

# Partisan Action Groups

## AT A GLANCE

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## HOW TO CITE

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## SUMMARY

**Formed:** 1969

**Disbanded:** 1972

**First Attack:** September 22, 1970: GAP members staged explosions at two construction sites in Milan. (0 killed)<sup>1</sup>

**Last Attack:** March 14, 1972: Three GAP members, including founder Feltrinelli, attempted to blow up a power pylon in Milan. Feltrinelli was killed when the bomb went off early. (1 killed, 2 wounded)<sup>2</sup>

## OVERVIEW

Partisan Action Groups (GAP) was one of the earliest left-wing terrorist groups in Italy. It was small and short-lived and was best-known for its leader, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a wealthy publisher who feared a fascist takeover of Italy and sought to recreate World War II-era communist resistance. The group ended with Feltrinelli's accidental death while planting an explosive; its remaining members were absorbed into the Red Brigades.

## NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Partisan Action Groups (GAP) was the second left-wing terrorist organization to form in Italy. It was smaller and less violent than later Italian terrorist groups. Its purported goal was to ward off a feared fascist coup d'etat.<sup>3</sup> GAP's targets did not clearly reflect this aim, however. The group staged mostly sabotage attacks against corporate properties and does not seem to have successfully attacked any Italian right-wing groups.<sup>4</sup>

GAP is best known for its founder, the wealthy publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. GAP was significant less for its handful of successful sabotage attacks than for Feltrinelli's international connections and his influence on later groups through his publishing company. Feltrinelli had ties to Latin American Communists, including Fidel Castro.<sup>5</sup> His publishing company published Italian translations of their theoretical and tactical writings. These works influenced the ideology and tactics of later Italian left-wing terrorist groups.<sup>6</sup>

GAP took its name and principles from the Italian left-wing groups, known as partisans, that had fought the fascists during World War II. Feltrinelli planned to eventually launch attacks from the mountains as the partisans had done, but GAP conducted attacks primarily in cities throughout its short lifespan.

The group largely dissolved after Feltrinelli accidentally died planting an explosive. The Red Brigades absorbed some of its remaining membership.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### A. LEADERSHIP

**Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, alias "Osvaldo"** (1969 to 1972): Feltrinelli was the group's founder and a prominent publisher. He fought alongside the U.S. Army as a teenager in the Italian anti-fascist resistance in World War II. He accidentally died planting an explosive in 1972.<sup>7</sup>

### B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

### C. SIZE ESTIMATES

### D. RESOURCES

Feltrinelli financed the group himself with money from his successful publishing empire.<sup>8</sup> He bought their guns and paid for the apartments they used as bases.

### E. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

**Disclaimer:** This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

GAP operated in Milan, Genoa, and Trento.<sup>9</sup>

## STRATEGY

### A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

GAP's chief aim was to prevent a fascist coup d'etat. The group sought to prevent it in part by creating squads of guerrilla fighters modeled after those that had fought the fascists in World War II.<sup>10</sup> These fighters had been known as partisans. Some of GAP's members were former partisans, and some were former members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) who felt the party was too reformist and too accommodating to the right wing.

## B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

GAP members included former Communists who had left the party disillusioned, finding its stance too gradualist. GAP founder Feltrinelli in particular had financed the Italian Communist Party (PCI) prior to the mid 1950s. He broke with the Communists after the Soviet Union's suppression of the Hungarian uprising.<sup>11</sup>

Feltrinelli wielded a great deal of political influence through his publishing company. He published his own political writings as well as those of other left-wing thinkers, especially Latin American revolutionaries.<sup>12</sup> GAP also spread propaganda by hijacking television waves.<sup>13</sup>

## C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

GAP targeted symbols of industry and capitalism like construction yards.<sup>14</sup> The group planned to conduct guerrilla war from the mountains but was based in cities throughout its short lifespan.<sup>15</sup> The group did not successfully target either state symbols or fascist groups, though the allied October 22 Circle did.

GAP conducted sabotage attacks against property with bombs and incendiary devices. No killings are attributed directly to GAP, though founder Feltrinelli aided the assassination of a Bolivian official in Germany involved in the capture and death of Che Guevara.<sup>16</sup>

## MAJOR ATTACKS

**Disclaimer:** These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

**September 22, 1970:** GAP members staged explosions at two construction sites in Milan. (0 killed).<sup>17</sup>

**March 14, 1972:** Three GAP members, including founder Feltrinelli, attempted to blow up a power pylon in Milan. Feltrinelli was killed when the bomb went off early. (1 killed).<sup>18</sup>

## INTERACTIONS

### A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

## **B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

The relationship between the October 22 Circle and the communities in which it resided is unknown.

