

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #582
Piazza Fontana & The Accidental Death of An
Anarchist
5th Dec, 2025

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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are [kicking off](#)¹ another three-part mini-series, our last for 2025.

[00:00:30] The theme for this month will be “Gli Anni Di Piombo”, the “Years Of Lead”, the almost twenty-year period of post-war Italian history that was [marred by](#)² violence, terrorism, and murder.

[00:00:45] In part one, today's episode, we'll be talking about the early years, focussing on the bombing at Milan's Piazza Fontana, the search for the [culprits](#)³, and its political [fallout](#)⁴.

¹ starting

² damaged or spoiled by

³ people who did it

⁴ bad results or effects after the event

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[00:00:58] In part two, we'll talk about the Red Brigades and the [kidnapping](#)⁵ and “people’s trial” of the former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro.

[00:01:08] And in part three, it'll be the final years, the bombing of the Bologna train station, the state [crackdown](#)⁶ in its [aftermath](#)⁷, and the legacy this period has on modern Italy.

[00:01:21] OK then, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:01:28] It's easy to [romanticise](#)⁸ the Italy of the 1960s: handsome young men with [jet black](#)⁹ hair, beautiful women with bright red lipstick, the [hustle and bustle](#)¹⁰ of a cafe in the morning, the smell of coffee from the espresso machine, the [beeping](#)¹¹ [horns](#)¹² of [mopeds](#)¹³ from the streets outside.

⁵ taking him by force and keeping him prisoner

⁶ strong action to stop or control the situation

⁷ the time and effects after the event

⁸ make it seem better or more beautiful than it really was

⁹ very dark black colour

¹⁰ busy and noisy activity

¹¹ making a short, high sound like a car horn

¹² devices on vehicles that make a loud sound to warn people

¹³ small motorbikes with pedals

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[00:01:50] And in the afternoon of December the 12th, 1969, some version of this scene was no doubt being [played out](#)¹⁴ up and down the country, a nation that had only recently celebrated its 100th anniversary as one, unified state.

[00:02:11] In Milan, Italy's second-largest city and industrial centre, it might have seemed like it would be an afternoon like any other.

[00:02:21] In the headquarters of the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura, the National Agricultural Bank, just [a stone's throw away](#)¹⁵ from Milan's central cathedral, the business day was [drawing to a close](#)¹⁶.

[00:02:37] It was four-thirty in the afternoon, but the bank at Piazza Fontana was still full of customers, with people from the countryside who had travelled into the city to do their business before the weekend.

[00:02:52] Many would never make it home.

[00:02:55] At 16:37, there was a huge explosion in the central [atrium](#)¹⁷ of the bank.

[00:03:03] Fourteen people were killed instantly, while three more would die from their wounds.

¹⁴ happening or taking place

¹⁵ very close, a short distance away

¹⁶ coming to an end

¹⁷ a large open space inside the building

[00:03:11] 88 people were injured.

[00:03:14] Nobody knew it at the time, but it would mark the beginning of a nearly two-decade-long period that would come to be known as “gli anni di piombo”, the “years of lead”, two decades of modern Italian history that would see an astonishing 14,591 “acts of political violence”, an average of two every single day.

[00:03:43] Now, before we get into the details, let me add one little [disclaimer](#)¹⁸.

[00:03:50] This period is full of mystery and [intrigue](#)¹⁹; the lines between left and right are [blurred](#)²⁰, the Italian state is not one, single entity, and this is one of the most controversial and [emotive](#)²¹ periods in recent Italian history.

[00:04:09] So if there are [generalisations](#)²², I hope you will excuse them.

[00:04:15] I actually listened to an Italian podcast about this period, and the narrator spent the first twenty minutes giving a very long disclaimer.

[00:04:25] This one is shorter, and I won't stop every two minutes to say “this is a generalisation” or to explain the difference between two slightly different right-wing

¹⁸ a warning that explains limits or responsibility

¹⁹ secret or mysterious stories or situations

²⁰ not clear or easy to see or understand

²¹ causing strong feelings or emotions

²² simple statements that don't include all details or exceptions

groups, as that would firstly be [tedious](#)²³, and it would also mean we'd be here for hours.

[00:04:42] So, [pshaw](#)²⁴, we've got that out of the way.

