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Student protest and social movements, 1960s to '80s

Student protests in Italy had also begun to take off in 1967, and the movement continued right through the 1970s. Universities, from [Pisa](#) to [Turin](#) to [Trento](#), were occupied, lecturers and schoolteachers were challenged in the classroom, and [alternative](#) lifestyles began to dominate youth [culture](#).

Terrorism of Italy

When economic, social, and political stability suddenly collapsed after 1969, one of the most alarming results was [terrorism](#). Initially, [neofascist](#) groups backed and armed by some members of the security services carried out most acts of violence. They began planting bombs and derailing trains as part of a “strategy of tension” to undermine the labour advances of 1969–72 and encourage a right-wing [coup](#). The “strategy of tension” began in earnest with a series of bombings in [Milan](#) and [Rome](#) in December 1969. In a Milan bank, a bomb killed 16 people and wounded more than 90. Initial police suspicion fell upon the far left, especially the anarchists. One anarchist, Giuseppe Pinelli, died in mysterious circumstances after “falling” from a fourth-floor window of Milan’s central police station. Another anarchist, Pietro Valpreda, was arrested and charged with the Milan bomb attack. The Valpreda and Pinelli cases split Italy and radicalized large sectors of the student and workers movements. Many on the right continued to believe the version put out by the police and the state, while vast swathes of liberal opinion saw the affair as a mixture of [conspiracy](#) and cover-up. The inability of the state to find or prosecute those responsible (the eighth trial relating to the case began in 2000 and eventually ended in acquittal) only increased the disaffection with the authorities. Meanwhile, evidence emerged—which the police had ignored—that suggested that neofascists had planted the bombs with the active support of sectors of the Italian secret services. Valpreda was not acquitted until the 1980s and spent three years in jail awaiting trial. The Pinelli case was never resolved. The “strategy of tension” continued until 1984. The most deadly incident occurred in [August](#) 1980, when a bomb placed in a crowded waiting room at a [Bologna](#) railway station killed 85 people. Neofascists were later convicted of planting the bomb.

By the mid-1970s left-wing terrorism had begun to attract many young people unhappy with U.S. [foreign policy](#), the failures of centre-left governments, and the Communists’ recent collaboration with the Christian Democrats. It was carried on by hundreds of former militant students and unemployed workers in a host of small groups. The “red” terrorists began by kidnapping factory supervisors for brief periods of time. Soon they began kidnapping and killing politicians, judges, and journalists. The “red” terrorists were relatively popular on the far left at first, but after 1977–78 the extra-parliamentary movement began to distance itself from them. The best-known organization, the [Red Brigades](#), kidnapped and murdered former [prime minister Aldo Moro](#) in 1978; for 55 days the Red Brigades held him in Rome as Italy held its breath. Since then a series of mysteries have emerged over secret service blunders and possible complicity with the Red Brigades. After Moro’s murder the police were reorganized and given special powers, the courts gave captured terrorists every incentive to provide evidence, and by 1981–82 the terrorist threat was greatly reduced.

