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The Policing of Mass Demonstration
in Contemporary Democracies

Police Knowledge and Public Order:
Some Reflections on the Italian Case

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RSC No. 97/11

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EUI Working Paper RSC No. 97/11

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE

ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE

**The Policing of Mass Demonstration
in Contemporary Democracies**

**Police Knowledge and Public Order:
Some Reflections on the Italian Case**

DONATELLA DELLA PORTA

A Working Paper written for the Conference organised by the RSC
on *The Policing of Mass Demonstration in Contemporary Democracies*
held at the EUI the 13-14 October 1995,
directed by Donatella della Porta and Yves Mény

EUI Working Paper RSC No. 97/11

BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

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Printed in Italy in January 1997
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Badia Fiesolana
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy

One of the most delicate functions taken on by the police is the control of public order. Indeed, for people involved in demonstrations, the police represent the very face of state power (Lipsky, 1970; see also Muir, 1977). Direct interventions by the police to restore public order, moreover, put the police on the front pages of the press and increase the likelihood of public criticism (della Porta, 1994). It is likely, then, that because of this particular delicacy, the strategies of the police concerning the question of public order are multiple and ever-changing. So much so that important changes in the police organization often follow periods of political turmoil (for instance, Geary 1985; Morgan, 1987; Reiner, 1996), while a weakening in the repressive capacity of the state has been considered as a precondition for cycles of protest (for instance, Tilly, 1978; Skocpol, 1979; McAdam, 1982).

In Italy, as well as in other Western democracies, following above all the great wave of protest that came to a peak in the last years of the 1960s, the strategy of control of public order has been fundamentally transformed. Whilst the diffuse concept of the right to public protest has tended to be strengthened during this period, strategies of intervention have become distanced from the coercive model of policing which had predominated until then. During the course of the 1970s and 1980s, despite some setbacks and reversals, it is possible to trace a growing tendency to tolerate certain violations of the law that are now considered as minor offences. During these two decades, the public debate concerning police interventions into protest demonstrations followed a fixed scheme, between the left's 'coalition for civil rights' which criticized any harsh repression, and the right's 'coalition for law and order', which supported a tougher approach. By the 1990s, this situation seems to have changed. Whereas the movements of the left have little by little abandoned the most violent forms of protest which sometimes sparked off a spiral of conflict with the police, violence connected with football fans and racist skinheads has at the same time grown. In particular, on certain occasions involving attacks on immigrants, the police have been accused - and not only in Italy - of being excessively tolerant, this time by the left.

In both the eyes of political actors and social scientists, the problems connected with public order in Italy have changed enormously. Most observers now speak of an overriding pragmatism among political groups, and the widespread strategy of non-violence. The systematic, semi-armed conflicts between the right and the left of the 1970s were replaced by the sporadic street

fight between 'paninari' (an Italian youth culture based on casual fashion) and punks at the beginning of the 1980s. One of the characteristics of this decade, however, was the perceived escalation and ritualization of violence linked with football supporters. The 1990s opened with new episodes of violence, connected predominantly with racism against immigrants from outside the EC ('*extra-comunitari*'). From the middle of the 1980s onwards, small gangs of so-called 'nazi-skins' fomented aggression against those they saw as 'different', even infiltrating the world of 'ult-as' (hard-line football fans). Episodes of violence were also seen in connection with the squatted youth centres.

In order to understand the strategic choices of the police about questions of public order, we must look in several directions. The study of collective movements suggests in general that state reactions to challengers are influenced by specific characteristics of the political opportunity structure: in particular, the existing dominant culture and institutions (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1995; Tarrow, 1994). The political 'complexion' of a government is (or at least has been) another decisive variable in explaining strategic choices concerning public order. One other element intervenes, however, between the 'reality' of the situation and police action: the perception that the police have of disturbances, of the techniques at their disposal, and of the requests that come from outside their ranks. These perceptions make up part of what can be called *police knowledge*, a term which refers to the images held by the police about their role and the external challenges which they are asked to face (Manning, 1979: 48-9). We may assume then that, as in other spheres of social life, the activity of the police to control public order is influenced first, by the *professional culture* of the police, that is by the images the police hold about their own role - or, put another way, of the "totality of assumptions, widespread among actors, relative to the 'cause' to which they must be committed" (Worden, 1989: 674) - and second, by the *environmental culture* of the police, that is the totality of assumptions they hold about external reality.

In the course of this research, I have sought to reconstruct this *police knowledge* through in-depth interviews, following semi-structured questionnaires, conducted with police officials in two cities: Florence and Milan. These interviews have described first of all the police perceptions about the strategies available to reestablish order, singling out four different models of police control (Parts 1 and 2 of this working paper). Later on, I tried to explain police choices on the basis of the police's images of the kinds of actors who create potential

disturbances to public order (Part 3), and the role of the police themselves (Part 4), the politicians (Part 5), and public opinion (Part 6).

This text draws on illustrations taken from around 30 interviews in Florence and Milan.¹ In addition to these interviews, we also made close observations of certain police interventions in situations concerning public order, and interviews were held with actors who are 'challenging' public order.

1. The control of public order in the 1990s

Studies on the evolution of police styles have presented a complex image, describing at the same time a militarization of the police, but also a growing attention to de-escalation; the increase of technological means for the use of force and at the same time the development of a sophisticated bargaining. How does the Italian case fit into this framework? What is the central model of control of public order in present-day Italy? How does this connect with the images that we have already set out of the actors behind disturbances?

1.1. *The police force and public order in Italy: the organizational structure*

As a first point, it must be noted that in Italy, as elsewhere, an intervention in favour of public order involves various institutional actors. At a local level, the political duty to maintain public order falls to the *Prefetto* (who represents the central government at the local level), whereas technically the *Questore* (the head of the police) is responsible for public order. When potential disturbances to public order arise - when, in particular a gathering of a large crowd or political initiative is foreseen - the *Questore* orders the police to become involved, delegating an official to command the forces in action. The principal police corps who may intervene are the *Digos* (branch for general investigations and special operations, an everyday political policing unit), and the *Reparto Mobile*, for rapid reaction forces. The plain-clothes *Digos* have responsibilities for information gathering; the uniformed *Reparto Mobile* is available for forcible intervention. Whilst the *Digos* forms part of the *Questura*,

¹ In the case of Florence, seven officials from the *questura* (police headquarters) were interviewed; in Milan, five officials from the *questura* and ten from the *Reparto Mobile* (police action force) were interviewed, in addition to the head of the centre of study and research on the police, run by SIULP (the largest police trade union). The interviews in Florence were conducted by Donatella della Porta; those in Milan by Rocco De Biasi.

the *Reparto Mobile* is under the direct command of the head of police: the *Questore* must therefore ask the head of police to assign a certain number of men or women in uniform, who may be taken from various units of the city under the *Questura*'s control, or from other units. In the sphere of public order, the *Questore* also commands the *Carabinieri*, who are expected to cover half of the policing duties in the case of large scale police interventions. In exceptional circumstances the army may also be mobilized. In certain situations, the *Squadra Mobile* (Mobile Squad) may sometimes also intervene, a squad which is composed mainly of agents in civilian dress who are responsible for judicial policing; the *Volanti* (Flying Squad), a uniformed patrol whose job is to watch for criminal offences; and the *Polizia Scientifica* (Scientific Police), plain-clothes agents and officials who are responsible for gathering evidence on possible crimes.

In the words of a Florentine official, a police intervention over public order would be centralized, and involve a series of different actors:

"Every section concerned with public order... starts with the "communication" [by the organizers] to the *Questura*. Three days before the demonstration, and on this basis the *Questore* get informed on the demonstration, makes an evaluation of the route of the march and the size and type of the march, and then sends out orders on this basis that indicate the following: what type of demonstration it will be, who is directing the forces of public order, who is being given duties, the size of the force to be assigned, and possible special assignments relative to the particular demonstration. Each demonstration is normally preceded by an inspection of the place where the demonstration is to take place... and so the ASNU is called to empty all the litter bins, ENEL to check all the electrical apparatus, SIP to check telephones, and the water board, etc. There are orders which indicate how the place is to be inspected, and which give reminders of the legal regulations of the event: it can be illegal to do things in certain ways, and this gives an indication of how things must be done. Assuming it is a large demonstration, the *Prefetto* appoints the committee responsible for order and public safety, that is, it gives directives of a general nature that can then be translated by the *Questura* into orders for action, which will say how forces protecting public order will be deployed" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

The structure of command over police intervention is hierarchical, with police agents responding only to their direct superior. Hence, according to the same interviewee:

"The philosophy of public order requires that every decision comes from the chief in charge, because it is never (or almost never) the case that there is only one person policing public order. There are at least seven or eight officials depending on the orders and the demonstration... we are all connected by radio and the optimal line of

command would be that whoever intervenes, when it is made necessary by the situation that is created, is authorized to react preventively by the chief of service. Indeed, very often, ideally at least, it would be that if there is time, any forcible intervention is first advised to the chief superintendent" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

Other actors, external to the police, may be involved in the management of public order, if only in a consultancy capacity. For more significant interventions, the *Prefetto* may make use of the consultancy of the Provincial Committee for Public Order and Safety, in which representatives of different political parties may participate in addition to the *Questore* and Chief of the *Carabinieri*. After hearing the opinion of the committee, the *Questore* makes the order requesting the Minister for a certain number of men and women from the *Reparto Mobile* and *Carabinieri* to be assigned. Only after this will the chief officers of the *Reparto Mobile* be contacted (Interview Milan, 10-11 October 1994).

1.2. Coercion, containment, consensus: The use of force in the control of public order

In the course of our interviews we sought to uncover the objectives of these diverse actors concerning public order interventions in different situations.² In the first place, it can be said that the most prevalent perception among the police is that their presence is oriented primarily towards the *defusing of a situation*.³ Nearly all the officials interviewed agreed on defining the strategy used in recent times as a strategy designed to seek a consensus through "dialogue" with protestors.

"I would say that there has been a period - which does not apply for certain demonstrations such as those at the football stadium for example - in which on each occasion a dialogue is sought with whichever go-between comes forward. We always look to avoid incidents. If you think about it, all demonstrations, of whatever kind or

² In follow-up work, in-depth interviews with actors "on the other side of the barricades" - autonomous groups and trade union members - will allow us to compare the social construction of reality of the police with the social construction of other actors involved.

