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Italian Farce

El Paso

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A short while ago the Nobel committee disclosed that this years Nobel prize for literature has gone to radical Italian playwright Dario Fo. Many of you will remember Fo's dark humor and subversive message in plays like "Accidental Death of an Anarchist." The burlesque scenes in Fo's plays are not just a product of a creative artistic imagination, they are a reflection of the realities of Italian public life and system of justice. In the early 70'ies a bomb went off at piazza Fontana in Milan, killing dozens of people. The anarchists were blamed, and an anarchist named Pinelli "accidentally" fell from a 5th floor window of Milan police headquarters while being interrogated. Today, a quarter of a century later, the judiciary itself has had to admit that it was the State secret services who placed the bomb.

Today a new farce is being played out in Italy's courtrooms. The first act took place in September 1994 when four anarchists were caught robbing a bank in Trento. The four declared that the robbery was committed for reasons of personal needs. This, however, was not good enough for the prosecution, who, with the help of the media, concocted the existence of a secret paramilitary anarchist group that was given the name ORAI (Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica Insurrezionalista).

In the following three years, raids against anarchists have taken place all over Italy and more than 60 individuals have been arrested and charged with being part of this fictitious armed band. The "ORAI" has been blamed for a number of bank robberies, a kidnapping, several attempted murders, in addition to car bombs and bombings against the police, the military, and against the supermarket chain Standa (owned by right wing politician and billionaire Berlusconi).

The prosecutors only "evidence" is a bought witness, the former girlfriend of one of the fore mentioned bank robbers. This star witness had her debut in court last year. Here she claimed to have participated in a bank robbery together with five other anarchists. Despite the fact that this was the only criminal action she claimed to have taken part in, she couldn't remember any details from the robbery. She didn't remember the name of the bank they supposedly robbed, she didn't remember how the building looked, she didn't remember who took the money, whether she wore gloves, whether she fired a shot or not, nor what kind of gun she held. One of the few things she did remember was that her accomplices wore worker's overalls. However, the bank's security cameras showed the robbers wearing jackets and ties. Despite this rather unconvincing testimony, the judges handed down guilty sentences.

The latest act in this farce of justice is just starting, as 58 anarchists stand trial for "subversive association" — a crime inherited from Mussolini's fascist legal system — and for being members of an armed gang, an organization that only exists in the head of an Italian prosecutor, Judge Marini, with the ambition of "arresting a gang of terrorists" before he retires.

On the 10th of July 1997, an alternative radio station in Turin, Radio Black Out, received a 14 page internal memo of the ROS, the Italian political police, dated December 1994. The document, which had been sent by an anonymous source, was the subject of a press conference by Radio Black Out

on July 16th, and has later been circulated over the Internet. It discusses activities to be carried out to artificially create evidence sufficient to incriminate the so-called "insurrectionalist" anarchist circles in view of the failure of 15 years of investigative activity on the part of the very same police. The document then goes on to suggest the possibility of using a young woman described as "a vulnerable element and particularly malleable," prepared to cooperate with the police, and "available to make any contribution." In essence the document confirms the frame up of the 58 anarchists now on trial.

Instead of waiting for an investigation designed to verify the authenticity of the document, the judge in the case of the anarchists declared the document a forgery and an "awkward attempt to put off preliminary hearings past the date of cautionary custody." Judge Marini then issued a search warrant for the location of Radio Black Out and the residence of the two editors, in connection with the crime of "forgery of an official document." The two hour search resulted in the seizure of a copy of the document itself and of a computer. It should be mentioned that the editors of the radio station had already personally delivered another copy to the Turin Police Headquarters.