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The Policing of Mass Demonstration
in Contemporary Democracies

Police and Public Order in Italy,
1944-1948
The Case of Florence

HERBERT REITER

RSC No. 97/7

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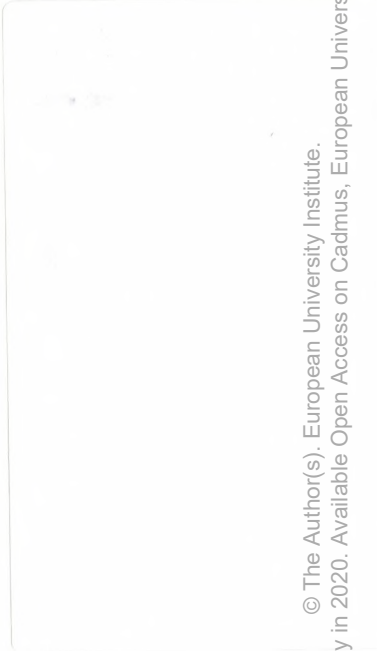
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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE

ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE

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

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The Case of Florence**

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A Working Paper written for the Conference organised by the RSC
on *The Policing of Mass Demonstration in Contemporary Democracies*
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This paper¹ is based on a case study of the city of Florence. The central region of Tuscany, and more specifically the province and city of Florence, liberated in August 1944, formed a stronghold of the Communist party during the post-war period, though not to the extent of the neighboring region Emilia-Romagna. The archival sources used for this study are predominantly the files of the Florentine *questura* (police headquarters). For this reason, I deal with the state police, which report to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome and were considered 'the government's police'. The *carabinieri*, as the traditionally royal national police force, form part of the regular army, and are dealt with herein only in as much as they are referred to in the *questura* files.²

In the first section I discuss the organization of the Italian police as a militarized and centralized force, which in its structure, its tasks and its personnel maintained a very high degree of continuity in the transition period from fascism to democracy. During 1944-48, a police style, characterized by control of public order by large-scale, inconspicuous surveillance and intervention at a certain point with massive forces, remained unchallenged. Initially this tactic, lacking political and public support, proved largely unsuccessful and even counterproductive by provoking violent reactions. In their intervention in cases of public order the police were hampered by their fascist past, by a lack of experience concerning demonstrations, and by organizational deficiencies which resulted in conflicts of competence and waste of personnel. The police attempted to reduce these difficulties by increasing personnel and strengthening militarization in terms of both equipment and the type of intervention. In the final analysis, however, these deficiencies were only overcome when the political authorities called for the kind of intervention that the Italian police were able to provide.

¹ The material for this chapter was collected as part of a research project entitled "Reform or Restoration? The Police in Italy and Germany 1943/45-1950". My special thanks are extended to the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, New York, which provided a research grant to finance this project.

² Administratively the *carabinieri* come under the Defence Ministry; the Ministry of the Interior has responsibility only as far as their deployment as a police force is concerned. On the general development of the *carabinieri* see Comando generale dell'arma dei carabinieri (eds), *I Carabinieri, 1814-1980*, Roma, 1980; Gianni Oliva, *Storia dei carabinieri. Immagine e autorappresentazione dell'Arma (1814-1992)*, Milano, 1992.

This process went through three phases. In the *first phase, disorientation (1944-45)*, the police were largely conditioned by the burden of their fascist past. A tolerance out of weakness prevailed, although the traditional police style and public order tactic dating from predemocratic times were not challenged. Police intervention in the *second phase, transition (1946)*, was determined by the internal contradictions concerning the protection of public order within the 'grand coalition' (Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists) governing Italy. It was initially characterized by continuing disorientation and moderation, but during the course of the year the police became more effective within their tactical framework by strengthening the military and offensive aspects of their deployment and equipment. In the *third phase of cold civil war (1947-48)* the Christian Democratic Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba gave the police a clear political direction, with the enemy identified in the left-wing parties and their collateral organizations. In their clashes with this enemy, the police used a '(cold) civil war tactic': strong central control; constant surveillance which routinely employed espionage methods focused against the political enemy; the deployment of heavily armed paramilitary units for intimidation and proactive as well as reactive repression. In the background 'hot' civil war was always present as a hypothesis, for which the Italian police undertook training as a component of the armed forces. For this adaptation to a cold war situation, only slight changes in the traditional Italian police style were necessary. The inevitable politicization of police intervention was accompanied by a growing polarization of public opinion in this regard.

1. Organization and Duties of the Italian Police

1.1. *The Italian Police Style*

The Italian police traversed the transition period from fascism to democracy with a surprisingly high degree of continuity in personnel, organization and tasks. The *epurazione*, i.e. the purge of the state apparatus of fascist personnel, seems to have been especially unsatisfactory in the area of the security forces.³ The fascist law on public security of 1926 which gave the

³ See Canosa 1976, 112. Canosa's study still remains the basic text on the Italian post-war police force. Most of the (not very numerous) scientific literature on the Italian police concentrates on the period up to the First World War. Sannino 1985, is quite uneven in its

police extensive powers for intervention and almost unlimited discretion stayed on the books until the mid-1950s (Carucci 1976). Neither the allies, nor the resistance movement, nor the Italian government initiated a democratizing reform of the police as an organization. In Florence (and elsewhere) the police were immediately integrated into the war effort. This was of decisive importance in terms of continuity, especially as the duties assigned to the police after the liberation were very similar to those they had been trusted with before.⁴ It is worth stressing that a reform approach regarding the police was lacking at both the national and the local level of Italian politics. Florence was liberated in August 1944, with an important contribution by Italian partisans. When the allied troops arrived in the city, the CTLN (*Comitato Toscano per la Liberazione Nazionale*) had already laid the basis of a functioning self-government. The CTLN established a police commission, mandated to proceed with a first purging of the police personnel and to monitor the political reliability of the daily work of the *questura*. However, the commission's report on a democratic reorganization of the police, prepared for the government in Rome, appears to have dealt exclusively with the *epurazione*.⁵

Because of the absence of a reform policy and the high degree of continuity, the dominant police style in Italy remained unchallenged. The Italian

interpretations, although it provides useful information, especially on the working conditions of the police.

⁴ This was obviously the case regarding guard duty, for instance at the food and war materials depots, but it also holds true for the political police, naturally with the 'substitution' of the enemy. For Christmas and new year 1944, the Florentine *questura* copied the order for the previous year word by word. The only difference was that the fascist order of 1943 gave instructions for the German military installations and all known anti-fascists to be strictly guarded, while in 1944 it was the allied military institutions and all known fascists. *Ordinanza* of 21 Dec. 1943 and 20 Dec. 1944, AS (Archivio di Stato) Firenze, Questura 371, fasc. 33. Continuity was also created by direct orders of the allies and the Italian government who for instance in January and October 1945 ordered the (political) surveillance of the clergy. *Ibid.*, fasc. 54; 390, fasc. 2.