³ Similar tendencies are stressed not only about long-lasting democracies--such as France (Fillieule and Jobard, 1996), Great Britain (Waddington, 1996), and the United States (McCarthy, McPhail and Schweingruber, 1996)--but also about recent democracies, such as Spain (Jaime Jiménez, 1996). For a comparative approach, see della Porta and Reiter (1996). Moreover, on Italy and Germany, see della Porta, 1995, chap. 3.

type, are normally preceded by direct contacts with police headquarters or the officials of the *Digos* or other forces to agree on the course of the march, in order to know who we should speak with, to see what kind of situation we will be faced with, to understand what the real issues of the march are, so that we can prepare a possible dialogue with the people who are organizing the demonstration. In this sense, the tactics, particularly during the 1980s, have changed the style of interlocation, that is demonstrators do not find themselves in front of masked men with helmets and batons: there is always some attempt at mediation" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

In terms of the instruments of forcible intervention, the choice of dialogue seems to have come with a limitation on the type of coercive tactics considered appropriate to face public order problems. Not only is the use of firearms now considered inappropriate to these situations, and certain "tougher" techniques such as jeep charges or the water cannon have fallen into disuse, but the shortcomings of baton charge and tear gas are also often emphasized.⁴

In general, recourse to a repressive intervention, whether with batons or tear gas, is, however, considered to be a failure in policing terms. According to the officials, the primary objective of a police intervention in defence of public order is to avoid "upsetting the balance of the situation", and hence producing disturbances to the peace. For this reason, especially when there are more radical groups of people within a larger peaceful demonstration, a strategy of "underenforcing the law" and "containment" prevails which, however, takes on different characteristics according to the different actors that are "threatening" public order. In spite of the often-quoted principle of "neutrality", by which the police claim that "the reaction of the police is always the same", in reality their responses to a range of challenges in different public order situations, reveal diverse models of *policing*, each formulated with regard to the particular problem posed. As a young vice-superintendent of the *Reparto Mobile* observed:

"Clearly, when we are talking about Leoncavallo, that is demonstrations with a particularly high political element, then we always keep our distance. With the ultra football fans, the opposite is the case: we get right in amongst them. With the ultras,

⁴ As regards tear gas, the interviewers underline the technical limits of its use: atmospheric conditions, when there is a downwind; logistical conditions, which require escape routes for those trying to get away; and the general problem of the large numbers of uninvolved persons present. As for baton charges, two limits are indicated above all: firstly, while the point of intervention is, according to the police manuals, to stay compact and together, during the charge the officers enter into direct "combat" with the protesters, with the risk of injury; the baton charge also creates the risk of "direct contact", with a consequent loss of control of chief officers over individual policemen (see also Waddington 1991).

if you give them 50 metres, they start throwing stones at you. When we want to show our muscles, especially with the Leoncavallo people, the policy of the *Questura* in the last few years has usually been to send a massive and highly visible police presence, of a size such that it is made very clear that the balance of forces is tipped strongly in our favour. With such a visible presence, they can see that if they misbehave themselves we are going to be there en masse... For the demonstration of May 1st, we had a purely passive presence. With the workers on May 1st, it's almost like it was our celebration, our presence is purely a formality, with the idea that we are there simply to demonstrate our own presence. Obviously, we are always alert, and on the spot (even if, may be, more hidden), because you never know when someone might get into the crowd and cause a disturbance. However, we never put on our helmets on May 1st, we just walk along quietly at the front of the march, with the utmost calmness. And it's really because there is no longer that sense of opposition with the workers' movement nowadays..." (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994).

For large demonstrations organized by the trade unions or political parties, a *cooperative* model of managing public order seems to predominate. This is based on collaboration between the organizers and the police force, with policing oriented towards protecting, in equal measure, demonstrators and potential "targets of risk". As one official from Milan observed:

"Demonstrations by workers, civil servants, whatever, we're there for all of them. Also because we are no longer a force opposed to them. In fact, people see us as workers ourselves, who are there to guarantee everyone's security ... What I always say now is that *we are not there to stop them from causing a riot, but rather that we now accompany the demonstration to make sure they can demonstrate without being disturbed themselves*" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994).

In these cases, there is an awareness on the part of the police that the legitimacy of a demonstration lies in the willingness of the protesters to avoid upsetting the precarious balance of public order. For example, this is how the police's involvement in the demonstration in Florence in support of the general strike of 14 October 1994 was retold in hindsight:

"I maintain that at a demonstration such as the one in Florence on 14 October, 150,000 people, it is implausible to think of breaking up the march by force. It's obvious therefore that the only thing we can do is to be as preventive as possible, with as much information as possible and rationalization of resources. But it is obvious that there are really serious risks involved with a march that starts in Piazza San Marco and finishes by moving into Piazza Santa Croce four hours later. While they are following this long route there are a thousand possibilities that they will be attacked by people outside the march or that they will attack someone themselves. In this case, as an example of our tactics, it was decided to guard potentially sensitive targets or

places we classify as such, that is the offices of political parties, trade unions or other political groups, because we realized that the march as such was beyond a certain size that couldn't be monitored entirely, unless we deployed the entire police force to accompany it. Apart from anything else, this would have been a Chilean style solution, and would have entailed an enormous deployment of police forces, and so it is for this reason that mediation, and the building up of knowledge and information, is used to give priority to guarding certain potential targets that might be attacked by those who might, if they get more agitated, break away from the march" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).⁵

In these situations, the perceived danger is the infiltration of violent groups. A forcible intervention is considered to be inappropriate because it could cause peaceful demonstrators to get involved. Thus, a policeman explained, for instance, the reason for the "soft" handling of a demonstration during the Gulf War:

"There were some stones, money, bottles, etc. thrown at a church. It was during a demonstration about the Gulf War. In the centre of the demonstration, there was a small group from one of the social centres, with certain intentions. We were lined up in front of the church, fixed and immobile, and then these stones, bottles and stuff are thrown. We didn't react in any way because these people, in the middle of a big demonstration of 4-5,000 people, well, we would have immediately created a panic and disturbance amongst all the others. Or we might have got ourselves hurt, or others, confronting people who had nothing to do with it. For four people who were throwing stones. It wasn't the right time to intervene. You understand that to go and arrest a protester in the middle of a demonstration, even with an enormous deployment of officers, that would just create more disorder rather than restore public order. So the officials were right not to order us to arrest a protester who was writing graffiti on a wall. That is, those responsible for public order prefer a wall to be written on than a big disturbance in the streets. And, in my opinion, I think they are right" (Interview Milan, 18 October 1994).

As we will see in the following passage, peaceful demonstrators are seen in these cases as the police's best allies in the face of violence:

"When the Milanese 'social centres' were protesting in the middle of certain other demonstrations, they were marginalized, not by us, but by the other demonstrators themselves! There was a clear-cut distinction. There were workers on the one hand, and students on the other. No doubt about it. So it's true that our biggest help - because they nevertheless tried to get back into the march, to infiltrate it in various ways - were in fact the marshalls of the demonstrators themselves. We didn't have

⁵ This report is confirmed by our "eye-witness" observations during the demonstration.

to intervene at all. It was the workers themselves who set themselves apart, who pushed out the others, because they were saying 'We have nothing to do with that lot'. It has always been one reason why it was right for us not to intervene, in my opinion" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994).

In concrete terms, the common interest is that the "peaceful demonstrators" take the head of the march: "If the head of the march is made up of peaceful people, whom we can trust, then the march unfolds normally" (Interview Milan, 18-19 October 1994).

In contrast, a more *negotiated* intervention of the police characterizes more disruptive protests - road or rail blocks for example - of workers, the unemployed, homeless, and so on. In these cases, the police see themselves as a mediator who must make a certain visible presence to the protesters, at the same time reducing inconveniences for other citizens:

"we try to plan deviations for the traffic, by collaborating with the head of the *Vigilanza Urbana* (traffic squad), we thus try to avoid exactly what the protesters are aiming to do - that is paralyse the traffic, create problems for everyone - by blocking the traffic coming in one direction or the other, deviating it for a while, creating alternative routes around the streets as far as possible" (Interview Milan, 27 December 1994).

The police, intervening in this case in a "visible" way, often interpose themselves to avoid direct conflict between the demonstrators and drivers who might try and force their way through the road block. The road block is thus tolerated, at least for a period of time judged sufficient to "express" the protest:

"Generally we find a way of mediating. That is, by telling them, 'OK, we won't intervene, if you're here for a quarter of an hour, we can tolerate the road block, but more than that, I ask you, no!'" (Interview Milan, 18 October 1994).

A third model, which is based on a kind of *ritualised stand-off*, appears to be the dominant approach to protests by the youth clubs associated with the autonomous groups. In many of the demonstrations by autonomous groups the forces of order are present in numbers judged sufficient to discourage any violence. Their equipment is, in general, "combat gear": with a helmet under the arm and baton (just to put the helmet on can in itself be a good means of dissuasion). Large cordons are deployed to defend "sensitive targets", and to prevent the march deviating from its planned route. As one officer of the Milanese *Reparto Mobile* affirmed:

"With the autonomous groups, it is a question let's say of maximum attention, ... with maximum attention for the number of police officers present in the streets. Everything goes calmly, lets say, as far as we're concerned. However, at the same time, there is a certain risk present ... You see, you feel, that at any moment something could break out. The way of approaching this, generally speaking, is always clear in this case, that if they are going past certain parts of the city, public buildings or offices, etc., they are all covered by forces of order to avoid them becoming the target of various attacks" (Interview Milan, 21 November 1994).

In other cases, however, the presence of the police might be less visible, as a way of "calming the mood" of the protest: "Quite often, and voluntarily, it is a good idea to hide ourselves. They don't see us, and so they stay calm. Because they see us as the ones who cause trouble" (Interview Milan, 18 October 1994). As one Florentine official said, emphasizing the presence of a degree of "personal" choice⁶:

"It has happened to me that I have to decide in which circumstances it is more appropriate that the forces of order are not too visible ... For example, in the case of demonstrations on the streets by autonomous groups. They do not gladly accept a stifling or overwhelming police presence. They see it as a provocation, so that when we have these demonstrations by autonomous groups, unless they are demonstrations that have already proven to be particularly dangerous, when they are quite spontaneous demonstrations, we prefer to control these young people in a more indirect way. Personally I have always chosen this type of intervention" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

A fourth model is based on the *total isolation* of "trouble makers". It foresees a complete control over the area at risk and the movement of persons considered "dangerous" for public order. The principle application of this model of police involvement is during football matches, above all those which involve some kind of traditional rivalry between the fans. The police intervention in this case is based on a massive investment of energy and resources:

"In my opinion, all in all the situation which creates the most worries for us, from the point of view of public order, is the football stadium. In the sense that you get so many people at an event like that. In Milan that means 70-80,000 people. In Bergamo, 30,000. They stay in the stadium, they meet up, they go wherever they want, on the underground for example ... for us, for sure, it's the hardest job we do. It's the most

⁶ As already mentioned, the informal character of the negotiation process increases the discretionality of the police officer responsible for the police intervention. See also De Biasi 1996.

tiring work, it's the thing that takes the most time, because a day at the stadium begins in fact at 8 a.m., with the service that goes to check the inside of the stadium, to see if they have hidden any sticks or blunt objects, anything that could be used to hurt the opposing fans. That's 8 in the morning, and the match is at half past three in the afternoon. ... We have to meet up, assemble, get our equipment together, set off, etc. And sometimes we finish at 8 in the evening. And then maybe there is the escort for these people. We have to wait until the train leaves, see that everything is peaceful.... Often we are deployed to take the people from the trains. A train arrives - usually it would never arrive in the centre of Milan, for security reasons it arrives at Sesto San Giovanni, making use of the fact that there is an underground station there - so therefore they take the underground, without stopping, and they are accompanied directly to the stadium, that is in Piazzale Lotto. It's a kind of special train. The journey is quite a long one: 35-40 minutes, with us in helmets standing in the underground. It's a heavy situation. Especially the return journey. You've already done six, seven, eight hours of service. From Piazzale Lotto, we then accompany them all the way to the stadium, and there, you often see, not what I would call incidents, but forms of impatience by the fans. The match is almost starting, and these people have to get there on foot. You want this because our basic aim is to keep them together as a group. We can't afford to let the fans split up into two, because that splits us into two as well" (Interview Milan, 18/19 October 1994).