[00:04:45] But before we get right into the years of lead themselves, and to better understand why Italy lived through such a [tumultuous](#)²⁵ period, and for the purposes of today's episode, what all started it, we must remind ourselves of what was happening before.

[00:05:06] Italy, let's remember, was still a very young country, little more than 100 years old.

[00:05:14] For centuries, it had been a [patchwork](#)²⁶ of kingdoms and city-states.

[00:05:20] Someone from Turin in the north would most probably have felt more in common with someone across the border in Geneva or Nice than with their "[fellow](#)"²⁷ Italian from Naples or Palermo, in the south.

²³ boring and taking too long

²⁴ expressing a strong reaction of relief

²⁵ full of confusion, change, or disorder

²⁶ a mix of many different parts or pieces

²⁷ someone who belonged to the same group as them

[00:05:37] And when the Kingdom of Italy was created in 1861, and this collection of different regions was [stitched together](#)²⁸ and given the name of Italy, well, these divides didn't go away overnight.

[00:05:53] The richer, more industrialised north and the poorer, [agrarian](#)²⁹ south. The city and the countryside, and of course, between regions with centuries of rivalry between them. Italy was united on a national level, but significant differences and divisions remained.

[00:06:16] Little more than fifty years into the creation of Italy came World War I.

[00:06:22] And shortly afterwards, Mussolini and twenty years of Fascism.

[00:06:27] For these two decades, the Fascist Party controlled every aspect of life.

[00:06:33] And when Mussolini fell, in 1943, his political ideology did not disappear with him.

[00:06:42] Fascism might have been [discredited](#)³⁰, but it certainly did not go away. It remained like a ghost, hanging over Italian politics.

²⁸ joined or connected to make one thing

²⁹ related to farming or the countryside

³⁰ no longer trusted or respected

[00:06:55] And the other important factor, when it comes to understanding the years of lead, is what was happening in Italy at the end of the Second World War.

[00:07:07] Italy was initially allied with Nazi Germany, but switched sides in 1943, [surrendering to](#)³¹ the Allies. What this meant was that for the last two years of the war, the country was effectively split in two.

[00:07:24] In the north, German troops and the [remnants](#)³² of Mussolini's fascist regime fought [bitterly](#)³³ against [partisan](#)³⁴ resistance fighters.

[00:07:34] In the south, mostly American and British Allied soldiers occupied the country and pushed northwards.

[00:07:41] By 1945, peace had returned to Europe, but Italy was exhausted and deeply divided.

[00:07:52] And almost immediately, it found itself on the front line of a new conflict: the Cold War.

[00:08:00] Italy had the largest Communist Party in Western Europe, which was directly supported by Moscow.

³¹ giving up or agreeing to stop fighting them

³² what was left after most had gone

³³ with strong emotion or anger

³⁴ a person who fought against the enemy, often secretly

[00:08:08] But it was also home to powerful Catholic and conservative forces that looked in the other direction, to Washington for protection.

[00:08:20] So, for the CIA and the KGB [alike](#)³⁵, Italy was not just another European country: it was an ideological battleground.

[00:08:32] And while all of this was [playing out](#)³⁶, Italy was changing fast.

[00:08:38] In the 1950s and 60s the country experienced what was called the miracolo economico, the “economic miracle.”

[00:08:48] Millions of Italians left the poor countryside of the south to work in the [booming](#)³⁷ industrial north, in cities like Milan, Turin, and Genoa.

[00:08:59] This was the era of Fiat, of the [spaghetti Western](#)³⁸, of Sofia Loren and Federico Fellini, of Italy becoming a rich, modern state.

³⁵ in the same or a similar way

³⁶ happening or developing over time

³⁷ growing fast and doing very well

³⁸ old cowboy films made in Italy

[00:09:11] Perhaps it's hard to imagine it as anything other, but let me give you some statistics to [illustrate](#)³⁹ quite how fast and [steep](#)⁴⁰ this transition was.

[00:09:24] In 1955, only 3% of Italians had a fridge at home, and 1% had a washing machine. By 1975, the figures were 94% and 76%.

[00:09:42] And in a similar period, average incomes [tripled](#)⁴¹.

