

Aldo Moro Anniversary: Time To Tell the Truth

Judith Harris (May 04, 2008)



On May 9, 1978, the President of the Christian Democratic party was found in Rome, murdered by the Red Brigades. New revelations today emerge to challenge official versions of this pivotal episode of Italy's political history.

ROME - Bologna, April 2, 1978, a gray Sunday afternoon in a country house near Bologna. A dozen friends, mostly professors and their wives, had just enjoyed lunch, but rain had set in, and with it, tedium. As children play in the background the grownups' talk turned to the missing Aldo Moro. The president of the Christian Democratic party had been kidnapped 17 days previously by Red Brigades, among whom was one highly skilled marksman who efficiently dispatched five bodyguards in two cars. Untouched by gunfire, thanks to this marksman's skill, Moro was spirited away. Now all Italy was asking where he was being kept.

Seated before a Ouija Board the group began four hours of contacts with the spirit world. These spirits were politically progressive, for they included—so said the players—the late founder of Moro's



own party, Don Luigi Sturzo, and the late reformist Catholic mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pirra. Eventually the Ouija spat out the word “Gradoli” and the numbers 6 and 11. Gradoli, the group excitedly reasoned—maybe that is where Moro is being held.

Francesco Cossiga, the Interior Minister chairing the government’s ad hoc Crisis Committee, was informed of the séance via its participant Romano Prodi, today the acting premier. Cossiga ordered 450 military to search the town of Gradoli north of Rome, but to no avail. Moro was never found until his body was dumped on a street in downtown Rome just thirty years ago this May 9.

Official documents of the fishy séance appear in the appendix of *Doveva Morire* (He had to Die), by judge Ferdinando Imposimato, the investigating magistrate who wrote the first indictments for the trial of the Red Brigades convicted for the murder of Moro and his bodyguards, and veteran journalist Sandro Provvigionato. The book is the most important of a spate of new publications and films timed to coincide with the anniversary of Moro’s death in 1978.

A new docudrama called *La Verità Negata* (Truth Denied) similarly challenges the official versions that have survived for three decades, however shabby. A miniscule example: as film writer/director Carlo Infanti points out that, whereas twelve people had testified about the rainy day séance, it had not even rained in or near Bologna that day. “I checked with the aeronautics weather office,” Infanti said at a press conference.

Some believe in séances, of course. Market research for future programming on Britain’s Living TV showed that, of 1,000 people interviewed, 67% claimed belief in paranormal phenomena, but these believers tended to be adolescents and youth influenced by reading Harry Potter and his ilk. Indeed, in the West Midlands 78% admitted believing in psychic powers.

One hundred percent of the members of the Aldo Moro Crisis Committee, meeting in the Interior Ministry in Rome, chose to believe. Acting on the tip from the dearly departed in Bologna, they dispatched 450 military to the little medieval town of Gradoli north of Rome. TV newscasts showed the town being searched stem to stern, even though Gradoli authorities interviewed on camera by Infanti say their town was never ransacked. “I guess some soldiers poked around a few abandoned farmhouses,” said the deputy mayor, speaking to camera. The massive door-to-door search shown in the newscast (presumably stock footage) and reported in just two newspapers seems never to have taken place.

Above all, no Red Brigades den was found.

Meanwhile, Aldo Moro’s wife Eleonora was asking if perhaps a Via Gradoli was intended. Interior Minister Francesco Cossiga, chairman of the Crisis Committee, responded that, no, there was no such street.

And so there was no contact with the farther shores of reason via a Ouija Board, no rain, not much of a search, and supposedly no Via Gradoli. What was going on?

But there was a Via Gradoli, off Via Cassia in a quiet North Rome neighborhood, where numerous apartments owned by the secret services were used as safe houses by Italian and foreign secret agents; indeed this reporter knew two foreign agents living nearby. Residing under a fake name at Via Gradoli 96, apartment 11, was Mario Moretti, considered the top leader of the Brigades. Moretti traveled almost daily to interrogate Moro. If spotted, he could have been tailed to Moro’s prison. But he was not spotted even though, on March 18, two weeks before the search of Gradoli township, a busybody neighbor had informed police of three people lingering suspiciously outside number 69 “as if checking who came in and who came out.” Another tenant told police of peculiar noises from Apartment 11, like the tapping of a Morse code; the police report on this disappeared.