As has been confirmed by our eyewitness observations at the stadium, this total isolation is maintained both outside and inside the stadium. Inside the stadium, the two groups of fans are kept apart, often by creating open spaces (segments of empty stadium seats) that separate the two potential adversaries. In our observations, we noticed that police cordons form close to the fans of the home team and on the edges of the field. The officers are overtly equipped for the defence of public order, with helmets, batons and protective devices. The camera unit is also found next to the field. Wherever possible, the fans of the visiting team are closed off in a sector of the stadium with high anti-crush barriers. The police involvement is designed to prevent contact between the two groups of fans, whereas they do not stop the throwing of various types of objects (money, plastic bottles full of water and objects taken from the toilets). The concern with separating the two groups of fans is also evident outside the stadium, both before and after the match. Here, police officers and *Carabinieri*, present in large numbers and equipped for combat duty, collect the fans of the visiting team from the railway station and bus stops, surround them with a police cordon that closes the group in on all four sides, and escort them to the visitors entrance, where the fans have to go through a brief search. At the exit to the stadium, the supporters of the visiting team have to wait until their rival home fans have been moved on. Before the doors of the guest fans' section are opened, the police create what one official defined as a "*bonifica*" or "reclaimed

space", distanced from the spaces where the other fans and onlookers are standing. The guest fans are then surrounded by a police cordon once again, and reaccompanied to the trains and buses. In the case of the police intervention for the Fiorentina vs. Roma match, which we observed at close range, one official later explained the reasons for an intervention that was criticized in some newspaper commentaries as too "heavy-handed":

"Here is why we need 1,200 officers, it's necessary to cover all eventualities. There was an escort all the way during the train journey ... On the train there was also the escort from Roma which accompanied them all the way to Florence, and here in Florence there was a large force of order deployed ... At the end of the match, the same thing - in general the technique, even for matches where there is no risk but where there is a presence of visiting fans, it's always the same. First we let out the mass of local people (around 25,000 spectators). We wait 15-20 minutes, enough that the zone around the stadium begins to clear a bit. After that we do an operation to reclaim space with the officers that we have at our disposition, and we ask people to move away from the path that has to be made with the opposing fans; then we surround them and accompany them to the train or buses. In general, this is the technique that we use for operations at the stadium ... In practice, yesterday practically half the force was at the stadium, without counting the other officers in the city; around 300-350 police officers and as many *Carabinieri*. Among the police there were the *Reperto Mobile* of Florence and Naples, because in these cases we often end up asking the assistance of cities quite a long way away, perhaps because cities nearby might have other commitments" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

1.4. *The mediators of public order*

The more "cooperative" the method of control, the more important a particular figure becomes: *the mediator*. The relevance of mediation, underlined continually in our interviews, has also been explicitly recognized in the highest ranks of the police. For example, in an information note of 7 March 1990, the head of police Parisi advised Prefetti and Questori to make "contacts with the organizers of the demonstrations in order to ensure that they unfold peacefully", suggesting moreover to "direct resources to preventive measures which, supported by in-depth analyses and evaluations of the various problems, are agreed to contain, through appropriate persuasive actions, potential flashpoints, avoiding incidents and limiting direct interventions to concrete cases of danger to public order and security, and where there is a need to avoid serious damage being done".

Other research on public order in Europe has already stressed the particular relevance of the negotiation phase between the police force and

demonstrators.⁷ In Italy as well, the announcement of demonstrations--a formal act required at least three days before the demonstration--is followed, in the case of the largest ones, by negotiations on the route of the demonstration, its duration, and how it will be dispersed. As one interviewee observed,

"For better or worse there is a great deal of work spent on planning, which is all a preventive exercise. We pay particular attention, it seems to me, to the route that is going to be followed - here I am just talking about political demonstrations, the stadium is an altogether different thing ... There is a lot of work done on the route, through informal contacts, at the level of 'we won't go that way, when you go that way', in the end what's allowed is a small protest that won't degenerate further than that, there is a lot of work of this kind. There are persons, also on the other side, who ... make direct contact with our senior officials" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994).

The negotiation phase is in fact presented as being oriented towards facilitating the realization of common goals: the peaceful unfolding of the demonstration.. When the participation of groups considered as a source of potential danger to public order is foreseen, the police officials may make an agreement with the organizers in order to avoid any escalation. According to one chief officer of the *Digos*:

"... We are also able in some way to give suggestions and ask for clarifications and give them help. Undoubtedly we say, look at these people who might create a bloody mess, excuse the term, either you isolate them or we'll have to think about doing it ourselves, that is the technique we use. *This works every time, because when a sizeable part of the demonstration are workers as they are at the moment, then it is in fact the workers who in these big initiatives want everything to go well, otherwise the demonstration fails. These days, well, the degeneration of a demonstration is now seen as a failure of the demonstration itself* ... you have to isolate the virus" (Interview Florence, 14 November 1994, emphasis added).

Differently than in other countries, in Italy however the figure of the mediator, although present informally, has not been institutionalized. It is thus a role covered, according to the circumstances, either by the police official who

⁷ This point on the importance of negotiation for public order is made also by Waddington (1996) on Great Britain; Fillieule and Jobard (1996) on France; McCarthy, McPhail and Schweingruber (1996) on the United States. See also Winter 1992; Fillieule 1995.

is directing the operation or by the chief officer of the *Digos* present at the demonstration:

"The *Digos* is the one who creates the contact. Anything, therefore, can help--for example, to stop a particular banner being shown because it is offensive. Before we have to arrest him, because then you create tensions, obviously. On the other hand, to contact one of the people responsible for the march in order that they follow a certain route rather than another because of some surprise factor, it's the *Digos* who contacts them. Because it is the *Digos* who knows these things" (Interview Milan, 29 December 1994).

Again in contrast to the other countries, there is in Italy also a lack of official rules, and action is therefore based predominantly on individual initiatives by the chief of police. This informality brings with it a mixing up of roles that can have potentially negative effects. As an example, the *Digos* officials, who are responsible for negotiation, are the same ones who press charges; and the official of the *Questura* is the one in charge of possible cases of custody. Contrary to the British case, where the formality of the agreement facilitates a certain respect, the informal Italian culture may favour an opportunistic approach in which, particularly in situations of uncertainty, both parties might be tempted not to conform to the agreements they have made.

2. Information work and the control of public order

Dialogue and mediation however are accompanied, in the strategic conception of the police, with an important element of "control" of demonstrators through the collection of information.⁸ The strategy that is defined as "dialogue" goes hand in hand with the development of certain *information techniques*, in particular those allowing for control at a distance, such as television cameras in stadiums and interventions from above with helicopters during marches.⁹ As regards the control of stadiums, one official explained:

⁸ Those interviewed were, however, in general against interventions aimed at "outlawing" groups which systematically provoke disorder and incite violence - a solution which they judged as counterproductive and anti-democratic.

⁹ On the influence of technological development on police technique of information gathering, see also Donner, 1990.

"We are advising the use of cameras that have tremendously good zoom lenses for all sections of the stadium. You can really see a person's face well, with the possibility therefore of photographs and the registration of images at any moment in time. Thus, during the match there are two or three permanent operators, we have the chance to follow exactly what is happening ... we can fix the image, then we can go and print the photo immediately. [trouble makers] can be photographed immediately in ten seconds through a Polaroid system ... now in some matches this system with video-cameras is allowed to be screened on the announcement board that they have at the stadium for results and adverts. When they are moments of particular tension or brawls, the image is projected on the largest screen. We write on it: the police are filming you. Then they can see for themselves that we are filming them and underneath it is saying: these images will be taken, and examined as evidence, etc. This might also work as a deterrent" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

The gathering of information with audiovisual technology is usable in the event that charges are pressed, but it is nevertheless necessary that there are interventions prior to crimes being committed, in particular the identification of people who may participate in disturbances to public order. As another official observed, in the case of the football stadium, this form of control can be implemented through keeping records on file of those who buy tickets to follow their team in away matches:

"The matches that are particularly at risk are prepared to the minutest detail. As for yesterday's match, there was a not inconsiderable amount of work put in by the *Questura* in Rome. Already from Rome it had been signalled in great detail who were the people leaving to come, they had been identified, given tickets - I am talking about official departures here, some of them come in their own cars. But for those on the train and the buses, that is the majority, nearly 1,700 people, they had been identified, given tickets and signalled to us. In effect, there was this signal to tell us that those on the train were more the hot heads, that those on the buses were predominantly less aggressive people" (Interview 12 December 1994).

Because it happens in advance of any crime being committed, this type of police intervention cannot be defined as criminal investigation, whilst neither does it have the character of prevention. In the strict sense of the word, it is not oriented towards prevention, but rather in order to make repressive action possible.

The trend towards an increase in intelligence work, which appears to be common to several countries, is summed up in Italy with the peculiar conception of the competencies of the *Digos*, as an information service which operates above all in political terms. In distinction from the *Squadra Mobile*, which has the function of judicial policing for "everyday" crimes, the *Digos* deals with

"political" crimes - that is, according to the definition given by its own chief officers, of crimes "known to have political ends" - and, in addition to the criminal investigations it also have the function of information gathering, for which the *Digos* do not need any authorization from the magistrature before undertaking them.¹⁰

The "omnipresent" conception of the information-gathering powers of the *Digos* -- adapted to collecting information on about all kinds of themes, from political parties to trade unions, from questions about social conditions to economic ones -- is reflected in its organizational structure, with sessions that are expected to cover, via the collection of information, all the possible sources of social tension, including therefore political ones. For instance, in Milan:

"The *Digos* is composed of a certain number of sections. Six to be exact. Out of these, five are operational and one is concerned with the administration of personnel. The first section deals with political parties and trade unions. Then there is a second section that deals rather with movements of the radical left, the extreme left. The third section is the anti-terrorist section. The fourth section ... deals with movements of the extreme right, the radical right, you might say. The fifth section deals with the practice of judicial policing" (Interview Milan, 27 December 1994).