⁵ Before the arrival of the allies, the control commission suspended the *questore*, 10 *funzionari*, 8 officers, 29 NCOs, 24 *agenti effettivi* and 120 *agenti ausiliari*. ISRT (Istituto Storico per la resistenza in Toscana), CTLN, Commissione Controllo PS, 712, report dated 30 September 1944. In the report the control commission asked for a reform of the police "nei sistemi e nel costume". For the report which in October 1944 was sent to Rome, see *ibid.*, 721.

police were traditionally characterized by centralization and militarization, and followed the police model dominant on continental Europe. Even within this model, however, it is surprising to which extent the Italian police privileged the maintenance of public order over the protection of citizens' security. Italian official and semiofficial police literature theorized about a 'general public order' (referring to 'the primordial goods, necessary for the cohabitation of the collectivity') which found its expression in a 'public order in the strict sense', i.e. in the 'defense of the normal course of the everyday life of the collectivity' (Roddi 1953, 7). Theoretically, public order was not to be imposed by force, suffocating the costumes, the religion, the national spirit, or the rights of the citizens, not because this were against the *human and democratic* rights of the citizens, but because public peace would be precarious and society in permanent unrest (Salerno 1953, 600).

Behind this verbosity stood a highly politicized practice of internal security policies. Even before fascism, the Italian police was known more for being the police of the government in a political sense, than for effective crime control. The methods foreseen for the defense of the 'general public order' were primarily 'observation' and '*vigilanza*' (surveillance). The Italian police were in fact convinced of their ability to recognize and eliminate all potential sources of danger with a perfect and inconspicuous control of all aspects of public life. Consequently a large part of police activity was devoted to the gathering of information, especially political information, rationalized as an emphasis on prevention (Roddi 1953, 59). This large-scale surveillance was accompanied by a massive deployment of policemen for guard duty at public buildings -- the rank and file policeman in Italy was known in fact as '*guardia*' and not as '*patrolman*'.

Contrary to official and semiofficial police literature, police action was far from restricted to 'prevention'. Post-unification Italy endured a high degree of political and social tension, with its governments and security forces reacting with extreme harshness to popular protest (Canosa 1976, 27ff., 83). Within this framework, however, the state police accumulated only a selective and therefore limited experience in the handling of demonstrations. Before World War I, the dominant role in the control of public order had been played by the army. This indicates that the process of professionalization of the Italian police was not very advanced. Despite the growing unwillingness of the army to fulfill internal security functions (the deployment of soldiers for public order duty hampered

their own professionalization), the situation changed only after World War I when drafted soldiers were no longer deemed politically reliable.⁶ In the few years up to Mussolini's march on Rome, a reorganization of the police was undertaken, in order to prepare it for the exclusive responsibility of crowd control. This reorganization emphasized centralization and militarization (Donati 1977). In the 20 years of fascist rule, the police force was undoubtedly one of the pillars of the regime, but it largely maintained its traditional police style without degenerating to the extent of its German counterpart.⁷ During this period, the Italian police were not confronted with demonstrations or public marches. It was only in the post-war era that this became an important aspect of their work and their (and the *carabinieri's*) exclusive responsibility. The general direction of police intervention was defined by the central government in Rome, but the tactic used in concrete cases developed to a large extent out of the specific Italian police tradition. The elements which seem to have had the strongest influence in this sense were the political nature of the daily work of the police, the overall administrative structure and the specific military organization. In the immediate post-war years these features proved to be weaknesses, in contrast with the image of strength transmitted by terms like 'centralization' and 'militarization'.

1.2. *The Political Character of the Daily Work of the Italian Police*

⁶ On the Italian police and public order before World War I see Fiorentino 1978; Canosa 1976, 27ff., 56ff. Police and *carabinieri* frequently did not have the numbers to deal with larger demonstrations. In these situations they often resorted to the use of firearms. However, their main task in the control of public order lay in the so-called 'preventive measures' (e.g. the large-scale detention of known 'subversives') and in the leadership role of their functionaries. For the failure of Giolitti's (limited) reform approach see Dunnage 1989.

⁷ The fact that the Italian police did not degenerate is an important factor contributing to the post-war continuity. The 'benevolent' aspects of the Italian police during fascism, however, should not be overestimated, as indeed frequently occurs. Among the scarce scientific literature on the Italian fascist police see especially Carucci 1976. On the involvement of the police and the *carabinieri* in fascist violence in the early 1920s see Canosa 1976, 61. On the local level, not only parts of the police but also of the *carabinieri* intervened directly in favor of the fascists - mainly in the provision of weapons and transport, but also in the participation in 'punitive actions' (Snowden 1989, pp. 96f., 198ff., 202f.). See also Dunnage 1992.

The importance of the political aspect of the daily work of the police clearly emerges from the monthly reports, based on reports from individual police stations, which the *questore* had to send to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome. For these reports, the ministry established a detailed format.⁸ Five areas had to be covered: the political situation of the territory, public order, the economic and food situation, the 'public spirit' and public security. The government in Rome was above all interested in obtaining an exact picture of the political situation in each province.⁹ The police had to report on all political parties, associations and movements, including their activities, members, and their attitude to the 'authorities'. Any reaction of the population to economic and political developments as well as to actions of the government had to be detailed. The police were also supposed to report on the trade unions, the women's movement, the clergy, the political and administrative situation of the local authorities, and so on. This context shaped reporting on public order. The emphasis on transmitting all information which might be "of a certain importance for the political reflexes of the province" shows how extensively the government wanted to be informed. In these monthly police reports the fight against crime was merely the last point and the one to which the least space was devoted.

Combined with the high degree of political subordination of the Italian police, this strong political component of their daily work made a political bias in their performance in public order cases likely - a bias which could be expected in the field of information-gathering as well as in police intervention. It is probable that the police for this reason were perceived and even hated as a biased political police force by at least part of the population. Above all, however, it must have had a paralyzing effect for a police force of this kind to be left without clear directives in the field of public order maintenance.

1.3. *The Overall Administrative Structure*

⁸ The *questura* communicated this format to the police stations on 12 July 1945. AS Firenze, Questura 390, fasc. 6.

⁹ According to the Florentine *questore*, *ibid.* Whether this objective of the reports was realized is to be doubted. The reader gets the impression of being presented not with objective reporting but with random reflections and individual political opinions, which especially after the elections of April 1948 were not free of opportunism.

The administrative organization of the Italian police was prone to problems due to its very structure. Multiple conflicts of competence both within the police force and between the police and other security forces, together with a strong centralization, characterized the Italian police system. In cases of public order, these conflicts could only lead to increased confusion, especially in a time of disorder like the post-war period.

The highest-ranking policeman in the city and the province was the *questore*, a position requiring a law degree and police training. His superior, however, remained the prefect, i.e. the 'government's man' in the province. The prefect could always intervene if he judged it necessary for the maintenance of public order. He could even decide on the police tactic to be used in particular public order cases. The deployment of certain units of the *carabinieri*, for instance the *battaglione mobile* or the students of the national school for NCOs in Florence, could be ordered only by the prefect.

The *questore* was responsible for coordinating the work of the different police forces in the province, primarily the *carabinieri* and the police. The *carabinieri*, however, retained a certain autonomy from the *questura*, even as far as their deployment and their duties were concerned. The existence of different national police forces with overlapping or coinciding areas of responsibility constituted an obvious weak point of the Italian police system.¹⁰ Rivalry and tension between the *carabinieri* and the police was inevitable and perhaps intentional.¹¹

¹⁰ Already in the debate on police reform after the assassination of King Umberto I. the problem was discussed (Fiorentino 1978, 24). However, vested interests always proved stronger than reform efforts. In the years from 1944 to 1947 the allies brought up the problem several times, but with no result. Apart from the police and the *carabinieri*, several other corps with police functions exist in Italy, including the *guardia di finanza* and the municipal *vigili urbani*.