## **C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS**

GAP leader Feltrinelli advocated coordination among both the legal and the clandestine Italian leftist groups<sup>19</sup> and likely financed other left-wing terrorist organizations.<sup>20</sup> GAP's greatest influence on other groups was through Feltrinelli's publishing house, which published Italian translations of the writings of Latin American revolutionaries.<sup>21</sup>

GAP's ties were strongest to the Genoa-based left-wing terrorist group October 22 Circle. GAP helped the group claim attacks through hijacked state television waves and may have participated in the attacks themselves.<sup>22</sup> GAP absorbed the remainder of the October 22 Circle after most of the Circle's members were arrested.<sup>23</sup>

Feltrinelli tried to strike an alliance with the Red Brigades but was rebuffed because the BR's leaders did not share his preoccupation with the possibility of a coup nor his ambition to stage guerilla attacks from the mountains.<sup>24</sup> Many of GAP's remaining members and bases were absorbed by the BR after Feltrinelli's death.<sup>25</sup>

Feltrinelli also financially supported Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF).<sup>26</sup> Feltrinelli's gun was used to assassinate the Bolivian consul-general, who had played a role in the capture and death of Che Guevara, in Hamburg on April 1, 1971.<sup>27</sup>

Feltrinelli also had personal and ideological ties to the legal left-wing group Worker Power (PO) and its militant wing Illegal Work (LI) and may have helped fund them.<sup>28</sup>

## **D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES**

GAP was most strongly influenced ideologically and tactically by Latin American revolutionaries including Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. GAP founder Feltrinelli's publishing company published Italian translations of their writings. Feltrinelli himself had visited Latin American and knew Castro personally.<sup>29</sup>

The group also had ties in Europe. Feltrinelli acquired arms from countries such as Lichtenstein and Czechoslovakia, which had more liberal gun laws than Italy, though GAP was not directly sponsored by any state.<sup>30</sup>

## **MAPS**

- Italy

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<sup>1</sup> Feltrinelli, Carlo. Feltrinelli. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harcourt, 2001. p. 306

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- <sup>2</sup> Barbato, Tullio. *Il Terrorismo In Italia Negli Anni Settanta : Cronaca E Documentazione*. Milano: Bibliografica, 1980. p. 59
- <sup>3</sup> Barbato, Tullio. *Il Terrorismo In Italia Negli Anni Settanta : Cronaca E Documentazione*. Milano: Bibliografica, 1980. p. 42.
- <sup>4</sup> Feltrinelli, Carlo. *Feltrinelli*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harcourt, 2001. p. 306
- <sup>5</sup> Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security : the Italian Experience : Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 30
- <sup>6</sup> Segio, Sergio. *Una Vita In Prima Linea*. 1. ed. Milano: Rizzoli, 2006. pp. 41-42
- <sup>7</sup> Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security: the Italian Experience: Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 13; Solomon, Barbara Probst. "Man of All Qualities." *Harper's*. May 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security : the Italian Experience : Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 13.
- <sup>9</sup> Segio, Sergio. *Una Vita In Prima Linea*. 1. ed. Milano: Rizzoli, 2006. p. 40
- <sup>10</sup> Barbato, Tullio. *Il Terrorismo In Italia Negli Anni Settanta : Cronaca E Documentazione*. Milano: Bibliografica, 1980. p. 42.
- <sup>11</sup> Solomon, Barbara Probst. "Man of All Qualities." *Harper's*. May 2003. p. 87.
- <sup>12</sup> Segio, Sergio. *Una Vita In Prima Linea*. 1. ed. Milano: Rizzoli, 2006. pp. 41-42
- <sup>13</sup> Piano, Paolo. "22 Ottobre" : *Un Progetto Di Lotta Armata a Genova (1969-1971)*. Genova: Annexia, 2005. p. 103
- <sup>14</sup> Feltrinelli, Carlo. *Feltrinelli*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harcourt, 2001. p. 306
- <sup>15</sup> Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security: the Italian Experience : Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security : the Italian Experience : Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 13.
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- <sup>18</sup> Barbato, Tullio. *Il Terrorismo In Italia Negli Anni Settanta : Cronaca E Documentazione*. Milano: Bibliografica, 1980. p. 59.
- <sup>19</sup> Segio, Sergio. *Una Vita In Prima Linea*. 1. ed. Milano: Rizzoli, 2006. p. 40
- <sup>20</sup> Piano, Paolo. "22 Ottobre" : *Un Progetto Di Lotta Armata a Genova (1969-1971)*. Genova: Annexia, 2005. p. 103
- <sup>21</sup> Segio, Sergio. *Una Vita In Prima Linea*. 1. ed. Milano: Rizzoli, 2006. p. 41
- <sup>22</sup> Piano, Paolo. "22 Ottobre" : *Un Progetto Di Lotta Armata a Genova (1969-1971)*. Genova: Annexia, 2005. p. 103
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- <sup>24</sup> Meade, Robert C. *The Red Brigades : the Story of Italian Terrorism*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990. p. 49
- <sup>25</sup> Barbato, Tullio. *Il Terrorismo In Italia Negli Anni Settanta : Cronaca E Documentazione*. Milano: Bibliografica, 1980. p. 56 and Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security : the Italian Experience : Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 13.
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- <sup>28</sup> Segio, Sergio. *Una Vita In Prima Linea*. 1. ed. Milano: Rizzoli, 2006. p. 40
- <sup>29</sup> Pisano, Vittoriofranco S. *Terrorism and Security : the Italian Experience : Report of the Subcommittee On Security and Terrorism of the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1984. p. 30
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