[00:09:48] It was a huge transformation. A veritable “miracle”.

[00:09:54] But this miracle was uneven.

[00:09:57] While some Italians grew rich, many were left behind.

[00:10:01] The South remained poor. The new urban workers were [crammed into](#)⁴² overcrowded neighbourhoods. They were overworked and underpaid.

[00:10:11] [Strikes](#)⁴³ and protests became part of daily life. Students occupied universities. Workers occupied factories.

³⁹ show or explain with examples or facts

⁴⁰ rising quickly or sharply

⁴¹ became three times bigger

⁴² put into a small space

⁴³ times when workers stopped working to protest

[00:10:22] The autumn of 1969 became known as “Hot Autumn” and was [marked by](#)⁴⁴ protests and strikes for better pay and working conditions.

[00:10:34] Meanwhile, the ghost of fascism was emerging from the shadows. The sense of crisis was everywhere.

[00:10:42] By the end of the 1960s, Italy was a country of [contradictions](#)⁴⁵: modern and [prosperous](#)⁴⁶ on the surface, but [fragile](#)⁴⁷ and [unstable](#)⁴⁸ underneath.

[00:10:55] And it was in this Italy — divided, [restless](#)⁴⁹, and full of [tension](#)⁵⁰ — that the bombs began to explode.

[00:11:04] Indeed, the explosion at the bank in Milan was not the only bomb that day.

[00:11:10] In Rome, three bombs exploded at almost exactly the same time, with injuries but fortunately no casualties. Another was discovered before it went off.

⁴⁴ characterised or stained by

⁴⁵ things that were opposite to each other

⁴⁶ rich and successful

⁴⁷ easy to break or damage

⁴⁸ likely to change or fall apart

⁴⁹ unable to stay still or calm

⁵⁰ nervous or unfriendly feelings between people or groups

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[00:11:22] Clearly, this was a coordinated effort.

[00:11:26] But, perhaps surprisingly, nobody [claimed responsibility](#)⁵¹ for the attack.

[00:11:33] Within hours, investigators announced that far-left [anarchists](#)⁵² were to [blame](#)⁵³.

[00:11:40] [Leaflets](#)⁵⁴ and [manifestos](#)⁵⁵ from radical [anarchist](#)⁵⁶ groups had been [circulating](#)⁵⁷, and the police quickly [rounded up](#)⁵⁸ dozens of suspects.

[00:11:50] One of them was a 41-year-old railway worker called Giuseppe Pinelli, who was a well-known [anarchist](#) in Milan.

[00:11:59] Pinelli was taken to the police station for questioning.

⁵¹ said they were the ones who did it

⁵² people who didn't believe in government or laws

⁵³ be held responsible

⁵⁴ small printed papers given to people for information

⁵⁵ written statements explaining the groups' beliefs or plans

⁵⁶ relating to people who didn't believe in government or laws

⁵⁷ moving or being passed from person to person

⁵⁸ caught and gathered together

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[00:12:04] But after three days of [interrogation](#)⁵⁹, [onlookers](#)⁶⁰ would see him crashing out of the fourth-floor window of the police headquarters, falling to his death.

[00:12:17] The official [verdict](#)⁶¹ was initially that he had committed suicide.

[00:12:23] Few bought this, and his death would become one of the most infamous episodes of the period, a symbol of police brutality and the deep [mistrust](#)⁶² between the Italian state and the left.

[00:12:38] Now, we will return to Pinelli and what might really have happened in a few moments, but we must first move on with this fast-moving story.

[00:12:50] The day after Pinelli's death, the police announced they had arrested another man.

[00:12:56] His name was Pietro Valpreda, and he was a member of a small [anarchist](#) group.

⁵⁹ long and detailed questioning by the police

⁶⁰ people watching it happen

⁶¹ final decision

⁶² not believing or not having confidence in them

[00:13:03] Valpreda protested his innocence and [pointed out](#)⁶³ that the only evidence against him was the [testimony](#)⁶⁴ of a taxi driver, who said he had dropped him off at the bank.

[00:13:16] The evidence seemed...[shaky](#)⁶⁵, at best, but Valpreda was quickly [cast as](#)⁶⁶ "the monster of Piazza Fontana" and thrown into jail. He had to wait three years for a trial, then by the time the trial took place, the only [witness](#)⁶⁷ against him—the taxi driver—had died of a heart attack.

