

# Rome pulls plug on Bush radio protests

**By Timothy Karr**

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**I**taly's largest electric company pulled the plug on two left-wing radio stations the morning of U.S. President George W. Bush's visit to Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. The outage – described as “strange maintenance work” by Enel, Italy's 60 percent state-owned utility – forced Radio Città Aperta and Radio Onda Rossa off the air as they were preparing to broadcast extensive coverage of street protests against the president's visit.

“The stations lost electricity for four hours, all the morning, during several ‘actions’ of the civil disobedience movement,” Francesco Diasio told MediaChannel by email. Diasio, managing director of Amisnet, a community radio agency supporting several Italian radio stations, was working with Radio Città Aperta (Open City Radio) and Radio Onda Rossa (Red Wave Radio), in concert with several other radio networks in Italy, to broadcast up-to-the-minute reports on the Rome protests.

According to Diasio, Enel cut the power at 8:30 am to the Monte Cavo transmitter where the antennas of the two stations are housed. A private television station, Tele Ambiente, was also affected. Electricity was restored to Monte Cavo by 12:25 pm.

A spokesman for Enel declined to comment on the Monte Cavo outage. Last September, the country suffered a nationwide blackout after power lines crossed in Switzerland triggering a massive Italy-wide failure. The cut to power at Monte Cavo, however, was attributed to a company decision to repair a single plant at the height of the protests. “It's a really strange coincidence,” Diasio said, adding that Italian Green Party MP Paolo Cento has promised a parliamentary inquiry into the outage.

“It is something outrageous because while [Italy's] communication law recognizes the important role of local broadcasting, this role is taken away in a special day with great need of information and communication” Cynthia D'Ulizia the director of Radio Città Aperta said.

Alessandro Marenga, a music program director working the midnight shift at Radio Città Aperta, told MediaChannel that these types of outages are rare. “When outages do happen,

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a representative from the company comes by our offices to give advance warning,” Marenga said. Enel gave the station no advanced warning on Friday.

Representatives at Radio Città Aperta tried throughout the morning to contact Enel to ask for repairs, Marenga said, but their calls didn’t go through.

Throngs of protesters took to the streets of Rome on Friday to demonstrate against the US and Italian governments’ support of the war in Iraq; the largest crowd marched from the Piazza della Repubblica to Piazza Venezia, according to wire reports. The protest drew 250,000 people, organizers say. Police put the crowd at around 25,000.

Diasio’s group Amisnet was working with Radio Citta’ Aperta as part of the Global Project (<http://www.globalproject.info>) which combines local radio links through a global satellite radio channel featuring a live feed from the streets and recorded interviews by journalists working for affiliated stations in Rome, Milan, Veneto and Cosenza.