The activity of the *Digos*, in gathering information even about parties and movements that are perfectly legitimate, comes to be justified through a distinction - that frequently re-emerged in the interviews - between "investigating" and "collecting information". The *Digos* thus portrays itself as a genuinely "epistemological" organ of the state. Its activity reflects a conception that has taken root over time, of policing oriented towards the total knowledge of a particular territory. On this very theme, the following passage taken from an interview with an official of the Milan *Digos*, is particularly interesting, explaining his work as oriented primarily to the gathering of knowledge - and identical in some ways to the work of a journalist:

"In practice, we follow events, in a journalistic way, that is with reports and memos, and also with research, news that is in advance of that which is given to the public, therefore with the same kind of input that a journalist might have. I deal with parties,

¹⁰ As far as interventions in demonstrations are concerned, personnel from the *Digos* participate in civilia clothes, and without any official identity badge (whereas any official from the Questura doing public order work has to wear the tricolour band), with the only constraint that they have to inform the Questura. The presence of plain-clothes officers in among demonstrators has often caused arguments and criticisms about their possible role as 'agents provocateurs'.

institutional parties, and the political parties that are now registered, and all the trade unions, whether they are the institutionalized ones, Cgil, Cisl, Uil, or the autonomous ones, like the Cub. The parties I am responsible for are: the ex-Socialist party, now the Socialisti Italiani, Partito Democratico della Sinistra, the Movement for Democracy-the Rete, Italia Democratica, that is the last organization founded by Nando dalla Chiesa, Alleanza Democratica, Lega Nord, Partito Socialdemocratico Italiano, or at least what remains of them, together with the Repubblicani Italiani, or what's left, Rifondazione Comunista, Forza Italia, Centro Cristiano Democratico, Partito Popolare. ... *The Digos, as part of a Questura, is a kind of observatory of Milan and its region in the service of the Minister of the Interior, to know what it is going on in the country in substantive terms.* So, what do we do, myself or my colleagues? We go to find out about these parties. We go and attend meetings of the party sections, we try to develop relations with the trade unionists, with the members of parliament, with the local secretary, or with the representative of the local area. ... I go to the branch meetings, I go to the party congress, I present myself as an official of the Milan *Digos*, I tell them who I am, and I am the person who is known to them, of course. For them, I am the face of the *Questura*... My work is often exactly the same kind of thing as the work of those who I refer to as my "journalist colleagues". Because we are always the same set of people, in the same environment, who are going to meetings of, who can I say, Forza Italia for example. I have had a genuinely journalistic interest all along in the Lega Nord and Forza Italia, because I saw them being created. Out of nothing. Well, I remember when Forza Italia didn't exist, I remember the first promotional materials, the first things that they did, the first meetings, because I was already there. They were even asking me to remember the first street demonstrations that they held after the political crisis, they asked me advice about how to get a march together. Fun things like that. Therefore *we have to procure these pieces of news, on the basis of which can elaborate a certain body of knowledge, which are then written into reports, and put into memos, and they are no more and no less than pieces of journalism*" (Interview Milan, 29 December 1994).

Similar to this, and equally interesting is the image presented by a Florentine official, who compares the functions of the *Digos* to those of a research centre:

"One has to distinguish between investigating and collecting information ... because we are not gathering secret information, we are rather just following the social and political events of the Republic, the same things that you find in the newspapers. Obviously if they put information in the newspapers it is of less value to us ... Among my tasks is that of securing social, political, cultural activities ... Our activity is about making reports on the progress of social, economic, political, and criminal events. These are reports that go the Minister, that go to the *Prefetto*, if there's no turbulence or reasons to worry about something, the *Prefetto* is not going to have the motive to ask for information... You know, *we are the information eye of the Repubblica, without that meaning that we are questioning or fighting against what we see in the*

purview of law and social rules. It's more a question of putting our finger on what's going on with the social and economic situation of the country, it is what the Local Office of Employment does on questions that are important to them; I think the Chamber of Commerce, I'm not sure if they are the ones who do it, but every now and then they also do their own study on the social and economic situation; the Bank of Italy makes reports about the lira, I think that it's the same kind of thing" (Interview Florence, 14 November 1994, emphasis added).

Just as the generalized gathering of information thus becomes considered a "legitimate" activity, the readiness of people to open themselves up to the officials of the *Digos* comes to be taken in itself as an indication of "good will". Closing up to the outside, meanwhile, comes to be seen as suspect, as a wish to hide potentially evasive secrets: "Even the fact of not being able to get information might be a symptom that perhaps things are not as untroublesome as they should be" (Interview 21 November 1994). From this point of view, the parties of the left - whether the PDS or the Rifondazione - thanks to their long-time practice of cooperating with the police and their predictability, come to be considered as more easily kept under control than more recent groups, that are "suspect", such as the Lega.

The model of protest policing based on the gathering of information is connected more generally to a historical tradition. In Italy, this has created an organization of policing which, like in France, has given high priority to the collection of information. The development of this activity of information gathering requires further explanation. From this point of view, one might discuss the hypothesis). The growth in the relevance of information gathering, and thus the permanence if not the growth of specialized agencies dealing with these tasks, might however also be seen as a consequence of organizational dynamics that push them to expand their own functions (for instance, Garret 1981; Marx 1979). If the *Digos*, and before it the "political office" of the *Questura*, has thrived even when the political situation becomes less polarized and political violence has almost disappeared, this might be explained in part by the tendency of organizations to perpetuate themselves over time. There is still a third explanation, not necessarily an alternative, that we shall see in Part three: the necessity of making the information sector more efficient in order to "compensate" for the decline of paramilitary intervention.

3. Police knowledge about the actors who produce public disorders: bad and good demonstrators

Police reactions to demonstrations are linked to the knowledge police have about the disturbances, as well as their role and the role that other actors play: notably, political power and public opinion. In general, the sociological literature on the police emphasizes the diffusion of stereotypes on the origins of disorders, and of those who are considered to be responsible for breaking the rules (Lipsky, 1970: 4). Some recurrent themes have been singled out in the police definition of potential trouble-makers as mainly *young*, '*outsiders*' (immigrants, ethnic minority members or 'agents provocateurs'), deviants and *disadvantaged socio-economic groups* (Lacey, Wells and Meure, 1990: 71). More specific to political disorders are the stereotypes related to "conspiratory" theories- such as the "masked man", the "rotten apple", or the communist agitator (among others, McClintock, Normandeau, Robert and Skolnick, 1974, 127-130; also Kettle and Hodges, 1982, 20). One of the first questions that we asked ourselves, therefore, was whether any of these stereotypes - or others - were held by the leadership of the police concerning people who potentially threaten public order. As we will see, our research uncovered a different type of classification, which sets up a twofold distinction between demonstrators who are either '*good*' or '*bad*' by nature (for a similar point, Waddington, 1994; Willelms et al., 1988).

The interviewees are in agreement, above all, on an image of profound change in the nature of challenges to public order. In the words of one official from the *Questura* of Florence, there has been a *qualitative* transformation of the question of public order:

"There has been a transformation in the kind of people involved, in the sense that the problems of public order of the 1970s and early 1980s ... were essentially problems linked to political demonstrations: by the Autonomia Operaia (autonomous workers union), opposition groups, or extreme right. These were the main focus of concern for public order. I would say the underlying themes of protest that were felt so heavily in the problems of public order of the 1970s and early 1980s are now much less clear. ... If we go looking for people who are a dangerous threat to public order nowadays they can however be found in the world of sport. ... it is a fact that between the problems of the 1970s and those of the 1990s, there has been, as far as I can see, a difference in the type of disorders involved, that is the kind of people who participate in them. The problems then were essentially connected with political protests of 'opposition', whereas in this period now they are above all connected with sport" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

The principal actors who create problems for public order are therefore not defined according to their ideological beliefs: "It is the stadium, essentially, that accounts for 90 per cent of the public order problems that we cover generally: which is 80 per cent stadium work, and 20 per cent public demonstrations" (Interview Milan, 18-19 October 1994). This distinction involves two main differences: one in the motivation of the actors, and the second in the degree of their internal organization.

According to a commonly-held perception, today, in contrast to the past when political *motivations* were uppermost, whoever creates problems of public order today now does so because they want a fight.

"... Above all, it's young hooligans who throw themselves into these acts of violence for the taste of violence alone. They find an excuse in the stadium, or among the immigrants who sell drugs which they are against. But these are only secondary justifications. What they want to do is get in a fight either at the stadium or with the immigrants" (Interview Florence, 17 November 1994).

The perception prevails therefore of a distinction between "political" protest, seen as "positive", and "non-political" protest, seen as "pure acts of vandalism, outbursts, violence pure and simple" (Interview Milan, 15-19-27 July 1994). Hooligans do not have motives:

"it is the high-risk football matches that really put public order most at risk. *There's no motive for it. It's just football hooliganism let loose, people going crazy for their team, their passion. They go there because they have to. Above all, they enjoy a fight with the police. Because they want to challenge us. In other words, they want confrontation with public institutions, with the state*" (Interview Milan, 21-22 November 1994, emphasis added).

The lack of "politicization" of public order problems gives rise to particular problems, which were referred to frequently in the interviews: the difficulty of 'predicting' the actions of the crowd. While political motivations, with their instrumental logic, are perceived as relatively easy to control, irrational hooligans are more difficult to control, precisely because of the lack of an understandable logic behind their actions:

"In the 1970s there were many demonstrations, all of them of a political nature - and for this reason easy to deal with in an instrumental manner. Whereas, let's say for about ten years now, demonstrations no longer have this kind of nature, they are simply demonstrations of intolerance, by people who, above all in the case of stadium

violence, have found a way of releasing their own internal tensions" (Interview Milan, 21 November 1994).

Moreover, the control of public order becomes more complex, the less there is any structured *organization*. The control of stadiums, therefore, has, over the period during which our interviews were conducted, been rendered more difficult by the weakening of the traditional structure of organization of football fans. As one interviewee observed:

"If these groups of fans come together under a certain flag, or label, under a symbol of some significance, and if there are people at the head of this group who are recognized as leaders, let's just say it all makes our life much easier. If, on the other hand, it can be seen, as is the case in recent times - at least this seems to be the tendency - that there is a splintering of groups and gangs, our police work becomes more difficult. This is because these groups and gangs can move around and hide themselves during the course of a season, and you then have difficulties in your police operations to stay on top of these continual developments. Whereas when the phenomenon was more marked out and more stable, it was much easier for us" (Interview Milan, 5 December 1994, emphasis added).