[00:13:41] Valpreda would spend [the best part of](#)⁶⁸ the next two decades in the Italian judicial system, and it wouldn't be until 1985—16 years after the attack—that he was eventually [acquitted](#)⁶⁹ of all charges.

[00:13:58] As you'll see throughout this mini-series, the wheels of the Italian judicial system move very slowly, and aren't always very just at all.

⁶³ said or showed it clearly

⁶⁴ spoken statement used as evidence

⁶⁵ weak or not certain

⁶⁶ shown or described as

⁶⁷ person who had seen the event

⁶⁸ almost all of

⁶⁹ found not guilty of the crime

[00:14:08] So, if Pinelli and Valpreda didn't plant the bomb, who did, and why?

[00:14:16] Well, it has now been [attributed to](#)⁷⁰ a far-right, neo-fascist group called Ordine Nuovo – New Order, in English.

[00:14:27] The possible involvement of this group, and the fact that it was an attack by the far-right rather than the far-left, was something the authorities were aware of relatively soon after the attack.

[00:14:41] But there are accusations that actors within the police might have [covered this up](#)⁷¹.

[00:14:49] Why?

[00:14:49] Why might it have been advantageous for the bombings to be [pinned on](#)⁷² the far left?

⁷⁰ said to be the work of

⁷¹ hid the truth about it

⁷² connected with, attributed to

[00:14:55] Well, one theory is that this was not just a [cover-up](#)⁷³, but part of a [broader](#)⁷⁴ [pattern](#)⁷⁵, a way of using fear to [manipulate](#)⁷⁶ politics.

[00:15:08] By carrying out acts of terrorism against civilians, and then [blaming](#)⁷⁷ them on the left, far-right extremists — sometimes with the knowledge or protection of parts of the state — they could frighten ordinary Italians into demanding stronger security measures and a tougher, more authoritarian government.

[00:15:32] In the years that followed, this [pattern](#) would appear again and again: bombings that targeted innocent people, rushed accusations against the far left, and investigations that mysteriously fell apart.

[00:15:48] Journalists and magistrates would later call this la strategia della tensione, the “strategy of tension”, a campaign of fear intended to keep Italy from [drifting](#)

⁷³ attempt to hide the truth

⁷⁴ wider or more general

⁷⁵ a repeated way in which it was happening

⁷⁶ control or influence cleverly or unfairly

⁷⁷ saying they had caused it

[towards](#)⁷⁸ communism and [bolstering](#)⁷⁹ support for a stronger, more authoritarian state.

[00:16:08] And there is also a [broader](#), international dimension, linking back to Italy's status as a "front line" of the Cold War.

[00:16:18] At the end of World War II, there were secret "stay-behind" NATO operations set up across Europe, where operatives were [tasked with](#)⁸⁰ resisting in the event of a Soviet invasion.

[00:16:32] In Italy, this was called Gladio.

[00:16:36] So, its [remit](#)⁸¹ was to stay underground, only [emerging](#)⁸² if the Red Army ever crossed the Iron Curtain.

[00:16:45] But there are suspicions that Gladio operatives were a little more active than they were supposed to be.

⁷⁸ slowly moving or changing towards

⁷⁹ making it stronger

⁸⁰ given the job or duty to do it

⁸¹ area of responsibility or work

⁸² starting to appear

[00:16:54] In Italy, some of these networks are suspected of [overlapping⁸³](#) with the far right.

[00:17:02] As to the extent of these [overlaps⁸⁴](#), well, some accuse Gladio operatives of direct collaboration, of helping far-right terrorists [source⁸⁵](#) bombs and plan attacks, while others accuse them of simply [turning a blind eye⁸⁶](#).

[00:17:20] For what it's worth, the Americans say they never collaborated with terrorists, and that this is Soviet [disinformation⁸⁷](#).

[00:17:29] What does seem clear is that quite a few members of far-right groups had pretty [intimate⁸⁸](#) knowledge of the operations of Gladio, and have suggested that Gladio operatives [tolerated⁸⁹](#), or even encouraged, these actions of violence.

