

41 years on – Remembering the Bologna Bombings

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WHO PAID FOR THE BOLOGNA BOMBING?

By Alfio Bernabei Published in Searchlight (Autumn 2020) on the 40th anniversary

Secret organisations need money – and it can take time for the paper trail to emerge. But documents seized from Licio Gelli, the head of the Masonic lodge *Propaganda Due* (P2) back in 1982 are now thought to reveal payments made to the fascist terrorists who carried out an attack at Bologna railway station on 2 August 1980 that killed 85 people and wounded 200.

The documents, seized in September 1982 when Swiss police arrested Gelli in Geneva, are at the centre of renewed inquiries by the Bologna public prosecutor. Details appear to note payments made to those who took part in the initial planning – which may have started 18 months before the explosion – and to those who later sidetracked investigations into the atrocity.

At the time of his arrest, Gelli was a fugitive from justice. Police looking into financial transactions and money laundering involving the Mafia organisation *Cosa Nostra*, the Vatican and the secret services of various countries had raided his villa in Tuscany on 17 March 1981. Inside, locked in a safe, they found a list of 962 names – all members of P2, which was not just a Masonic lodge but, rather, the architecture of a “state within a state”. On the list were: 3 Italian ministers, 67 other politicians, including 44 MPs and 52 government officials. It also contained 208 army and police figures, including highly placed secret service agents, 18 magistrates, 49 bankers, 120 industrialists and 27 journalists.

Gelli had fled abroad. An arrest warrant was issued. The Swiss government froze one of his bank accounts with a huge sum of money in it – and when he went to the bank to find out why, he was arrested.

This is when a document headed ‘Bologna – 525779 – X.S.’ was found in his possession, with a number that corresponded to a current account opened by Gelli at the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) in Geneva.

For reasons which remain unclear, the document reached Italy only in 1986. Even more strangely, it was photocopied and sent to the Bologna prosecutor – but without the front page where the name ‘Bologna’ appeared. This made it difficult to interpret it as having an explicit link with the attack at the railway station.

Finally re-examined in its original form, the document reveals a \$5m operation led by Gelli and managed through “MC”, his Italo-Swiss advisor, Mario Ceruti – this being part of the larger sum of \$10m that Gelli and Umberto Ortolani, the P2 banker, stole from the collapse of Roberto Calvi’s *Banco Ambrosiano* – whose major shareholder was the Vatican. This is the money that is now thought to have been used to pay those who carried out the Bologna massacre.

Crucially, on one paper, Gelli notes that he has “delivered cash” for “one million dollars” from “20 to 30 July 1980”, that is about a week before the terrorist attack. This was followed, a month after the bombing, by \$4m paid into a UBS account in Geneva.

The investigators believe that the \$1m cash payment was delivered to the terrorist organisation *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR) as an advance during a meeting in Rome. Gelli was in the capital at the time, staying at the Excelsior Hotel, and Ceruti may have handed the money to Francesca Mambro and Valerio Fioravanti, who have each served a sentence for their part in the Bologna massacre.

Mambro and Fioravanti were among the founders of the fascist NAR organisation that was set up in 1977, probably as an armed youth wing of Gladio, the NATO-backed “stay-behind” post-war organisation in Italy. NAR committed 33 murders in four years, not counting those at Bologna. The

members had close links with the [Banda della Magliana](#), a criminal organization, which provided false papers, weapons and bombs, some of which were kept hidden in the basements of Italy's health ministry. NAR was also in contact with agents of SISMI, the Italian secret service, along with high ranking military figures and members of P2. In 1980 a second front organisation was set up, called *Terza Posizione*, or Third Position.

After the Bologna attack, a number of NAR members, including Massimo Morsello and Alessandro Alibrandi, took refuge in London along with members of the Third Position, such as Roberto Fiore, now head of Italy's *Forza Nuova* fascist group, which he and Massimo founded. The NAR killer, Luciano Petrone, joined them at the centre of a network of Italian drug dealers, art gallery owners and antiquarians.

Carlo Calvi, the son of the *Banco Ambrosiano* banker – who was found hanged under London's Blackfriars Bridge in 1982, is convinced that Gelli's money was reaching the large group of Italian fascists in Britain, the country Gelli spoke of as being at the head of the world of Masonry. He recently told the Italian TV programme *Report* that some of the money Gelli gave to Ceruti was passed by the latter to antiquarians, who in turn were helping the fugitives. "The role of Italian antiquarians in London was fundamental for Gelli – the money they received from the P2 helped to finance the Italian fascist fugitives who fled Italy soon after the attack in Bologna", he said.

The Bologna prosecution will reopen investigations early in the autumn.

After 40 years of attempts to identify those responsible for the massacre it has finally dawned that uncovering the full truth is much more than a question of justice for those who lost family members, but is a necessity for Italy and its democracy as a whole.

This was made clear during the ceremony marking this year's 40th anniversary of the attack, which took place in Bologna's main square due to the coronavirus pandemic. Usually, the annual march through the town is led by the families of the victims, ending at the railway station, where the main clock still shows the time of the explosion – 10.25 am.

Significantly, this year's ceremony was preceded by a visit by Italy's President, Sergio Mattarella, who referred directly to the fact that because of uncertainties still remaining over those behind the attack, the very principle of the country's democratic system was at stake. He was followed by the president of the senate, Elisabetta Casellati, who declared, "Without the truth, Italy has no future." In turn, prime minister Giuseppe Conte also indicated that the last secrets about the massacre must be made public.

And here is the real stumbling block: some secret papers remain classified. Why? Over the past 40 years the Bologna tribunal has put on trial and sentenced NAR terrorists Gilberto Cavallini and Luigi Ciavardini, as well as Mambro and Fioravanti – and it has named the masterminds acting under the umbrella of the P2 led by Gelli.

But we must not forget that Gelli was a guest at the White House on at least two occasions – he kept the invitation cards signed by US presidents Ronald Regan and Jimmy Carter. One of the reasons that papers about Bologna remain classified must be because Italian governments since 1980 have found it impossible to confront and question the secret services of states ranging from the US to countries in Latin America and Europe, including Britain. Probing the issues risks difficulties in the relations with several governments.

Faced with the possibility of disclosures and declassification of secret papers, Mambro and Fioravanti issued a statement on the 40th anniversary of the attack, reiterating their innocence, This may also have been intended as a reminder that they are in position to name those who recruited them to a clandestine fascist armed group – as maybe Italian heads of state who knew what was going on but felt they had no choice but to submit to the power of those beyond Italy's borders who believed they could treat the country as if it was under their control.