who organized mostly in informal groups and *Centri Sociali* (volunteer-run community spaces, often in squatted premises). Anarchists participated actively in the protests against the G8 meeting in Genoa in 2001 as the so-called “black bloc.” From 1999 to the present, various

of Giustizia e Libertà, the communist Garibaldi brigades, or autonomous anarchist fighting groups such as the Michele Schirru battalion in Tuscany, or the Malatesta and Bruzzi battalions in Milan and Genoa. On September 19, 1945, the Italian Anarchist Federation (Federazione Anarchica Italiana, FAI) was founded in Carrara in an attempt to rebuild anarchist unity. The directive committee of the federation refused to support the National Liberation Committee (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale, CLN), which would be instrumental in the constitution of the new republic. This position, together with the strong hegemony of the Italian Communist Party, closed spaces for the anarchist initiative and its presence among the working class.

In the 1950s, anarchism entered a deep crisis. At the beginning of the 1960s, the formal unity of FAI began to splinter into the three main organizations and tendencies that have continued to the present time. One breakaway group, claiming the heritage of the “anarchist party” projected by Malatesta, gave birth to the Federation of Anarchist Communists (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, FDCA). Local autonomous groups belonging to the anti-organizational and individualist tendency left the FAI in 1965 and founded the Anarchist Initiative Groups (Gruppi di Iniziativa Anarchica, GIA), and then in 1967 the Federated Anarchist Groups (Gruppi Anarchici Federati, GAF), which became the Italian section of the Anarchist Black Cross (an international prisoner-support organization) and the hegemonic group in the country.

## **Anarchist Struggles AND THE “Strategy of Tension”**

During the movements of 1967–79, anarchists were often attacked and used by the security forces for provocation and infiltration, as part of a “strategy of tension” aimed at arous-

political terrain opened up by the introduction of universal suffrage. Anarchism in this period was characterized by intense activity among workers, leading to the formation in 1912 of the Italian Syndicalist Union (Unione Sindacale Italiana, USI) as a branch of the International Workingmen’s Association (Associazione Internazionale dei Lavoratori, AIT/IWA). Meanwhile, anarchists participated in the General Chamber of Labor (Camera Generale del Lavoro, CGDL), today the Italian General Confederation of Labor (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro, CGIL), with the aim of gaining positions within the working-class organizations. Beginning in 1912, protests against Italy’s colonial war in Libya led to nationwide strikes and to generalized standoffs, with a revival of individualist attacks against military personnel and politicians.

In 1914, conditions of low wages and high prices were exacerbated by heavy police repression. A political meeting attended by Malatesta in the city of Ancona was attacked by the police, and the ensuing protests culminated in riots which soon spread to the major urban centers of the country, as well as to regions where anarchists had strong bases, such as Romagna and Marche. Riots, strikes, and acts of sabotage broke out all over Italy, often led by anarchists. The majority of republican, socialist, and anarchist leaders chose not to push the popular unrest into a general insurrection, and the state regained control through another round of repression that sent many anarchists to jail and Malatesta into exile. In the same year, anarchist newspapers and activists led a campaign against the possible participation of Italy in the war. When Italy attacked Austria and Germany in 1915, many anarchists chose to respond by acts of individual and collective desertion and sabotage. After the war, in 1919, the Union of Italian Communist Anarchists (Unione Comunista Anarchica Italiana, UCAI) was founded in Florence. One year later it approved Malatesta’s “Anarchist Program” (Malatesta & Richards 1993: 182–98) and

became the Italian Anarchist Union (Unione Anarchica Italiana, UAI), publishing its own newspaper, *Umanità Nova* (New Humanity).

When, in 1920, there was another nationwide protest following on from a revolt of military conscripts in Ancona that had popular support, anarchists such as Pietro Ferrero (1892–1922) and Maurizio Gorino joined the radical socialists and the collective of Antonio Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order) in promoting the occupation of factories and the takeover of the production of essential goods and services. The movement was strong, especially in the main industrial districts of Turin and Milan. This revolutionary movement was defeated in 1921 by the rising violent reaction emerging from the newborn fascist organization. In response, many anarchists joined the *Arditi del Popolo*, a paramilitary organization formed by ex-soldiers and political militants that practiced armed struggle against fascists until 1924.

## Italian Anarchists Abroad

From the second half of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, Italians had migrated to the Americas by the millions. The Italian anarchist presence in the United States, Argentina, and Brazil was significant enough to sponsor newspapers and initiatives, as well as to provide economic support to prisoners and organizations, all of which had a strong impact in Italy itself. Two of the most important Italian anarchist newspapers were founded in New York: *Il Martello* (The Hammer) in 1918 by Carlo Tresca, which was an organ of revolutionary syndicalism, and *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (The Call of the Refractory Ones), an organ of the anti-organizational and individualist tendency founded in 1922 by Armando Borghi. In Buenos Aires, Italian anarchism had a strong influence within the labor movement and gained a reputation for its violent and

open resistance to repression, notably with the group around Severino di Giovanni (1901–31). *La Battaglia* (Battle) and *Guerra Sociale* (Social War), among many other journals, were edited in Brazil. Giovanni Rossi founded the experimental colony of Cecília in the province of Paraná (1890–4), and one of his associates, Gigi (Luigi) Damiani, became an important union leader during the strikes of 1917–19 in São Paulo. In addition, individual anarchists, including such luminaries as Malatesta, Galleani, and Luigi Fabbri (1877–1935), also made journeys around the Mediterranean, establishing small groups, educational projects, and publications in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Turkey (Khuri-Makdisi 2003; Gorman 2005).

The rise of the fascist regime in Italy in 1926 forced many anarchists into exile or underground. Various anarchist groups went to Spain to participate in the anti-fascist resistance there on the side of the anarcho-sindicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo-Federación Anarquista Ibérica (CNT-FAI), most notably in the enlistment of anarchists from the UAI with the republican organization *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Liberty), part of the Italian *Ascaso* Column led by the anarchist Camillo Berneri (1897–1937), later assassinated by Stalinist agents.

## Recovery of the Movement and New Crises

After years of underground activity, exile, and detention, witnessing the crisis of the fascist regime, anarchists confined in the island of Ventotene held a clandestine congress in 1942 in which they planned for the fall of fascism and a new revolutionary project. In 1943, the Federation of Italian Anarchist Communists (*Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici Italiani*, FCAI) was founded. Anarchists often fought in the popular armed resistance with the republican partisan groups