⁸³ sharing some parts or areas

⁸⁴ parts that were shared or covered each other

⁸⁵ get or obtain

⁸⁶ pretending not to have seen something wrong

⁸⁷ false information shared on purpose

⁸⁸ very close or personal

⁸⁹ allowed to happen

[00:17:47] It is [speculation](#)⁹⁰, and it's highly unlikely that the full extent of these connections will ever [come to light](#)⁹¹.

[00:17:56] And on the subject of things never [coming to light](#)⁹², and the [murky](#)⁹³ connections between the police, the state, and the far right, we must return to Giuseppe Pinelli, the railway worker who came crashing out of the police station window to his death.

[00:18:14] As you will remember, the police initially said it was suicide, but soon there were [conflicting](#)⁹⁴ [witness](#) reports, with other officers saying he had [fainted](#)⁹⁵ from exhaustion, that he was near the window and was so tired after extensive questioning that he simply fell over, out of the window.

⁹⁰ guessing or theory without proof

⁹¹ become known or discovered

⁹² becoming known or discovered

⁹³ unclear, dark, or hard to understand

⁹⁴ different or opposite, not agreeing

⁹⁵ lost consciousness for a short time, felt dizzy

[00:18:35] Now, even if this were true, clearly the police have a responsibility to anyone in [custody](#)⁹⁶ to make sure that they don't die, so they must [bear the responsibility](#)⁹⁷ for Pinelli's death.

[00:18:49] And of course, many didn't buy this official accidental verdict, suggesting instead that Pinelli was either beaten to death by the police and then thrown out of the window to make it look like a suicide, or the police were [dangling](#)⁹⁸ him out of the window to try to get him to [confess](#)⁹⁹, and somehow they lost their [grip](#)¹⁰⁰ and he fell.

[00:19:11] And it wasn't just general police mistrust; later [autopsies](#)¹⁰¹ were full of [inconsistencies](#)¹⁰², suggesting that Pinelli was likely dead before he hit the ground, and suggesting he suffered a serious [blow](#)¹⁰³ to the neck before he fell. In other words, he

⁹⁶ the state of being kept by the police

⁹⁷ accept that they were responsible

⁹⁸ holding him so that he hanged loosely

⁹⁹ say that he was guilty

¹⁰⁰ the way they held him tightly

¹⁰¹ medical tests done on his dead body to find the cause of death

¹⁰² things that didn't match or agree

¹⁰³ a hit or strike

was killed by the police, and then they threw him out of the window to try to [cover their tracks](#)¹⁰⁴.

[00:19:39] Terrible in any case, and made even worse when you think about the fact that Giuseppe Pinelli shouldn't have been there.

[00:19:49] For starters, there is no evidence he had anything to do with the bombing; he was innocent.

[00:19:55] And secondly, Italian law says that the police can hold a suspect for 48 hours without charge. After that, they have to be either charged with a crime or released.

[00:20:10] Pinelli had been held for 3 days, way past the legal maximum, which indicates that police might have taken to even more extreme measures to force a [confession](#)¹⁰⁵.

[00:20:23] And this case gets even [murkier](#)¹⁰⁶ still when you hear that the police officer who was responsible for Pinelli's arrest and [interrogation](#), a man called Luigi Calabresi, was himself murdered in 1972, two and a half years after Piazza Fontana.

¹⁰⁴ hide what they had done

¹⁰⁵ a statement that he was guilty

¹⁰⁶ less clear, more confusing or suspicious

[00:20:44] His murder would be claimed by far-left activists as revenge for Pinelli's, but there are theories that he was actually murdered by the far-right, or even state elements, as he was one person who knew "the truth".

[00:21:01] Now, when talking about much of the Years of Lead, it is hard not to get too pulled in to these [webs](#)¹⁰⁷ of [conspiracies](#)¹⁰⁸ and theories.

[00:21:12] After all, there is an [abundance](#)¹⁰⁹ of evidence that elements of the Italian secret services had obstructed investigations, hidden evidence, and even protected suspects.

[00:21:25] Files went missing. Witnesses gave contradictory testimony. Judges complained of being [misled](#)¹¹⁰ by the very police and intelligence services meant to help them.

[00:21:37] Not just after Piazza Fontana, but throughout the Years of Lead.