¹¹ Apart from increasing competition for the scarce resources, this rivalry also took on a political tinge in the immediate post-war years. In June 1946 a rumor circulated among Florentine policemen that the *carabinieri* planned to occupy the *questura* in the case of a victory of the monarchy over the republic in the upcoming referendum. The news was taken up by the local press and even provoked clashes between policemen and *carabinieri*. AS Firenze, *Questura* 428, fasc. 36. On the ambiguous attitude of the *carabinieri* on the national level regarding the referendum see Sannino 1985, 442ff.

The *questore* was directly responsible for the police in the province, although in the centralized Italian state the Ministry of the Interior could intervene any time. However, only the civilian *funzionari* (police officers with a law degree and police training) and the administrative personnel were direct employees of the *questura* in an administrative sense. In September 1947, the personnel of the Florence *questura* numbered 80 people, half of whom had purely administrative roles.¹² The *funzionari* were charged with the management of the police stations as well as the political and the investigative unit, and were the commanding officers for public order interventions and guard duty.¹³

The rank and file policemen were organized in the police division 'Toscana', which was built on a military model and subject to military rule. Uniformed officers, who usually had no police experience and came from the regular army, were responsible for leadership, administration, discipline and training. At equal rank, they remained under the command of the civilian *funzionari* during deployment. The division had its own independent headquarters located in a building separate from the *questura*. Administratively, all policemen of the division remained under the command of this headquarters which could for instance transfer personnel of the *commissariati* (police stations) or the special units, etc., on short notice and without informing the *funzionari* in charge. Separated from the main part of the division, the *gruppo guardie P.S.*, were the *compagnia mobile* (mobile unit) and the *polizia stradale* (road police), which had their own commands and their own barracks.

1.4. The Military Organization

In the post-war period, the traditionally military character of the Italian police did not come under attack - on the contrary it was reinforced by several factors: the decision to immediately integrate the police into the war effort; the

¹² AS Firenze, Questura 488, fasc. "Personale di PS della Questura di Firenze - Assegni complessivi corrisposti nel 1947".

¹³ In the city of Florence there were eight police stations (*commissariati*), two more existed in the provincial cities of Empoli and Prato. Compared with other European countries the number of police stations was low and the territory for which they were responsible extensive. Parallel to the *commissariati* were the *carabinieri* stations.

military tradition within the resistance movement; the military tradition of the rival police force, the *carabinieri*; and, especially with the advent of the cold war, the ceiling set by the allies for the strength of the Italian army in the armistice and later the peace treaty. In general, a militarily organized police force is considered to be more likely to intervene in a harsh or even brutal way. The training and life in the barracks under military rule with its isolating effects are assumed to condition the behavior of individual policemen in the same direction. However, for the immediate post-war period, at least up to 1946, it is important to stress that the Italian police force to a large extent lacked the kind of 'strength' associated with 'military'. Its organization as a barracked police force with several commands, combined with the traditional emphasis on guard duty, proved rather a weakness in public order cases.

The specific kind of military organization of the Italian police meant that policemen were deployed in such ways as to result in a chronic lack of personnel. Except for the loss of vehicles, the police in Florence had suffered practically no material damage due to the war.¹⁴ In a memorandum on the situation of public security written in the summer of 1945, the *questore* lamented the lack of trained personnel and the high proportion of *ausiliari* (auxiliary policemen). Because all of the latter came from the city or its immediate environs, the *questore* was especially suspicious of their performance in matters of public order.¹⁵ However, even during the months of crisis during 1944 and 1945, the backbone of the police division 'Toscana' was made up of professionally trained policemen.¹⁶ It was not the badly trained and unwilling *ausiliari* who were responsible for the problems of the Florentine police, but an inefficient use of personnel which was indeed inherent to the Italian police style. On 6 August 1946, the command of the police division asked the Ministry of the

¹⁴ See the report of 3 June 1946, AS Firenze, Questura 430, fasc. 22.

¹⁵ AS Firenze, Questura 428, fasc. 22. The *questore* mentioned positively the commitment of the *ausiliari* for the liberation of Florence, but criticized their lack of technical training, their insufficient sense of discipline and their inadequate sense of duty. It would be wrong to suggest that most of the *ausiliari* were partisans who entered the police force after liberation. Many of them had signed up at the time of the *repubblica sociale* in order to escape the draft.

¹⁶ On 21 April 1945 the police division consisted of 567 *effettivi*, 94 *richiamati* (recalled ex-policemen), and 261 *ausiliari*. Of the NCOs 140 were *effettivi*, 38 *richiamati* and 33 *ausiliari*. AS Firenze, Questura 427, fasc. "Agenti di P.S. - relazione settimanale".

Interior for an additional 136 men. In the face of the constantly increasing number of demonstrations, it felt unable to maintain public order with the forces at its disposal. According to this report, 513 of the 803 policemen of the division were tied down by fixed duties: 432 policemen (53.8 % of the division) were deployed for various guard duties (guarding of prisoners and sentries at police barracks and government buildings) and for duty within the buildings of the *prefettura*, the *questura* and the division command. In general, only 90 policemen could be deployed for the normal necessities of public order. Additional personnel had to be withdrawn from the offices and police stations, causing continuous problems in the daily police work.¹⁷

In the immediate post-war period, i.e. up to 1946, these 'organizational' shortages of the Florentine police were made worse by 'real' ones. A shortage of personnel was a tradition in the Italian police and the Ministry of the Interior initially hesitated or was unable to send additional policemen. Police equipment was also deficient, especially in the *commissariati*. Transport and communication equipment were inadequate, as were weapons and even simple office materials. The personnel problems of the Florentine police, however, seem to have been caused largely by the organizational weaknesses inherent to the Italian police model, a conclusion also drawn in a report of the *Public Safety Division* of the *Allied Commission* of February 1947 on the Italian police system. This report stressed the fact that Italy seemed unable to solve its internal security problems.

¹⁷ AS Firenze, Questura 433, fasc. "Reparti Guardie di P.S. dipendenti dalla Questura di Firenze - situazione". The personnel shortages of the Florentine police were to be blamed, for instance, for the fact that the units commanded by the *questura* for certain interventions (e.g. for the many demonstrations in the postwar years) were often not supplied in full force, sometimes not at all. These shortages were worsened by the fact that the principles employed for deployment in the various offices and police stations did not differ from those of the division command, as the duty roster of the *compagnia mobile*, the *polizia stradale* and several *commissariati* in the files of the Florentine *questura* show. These rosters also evidence the fact that the Italian police force was a strongly hierarchical organization. Some policemen were ordered to duty as orderlies, barbers, tailors, etc. This situation provoked tension between the rank and file and the officers, which vented itself in anonymous letters to the prefect and to local newspapers.

despite the fact that the overall strength of its police forces was disproportionately high if compared with Great Britain.¹⁸

The Italian government did react to the difficulties of its police forces with an impressive increase in personnel. The strength of the *gruppo guardie di P.S.* in Florence went up from 803 men in August 1946 to 1,151 in May 1948. The growth in personnel was especially striking for the *compagnia mobile*, which was not included in the earlier figure. While in December 1945 it numbered only 98 men, by May 1946 it already counted 178 and by May 1948 the figure had risen to 439 policemen.¹⁹ It was this increase in numbers which balanced the organizational weaknesses of the Italian police.

