



ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

GIUSEPPE PINELLI



The Anarchist whose death inspired this play.

On Dec 12th 1969 a bomb exploded in the Piazza Fontana, Milan, killing 16 people and wounding around 100 others.

This particular bomb attack followed a day after the signing of the Labour Charter between Trade Unions and the Government. This charter had been hard won by workers through a series of strikes culminating in the Autunno Caldo (hot autumn) of 1969.

These strikes had been imaginative and effective, involving a coalition of students and workers with both practical and ideological objectives. The Labour Charter consolidated the gains made by workers during their protest.

Post fascist Italy, dominated by the Christian Democrat Party, was strongly allied to the Roman Catholic Church and to the United States. Throughout the 1960s the changing world was impacting on Italy. The US had revealed its darker side in the Vietnam war; those disillusioned with Soviet Communism were looking to the Cultural Revolution in China for a new communist model; in 1968 Che Guevara was executed and the student movement grew across Europe.

For many reasons the powers in Italy believed that their country was as close to Socialist Revolution as it had ever been. It became important to the government to attribute any social disturbance to the far left and anarchist groups whose thinking lay behind the strikes.

What was not generally known at the time, but subsequently uncovered, was that the work of destabilisation was the work of extreme right wing groups, sanctioned by the government – a point which Fo makes clearly in his play. The Piazza Fontana bomb was later thought to be the work of GLADIO, a secret inter-governmental organisation, itself under the auspices of NATO.

Whatever the reasons... soon after the explosion in Piazza Fontana, one Judge Amati telephoned Police HQ in Milan and told them to look for perpetrators amongst the anarchist groups.

Later that same day **Giuseppe Pinelli** was arrested, along with two others, on suspicion of being involved in this terrible attack; the largest in a series of bombings which had peppered civic life in Italy throughout 1969.

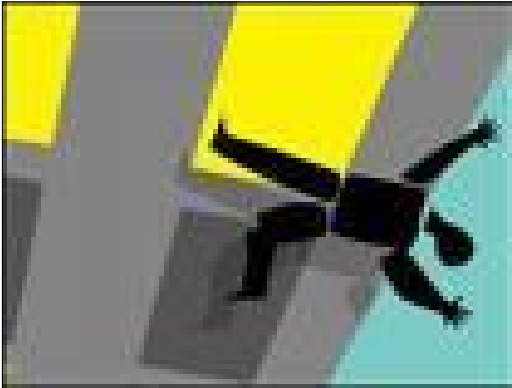
Pinelli was 41 years old; a family man with a wife and two daughters. He was a worker on the railway and a member of an anarchist group. His father had been a socialist and Pinelli first became interested in anarchism in his mid teens.

He met his wife at Esperanto classes in 1952. Esperanto being the means, so they believed, by which peace and unity might be brought to Europe. Through their early life together Pinelli and his wife were too busy to be overtly political; but after the birth of the children he reconnected with some old acquaintances and began attending anarchist meetings.

A few days before his arrest Pinelli had sent a favourite book to a friend with a note saying, 'L'anarchismo non e violenza...' Pinelli was not a man of violence.

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What exactly happened in the Central Police Station in Milan between Dec 12th and the early hours of the 16th is known only to those who were there. Fo's play is a dramatic reworking of the findings of investigative journalists – the events and subsequent cover-up. Fo was by no means the only person who believed Pinelli was innocent, and that he did not commit suicide.

The initial story was that Pinelli had thrown himself from the window at 11.30...

Commissario Luigi Calabresi, the senior interrogating officer, had told him it was pointless denying his guilt and that his friend had already confessed. Pinelli is supposed to have cried 'Allora e la fine dell'anarchia!' and immediately rushed to the window,

opened it and jumped out.

Subsequent details emerged. Pinelli suffered no breaks to his hands and arms, and his body lay on the ground in a position inconsistent with such a fall. There was mysterious bruising to the back of his neck and, as might be expected, there was no bleeding from nose or ears.

And of course there was the ambulance call, which was logged at 58 seconds past midnight. Witnesses on the ground put Pinelli's jump at 3 minutes past – making the ambulance pre-emptive by two minutes and two seconds.

Contradictions emerged and within a month there had been three versions of events, all beginning, 'when Pinelli had opened the window...' The last statement claimed that an officer had tried to restrain Pinelli and had been left holding one of his shoes. Those who saw the body after the fall clearly recall that it was wearing both shoes.

There are many hypotheses, but only two categories of possibility – bungling or murder. The first investigation by the Public Prosecutor concluded Pinelli's death was 'una morte accidentale'. The second investigation was inconclusive, but opted for suicide.



Cartoons appeared in *Lotta Continua*, a far Left newspaper of a libertarian group of the same name, accusing Luigi Calabresi of Pinelli's murder.

Calabresi sued for libel and, as there had been no public trial, this was the first public airing of the case. The libel trial was in Dec 1970 – one year after Pinelli's death

and in the same month as the first performance of Dario Fo's *Morte accidentale di un anarchico*. Fo was able to incorporate some of the information that came out at the trial immediately into his play.