¹⁰⁷ complicated systems or networks

¹⁰⁸ secret plans by groups to do something bad or illegal

¹⁰⁹ a large amount of

¹¹⁰ made to believe something untrue

[00:21:42] Some officers were later convicted, not for [planting bombs](#)¹¹¹ themselves, but for [covering up](#)¹¹² who really had.

[00:21:52] As to their motivations, the links they may or may not have had to politicians, foreign powers, even organised criminals, that is a subject that is still debated today.

[00:22:04] What is clear is that the Piazza Fontana bombing, and the subsequent years of [carnage](#)¹¹³ that it unleashed, would be deeply [destabilising](#)¹¹⁴ for Italy.

[00:22:15] This strategy of tension, as it would later be called, worked, or at least, it created a [hostile](#)¹¹⁵, frightening environment.

[00:22:25] The images of the destroyed bank [atrium](#) shocked Italians: [shattered](#)¹¹⁶ glass, broken [marble](#)¹¹⁷, [bloodstains](#)¹¹⁸ on the floor where customers had been waiting only moments before.

¹¹¹ putting bombs in a place to explode later

¹¹² hiding the truth about it

¹¹³ great destruction and killing of many people

¹¹⁴ making it weak or likely to fall apart

¹¹⁵ unfriendly or aggressive

¹¹⁶ broken into many small pieces

¹¹⁷ hard, smooth stone used for buildings

¹¹⁸ marks left by blood

[00:22:39] And the victims were not politicians or police officers.

[00:22:42] They weren't even political activists or protestors; they were ordinary men and women, farmers who had come in from the countryside to deposit their savings, workers finishing up their business on a Friday afternoon.

[00:22:59] In a country that was already on edge, the message was terrifying: if you could be killed simply by walking into a bank in the centre of Milan, then nowhere was safe.

[00:23:13] And Piazza Fontana was only the beginning.

[00:23:17] Over the next decade, bombs would go off in trains, in public squares, at police headquarters.

[00:23:25] Some were **carried out**¹¹⁹ by the far left, but an **overwhelming**¹²⁰ majority by the far right.

[00:23:32] Hundreds of Italians would die, thousands would be injured, and entire generations would grow up in a country where violence was part of daily life.

[00:23:44] But perhaps the most famous and most shocking episode of all was still to come: the kidnapping and murder of the former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro.

¹¹⁹ done or performed

¹²⁰ very great

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[00:23:55] And that, my friends, is where we will go in part two.

[00:24:01] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on the Piazza Fontana bombing.

[00:24:05] As a quick reminder, this is part one of a three-part mini-series on the years of lead, gli anni di piombo.

[00:24:12] Next up will be the Red Brigades and the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, and in part three, it'll be the bombing of the Bologna train station, and the legacy this dark period has left on the country.

[00:24:25] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:24:30] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Kicking off	starting
Marred by	damaged or spoiled by
Culprits	people who did it
Fallout	bad results or effects after the event
Kidnapping	taking him by force and keeping him prisoner
Crackdown	strong action to stop or control the situation
Aftermath	the time and effects after the event
Romanticise	make it seem better or more beautiful than it really was
Jet black	very dark black colour
Hustle and bustle	busy and noisy activity
Beeping	making a short, high sound like a car horn
Horns	devices on vehicles that make a loud sound to warn people
Mopeds	small motorbikes with pedals

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Played out	happening or taking place
A stone's throw away	very close, a short distance away
Drawing to a close	coming to an end
Atrium	a large open space inside the building
Disclaimer	a warning that explains limits or responsibility
Intrigue	secret or mysterious stories or situations
Blurred	not clear or easy to see or understand
Emotive	causing strong feelings or emotions
Generalisations	simple statements that don't include all details or exceptions
Tedious	boring and taking too long
Phew	expressing a strong reaction of relief
Tumultuous	full of confusion, change, or disorder
Patchwork	a mix of many different parts or pieces
Fellow	someone who belonged to the same group as them
Stitched together	joined or connected to make one thing