2. Police and Public Order in Florence

In correspondence with the traditional Italian police style the dominating concept of 'public order' was very extensive. The order of 12 July 1945 concerning the monthly reports stipulated that the police had to mention all incidents, demonstrations, political and economic protests, illegal occupations of land and factories, and rebellions of significant importance against the police.²⁰ The files of the Florentine *questura* show that 'ordine pubblico' served as a justification for police intervention for a variety of reasons. Intervention was resorted to not only for 'incidents' of a legal or illegal nature, but in principle by all occasions where a crowd, organized or not, gathered. For example, each year on 2 November, the day of commemoration for the dead, police were deployed to all the Florentine graveyards.²¹

¹⁸ NA (National Archives) Washington, RG 59, 865.105, Enclosure to Dispatch No. 48, 6 Feb. 1947, American Embassy, Rome. This report, which discussed the Italian police system in detail and proposed a complete reform, is partly quoted by Sannino 1985, 460f.

¹⁹ These figures according to AS Firenze, Questura 433, fasc. "Reparti Guardie di P.S. dipendenti dalla Questura di Firenze - situazione"; *ibid.*, 372, fasc. 4; *ibid.*, 431, fasc. "Compagnia Mobile di Polizia. Assegnazione Uomini Servizi d'Istituto"; *ibid.*, 489, fasc. "Premio al personale di P.S. per le elezioni 1948".

²⁰ AS Firenze, Questura 390, fasc. 6, *questura* to all *uffici P.S.*, 12 July 1945.

²¹ AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Defunti Commemorazione". Similar orders had been issued under fascism.

In the following, I will concentrate on police intervention during demonstrations, many of which were spontaneous. The immediate post-war period saw numerous protest marches in the city of Florence. Already in autumn 1944 the scarcity of food and fuel had led to protests, to a large extent carried out by women. From spring 1945, with the return of the soldiers, partisans and prisoners of war the unemployment problem became more and more pressing. Throughout the post-war period this problem led to numerous demonstrations, organized by official organizations like the trade unions and by informal associations. From the summer of 1947, the political debate became increasingly heated, a tension which made itself felt during demonstrations and which reached a peak with the general strike following the assassination attempt on Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Communist party.

2.1. Phase I (1944-45): Disorientation

Immediately after the fall of the fascist regime, an evident disorientation of the police, visible for instance in internal conflicts over tactics to be employed, in Florence went hand in hand with considerable tolerance towards protest events. Especially the political parties and movements connected with the fight for the liberation of the city enjoyed a freedom of action unparalleled in the post-war years.²² Numerous are the orders of the *questura* for conferences and meetings of these groups to escort public marches, if they should form, i.e. to not intervene in a repressive manner against demonstrations held without the necessary permission. Already in the autumn of 1944, however, two fundamental aspects of the public order philosophy of the Italian police were perceptible: a profound distrust of demonstrations in general and a tactic of extensive surveillance to enable the police to suppress protests at an initial stage. Both of these aspects may be seen in the attitude of the local police leadership to the protest marches against the bread, food, and fuel shortages, which took place in many villages and towns of the province as well as in the city of Florence itself from autumn 1944 on, i.e. spontaneous protests without politically legitimized organizers.

²² This attitude, however, was never without ambiguity because of the deeply ingrained anticommunism in all police forces. On the basis of the allied orders to investigate politically suspicious individuals, potentially dangerous for military security, which were clearly directed against fascists and collaborators with the Germans, the *carabinieri* in Borgo S. Lorenzo in December 1944 investigated the communists. NA Washington, RG 331, 10802/143/45.

2.1.1. *The attitude of the police towards demonstrations*

The *questura's* understanding of demonstrations was based on the conviction that protests were legitimate only if they were meant to draw the attention of the government to a problem it had overlooked. On 20 November 1944 the *reggente la questura*, the provisional head of the Florentine police administration, wrote about the 'hunger demonstrations':

Come è già noto, gli organi competenti, d'accordo con le Autorità Alleate, si stanno occupando e preoccupando di tale stato di cose, e fanno del loro meglio per ovviare alla lamentata deficienza di generi di prima necessità. Al raggiungimento di tale fine, però, deve cooperare la stessa popolazione, mantenendosi nella più perfetta tranquillità e conservando la piena fiducia nelle Autorità, che si sono addossate così grave onere.²³

With growing political polarization in the following years, this attitude could lead to the suppression of criticism. In May 1948, for instance, the commanding *maresciallo* (warrant officer) of the permanent police post in a refugee camp in Florence confiscated a film of photographs two journalists had taken inside the camp. In his report the *maresciallo* emphasized that only a few days earlier a commission of the Ministry of the Interior had inspected the camp and had promised immediate measures for an improvement of conditions. Publishing photographs of the camp could therefore no longer be justified by the wish to call the attention of the ministry, but had to be understood as the desire to act against it. He thus believed it was his duty to confiscate the film.²⁴ This argumentation was adopted without any modifications by the prefect in his report to the Ministry of the Interior.²⁵

²³ AS Firenze, Questura 342, fasc. 152. (As is already known, the competent organs, in agreement with the allied authorities, are already occupying and preoccupying themselves with this state of things, and they are doing their best to remedy the lamented deficiency of indispensable goods. In order to achieve this goal, however, the population must cooperate, keeping the most perfect tranquillity and conserving complete trust in the authorities that have assumed such a heavy burden.)

²⁴ AS Firenze, Questura 486, fasc. "Centro Profughi. Sequestro di una pellicola fotografica ai giornalisti del periodico 'So tutto' (ex 'Lo Scandalo')", report dated 25 May 1948.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, telegram dated 25 May 1948.

2.1.2. *The Police Tactic: Surveillance and Suppression*

The 'hunger marches' in the city and the province of Florence initially fell under the category of demonstrations considered acceptable to the *questura*. In the course of the demonstrations, however, it also came to acts of violence, such as attacks on private homes where the crowd suspected that food was to be found.²⁶ In general, the police forces in the province seem to have been surprised by these demonstrations and did not intervene.²⁷ In the city of Florence the presence of allied military police enabled the military government to intervene directly and gave it a greater weight. The allies had decided against a long-term occupation of Italy and against a direct reformist intervention in the state apparatus. They did, however, expect support for their short-term objectives, i.e. the absolute safeguarding of law and order behind the front line. In pursuing these short-term objectives, the allies appear to have reinforced tendencies within the Italian police in the field of public order, which were a stumbling block in terms of their democratization.²⁸ In Florence the situation was further complicated by the fact that direct attacks against the prefect, who was accused of a fascist past, gave the demonstrations a stronger political color.²⁹

²⁶ See AS Firenze, Questura 340, fasc. 30.

²⁷ See AS Firenze, Questura 340, fasc. 64.