This is also true for a second group of trouble-makers, apparently of a more political nature. A distinction between disruption that is comprehensible and genuine because it is "motivated" and the more dangerous violence that is "violence for the fun of it" is also used to distinguish among the politically motivated demonstrators, between "good" and "bad" ones (see also P.A.J. Waddington 1994: 112-113). The former are above all those who protest their own direct interests, often dangerously under threat: workers defending their jobs, unemployed people who cannot find work, people who have been evicted and cannot find a home, or people who live on a particularly busy and chaotic street. The second category, meanwhile, are those who protest about issues that do not concern them directly, and themes that are more "abstract" and more "instrumentalizable" politically. Protests in the eyes of the police are also seen as more legitimate, the more those who participate in them are directly concerned with the issue that they are mobilizing around, such as the "workers":

"Nowadays, for the policeman who is involved in the protection of public order, but also in other duties, one thing is clear: he can recognize exactly the different kinds of people who go on demonstrations - maybe this wasn't true in the 1960s, but today it certainly is. And, I would say on many occasions, faced with people who have lost their jobs, and who are protesting in a calm and dignified manner, then there is even an emotional involvement with them, that is, we felt close to these people. We were there to protect public order because we had been sent there. Therefore, we don't have a predetermined negative attitude against people who are protesting, because on many

occasions people are protesting to safeguard a certain right or their jobs, which is essential in order to survive. Nowadays, before we go out on a public order assignment, we often have a chat with a public official and in some cases with the leaders of the demonstration, during which, therefore, before we go out on service, we ask what are the motives and scope of the demonstration. That is to say, we go out into service knowing who we are going to meet. We know whether we are going to encounter family men in the streets, or people who are likely to cause trouble. We go, therefore, already knowing what we are going to encounter" (Interview Milan, 5 December 1994, emphasis added).

In this case too, the instrumentality of the action gives predictability to the actors and pushes them to avoid escalation:

"There is a great deal of tolerance. You see it, above all, in the workers' marches where they are protesting for a just cause, they follow their route and then stage a protest at the railway station. Now this is a serious disturbance because the occupation of a platform is illegal, but we tolerate it because an intervention at this point would really cause some big problems, and would provoke a chain reaction that would be uncontrollable. The occupation is just symbolic, they block things for half an hour" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

Those who aim at material changes can therefore be relied upon:

"In my experience, every demonstration, unfortunately, is an occasion for groups or gangs of people who join in to create trouble. *It is clear that workers who come into the streets to defend a right to a pay rise, or a right to work, family men, these people for sure do not come into the streets with the intention of creating disorder. But it is also clear that in any peaceful demonstration some gangs of people try to penetrate the demonstration who have an interest in seeing the event degenerate.* It is clear that in all these cases, ... because we know who they are, it is easy to pick out the people who might create a disturbance. This is why we - in this case the official in charge of the demonstration - we look to isolate them, these gangs - and in recent times it has been the peaceful demonstrators themselves who do this. And if they don't succeed, we look ourselves to isolate them from the peaceful demonstration to stop them creating disturbances, which is the way to uphold the right kind of public order" (Interview Milan, 11 November 1994, emphasis added).

"Just" motives thus legitimate forms of protest that were once considered illegal, through definitions that differentiate specific types of illegality. Thus, repeatedly, the officials interviewed underlined the difference between a peaceful obstruction of the traffic and a violent road "block":

"When we talk about road blocks, we mean something different: these are when people put themselves in the middle of the road to protest, although, if you think about it, any demonstration is a kind of road block. No, with these people, what I mean is they take the trash can, they throw it down in the middle of the street, they make barricades, in that case, we are talking about something that is against the law" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

The recognition of a certain legitimacy to a protest permits the justification of actions that are more radical, perhaps even involving a certain aggressivity towards the police:

"One has to evaluate the mood of the demonstrators: take each case as it comes. For sure a demonstration by *cassa integrati* [people on unemployment benefits] who come to carry out illegal acts against the officers who are there to show their presence and manage public order - and I don't just mean acts of violence, but also mention other things that are much more widespread, which are generally not pursued, like spitting or verbal abuse - now, obviously these things could be pursued, but clearly they are made by people who are angry and exasperated, against police officers who are certainly not seen as people who are victims of violence, and so for this reason these persons ought to be liable to immediate punishment, but it must be seen in a, let's say, wider perspective. That is, *because the police officer at that moment has offered a service, in a practical sense, in fact a moral service, you might say, that is why we must face up to the demands of the situation, try to tolerate, if you like, even the most angry demonstrations, because they might be people who have genuine motives for this. Certainly, the same behaviour by football fans, or young people who just want to provoke us, that's a standing order, that is certainly a different thing altogether*" (Interview Milan, 19 November 1994, emphasis added).

Another characteristic of the trade union movement considered in very positive terms by police officials is their experience of demonstrations and hence their capacity to "control themselves".¹¹ As one of them observed:

"Look, they are always having them. Because it is something that has been handed down by tradition. Therefore, when it comes to the workers, for example, I won't include them [as a public order problem] ... because all they are doing is asking for their just rights. The *Reparto Mobile* goes there, but it just watches, surveys it, because it would be very difficult for the force to intervene directly against the workers. We

¹¹ As for the London police, Waddington also noted: "There is little doubt that most police genuinely believed that it was mutually advantageous if marchers 'policed themselves'. Indeed, they valued those organizations most that were best able to do so. Thus, trade union marches were regarded with something approaching affection, because they were well organized and stewarded" (1994: 83).

go there but it's just for observation reasons, more than anything. For there to be a repressive intervention some penal norms must be infringed. But usually, there is no intervention with the workers ... the trouble makers today, well, today it's the workers themselves who marginalize them. It's true, yes, in some demonstrations, you do get trouble-makers, but the police in that case ... you look to see if the workers have their own marshalls, created by the unions or by themselves, most times they warn the police that there are these trouble-makers present. *Then, during the route, with their own marshalls, they intervene to isolate them.* Obviously, in cases where their own marshalls can't manage it, then the police intervene ... But the workers are intelligent people" (Interview Milan, 21-22 November 1994).

In contrast, in the case of football fans, the probability that the negotiators are committed to valid ends is considered to be particularly unlikely. The perception here then is that the opportunity of mediation is something which must be earned: whilst it is something that is considered likely to be beneficial with the workers, it is however seen as unpromising in other cases. As an other official observed, "a dialogue at the stadium is impossible"; "it would be like giving some official status to this rabble" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

Not only the workers, however, but even the autonomous protest groups (anarchists) of the past - of the 1970s in particular - would now be preferable to today's protesters, according to current police perceptions, because their motives were more comprehensible. The following dialogue is highly illustrative: an interviewee in Milan criticizes the Leoncavallo Social Centre for "vandalism" without a political motive, thereby "rehabilitating" the autonomous groups of the 1970s:

Interviewee: Well, these people really go for it in a big way!!

Interviewer: But didn't they do as much wanton damage in 1977?

Interviewee: No. No. They were doing it also for political ends.

Interviewer: You mean to say that they are much closer to vandalism nowadays?

Interviewee: Yes. A lot of them are vandals. And we saw the damage that they did in Turati Street!

Interviewer: And what about the damage in 1977?

Interviewee: Well, a few cars were touched, but now they just destroyed things on purpose...

Interviewer: All in all then, just to understand you clearly, would you say with respect to 10 September [a demonstration of the Autonomous groups in Milan] that these conflicts in the streets are more or less alarming nowadays?

Interviewee: Certainly not less. Because they can degenerate all the way, to completely gratuitous violence, a full-scale riot. There can be victims ... " (Interview Milan, 10 November 1994).

This point of view is confirmed in another interview, in which the "preference" for the autonomous groups of the past is explained by the fact that they had higher "ideals":

"Because there is censorship going on. With these autonomous groups these days - we might even ask whether they really are 'autonomous groups', because I used to know the autonomous groups of the past. And I know these people we have now. And in my opinion, they are two completely distinct and separate things, for generational and ideological reasons: once these people used to put themselves personally at risk and weren't afraid to put themselves at risk. They weren't afraid to go and take responsibility for their actions before the state which they considered to be the principal target of their action. *Yet they were people that had a strong idea of social justice, even if they were perfect delinquents, by God! These others, however, I think of them more as hooligans.* The hooliganism of the football stadium, that's what it is. Their political ideology is purely nostalgic, because they have to prove something, I say. But they are completely anachronistic. *In contrast, the autonomous groups of the past, they were an integral part of society, because they were a movement that had very precise demands, it was something completely different. There was also a worker's movement that was particularly active at the time... A lot of the people in the autonomous groups were people who would then go off to work in a factory. Some of them were also university students ...* What they were talking about, effectively, were values. *They wanted to make a revolution! Completely wrong-headed, but at least they were talking about something concrete. ...* Nowadays, why do you think these people talk about social centres? Because it's a business, that's why!" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994, emphasis added).

So too, for the "radicals" of the Left and the Right experience with demonstrations and self-organization is considered in general as an advantage in the control of public order. As far as the left-wing militants of the *Autonomia* are concerned, for instance, having now almost a nostalgia for the past - the days when public order problems were caused by actors who at least had 'comprehensible' end-goals - the interviewees underline the difficulties that derive from an "unorganized" violence:

"Nowadays we do have difficult problems to face, and they are caused by exactly the same political fringes which are sprouting again; that is today, there is a return of the kind of violence that was always characteristic of the political extremes of left and right, but whilst before these people also followed a doctrine, their violence was organized, nowadays there is no longer this organization, there is no longer a school where they learn like anyone else how to exercise violence. *Violence today, therefore, can break out in isolated episodes, which are very violent, however, because sometimes not even they understand why it is happening...* When they don't have that school for violence, then when someone decides to be violent and says 'Today, I want to be

violent', more often than not, they don't control the violence that they set off, which is therefore an unpredictable violence. That is, a group that comes out into the streets nowadays might immediately use means and arms that we are not expecting, and we are therefore unprepared in the face of this kind of violence... *Less organized groups are more difficult to manage: the best example of all that I have been saying is violence in the stadium, which is really very hard to handle* (Interview Florence, 28 November 1994, emphasis added).