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Agrarian	related to farming or the countryside
Discredited	no longer trusted or respected
Surrendering to	giving up or agreeing to stop fighting them
Remnants	what was left after most had gone
Bitterly	with strong emotion or anger
Partisan	a person who fought against the enemy, often secretly
Alike	in the same or a similar way
Playing out	happening or developing over time
Booming	growing fast and doing very well
Spaghetti western	old cowboy films made in Italy
Illustrate	show or explain with examples or facts
Steep	rising quickly or sharply
Tripled	became three times bigger
Crammed into	put into a small space
Strikes	times when workers stopped working to protest

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Marked by	characterised or stained by
Contradictions	things that were opposite to each other
Prosperous	rich and successful
Fragile	easy to break or damage
Unstable	likely to change or fall apart
Restless	unable to stay still or calm
Tension	nervous or unfriendly feelings between people or groups
Claimed responsibility	said they were the ones who did it
Anarchists	people who didn't believe in government or laws
Blame	be held responsible
Leaflets	small printed papers given to people for information
Manifestos	written statements explaining the groups' beliefs or plans
Anarchist	relating to people who didn't believe in government or laws
Circulating	moving or being passed from person to person
Rounded up	caught and gathered together

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Interrogation	long and detailed questioning by the police
Onlookers	people watching it happen
Verdict	final decision
Mistrust	not believing or not having confidence in them
Pointed out	said or showed it clearly
Testimony	spoken statement used as evidence
Shaky	weak or not certain
Cast as	shown or described as
Witness	person who had seen the event
The best part of	almost all of
Acquitted	found not guilty of the crime
Attributed to	said to be the work of
Covered this up	hid the truth about it
Pinned on	connected with, attributed to
Cover-up	attempt to hide the truth

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Broader	wider or more general
Pattern	a repeated way in which it was happening
Manipulate	control or influence cleverly or unfairly
Blaming	saying they had caused it
Drifting towards	slowly moving or changing towards
Bolstering	making it stronger
Tasked with	given the job or duty to do it
Remit	area of responsibility or work
Emerging	starting to appear
Overlapping	sharing some parts or areas
Overlaps	parts that were shared or covered each other
Source	get or obtain
Turning a blind eye	pretending not to have seen something wrong
Disinformation	false information shared on purpose
Intimate	very close or personal

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Tolerated	allowed to happen
Speculation	guessing or theory without proof
Come to light	become known or discovered
Coming to light	becoming known or discovered
Murky	unclear, dark, or hard to understand
Conflicting	different or opposite, not agreeing
Fainted	lost consciousness for a short time, felt dizzy
Custody	the state of being kept by the police
Bear the responsibility	accept that they were responsible
Dangling	holding him so that he hanged loosely
Confess	say that he was guilty
Grip	the way they held him tightly
Autopsies	medical tests done on his dead body to find the cause of death
Inconsistencies	things that didn't match or agree
Blow	a hit or strike

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Cover their tracks	hide what they had done
Confession	a statement that he was guilty
Murkier	less clear, more confusing or suspicious
Webs	complicated systems or networks
Conspiracies	secret plans by groups to do something bad or illegal
Abundance	a large amount of
Misled	made to believe something untrue
Planting bombs	putting bombs in a place to explode later
Covering up	hiding the truth about it
Carnage	great destruction and killing of many people
Destabilising	making it weak or likely to fall apart
Hostile	unfriendly or aggressive
Shattered	broken into many small pieces
Marble	hard, smooth stone used for buildings
Bloodstains	marks left by blood

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Carried out done or performed

Overwhelming very great

Language spotlight

1. A stone's throw away

- **Meaning:** Very close; a short distance away.
- **Synonyms:** nearby, close by, within walking distance
- **Antonyms:** far away, distant
- **Examples:**
 - The bank was **a stone's throw away** from Milan's cathedral.
 - My office is **a stone's throw away** from the train station, so I walk there every day.

2. Turn a blind eye

- **Meaning:** To ignore something bad or wrong that you know is happening.
- **Synonyms:** ignore, overlook, pretend not to see
- **Antonyms:** notice, expose, confront
- **Examples:**
 - Some officials **turned a blind eye** to the far-right violence.

- The teacher **turned a blind eye** when students used their phones in class.