²⁸ At an early stage the allies had already shown concern about the efficiency of the Italian police, especially after riots in several Sicilian cities and the 'Caretta incident' in Rome. In the war period they restricted their intervention to a large extent to attempts to raise the efficiency of the existing police forces. When the allies in 1946-47 tried to pressure the Italian government for a reform of the Italian police and the institution of an allied police mission, the Italians refused.

²⁹ In 1941 the prefect had given a speech against the English, which the fascists liked so much they had it printed. Some of his personnel decisions were interpreted as protecting fascists. AS Firenze, Questura 373, fasc. 5. The tension in Florence was representative of the situation in northern Italy, where the nominations for administrative posts by the resistance movement from its own ranks were not accepted by the government in Rome, which sent career bureaucrats.

On 6 October, 1944 a 'hunger march' in Florence managed to reach the *prefettura* building without any intervention on the part of the police.³⁰ It broke up after a delegation had been received by the allied provincial commissioner. The course of this 'hunger march', however, convinced the *questore* to issue a general order concerning demonstrations. The ambitious demands he made on the police developed logically from the application of the traditional Italian police style to the field of public order. The police leadership expected perfect control of the territory and of its citizens. This 'complete' information on all risks to public order was intended to enable the suppression of all potentially dangerous situations at an initial stage ('sul nascere').³¹ The *questore* ordered the *commissariati* to introduce the most circumspect surveillance measures in order to control the movement of people and to prevent demonstrations reaching the *prefettura* offices. If possible, marches were to be dispersed, but were in all cases to be escorted by strong police forces. An invasion of the building of the *prefettura* was to be prevented at all costs.³²

The order of the *questore* of 6 October 1944 set down the principles of the tactic which was to be practiced by the Florentine police against demonstrations in the coming years. However, it soon became evident that even with continuously expanding stand-by forces the police were not able to satisfy the demands of their leadership. They did not manage to prevent a protest march on 10 November 1944, when demonstrators demanded distribution of food and fuel as well as the recall of the prefect.³³ Even in numerically favorable

³⁰ As the local symbol of the central government, the *prefettura* building was of equal importance for the police and the demonstrators. It was the destination and the target of most protest marches. For the demonstrators it was paramount to force the prefect to take notice of their requests. The police had to defend the *prefettura* as the symbol of the authority of the state against any attack.

³¹ The *questore* unflinchingly upheld this demand. On 6 July 1945 he reproached the *funzionario* of the police station of Santo Spirito, who had not reported an absolutely insignificant labor conflict, which had been settled immediately and peacefully. The *questore* had learned about the incident through the press. He threatened the *funzionario* with "unpleasant disciplinary measures", if anything similar happened again. AS Firenze, Questura 369, fasc. 8.

³² See AS Firenze, Questura 342, fasc. 152.

³³ See the report of the *questura* to the *prefettura*, 10 November 1944, *ibid.*

circumstances, the police failed to disperse the crowd. The demonstration was finally broken up not by the Italian police, but by allied military police which according to the *questura* acted "in a particularly dynamic manner".³⁴

2.1.3. *The Burden of the Fascist Past*

The provincial allied police command criticized the Florentine police over the protest march of 10 November 1944. It seems to have expected a more 'energetic' intervention, claiming that the police had not been active and watchful enough.³⁵ There were several reasons, however, why this was not a realistic expectation. With the liberation of the city, still a very recent event, the atmosphere of resistance remained strong, even dominant. The protest group, Florentine housewives, and the reason for the demonstration, an undeniable shortage of food and other essential items, were also significant factors. We may assume that individual policemen felt sympathy for or solidarity with the demonstrating women. However, a more important element in explaining the initial tolerance of the Italian police towards demonstrations may be traced to the burden of their fascist past and their disorientation regarding their role in a democratic society. Even though the police were officially integrated into the coalition against nazi-fascism, in practice they were on probation. Any sanction or violence, such as the use of batons, inevitably led to protests. In the months immediately after the liberation of Florence, such acts provoked unanimous condemnation by all political parties and local newspapers, which attacked the police for using fascist methods. An 'energetic' intervention against demonstrators and protesting citizens would have had direct negative consequences on the relationship between the public and the police, consequences which could only intensify the disorientation within the ranks of the police force itself.

An incident at Florence's central market bears witness to this mechanism. Protests due to inadequate food supplies were manifested not only as

³⁴ Report of the *questura* to the allied city police command, dated 11 November 1944, AS Firenze, Questura 342, fasc. 152.

³⁵ *Questura* to all police stations, 11 November 1944, *ibid.*

demonstrations, but also as spontaneous events at the markets, especially the central one. Despite a heavy deployment of police, numerous conflicts occurred between the public order units and customers. In the resulting clashes the police had immense difficulties in keeping the upper hand. On 16 September 1944 a housewife was killed and another wounded when the commanding *funzionario* ordered his men to fire in the air to disperse the crowd. Some weeks later, on 8 October 1944, another *funzionario* lamented that since this “painful event” the policemen stationed at the market lacked the necessary energy to assert themselves against the crowd.³⁶

The effects of this disorientation of the police, however, were limited because public criticism, although harsh, was not combined with a fundamental critique of the Italian police system and a demand for reform. The political parties of the resistance movement criticized the market incident as a relapse into fascist methods, but saw its cause exclusively related to an inadequate *epurazione*. *La Nazione del Popolo*, the newspaper of the CTLN, wrote that too many men who once had been members of the *guardia repubblicana* of Mussolini’s Republic of Salò now served in the ranks of the police; men who not long ago had faithfully served the nazi-fascist regime pretended now to be the defenders of public order, while in reality they were disseminators of disorder and perpetrators of customs and a moral which the Italian people rejected. The newspaper asked the commission responsible for the purging of the police to rigorously examine the files of these men.³⁷ The article did not criticize the tactic used by the police at the central market, nor did it discuss the relationship of the police to the population or demand any reforms. Reducing the problem to an inadequate *epurazione*, at the most with a generic call for reform, was a general phenomenon whenever errors on the part of the police were publicly discussed. This was even the case when a journalist was maltreated in the offices of the *questura*, apparently because he had not sufficiently acknowledged the role of the police in the arrest of the war criminal Pietro Koch.³⁸

³⁶ AS Firenze, Questura 449, fasc. “Mercato Centrale - servizio vigilanza”.

³⁷ *La Nazione del Popolo*, 15/16 September 1944, copy in ISRT.

³⁸ AS Firenze, Questura 370, fasc. 24. The journalist had reported that the arrest of Koch was due to a tip given by a citizen; according to the police, it was the result of their investigation.