For instance, about the Leoncavallo Social Centre, a place often at the heart of heated arguments in Milan, an interviewee significantly observed: *"They don't give us great worries except for the fact that they are unpredictable. Sometimes they come out into the streets with aggressive ideas, other times they just present themselves as regular political actors and nothing else"* (Interview Milan, 17 October 1994, emphasis added). The search for an accommodating "solution", also seems to respond to this need for "predictability" about the localization and activity of the group: 'I don't have a prejudice of the kind:

'As far as I'm concerned we should just throw them out'. Because it seems to me that if we throw them out of every place, we will never resolve the problem. Instead, it would be sensible, because there is a need for it, to give them a place, and that there are precise rules given to them" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994, emphasis added).

The same is true for the radical--and even, paradoxically--the "moderate" of the Right. Even here, in fact, the "experience" of organizing demonstrations is considered to be a "positive point", whilst inexperience is seen as a forewarning of problems to come. As an example, the following interviewee from Milan underlined the risks associated with new political groups on the scene, who do not have such experience:

"The danger today, however, is something else, and it is more serious in my opinion. Because for us, now, when Forza Italia come out into the streets, and the Alleanza Nazionale also come, we certainly are not relaxed about this! Because paradoxically these people are more violent than others! These people have not been out protesting in the streets before, or in the case of the Alleanza Nazionale, they were suppressed for many years, and we don't know what kind of reaction they might have. Sometimes, we have seen a youngster walking his dog wearing kefia [a symbol of the radical left], and I can't tell you the insults that I have heard! You wouldn't get that in even the most heated left-wing protests, you understand? Therefore, there is a danger with these new groups, with people who are not very manageable, because perhaps they have never been in the streets protesting before and they get carried

away and start shouting insults" (Interview Milan, 29 December 1994, emphasis added).

In this case as well, "predictability" comes to be considered as an element that facilitates strategies of control. Knowledge itself about the group permits a form of control linked to the "understanding" of objectives, an understanding that is lost before the "stranger", that is, autonomous groups that come from elsewhere. For example, on the question of the disturbances that broke out during the demonstration by social centres in Milan in September 1994, one vice-commissioner of the *Reparto Mobile* observed:

"[the September demonstration] in my opinion was a completely anomalous event, perhaps due to the fact that there were *many autonomous group members who came from outside Milan. I am convinced about this, they were people who had nothing to lose*" (Interview Milan, 18-19 October 1994, italics added).

As we shall see in the following section, this "depoliticized" image of the actors who create public order problems is accompanied by a tendency to limit the competences of the police, a fact that underlines the "social" nature of the problems that produce disturbances and the limits of responsibility of the police forces in confronting them.

4. The conception of the role of the police: police of the citizens or police of the King?

The strategic choice about protest policing is related not only to the image of demonstrators, but also to police self-understanding of their role. In general, the police tend to present themselves as a neutral actor, constrained by the law. Their strategy depends, therefore, upon external circumstances. For instance, the above-mentioned distinction between "good demonstrators" and "bad demonstrators" pushes away - at least explicitly - any reflection on the causes of possible escalations, giving priority instead to a reactive vision of public order, where tactics should derive directly from the nature of the problem of public order instead of being seen as perhaps also contributing to creating them.¹² An intervention by the police would in fact be, in the terms of an

¹² As one official observed, "in the 1970s there were not any of these big spaces for mediation between the police force and the demonstrators, during the demonstrations by the autonomous workers or the extreme right. In the calming down of the political climate, such

interviewee, "the antibody against the virus that has been introduced" (Interview Florence, 14 November 1994). As we have seen, however, the police have a high degree of discretion in the use of their power. In particular, the strategy that has here been defined as that of "dialogue" tends to increase the discretionary power of the police. This can represent a problem given that the police base their own legitimacy on the mere application of the law. As we will see, the form of control put into effect through the gathering of information allows them to resolve the dilemma between "the application of the law" and "the maintenance of peace"; that is, between pursuing violations and guaranteeing the safety and security of citizens in everyday situations.

In historical studies of the police one can trace two main lines of thought, more or less opposed to each another: one sees the police as a body created from below, or by civil society; the other as a body created from above, by rulers. Both of these conceptions have some basis in history. In the creation of the police, the requests for security and protection by the citizenry were certainly important - above all by those who were not rich enough to be able to buy these goods on the private market. On the other hand, the institutionalization of the police as a function of the state was linked above all to moments of social tension, in which the state needed an instrument in order to impose respect for its laws, even on those social classes and organizations that did not recognize themselves as under its rule. During the evolution of the police, the two functions of defending the citizens and the order of the state have also been tied up with one another, with a fluctuating dominance of one or the other according to different phases of history. The combination of the two functions creates a dilemma for the police, given that the defence of political order often alienates the sympathy of a good part of the citizenry, and this in turn undermines the police capacity to fight criminality.

To each of the two models, or functions, there correspond two modes of self-legitimation: a political legitimation in the first case, a social legitimation in the second. Conceptualizations of the role of the police oscillate between the two poles of being a state police (*Staatspolizei*), or being a people's police (*Bürgerpolizei*), who do not defend the government but the constitution. In Italy, ever since the formal creation of the police, the conception of being a "state police" - a function of the government - has dominated. Even in the reconstitution of the police in the proclamation of the Republic, the prerogative

spaces of mediation have opened up" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

of public order and political control prevailed over the fight against criminality and service to the public (Canosa, 1976). Various documents (for example, Fedeli, 1981, and Medici, 1979) indeed portray a police isolated from the population and close to political power. From the 1970s onwards, nevertheless, there seemed to be a tacit emergence within the police of a larger consideration for the opposite conception of policing, for a social vision of the police. In particular, the struggle against terrorism, seen as a national emergency, and the progressive legitimization of the political opposition contributed to a process of legitimization "from below" of the police. In the words of one interviewee:

"Nowadays the police are democratic, aware and conscientious. There is an internal culture that many years ago didn't exist. The *Questore* was an eternal father figure. Now, he is a civil servant like the rest of us, a high-ranking official with certain responsibilities. The mentality of the absolute, authority figure has been lost, it's absolutely right that we are here in the service of everybody ... now, there's more of a consensus, we are well integrated" (Interview Florence, 28 November 1994).

In some of the interviews, a self-definition of the police as "citizens" and "defenders" of the citizenry has emerged:

"In definitive terms, we work for the citizens, we are in the service of the government, but not the powerful in society as much but the people as a whole. As the ex-chief of police used to say, we are "people among the people", for which it is right that the citizens are kept informed about police activities" (Interview Milan, 17 October 1994).

Or again:

"We are a full part of the social fabric. *We are citizens and police officers*. Personally, I consider myself a citizen first, and a police officer next. But I find myself to be completely member of society. Because it's true that if something isn't right... I have participated in torchlight processions, in completely legal things like that, completely above board, because it cannot be otherwise, which is why I am not ashamed to go out in the streets to demonstrate my disagreement for something in civil and democratic terms. Because I am also allowed to do this. You don't get this kind of guarantee from the army, in my opinion" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994).

From this point of view, a profound break in the practices of public order can be noted, connected with the passage between the 1950s/1960s and the 1970s/1980s: the end of sharp conflicts with the workers. As will be seen better in the following passage, the picture often presented in our interviews is that, up until the 1970s, there was a sharp division between the police and the citizens:

"As far as I'm concerned, from the point of social relations, for certain, the 1960s with all the battles in the streets and the killing of people, of demonstrators, *we arrived at the lowpoint of relations between the people and the forces of order, who were thus seen in a negative way, as if they were operating with an iron fist*, let's say. This, particularly in Emilia, and the North, was felt as a real problem. To succeed following this in reestablishing contact with the people was the motive behind trying to give back to the police ... let's just say, the police over time looked to give itself some internal order. At the internal level there was the changes of 1981, practically speaking, with the reform of the police, in which we tried to recreate, to found what were the basics of police work and its activities, looking to pursue more concrete activities, more in the social context, to go in the opposite direction and try and make the people understand that the point of police operations is that it is a service, developed to manage and guarantee certain values, such as individual liberty" (Interview Milan, 19 November 1994, emphasis added).

The principal turning point was in fact singled out in the 1980s, with the police and union reform. In the police perceptions, one of the most important effects of this reform was the rapprochement of the citizens and police, and the resolution of those tensions that, in the eyes of many of those interviewed, were connected to the past "tough" interventions in defence of public order.

This type of legitimation seems to have acquired a growing importance in the 1980s, as political corruption accentuated discontent with the political parties. The chiefs of the police seem to have given a growing importance to their role as mediators between the citizens and public administrators. The relevance attributed to this function is connected to the fact that problems which create disturbances to public order are defined as social problems, whose solution is the duty of the political authorities to address.¹³ This rule of thumb is valid for all kinds of situations, from squatting to road blocks. For example:

"The clearing away of an illegal squat is a social problem. When we find ourselves faced with a public order situation where instead of ten evicted people we find two hundred of them in the middle of the street, supported by other people, before we get into a conflict with them, we have to try to solve the problem in the best way by also using the intervention of social and political authorities" (Interview Florence, 14 November 1994).

¹³ The need to provide the authorities with the information needed in order to "solve social problems" also provided a rationale for police preventive work in the past history of the Italian police (see Reiter, 1996).

The taking on of this role of mediator¹⁴ seems now to be a police routine in the control of public order:

"in certain cases - when for example demonstrators say that they want to speak with councillor so and so - in effect, we undertake this task through our own channels, we contact the secretary of these political figures and tell them that they have asked for them to get involved. Ninety per cent of the time they come, sometimes they don't" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

Recognizing the social dimension of the problem, the interaction of between the police and demonstrators is bound up with interaction with (and between) other actors.

The leadership of the police seems to be distancing itself therefore from a restricted conception of its role as an agent of "reaction" by which the police ought to limit themselves to intervening when the law is violated in order to control disorders, and moving towards a "proactive" conception of policing for which the police should be an agency of public service, with a strong role social control role, and perhaps also the responsibility to intervene in the causes of criminality. This second conception, however, faces problems of legitimation. In a similar way to the magistrature, the police in fact ordinarily legitimate their role as a "technical" activity of application of the law. Yet to pass from a reactive conception to a proactive one increases the perception that they have complete discretion over their own powers of intervention. And, if the police have discretionary powers of intervention, the problem of their legitimation and - control - is posed in a new form. A management of public order based on "dialogue" and "mediation" poses the problem of how to legitimate their own choices.

One way of facing this problem, common to our interviews, is by denying that there are discretionary choices for the police in relation to the pursuing or not of those who commit crimes. Within the scope of the role of the police, in fact, the pressing of charges in front of the magistrate of those who violate the law during a demonstration allows them to reconcile the dilemma between "law enforcement" and "peace-keeping". As the following situation illustrates, the lack of "coercive intervention" and the growth of attention to the question of control that allows them to press charges with the magistrature are closely connected:

¹⁴ By mediating with the political authorities, the police enter into a strategy of mutual exchanges with the demonstrators: "By doing favors, they expected organizers to offer compliance in return" (Waddington, 1994: 86).