3. Bear the responsibility

- **Meaning:** To accept that you are responsible for something, especially something bad.
- **Synonyms:** take responsibility, be accountable, own up to
- **Antonyms:** deny responsibility, blame others
- **Examples:**
 - The police must **bear the responsibility** for Pinelli's death.
 - As the team leader, I **bear the responsibility** if the project fails.

4. Cover their tracks

- **Meaning:** To hide what you have done so no one finds out.
- **Synonyms:** hide evidence, conceal, disguise
- **Antonyms:** reveal, expose, confess
- **Examples:**

- The police tried to **cover their tracks** after the interrogation went wrong.
- The hacker deleted all the files to **cover his tracks**.

5. Come to light

- **Meaning:** To become known or discovered after being secret.
- **Synonyms:** be revealed, become known, be discovered
- **Antonyms:** remain hidden, stay secret
- **Examples:**
 - New evidence has **come to light** about the Piazza Fontana bombing.
 - The truth finally **came to light** after many years of investigation.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. How did the atmosphere in Italy change after the bombing?
 - a) People felt more united and hopeful
 - b) There was growing fear and mistrust
 - c) The government became more popular
 - d) Daily life quickly returned to normal

2. What was one long-term effect of the bombing and the Years of Lead?
 - a) Stronger democracy and unity
 - b) An agreement between all political groups
 - c) The end of political protests
 - d) A rise in political violence and extremism

3. Why does the narrator describe the Italy of the 1960s as “romanticised”?
 - a) Because people only remembered the good parts of that time
 - b) Because it was a time of peace and honesty
 - c) Because everyone had an easy life then
 - d) Because of the spaghetti Western movies

4. What did investigators first claim about the people responsible for the attack?
 - a) They were communist workers
 - b) They were far-right fascists
 - c) They were anarchists from the far left
 - d) They were foreign spies

5. What is “la strategia della tensione” (“the strategy of tension”)?
 - a) A plan to rebuild Italy’s economy
 - b) A campaign of fear used to control politics
 - c) A system for protecting banks from attacks

- d) A peace plan between left and right groups

True or False

6. Italy was already a united country for hundreds of years before World War I.

(True/False)

7. The period called “Gli Anni di Piombo” lasted for almost twenty years.

(True/False)

8. Giuseppe Pinelli died after falling from a window during police questioning.

(True/False)

9. Pietro Valpreda was found guilty and spent the rest of his life in prison.

(True/False)

10. The Italian police quickly found strong evidence against the anarchists.

(True/False)

Fill in the Blank

11. It's easy to romanticise the Italy of the 1960s: handsome young men with jet black hair, beautiful women with bright red lipstick, the hustle and _____ of a cafe in the morning.

12. In the headquarters of the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura the business day was _____ to a close.
13. But, perhaps surprisingly, nobody _____ responsibility for the attack.
14. Valpreda would spend the _____ part of the next two decades in the Italian judicial system.
15. There were secret “stay-behind” NATO operations set up across Europe, where operatives were _____ with resisting in the event of a Soviet invasion.

Vocabulary Practice

Choose the correct definition (A, B, C, or D) for each word or expression.

16. “**Marred by**” means:

- a) Made better by
- b) Damaged or spoiled by
- c) Celebrated by
- d) Ignored by

17. “**Crackdown**” means:

- a) A celebration of success
- b) A strong effort to stop something
- c) A slow negotiation
- d) A political meeting

18. “**Disinformation**” means:

- a) Wrong information shared by mistake
- b) Correct and useful information
- c) False information spread on purpose to mislead
- d) Private information hidden from the public

19. “**Blurred**” means:

- a) Clear and easy to see
- b) Very detailed and specific
- c) Bright and colourful

d) Not clear or difficult to understand

20. “**Fallout**” means:

a) A type of storm

b) The negative results of an event

c) A broken building

d) A loud argument

Answers

1. b) There was growing fear and mistrust
2. d) A rise in political violence and extremism
3. a) Because people only remembered the good parts of that time
4. c) They were anarchists from the far left
5. b) A campaign of fear used to control politics
6. False
7. True
8. True
9. False
10. False
11. bustle
12. drawing
13. claimed
14. best
15. tasked
16. b) Damaged or spoiled by
17. b) A strong effort to stop something
18. c) False information spread on purpose to mislead
19. d) Not clear or difficult to understand
20. b) The negative results of an event