It is, however, important to stress that large parts of the population and in the immediate post-war period also the majority of politicians and the press routinely made the connection with the fascist system when clashes between the police and the public occurred. This was indeed reasonable given that after the liberation most policemen - for instance, those deployed at the market, including the commanding *funzionario* - remained the same as during the Republic of Salò. Here the efforts of the police leadership, sustained by the political authorities, to project a 'resistance image' by stressing, for instance, the contributions of the police forces to the liberation of the city, found their limits. It is probably for this reason that the suggestion of the *questura* to conduct "azioni preventive di persuasione fra le masse popolari" (at least in rhetoric a new departure) did not have visible consequences.³⁹ The guidelines for police intervention, stipulated in the same order, continued to follow the old lines. In the case of the 'hunger march' on 11 November 1944 the allied police command reproached the Italian police among other things for not having taken any preventive measures to suppress the demonstration. The *questore* made a similar reprimand, as no police station had reported the formation of the demonstration which could not however have escaped them. He again issued an order for circumspect and uninterrupted measures of surveillance to be conducted, for the first time including the offices of political parties ("with due secrecy"). Finally he threatened to hold the *funzionari* of the *commissariati* personally responsible should they again fail to report the development of protest marches or to suppress them with the local forces before they got off the ground.⁴⁰

2.1.4. Tolerance out of Weakness

³⁹ Order of 20 November 1944, AS Firenze, Questura 342, fasc. 152. This order to a large extent was a copy of the one of 6 October. The efforts to project a 'resistance image' came to an end already in spring 1945, when the national police leadership in Rome intervened against those local policemen, who (at least as the ministry saw it) had too close ties with the resistance movement, e.g. against Soldano Benzi, the *funzionario* who had led the *questura* in the critical months after the liberation of Florence. NA Washington, RG 331, 10000/143/532, letter of the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 4 March 1945.

⁴⁰ Ibid., *questore* to the *commissariati*, 11 November 1944. In their reports all *commissariati* categorically denied that groups of demonstrators had formed in their territory. According to each of them the demonstration had been organized on the territory of a neighboring *commissariato*. See their reports in *ibid.*

The initial tolerance of the Florentine police towards demonstrations seems to have been determined more by the inability of the local police leadership to accomplish the objectives of their professed tactic than by a conscious decision on their part or by those politically responsible. There were many reasons for this inability, some of which have been mentioned already: a shortage of personnel, inadequate organization, disorientation due to the fascist past. It should be emphasized, however, that the public order tactic of the Italian police could only work if a 'hard' attitude was employed, either against a few people at an initial stage (the so-called preventive measures) or against many later on.

One example of the ineffectiveness of the police may be seen in a demonstration of Florentine tuberculosis patients on 20 September 1945, which had been declared in advance, thereby giving the police time to prepare for it.⁴¹ In its aftermath, the disorientation of the police force found expression in internal bickering about the behavior and deployment of the police. The *questura* had sent a reinforcement of 20 men to the *funzionario* in charge and had ordered him to convince the patients, if possible, to cancel the demonstration but, in consideration of the pitiful conditions of health of the protesters, to use force only if violence occurred.⁴² The patients marched to the inner city and then to the *prefettura*. There a delegation was promised an audience with the prefect, but only got to see the provincial medical officer. When the angry and dissatisfied members of the delegation were brought back to the entrance, one of them opened the gate which the policemen had left ajar, claiming that these were the prefect's orders. In this way more than 50 policemen were taken by surprise and overpowered by about 200 demonstrators (according to the local newspapers about 100, according to other police reports only 80), who stormed

⁴¹ Like their fellow sufferers in other Italian cities, the tuberculosis patients in the sanatorium of the hospital complex of Careggi had been in almost uninterrupted agitation since the end of the war. The reasons for this unrest lay in the insufficient food, unsatisfactory medical treatment and inadequate financial support. On a national level, the *Unione Lavoratori Tubercolotici* reached an agreement with the government on 9 April 1948, i.e. shortly before the parliamentary elections, which among other things provided for an increase in financial support for the patients in the sanatoria and for those discharged. AS Firenze, Questura 479, fasc. "Careggi - sanatorio - agitazione fra i ricoverati"; Questura 451, fasc. "Ricoverati degli Ospedali - Agitazioni".

⁴² AS Firenze, Questura 479, fasc. "Careggi - sanatorio - agitazione fra i ricoverati", *ordinanza* dated 19 September 1945.

the building. The prefect wrote to the *questore* and to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome:

Questo non torna ad onore del Corpo degli Agenti e mi fa molto seriamente dubitare che esso sia in grado di affrontare e sostenere, in caso di necessità, prove ben più serie di quella odierna. Non si potrebbe aver fiducia che in caso di perturbamento dell'ordine il compito di istituto possa dagli agenti essere assolto con disciplina e con ardimento.⁴³

The *questore* had to admit that a minimum of caution should have prevented the invasion of the *prefettura*. While the delegation of tuberculosis patients was inside the building, the *funzionari* in charge had left their men unsupervised and retired to the interior courtyard for private conversations. According to the *questore*, the policemen were therefore not under the control of their superiors and some of them even became friendly with the demonstrators. Even though he criticized the *funzionari* for negligence of their duty, he mainly blamed the incident on the passivity of the ordinary policemen and on their lack of discipline and sense of responsibility.⁴⁴ It should be recalled that only the *funzionari* were directly under the jurisdiction of the *questura*. The *questore* also reproached the only uniformed officer present who according to him, had expressed his concern about the danger of infection to his men with loud and tactless words, inflaming the mood of the demonstrators. This officer, who had originally served in the PAI, the colonial police of fascist Italy, but had been in Florence since 1943, defended the uniformed policemen and his own behavior in a letter dated 21 September 1945. He blamed all the

⁴³ (This does not turn to the honor of the corps of the *agenti* and it makes me very seriously doubt whether it will be able to confront and to handle, if necessary, far more serious tests than today's. One cannot trust that in the case of a disturbance of order the *agenti* are capable of fulfilling their institutional duty with discipline and boldness.) Ibid., letter dated 20 September 1945.

⁴⁴ Report to the prefect, 22 September 1945, *ibid.* The *questore* especially emphasized (again), that about 200 *agenti ausiliari* were serving in the police division 'Toscana' and that one could not trust them in public order cases. However, among the policemen who were identified and reprimanded, there was only one *agente ausiliare*. The *funzionari*, who had been in charge, also blamed the uniformed policemen or tried to explain the incident rather unconvincingly by the cunning of the demonstrators and the lightning speed of their action. See *ibid.* the reports of the three *funzionari*.

weaknesses of the intervention on the civilian *funzionari* on the scene and on the *questura* as a whole, attacking them implicitly as 'soft' and incompetent. According to him, he and his men could have dispersed the demonstration "but certainly not using only words". The *questura*, however, which he contacted by telephone had ordered him not to use force under any circumstances. For this officer the responsibility for the occupation of the *prefettura* rested solely with the *funzionari*. If they, like he himself, had stayed with the policemen, it would not have happened.⁴⁵

Besides a general friction between the different police offices and commands, these arguments indicate differences in mentality at the leadership level of the Florentine police. The civilian *funzionari* seem to have preferred a less confrontational style. In contrast, the uniformed officer had been shaped by a definitely military background. His letter of 21 September 1945, a reaction to the critical report of the *questore*, ends with the words:

"Quando altri nell'Amministrazione avranno dimostrato sui campi di battaglia d'Europa e d'Africa il loro comportamento, e sul corpo porteranno le cicatrici delle ferite che io porto, potranno parlare al riguardo di prove da sostenere."⁴⁶ In line with this background, he supported a confrontational tactic. However, throughout this police intervention the directives of the *questura* remained decisive. In all the phases of the deployment, the *funzionari* and the uniformed officer requested and waited for further orders from the *questura*, which in this case fell back on the position of defending the *prefettura*. In the following period of transition to a less tolerant attitude towards demonstrations, hints of a different mentality among civil *funzionari* and uniformed officers disappeared as the *questura* ordered a more 'energetic' style of intervention of the police.