"We find ourselves constrained to tolerate certain violations, obviously those that are of minor importance. If there are serious and really important violations we couldn't do anything except intervene, but sometimes because we don't want to ruin the relationship we have with certain demonstrators, some violations will be condoned. This doesn't mean, however, that those responsible for these acts will not be punished, that is we decide to not intervene at that moment but the plain-clothes men who have the task of individuating and putting their hands on certain people they have seen breaking certain laws, during the demonstration whether it's the plain-clothes men of the *Digos* or the scientific police who have cameras or disguised video recorders ... and record these particular moments and minor violations. Once these films have been taken, and with the help of these plain-clothes officers, whose job is this collection of information - to probe the situation and find out who these people are - once the demonstration is over, the plain-clothes officers make a report in which they say in effect that they saw so and so write offensive words on a wall, and these are minor offences, or that they defaced the door of the Prefettura with paint, then they can have charges pressed without any problems" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994).

The activity of gathering information and investigation serves then to resolve the dilemmas between avoiding disturbances and applying the law - a dilemma all the more amplified by the fact that according to Article 55 of the *Codice di Procedura Penale* (Penal Code), failure of a police officer to press charges amounts to a crime of non-fulfilment of one's duty as a public official.

"Immortalize them and identify them" - in the words of this interviewee - allow the police to pursue a crime, even if not at the moment it is actually committed. This in fact gives support to the belief that "it is only a matter of time before we go after the criminal. The problem is when it [the crime] is going to be pursued. If we postpone, but only postpone, and not rule out entirely a repressive type of intervention, it can be useful to avoid unnecessary disturbances, or more serious disorder, so then it is always advisable to avoid a direct intervention as such. But it's only a question of postponing it, avoiding doing it then and there" (Interview Milan, 27 December 1994).

This model of control based on not making an immediate coercive intervention, together with the gathering of information that allows charges to be pressed with the magistrature, is an explicitly strategic choice, that is reproduced through training and instruction at police school.¹⁵ As one young officer of the Milanese *Reparto Mobile* recalls:

¹⁵ The role of training in the diffusion of the protest policing style is emphasized by McCarthy, McPhail and Schweingruber (1996). Martin Winter (1996) suggests that this choice is linked to the debate on the police understanding of their own role.

"They trained us to not repress all violations of the law during the demonstration, that's right, not in public. Various instructors on public order told us that to repress a violation of the law during a demonstration at which there are thousands of people present can cause the whole situation to degenerate. During the course, we followed a programme that was designed by the Higher Police Institute, in which ... there were a certain number of hours dedicated to the question of public order. On this subject, during the course on public order, it was in fact a great surprise and very confusing to learn that during demonstrations in which thousands or tens of thousands of people are converging on a certain street or square, it was absolutely forbidden to the police force to intervene in order to suppress open violations of the law, and when this also means that they are committing a crime, therefore a violation of a penal norm which has a certain punishment attached to it, that would be enough for the police to adopt methods to enforce an arrest. In these cases, in order to prevent the demonstration degenerating, the chief of service, the chief of the section in charge of the operation in the square, will have to look for these violent individuals, the people who are breaking the law, by identifying them so that we can pick them later, instead of intervening then and there. Identify them perhaps with the help of the scientific police, with the right equipment, video cameras, and that kind of thing, individuate the people who are the authors of crimes, and look to arrest them later on, when the demonstration is over, perhaps when these people go home after they have been filmed by the helicopter or cameras or video recorder ... All this to avoid the possibility that, in trying to stop a crime on the spot, you create a much more serious disturbance, that might cause a situation that gets out of control ... *Above all, in order to avoid causing the demonstration to degenerate, to avoid more serious disturbances of public order, violations of the law are not repressed at the moment they happen.* They will be dealt with later on. Perhaps with the help of a specialized unit like the *Digos*, the scientific police, who with the means at their disposal can, later on, identify the authors of the crime. We know that that's how things are going to be handled: even if there is a crime committed, we defer to the officials of the *Questura*, to the chief of the *Questura* about how the police service should be organized" (Interview Milan, 10-11 October 1994, emphasis added).

Subsequent, training is oriented towards reinforcing these instructions given during the police course.

5. The police and the political power

There is always a close connection between the police and political power. The function of the police can be defined in fact by the situation "when, within a community that has the characteristics of a coherent society, certain of the most important aspects of its internal control are taken on by one or more institutions that are invested with this task, which act in the name of the

collective grouping and have the possibility of using physical force in order to achieve these ends" (Loubet del Bayle, 1992: 20). The police force is one such institution, legitimately endowed with the powers to enforce respect for the laws of the state. Nevertheless, the police may be more or less dependent on the ruling political powers: to return to the discussion developed above, they may define themselves as the "King's police" or the "people's police". And in fact, as Wisler and Kriesi (1996) documented, the political power often intervenes in the strategic choice on law and order.¹⁶

Whilst in Italy various studies have documented the long dominance of the first conception over the latter (amongst others, Canosa, 1976), our interviews have put into clear relief the important role that is still attributed to the ruling political powers in making decisions about which styles to privilege in the maintenance of public order. To cite just one example, concerning the decision to intervene in a public demonstration, an official of the *Questura* of Florence observed:

"It depends a lot on the orders that come from above ... The centre of these powers is political, the Minister responsible, the chief of the police and the Minister are together on this, on these questions they are always closely connected, they keep one another informed ... We get the information on the frontline; and then the *Questore* relays what the situation is, he is the carrier of information, which means to say that it makes known what is happening on the ground, that for example in Florence a week from now the workers from Hantarex are going to occupy the motorway. And so he then asks the Minister what to do: do we keep the motorway closed for an hour, with the repercussions that that can have nationally on traffic, or do we instead break them up immediately?" (Interview Florence, 28 November 1994).

According to the widespread perception held by the police, decisions are taken by the ruling political powers and the police's role is therefore one of "applying" them. Contrary to the theory that insists on the natural tendency of organizations to enlarge the range of their own influence, our interviews offered evidence of an opposite tendency: "to delimit the sphere of influence" concerning interventions by the police. The propensity of the political powers to transform social problems into "public order problems" was in fact frequently stigmatized in our interviews. In these cases, the explicit or implicit criticism of the political authorities is that of not fulfilling the duties that rightfully belong with the politicians', putting the police in the difficult situation of having to

¹⁶ On this point, for instance, Goldstein, 1978 and 1983; Reiner, 1991.

carry out a forceful intervention instead. As a chief of the *Questura* in Florence observed:

"There is a tendency to try to heap onto the problem of public order big issues that in my opinion have little to do with public order questions. For example, to talk about these Senegalese and so-called 'vu' cumpra' who sell necklaces in the street in terms of public order - since it is said they create tensions in the shopping centres of towns, all of which can reverberate onto the general question of public order ... It's an argument that very often is used to push the responsibility for these things directly onto those who, by law, have responsibility for the maintenance of public order, that is the Questore and Prefetto. It's a response that can work sometimes, but it also entails giving the responsibility for all kinds of public interventions to the police force. And to always invoke public order means passing over many of the means that logically and by law ought to deal with certain problems, putting the responsibility to intervene instead on the shoulders of the police, imputing it directly to the Questore and Prefetto - the Prefetto, because he is the local 'political' authority for public security, and the Questore for his technical powers. It's in this way that, in Florence, people have tried to argue about the question of Senegalese or other situations involving ethnic groups in terms of public order, but these ethnic minority groups, or gypsies haven't created problems for public order" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994, emphasis added).

The same point of view is given by the director of the research institute of the police union SIULP, this time concerning prostitution by the so-called "*Viados*", that is prostitutes from Latin America:

"I would not like the fundamental problem to become the question of black prostitutes. Of course, it is a problem, but the problem is about how to formulate an answer to everything in political terms. But it seems to me that in the meantime, at the political level, the issue has become a means for some people to make political capital because they have nothing else to say. And so they push everything into a question about public order! Because this always grabs the public's attention. And this, I believe, is a mistaken attitude for politicians to take. ... If you want to face up to the problem of illegal immigrants, which was one of the issues in the electoral campaign, if you want to tackle the problem, you can't say the problem is only one for the police force alone. To think about reducing the problem of the "viados" or black prostitution to a policing problem alone is a fundamental mistake!" (Interview Milan, 22 September 1994, emphasis added).

To summarize, it appears that the Italian police emphasize high levels of dependence on those in political power. Although a certain degree of autonomy does exist-- intervention of the political authorities occurs for only a small percentage of police work, they give only general indications; moreover, the

police provide the information on which decisions are taken--the image of the police role as merely applying political directives serves to maintain a self-legitimation as a neutral actor. From this point of view, we would say that even the hypotheses about direct police intervention being a source of "excitement" for police officers in contrast to the monotony of everyday activities, has not been confirmed, at least at the level of the police leadership (for instance, Reiner, 1982; McCabe and Wallington, 1988: 43). On the contrary, the need for legitimation causes police officers to limit the definition of their own tasks and duties, as they also look to avoid an overloading of problems they are called on to face.

6. The police and public opinion

The image of a total separation of functions, with an absence of discretionary powers for the police, is too far from reality to be taken as the only guide to the truth. Even though it was often not made explicitly, our interviewees did give a place in their discussions to the role that anticipating the reaction of public opinion has in the choice of strategies taken by the police leadership. For instance, the growing tolerance in police interventions seems also related to the perception that the public opinion would criticize police behaviour if an escalation should occur. According to a chief officer of the *Digos* in Milan:

"Nowadays, the perception of things has changed. Why? Because, lets say, culture has also changed, which means that *we don't want to see violence any more*, the state now tries to avoid getting into physical conflicts with demonstrators, but instead tries to have control of the demonstrators" (Interview Milan, 15-19-27 July 1994, emphasis added). According to one official with considerable experience in the management of public order police response take into account "who is creating a problem for public order. *I would take it as important that you cannot adopt the same coercive methods if, for example, the Union of Blind People goes out into the streets and someone then starts behaving strangely, compared with 2,000 Lazio fans who arrive as an organized group on a train... You have to think about public opinion.* This is what we saw in [the Neo-nazi demonstration in] Vicenza. There wasn't anything that happened there that disturbed public order in a technical sense, yet public opinion quite rightly said: 'What's going on? These people can go out on the streets and demonstrate without being stopped' - and this was a controversy caused by the lack of action taken" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

As emerges from this interview, the police therefore feel constantly "under fire" for possible errors--as one interviewee defined it:

"We respond one way or another according to whether there is a decision to intervene or not intervene; in the first case people ask why didn't you intervene, in the second case, they ask why did you intervene if you could have contained what was going on?" (Interview Florence, 28 November 1994).