When it became impossible to continue to deny there was a Via Gradoli 69, police were told to search every apartment. They did not search Number 11, however, on grounds that no one had answered the doorbell and that the neighbors had all vouched for the inhabitant, a claim some of the neighbors deny. In this way the apartment remained undisturbed for two more weeks, or until firemen were called because water was leaking downstairs from Apartment 11. Breaking open the



apartment at last, police found a flexible shower nozzle placed on a toilet brush stand, with water directed at a crack in a wall. In the hideout were 1,000 items of incriminating evidence, including the airline uniforms the killers wore during the kidnapping.

In a questionable decision by police, TV news crews were summoned to film the break-in. Predictably their presence drew crowds. Brigades chief Moretti, returning home on his motorbike, saw the crowds and whizzed away. So was the phony search and the Ouija Board a charade intended to save Moro, or to tip off those living in Number 11 at Via Gradoli 69?

That is only one of many unanswered questions. Here's another: in their search of the kidnapping site on Via Fani, police counted 93 bullet casings, of which 49 fired from a single machine gun, presumably that of the man eye witnesses described as highly professional. This marksman slaughtered five bodyguards while leaving Moro himself without a scratch. His skills were a far cry from those of the improvised gunmen of the Red Brigades, four of whose weapons failed to function, according to trial testimony. Was this professional gunman was even a "Red Brigade?" Even the number of gunmen on the scene ranges from nine to twelve, with missing identities.

Attending the presentation of scenes from the forthcoming documentary (not the same as the new Channel 5 movie) was Maria Fida Moro. The late statesman's eldest daughter, now 60, is among those detecting a connection between her father's kidnapping and that of the son of Socialist party leader Francesco De Martino, whose policies of seeking a rapprochement with the PCI were similar to Moro's. Young Guido De Martino was eventually released upon payment of a handsome ransom sum that created a political scandal. The political life of De Martino—until that moment tipped as Italian president—was at an abrupt end. "My father was very distressed at the De Martino kidnapping," said Maria Fida Moro. "It worried him."

Others agree. "The De Martino kidnapping was definitely a trial run for the Moro kidnapping," a judge with long experience in Red Brigades terrorism told me.

Mario Moretti continued to inhabit the Via Gradoli apartment for fourteen days after the widely publicized search of the town, even as every secret service in the West was supposedly searching for Moro, and even as its name and even the apartment number had been revealed in the "séance" or, more probably, by a certain lawyer in Rome—not Bologna—with whom the then Professor Prodi had business dealings. The lawyer, whose name is known, owned an apartment on Via Gradoli.

The Parliamentary Commission investigating the Moro affair says that it is a not uncommon secret service convention to protect sources by alleging contacts with the spirit world.

If there was scheming and skullduggery, if Ouija Boards do not communicate between the living and the dead, who was behind Moro's death? Two entirely opposing theories co-exist today.

The first is that the sponsor was the supposedly renegade P2 Masonic Lodge backed by operatives (including outside Italy) of Operation Stay Behind. This version leads to the West.

The second leads the opposite direction, to East European agents acting for the Soviets. In this view, Aldo Moro's mild opening to the Italian Communists risked luring them further away from the USSR than they already were, and, if Moscow had lost all control over the strongest party in the West, other parties might follow the Italians' lead. And indeed an infiltrated source traced back to the Stasi of East Germany, presumably through the Red Brigades' contacts with the German Red Army Faction (RAF), allegedly also slipped the name "Gradoli" to Rome, according to Imposimato.

Already PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer had declared independence from Moscow, and the prestigious party leader Giancarlo Pajetta had been barred from addressing, as usual, the Communist party congress in Moscow and was sent instead to speak in a gymnasium in an outlying suburb. In addition, an attempt seems to have been made on Berlinguer's life in 1974 while he was in Bulgaria and covered up until the 1990's.

Thirty years have now gone by, and it is time for the participants, including Acting Premier Prodi, the members of the Crisis Committee (they included a young American psychiatrist), the Red Brigades



themselves, and the surviving leaders of the Italian Communist party to tell the truth—the whole grownup truth. For, as Moro's daughter Maria Fida Moro, 60, said, her father's death was the equivalent of a coup d'état. The full story is waiting to be told.

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