2.2. Phase II: Transition

⁴⁵ Ibid. According to the officer, of all the policemen of the 'Toscana' division one could trust only the 70 to 80 *guardie* who had been under his personal command for a long time, i.e. only policemen who, like he himself, had served in the PAI.

⁴⁶ (When others in the administration have demonstrated their behavior on the battlefields of Europe and Africa, and when they bear on their bodies the scars of the wounds that I bear, then they can talk about standing up to trials.) Ibid.

During 1946 police intervention at organized demonstrations and spontaneous protests indicates that the security forces sought to implement a policy of normalization and legalization. In this regard, they followed the orders and guidelines from the central government. Both Prime Minister De Gasperi and Minister of the Interior Romita had promised more decisive police action against crime and against civil and political unrest. As far as organization and personnel was concerned the Florentine police were increasingly capable of intervening 'decisively' against protests, though without success. The police reacted to these failures not by reviewing their tactic but by deploying more men and heavier equipment. The fact that after such increases police intervention was still not successful within the framework of their tactic was largely due to the political circumstances, i.e. contradictions in the area of public order within the grand coalition governments of Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists.⁴⁷ Despite the official policy to curb social and political unrest, these contradictions seem to have resulted in first a reluctance of the local political authorities and police leadership to give clear orders for an 'energetic' police intervention and second criticism from inside the dominant coalition against 'tough' policing. In most cases of clashes between the police and demonstrators, public order was not restored by police intervention, but by the intercession of Communist and Socialist politicians and trade union leaders.

2.2.1. *Continuing Disorientation - Continuing Moderation*

By far the most active protest group during 1946 were the unemployed. Initially the unemployed in Florence moved within the framework of 'official' politics. Through organizations like the trade unions and associations of the partisans, veterans and prisoners of war, they tried to exert pressure on state agencies and on the associations of the employers asking for jobs, financial benefits, and the establishment of special programs for their reintegration. Their campaign started immediately after the end of the war. For 5 July, 1945 the first demonstration in the city center of about 150 returnees from Germany is recorded in the files of the Florentine *questura*. In September 1945 gatherings and protests became more frequent and on 24 September the first demonstration

⁴⁷ The restoration of public order had a considerable importance for the program of the first government led by De Gasperi, especially for the Christian Democrats, whereas the position of the Communist party was more uncertain (Canosa 1976, 114, 122).

outside the *prefettura* took place, which however did not provoke any incidents.⁴⁸ For some time the actions and demonstrations of the unemployed remained non-violent. They often used symbolic forms of protest, which were targeted against the employment of women in factories and offices.⁴⁹ The unemployed, however, did not restrict themselves to peaceful forms of protest. From the end of 1945 more and increasingly disruptive demonstrations took place, which put the police under pressure simply by their frequency. The unchanged tactic of the Florentine police leadership to counter demonstrations by a massive deployment of policemen placed heavy demands on police personnel.⁵⁰

Confrontation between the ‘forces of order’ and the demonstrators reached a first climax on 31 January, 1946. The police had been on alert for more than 48 hours, and already that morning some sections were unable to provide the numbers of men called up for public order duty.⁵¹ The demonstration took place in front of the *prefettura*. Inside the building 50 policemen and *carabinieri* were stationed, as many again were inside the *questura* and 110 more were on stand-by in trucks and armored cars. When the several hundred demonstrators in front of the *prefettura*, in the words of the commanding *funzionario*, acted

⁴⁸ AS Firenze, Questura 369, fasc. 8. The orders of the *questura* concentrated on the defense of the *prefettura* building.

⁴⁹ Several times, e.g. in March and April 1946, the unemployed prevented female bank and government employees from taking up their jobs, which they themselves symbolically took over for a short period of time. This form of protest seems to have met with understanding and even sympathy from the police, probably because of the nature of the group against which it was directed. See AS Firenze, Questura 430, fasc. 14, on the case of the ‘Banca del Lavoro’. The unemployed demanded the dismissal of all women who were not heads of family. For more examples see Questura 414, fasc. “Disoccupati manifestazioni”.

⁵⁰ The *questura* was conscious of this fact, but it continued to insist on reacting to every expected demonstration with the deployment of large forces of policemen. In his *ordinanza* of 1 January 1946 the *questore* wrote that he realized the exacting work the men of the police had been subjected to in the previous days, but that it was necessary for every policeman to double his efforts for the protection of public order in the supreme interest of the country. He counted on the “spirit of sacrifice and abnegation” which had always distinguished the *carabinieri* and the police. AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. “Disoccupati manifestazioni”.

⁵¹ For instance the *commissariato* S. Spirito and the *compagnia interna* of the *carabinieri*, i.e. the company responsible for the city of Florence. *Ibid.*

“too riotous” and “blocked the traffic in a way that gave rise to expectations of bigger disturbances of public order”, he gave the order to disperse the demonstration by force. At that moment a delegation of the unemployed, accompanied by representatives of the CTLN and the local trade union leadership, was still inside the building conferring with the prefect. When the police charge met with resistance, the *funzionario* ordered the firemen, who had been detailed for this duty, to use their hoses against the demonstrators. They refused to obey arguing that they were willing to use them against fires but not against demonstrators.⁵²

The police files are contradictory about the ensuing dynamics of the police intervention, which developed into the most ‘decisive’ action against a demonstration since 1944. The mobile units of the police and the *carabinieri* charged the demonstrators with their batons. To disperse the crowd they used armored cars mounted with 20 mm machine guns, which drove up and down the streets at high speed (the famous *carosello*). Several demonstrators were injured, some had to be taken to hospital. In their reports, the prefect and the *questore* justified the intervention by the fact that demonstrators had tried to storm a secondary entrance of the *prefettura* building. Neither the reports of the policemen at the scene nor the local newspapers contain any suggestion of such an incident. In this context, it is worth underlining that the armored cars of the *battaglione mobile* of the *carabinieri*, used on the side of the police, could be deployed only in cases of very grave danger to public order. A reason had to be given for the use of the armored cars, though it is hard to believe that it was really the prefect himself who gave the order while at the same time conferring with the delegation of the unemployed.

Despite this show of force, public order was restored not by the police but by the efforts of the local secretary of the Communist party and the secretaries of the *camera del lavoro* (trade union headquarters), who managed to calm down the crowd. The police intervention was sharply attacked by the local press. The local trade union leadership and the political parties protested, drawing a

⁵² According to a signed declaration of the *capo gabinetto* of the *questura*, dated 5 February 1946, these were the words of the officer on duty at the command of the fire brigade, when he himself telephoned to protest. *Ibid.*

connection with the fascist past.⁵³ The police leadership, which had felt strong enough to make a 'decisive' intervention against the protesters, was proven wrong by the events. Open and hidden resistance in the population, among the local politicians, and possibly also within the security forces were still too strong and support for a strict law and order position too weak.