It is interesting to note that, in general, the less "political" the actor causing public disorder is, the stronger the perceived pressure on the police to "intervene":

"At the stadium, so often we hear people say 'Look what's happening over there! Go get involved! Intervene!'. This is because of the discourse that we made before so many times that it is better to not intervene than intervene ... so many times you hear 'isolate the trouble-makers', 'throw them out of the stadium'... In a demonstration, this is more difficult, but at the stadium I've heard them say this. Many times. Perhaps they want to see more decisive action on our part. And maybe criticize us later on for that" (Interview Milan, 18-19 October 1994).

According to widely-held opinions, the control effected by public opinion is achieved through the intervention of the mass media.¹⁷

"Public opinion is neither deaf nor blind. The citizens are people who face their own problems with public order and so you can't hope that the press won't see or hear anything. So then you have to weigh up the fact that certain interventions might even get you on to Japanese television - for example, what happened in Vicenza, they even showed it on the TV news in Germany. While if I start beating up the Jewish community during their march, well probably I'll be on the air in Tel Aviv" (Interview Florence, 10 November 1994).

Among the positive aspects of the media presence, the capacity of the media to soothe the mood of the "good" demonstrators, offering them a channel of communication for their own demands, was stressed. In the press and indirectly in public opinion, the very important role of protest in the political process is indeed recognised. "Good" demonstrators, even when they cause certain disturbances to public order, do so because they want to make a certain audience aware of their problems, thus exerting pressure on the ruling powers. The presence of journalists, another set of actors who mediate between police and demonstrators, has the immediate effect of giving the protest a certain visibility - given that "in the end all these people here are interested in is the

¹⁷ On the relationships between media, protestors and the police, see, among others, Sumner, 1982; Murdock, 1984; Geary, 1985; Fielding, 1991; Green, 1990, ch. 3.

photographer arriving, or that the television people arrive, they make their interview or their photos, then they pack up and go home" (Interview Milan, 24 November 1994). Indeed, concerning the presence of the press, it has been observed that:

"Sometimes the people who protest, the people who want to demonstrate, look above all, as we know, for a way to make public opinion aware of their own particular problems. *The fact that there is the press in certain cases is very useful, because angry people - and I have very good reason to remember this - when they are interviewed, filmed and attract the attention of the media, they begin to calm down because their goals have then already been attained*" (Interview Florence, 12 December 1994, emphasis added).

A principle problem connected with the presence of the press seems to be the need for high levels of self control on the part of the police. To end up appearing on the television news or in the newspapers because of a public order intervention not only risks losing the public's sympathy, as we have already pointed out, but also increases the probability of creating what the literature on the police defines as "on-the-job-troubles", that is problems linked to political and administrative investigations into their behaviour:¹⁸

"There are things that we do, or certain mistaken interventions ordered by chiefs, that get censured by the administration. When we manage to contain a public order problem, well then when public order is protected that isn't much of a news item. When on the other hand public order is not maintained, either through some fault of our own or because the intentions of the protest are particularly extreme, in these cases, if there are brawls, clashes, violence, in these cases then not only is it going to be in the press, but it will end up in a ministerial inquiry, it will end up with the political parties making parliamentary and ministerial interventions. There are always further consequences. There are always inquiries, that go this way or that way, that say you did right or you did wrong. It's all part of the duties of public order maintenance" (Interview Florence, 28 November 1994).

Especially when "political" demonstrators are involved, the police acknowledge in fact a particular potential of "on-the-job-troubles". As Waddington observed, "Protesters were regarded as archetypal 'challengers' or 'assholes', that is people who are difficult to control because they are vocally

¹⁸ As Waddington observed in his research on the policing of public order by the London Metropolitan Police: "Arrests were regarded by the police as the last resort, for they risked escalating on-the-job trouble by sparking a greater confrontation" (1994: 54-55).

knowledgeable of their roles. They were seen as having influential supporters amongst journalists, campaigners and MPs, who would join in protesting about any police action that might have been construed as infringing freedom of speech" (1994: 51). Accordingly, Waddington concludes, "Whereas the police exercised power over protesters, others exercised power over them. It was the capacity to threaten or create on-the-job troubles that constrained police action" (Ibid.: 201). From this point of view, our research seems to confirm in the Italian case the widespread perception of the press as a filter between the police and citizens - and therefore the importance of enjoying "good press", given that "if the citizen doesn't have faith in the police force, they won't even turn to us when they need us" (Interview Milan, 11 November 1994).

An increased pluralism of information has accentuated the risks for the police of finding themselves the subject of criticism:

"Nothing has changed, if not certain methods, certain things are a bit different now because now, for sure, there are more journalists involved, the television, the mass media in general, whereas before only one television channel participated, the RAI. Now there are dozens of these private television channels who come to these big demonstrations. There also we have to be careful, it's better there to keep control and avoid things getting out of hand" (Interview Milan, 15-19-27 July 1994).

Even though it is often hidden behind the idea of "do your duty and don't mind the journalists", it in fact emerges that the awareness of the negative effects of "tough" interventions over public order, filtered by the mass media, may well have an effect on the image of the police in the eyes of the citizenry.

7. Summary

The object of this study has been to reconstruct some of the aspects of police knowledge relative to the control of public order. As we observed in the first and second parts of this working paper, the strategy used during the course of the 1980s and to date in our research, appears to be dominated by three principles: avoid coercive intervention as much as possible, mediate and perfect the instruments for information gathering. This strategy, not dissimilar to the one adopted by other police forces in continental Europe, differs however in that the practice of negotiation remains rather informal. Another characteristic of the Italian case is the weak presence of limits and controls on the activity of information gathering by the *Digos*, which as we have seen functions as an

“epistemological” organ of the state, given its role of collecting information on all the political actors and interest groups, and having a special direct relationship with the government. Within this general sketch, we then distinguished four models of control of public order: a model of *cooperation*, based on a collaboration between the police force and demonstrators, and an inconspicuous police presence; a model of *negotiation*, based on a more active presence by the police, with the objective of mediating between the demonstrators and “non-demonstrators” who suffer the disruptive effects of protests; a model of *ritualistic stand-off*, based on a more “aggressive” police presence, but often at a distance; and a model of *total control*, based on a massive presence and close involvement of the police forces. The principal example of the application of the first model is the large trade union demonstrations: of the second, direct action by unemployed or homeless people; of the third, demonstrations by the youth social centres: and of the fourth, the control of football fans.

In the third part, we looked at the effects on the strategic choices of the police of their knowledge concerning the actors who cause disturbances. On this question, two tendencies emerged. Firstly, the principle actors who provoke disorders in the 1990s are, according to a widespread perception of the police, actors who are moved not by political motives which are considered to be “noble” ends, but by an impulse for “hooliganism”, that reflects social problems. These actors are identified principally with the ‘ultra’ football fans, to which a good part of the activities of the police’s *Reparto Mobile* is dedicated. Secondly, we observed a distinction between “good” demonstrators, who protest with ends that are understandable, and “bad” demonstrators, whose objectives appear to be more confused. Among the former category are “workers”, or “family men” according to the definitions of those interviewed - who demonstrate in defence of their jobs or union claims, and who have both long experience of demonstrations and a noteworthy capacity of “self-control”. Among the second category, are the young people from social centres, whose demands are considered at best to be “confused”, and whose behaviour often appears to be “unpredictable”.

Moreover, we argued that these strategies are a function not only of the images the police have of the actors involved in a protest, but also of those they have of other social actors considered to be relevant to the question of public order: the police themselves (Part 4), political power (Part 5), and public opinion (Part 6) as it is perceived through the media. As far as the police are concerned,

we noted the adoption of strategies of "containment" - implying a considerable "underenforcement" of the law - which also bring with them problems of legitimation. Officially, the police justify their role as being merely one of "technical" application of the law. The "non-application" of the law when strategies of non-coercive control of public order are used brings with it the recognition of their discretionary powers, which negates the image of law enforcement as being purely technical. The development of technical means for gathering information serves to "negate" the existence of a discretionary power, through the subsequent pressing of charges to the magistrature of crimes. We found, moreover, a growing search by the police for legitimation in the eyes of the public. Alongside the acceptance by the police of a strong degree of control exercised over them by the political authorities, certain elements of tension have appeared, with impatience being expressed by the police about the enlargement of their responsibilities when politicians give the label of public order problems to more general social and political problems.

The declining legitimation of political parties and unions, may have accentuated this tendency: it may have given a new role to the police, as has been noted in recent years for the magistrature in Italy. In this sense, the Italian police seem to have acquired some of the characteristics of a people's police (or *Bürgerpolizei*)--at least in so far as the search for legitimation in public opinion is concerned. On the other hand, however, the organizational structure itself of the police, as well as self-definition of their societal role, assign to politicians a larger degree of control than that accepted by the police in other countries, such as for instance in the U.K.. In this respect, the Italian police retain many of the characteristics of the King's police (*Staatspolizei*), characteristics evident above all in the unproblematized acceptance by the police of methods of control exercised through the activity of information gathering about social and political actors.

In Italy, in fact, the tasks of gathering information about society for the state have been delegated almost entirely to the police. Studies on the police, concerning internal activities of information gathering, have distinguished a priority on (a) activities of information gathering rather than "active" tactics, and (b) information gathering about legal activities rather than illegal ones (Dobry, 1992: 25). In Italy, up to and including the 1970s, the police units given over to the gathering of information were suspected of also undertaking illegal activities, utilizing proactive tactics -- for example, putting *agents provocateurs* in among demonstrations. The model that we have reconstructed here for the

1990s, in contrast, does seem focus on legal methods of gathering information. Yet this activity itself raises doubts about its appropriateness to the functioning of a liberal democracy. Above all, the information gathered is to be put in the hands of those in government, and not public administrators generally, let alone the citizenry and society generally. Secondly, the gathering of information is oriented primarily around certain actors and themes which are thought to pose possible problems for public order. Thirdly, notwithstanding the fact that officially the information is intended to identify certain societal needs or problems, it can nevertheless be used as a means to repress certain social groups. Fourthly, the competencies necessary to gather and analyse information about social, political and economic reality that do not always coincide with what is taught at police training school (or even university faculties of law from which the major part of police officials come from).

It remains an open question as to exactly to what extent the new conception of police involvement based on "dialogue" has been interiorized, and to what point this conception is still a pure reflection of requirements that have come from elsewhere. It is probable that to stabilize the evolution that has been observed during recent years, a legislative reform is necessary in order to redefine the tasks and duties of the police and the rights of the citizens in respect to these. Perhaps the need to adapt to the application of the Schengen Agreement - with the demand this carries for a law to protect personal information - can help initiate a debate that has, at least for the time being in Italy, found public opinion and political forces, whether of the government or opposition, to be particularly deaf to the issues involved.

(Translated by Adrian Favell)

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