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Secret Societies in Italy: Origins of Propaganda Due

9-11 minutes

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Italian politics, after the end of the two world wars, was a very messy spectrum, comprising a number of groups lying on the left or the right, the communists or fascists, or something in between. What was even more fascinating, however, was the presence of secret societies and lodges. One of the better-known ones was the Propaganda Due, or P-2, which had many high-profile names as its members.





Propaganda Due, or P2, had its roots in masonic lodges, but ran much deeper in reality. It had complex political connections, and was believed to be the secret government of Italy.

(Image: Cris Foto/Shutterstock)

The Discovery of the P-2 Roster

On March 17, 1981, in the Tuscan town of Arezzo, a special anti-corruption force stormed the home of a local mattress manufacturer, Licio Gelli, suspected to have connections to two fugitive bankers: Roberto Calvi and Michele Sindona. Rumored to be members of the secretive Masonic lodge, Propaganda Due, or P-2, Gelli's papers were expected to hold information about the fugitives. Instead, however, the police found a membership roster for the lodge, consisting of an astounding 962 names. Even more surprising was that the Italian law enforcement agency Guardia di Finanza's own commander, Orazio Giannini, was also on the list.

The names in the P-2 roster included those of 119 senior military officers, 22 high-ranking police officials, 59 members of parliament, 30 journalists, and 128 corporate chiefs. There were also the names of the heads of all three of Italy's intelligence agencies. Because of these inclusions, it came to be known as a roster of Italy's "secret government". Investigations revealed that the P-2 lodge contained at least 2,400 members, and even housed a secret lodge within it, with Licio Gelli as the link between them.

Learn more about [Italy's secret societies](#).

Who Was Licio Gelli?

It was clear that Licio Gelli had friends in the highest circles, and was himself the master of the P-2. His brethren called him “King Cobra” and he called them his Frati Neri, or Black Brothers.



Licio Gelli was recruited to the Italian Grand Orient Lodge in 1963, confirming his connections to the P-2.

(Image: PD-Italia/Public domain)

Born in 1919, Licio Gelli grew up under Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime. He joined the Fascist Party in 1938 and served as a Blackshirt volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. Gelli collaborated with the German army and the SS during World War II. He continued to be a pro-fascist after the war. Gelli later came into contact with men such as Prince Junio Borghese. Together, they were part of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, a resurrected Fascist Party, which, in 1956, spun off into a small violent sub-sect called the Ordine Nuovo that the two men joined as well.

Another one of Gelli’s comrades was Stefano Delle Chiaie, who

was credited with inventing the “Strategy of Tension”, which used false-flag terrorism to create and exploit insecurity and fear. Delle Chiaie was also a close friend of Borghese, and a fellow member of Ordine Nuovo. He also formed a secret society out of New Order, called Avanguardia Nazionale in 1960, which he used to strong-arm attacks against leftists.

Connections Between Italian Dark Groups

In reality, therefore, the seemingly three different groups—the Italian Social Movement, New Order, and National Vanguard—were really all manifestations of one. While the Italian Social Movement was a mass political party, New Order was a neo-fascist think-tank of sorts. Further, the National Vanguard housed street fighters and terrorists. As seemingly separate entities, one couldn’t be automatically blamed for the actions of another.

There had always been suspicions about the coordination between the three groups, perhaps at an even higher level.

These suspicions came true in December 1963, when Licio Gelli was initiated into a Masonic lodge in Rome, and was put under the jurisdiction of the Italian Grand Orient Lodge. He was sponsored for membership by politician and socialist Lino Salvini, who would soon become grand master of the Italian Grand Orient. Despite Gelli being a fascist, their loyalty toward the secret society trumped their political differences. On becoming the Masonic grand master in 1966, Salvini recruited Gelli to revive the near-defunct P-2 lodge. Gelli then began to enroll new members. It is here that politics came into play.

Learn more about [Masonic lodges](#).

Post-war Italian Politics

After the war, power lay with the right-center Christian Democrats, and the far-left communists, with the moderate-left socialists playing third fiddle. Fascism and the Right were dormant, but not yet dead. While the Democrats were strong, they could not defeat the leftist parties if they combined. They want to prevent the communists from controlling seats in the government, which is why they made the socialists their junior partners.

At the same time, the neo-fascists were against communists, and created a “convergence of interests” among the Christian Democrats, socialists, and fascists. It was important to hide this convergence from the public, and the P-2 lodge was a way to do that.

This is a transcript from the video series ***The Real History of Secret Societies***. [Watch it now, on The Great Courses Plus.](#)

Origins of Propaganda Due

The origins of P-2 lodge go back to the 1870s, after the kingdom of Italy was established. Pope Pius IX was the biggest loser in the unification of the kingdom. He lost most of his territories and simply took an allowance from the state. He denied the legitimacy of the kingdom and excommunicated anyone who served it, including the king. He denounced the Italian state as the spawn of “revolution”, blaming the Freemasons for it.

He wasn't wrong either. The Grand Orient Lodge controlled Italian Freemasonry. It was linked to revolutionary politics and anti-clericalism, and Pope Clement XII issued the first papal decree against Masonry in 1738, as did at least seven popes after him. In

fact, Pius IX himself issued at least six condemnations of the brotherhood between 1846 and 1873.



Giuseppe Mazzini was the godfather of Italian Freemasonry.
(Image: Life/Public domain)

Giuseppe Mazzini, the godfather of Italian Freemasonry, was the real godfather of Italian unification as well. Spending most of his life as a conspirator and secret society luminary, Mazzini was reluctant to accept the Italian monarchy. He proposed the creation of *loggia coperta*—clandestine lodges—which obscured the role of Masons in Italian politics.

One such lodge, *Propaganda Massonica*, was formed around 1876, and was known as *Propaganda Uno*.

Mussolini banned the order in 1925, though, and Italian Freemasons stayed underground for the next 20 years. Then, in 1947, the new constitution outlawed secret organizations, and the P-2 was reconstituted as a regular lodge, which, to a large extent, simply sat dormant until Gelli took over in the late 1960s. Soon after that, P-2 became involved in a plot to overthrow the government.

This began in the early 1960s with leftist protests and labor unrest,

and went on to peak in what was called the Autunno Caldo, or Hot Autumn, of 1969. After a number of murderous bombings were pinned on the communists, tensions escalated to the point where a full-blown coup, called the Golpe Borghese, took place in the December of 1970.

Common Questions about Propaganda Due

Q: How was the P-2 roster discovered by Italian authorities?

The P-2 roster was discovered in March, 1981, when an Italian special anti-corruption force raided Lucio Gelli's villa, suspecting him of being involved with two fugitive bankers, Roberto Calvi and Michele Sindona. While they could not find any implication, they did find the roster of [Propaganda Due](#), which contained the names of the members of the secret lodge.

Q: Who was Licio Gelli?

The Italian business magnate, Licio Gelli, was believed to be the master of [Propaganda Due](#). He was referred to as "King Cobra", and was connected in the highest political circles, mostly to other fascist leaders such as Junio Borghese and Stefano Delle Chiaie.

Q: How were Italian dark societies connected to each other?

The Italian Social Movement, New Order, and National Vanguard, were all really fascist groups that were deeply interconnected. While the Italian Social Movement was a mass political party, New Order was a neo-fascist think-tank of sorts. Further, the National Vanguard housed street fighters and terrorists. As seemingly separate entities, one couldn't be automatically blamed for the actions of another.

However, suspicions for their inter-relation were ratified when Licio

Gelli, the master of [Propaganda Due](#), was put under the jurisdiction of the Grand Orient Lodge.

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