

Burnt on A Prank

E.M. (February 02, 2009)



Three Italian youths viciously assaulted an Indian immigrant, setting him on fire as he slept. Today the men were collared while Italian politicians sounded out on the crime

Yesterday Nettuno, a small sea-side resort outside of Rome, became the site of uncommon barbarity. An Indian immigrant, 35-year-old Navte Singh, was admitted to hospital with severe burns, perpetrated by three young men while he slept outside the local train station. His Italian attackers,



aged 29, 19 and the youngest, 16, had been out together drinking and smoking marijuana when they decided, while at a gas station, that they wanted "to end the night with a bang". They purchased a container of petrol and sought out a homeless man, planning to set him on fire and "teach him a lesson". Today Italian police apprehended them, with the help of descriptions provided by Singh. The three men, who have no previous criminal records, confessed to the atrocity and were charged with aggravated attempted homicide.

This, the latest in a slew of violent xenophobic reactions against immigrants, is being billed as a hate crime by many political figures in Italy. President Giorgio Napolitano made a firm public statement decrying the acts, "We are witness to horrifying incidents we can no longer view as isolated, but as symptoms of a wider, far more alarming trend. I appeal to our cultural and educational institutions to devote themselves to the cause of eradicating these manifestations of xenophobia, racism and violence." Setting himself apart from colleagues in an expression blatantly drawn along party lines, and rather beside the point, Berlusconi's Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni said that lawmakers had an obligation to be hard on illegal immigration and to "stop acting like softies". Joining the right-wing chorus was cabinet minister Roberto Calderoli who added, "While the attack at Nettuno is to be radically condemned, we cannot shift attention away from an international crisis that is putting our jobs at risk and which necessitates the suspension of new immigrant arrivals and free movement of immigrants across Europe."

The three Nettuno attackers are children of working-class families from the area, described as "neighborhood bullies" by one investigator. They assaulted Singh, a Sikh man who lost his job in construction, as he was lying under a bus shelter after what he said was a "calm night". Police found him with his pants still on fire and his legs, back and neck seared. He was able to say only a few words and shortly lost all feeling due to pain: over 40% of his body is covered in second and third-degree burns. Doctors from the Sant'Eugenio Hospital in Rome report that he is not at risk of death but that his condition remains "very serious".

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