

Italy's 'Irangate' targets influentials

by Umberto Pascali

Swedish police have formally requested that Italian magistrates provide them with all material pertaining to the links between Italian firms implicated in illegal weapons traffic to Iran, and Sweden's Nobel-Bofors arms firm. This documentation is directly relevant to the investigation into the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme, wrote the Swedish correspondent of Italy's *Corriere della Sera* Sept. 14.

The Italian side of the "European Irangate" is implicating "citizens above suspicion," including some of Italy's wealthiest, in the huge guns-for-drugs traffic.

On Sept. 14, Ferdinando Borletti and his son, arrested 10 days earlier, were given provisional release. Borletti is the owner of 50% of Valsella Meccanotecnica, the weapons firm at the center of sales of sea-mines to Teheran. The other half of the firm is owned, through the subsidiary Gilardini, by Gianni Agnelli's Fiat, on whose board Borletti sits. Gilardini in turn controls 51% of Misar, an Italian firm that leads in the production of sea-mines like those now floating in the Gulf. The two top executives of Misar, Paolo Torricelli and Carlo Callieri, also enjoy high-level positions on Fiat's board.

On Sept. 12, Borletti was interrogated at length by the young prosecutor of Massa Carrara, Augusto Lama, who had issued 55 arrest warrants. That day was a day of terror for the financial and political Establishment.

After receiving threats from the mafia ("we will kidnap your wife"), Lama was the victim of an unprecedented public attack by the president of the Italian Bar Association, Grande-Stevens, who, speaking before the association, stated that Lama was capricious and thoughtless in arresting people, and asked: "Who will pay?" when it is discovered that Borletti is innocent.

Grande-Stevens, the son of a journalist in vogue during the Fascist period, and of the daughter of a high-level British intelligence official, is considered the leading Italian expert in "off-shore investments." He is also the legal adviser to Agnelli and sits on the board of several companies linked to Fiat.

His attack on the prosecutor was part a desperate Establishment attempt to bury what had been uncovered. "Either they had to free Borletti or they had to arrest Agnelli . . . and to arrest Agnelli is unthinkable. He can collapse Italy. He employs 600,000 people," said a well-informed observer. It seems that Borletti had let his friends know that, were he not freed, he would have started naming names.

Andreotti and the Swedish connection

These are worrisome times for Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, whose policy has been very favorable to Syria, Libya, Iran, and Gorbachov's Russia. Not only is Borletti close to Andreotti, but another firm deeply involved in the illegal supply of weapons to Teheran, Tirrena S.A., is even closer to the foreign minister. Tirrena's chairman, Vittorio Amadasi, is one of his closest friends.

The role of Tirrena in smuggling weapons to Iran came out in the investigations of Sweden's Nobel-Bofors firm, which used Italy and Yugoslavia to ship huge amounts of explosives to Iran. Tirrena received 5,300 tons of M-1 explosive powder for export to Iran, supplied by Bofors, the Belgian PRB, the Scottish Nobel, the French SNPE, and the Dutch Muiden-Chimie.

A signed confession to the Swedish police by the chief of the military explosives department at Bofors, Mats Lundberg, supplies details of a meeting that took place in Tirrena's offices in Rome on May 4, 1984. In attendance were Amadasi, his assistant, and the Bofors representative in Italy, Renato Golinelli. Lundberg confessed that they had discussed the 5,300 tons of explosives and the support of Minister Andreotti for the renewal of Tirrena's license to export to Iran.

The Valsella involvement in supplying mines to Iran dates back to 1981, when the firm received an order for 1 million mines from Teheran. Valsella asked Bofors to supply as much explosive as possible.

The order, however, was too big for even the Swedish giant to fill. Lundberg therefore requested the help of a very secretive entity, the European Association for the Study of Safety Problems (EASSP), created in Brussels in 1975 by the very firms that supplied the 5,300 tons of explosives to Tirrena. The firms created a sort of pool, so that Valsella and other Italian firms were never in need when it came to satisfying the multimillion-ton orders from Khomeini.

A central place in this arrangement was (and is) Syria. Prosecutor Lama has told the press that the Syrian secret services were key in the "triangulation" used to ship weapons to Iran. Valsella would export its mines to a small firm in Barcelona, Spain, Boviga, that would then export them to Syria. Finally, the merchandise would arrive in Iran.

On Sept. 17, Lama announced that the owner of Boviga, Luis Vila Relaz, works for Syrian intelligence. His name appears on one of the 55 arrest warrants. Interpol has been unable to locate him. Boviga's payments to Valsella were made through a bank in Zurich.

The Spanish angle becomes more interesting. The Syrian intelligence station chief there is Firaas al Assad, son of Rifaat and nephew of Syrian President Hafez al Assad. Firaas Assad, known as "Modor," is the organizer of the traffic in opium produced in Lebanon's Syrian-occupied Bekaa Valley, whose proceeds are used to pay for weapons and terrorist activities.