After this initial confrontation the prefect seems to have followed a policy of preparing for the worst by means of a massive deployment of *carabinieri*. On 8 February 1946 he ordered the armored cars of the *carabinieri* and 100 students of their NCO school (a week later even 200) to be placed on stand-by because a demonstration of the unemployed was expected for the following day. However, this stand-by deployment, assigned to defend the *prefettura* in case of need, did not result in a harsher tone in orders issuing from the *questura* regarding demonstrations. The *questura* was clearly trying to prevent an escalation, as may be seen, for example, in an order of 22 March 1946 for a demonstration to be held the following day:

Raccomando vivamente ai Sigg. Dirigenti i servizi la dovuta energia e il massimo tatto per impedire qualsiasi atto di violenza e nel contempo evitare seri contrasti tra polizia e dimostranti, che potrebbero degenerare in gravi disordini.⁵⁴

However, the continuous state of alert and massive deployment of men to assist in expected demonstrations which often did not materialize or did not necessitate

⁵³ Ibid. Also the articles of *L'Unità*, *La Nazione del Popolo*, *Il Nuovo Corriere*, all of 1 February 46. The communist paper *L'Unità* asked in its headline who gave the order to attack and spoke of a clownish staging of repression, as the intervention of the left-wing leaders had been enough to reestablish the peace. According to *L'Unità*, this was the first intervention of the *celere*, recently constituted as a riot police squad. This might have been an additional reason for the aggressiveness of the police. The protest of the political parties and the trade unions arose especially after it had become known that an official investigation had been initiated against the firemen who had refused to obey the order to use their hoses against the demonstrators. According to *Il Nuovo Corriere* of 8 February 1946, the *camera del lavoro* protested with the words: "Siamo ancora forse in era fascista?" (Are we perhaps still in the fascist era?).

⁵⁴ "I strongly recommend all leaders of the services to use the necessary vigor and maximum tact in order to prevent any act of violence and at the same time avoid serious conflicts between the police and the demonstrators, which could degenerate into dangerous disorders". Ibid.

police intervention caused grave personnel shortages and was bound to wear down individual policemen.⁵⁵

2.2.2. *Continuing Organizational and Tactical Deficiencies*

In spring 1946 the Minister of the Interior in Rome issued general instructions concerning protests on the part of the unemployed, which had been increasing throughout Italy. These instructions show that the skeptical attitude of the Florentine *questura* towards demonstrations as well as the tactic it had pursued since October 1944 can be regarded as representative for the Italian police. In a telegram of 25 March 1946 the Socialist Minister of the Interior Romita emphasized that the government was making every effort to ease the unemployment problem, especially for the veterans. He blamed the unrest and incidents exclusively on the activities of agents provocateurs ("pochi elementi perturbatori estranei"), which he identified as common criminals, black marketeers and fascists. Against them he called for an active intervention by the police.⁵⁶

A second telegram by the minister gave precise instructions on how the agitation among the unemployed should be dealt with. As a preventive measure the police were to collect information locally, thereby enabling them to suppress protests at an initial stage. However, the minister wanted to avoid an escalation of violence and demanded that the police intervene with energy and tact. Firemen were also to be employed, making use of their waterguns.⁵⁷ As before,

⁵⁵ The high frequency of interventions resulted in a situation whereby the numbers of men requested were not or could not be made available. In July 1946 the *compagnia mobile* was unable to send all the men ordered on the 3rd, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 16th. Ibid.

⁵⁶ AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Dimostrazioni di protesta contro la disoccupazione - identificazione elementi estranei perturbatori dell'ordine pubblico". Romita did not stand alone in his conviction. According to the Florentine newspaper *Il Nuovo Corriere* of 4 January 1946, the *camera del lavoro* announced the setting-up of special groups on part of the unions which were supposed to safeguard public order. The reasons given were the numerous demonstrations and the unrest among people "who declare themselves to be unemployed". AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Disoccupati manifestazioni".

⁵⁷ AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Dimostrazioni di protesta contro la disoccupazione - identificazione elementi estranei perturbatori dell'ordine pubblico". Destruction and looting was to be prevented by all means.

the tactic proposed by Romita was not completely successful in Florence. Grave deficiencies emerged even within its framework, several of which became visible at a demonstration on 2 May 1946, when about 150 demonstrators, all of them 'disoccupati comuni' (the unemployed without special status), managed to invade the *prefettura* despite a police unit of 80 policemen and *carabinieri* inside the building.

First, either the information-gathering by the police was inefficient or the *questore* and the prefect were incapable of or unwilling to act on the information they received. In any case, the tactic of 'preventive' information-gathering did not necessarily prove to be de-escalating. Tension among the 'common' unemployed had been rising in April because they had been excluded from benefits granted to unemployed partisans and veterans. On 2 May they expected an answer to their demands, presented on 27 April to the prefect, who had promised his "interessamento". On that occasion they had blocked the traffic in front of the *prefettura* for half an hour. On May 2 after an assembly of about 500 participants about 150 demonstrators marched to the *prefettura* and asked to speak with the prefect. A delegation was allowed to enter, but it seems to have wandered around for some time in search of somebody to talk to, the prefect having left that morning for Rome. The long wait at the entrance stirred up the crowd. When the rumor spread that the prefect had refused to receive the delegation, the demonstrators invaded the building.

Second, the confusion of responsibilities and the organizational deficiencies continued to have directly negative consequences on public order interventions. The *questura*, which knew in advance about the assembly and the demonstration, had ordered reserve units of 20 policemen to be stationed in the *questura* and of 20 *carabinieri* in the barracks in addition to a reinforcement of the men at the *prefettura*. However, because of personnel shortages the police division command put only 11 men on stand-by, the *carabinieri* command not a single one. On the evidence of reports, the personnel situation in the police force was so precarious that it was unable to organize a functioning *celere*, i.e. riot police unit. It was called in as a reinforcement, but arrived after more than half an hour, when the *prefettura* had already been stormed. The commanding officer defended himself by saying that in practice a *celere* no longer existed. He had been forced to assemble the men he could find and even had to wake up some who had gone off duty only a few hours before. In the concrete case it cannot be definitely determined whether this was due to 'organizational' or

'real' shortages, but in view of the impressive mobilization of the police in the following days the former seems more probable.⁵⁸

Third, the negative effects of the existence of two national police forces with identical and overlapping tasks need to be emphasized, especially the fact that the *questore* did not have unrestricted access to one of them. According to his report dated 2 May 46, he had been informed of the failed deployment of the *carabinieri* reserve unit the day before, had complained personally to the *carabinieri* about this personnel shortage and had requested the deployment of men from their *battaglione mobile*. This request had been refused, because the orders of the central *carabinieri* command in Rome allowed the deployment of this unit only in the case of "serious disturbances of public order". Fifty *carabinieri* of the *battaglione mobile* were sent the following day only after the *questore* had asked for them twice within one hour. The first request had been rejected, because the *carabinieri* command did not see the requirement of "serious disturbances of public order" fulfilled - on what basis remains unclear. With more effective coordination the invasion of the *prefettura* probably could have been prevented.⁵⁹

Fourth, the fact that the three reports written on this police intervention all differ in important points provides evidence of continuing disorientation, persisting internal difficulties, but also of a lack of trust within the police forces and among the leading police officers.⁶⁰ Because of the contradictions in these reports neither the responsibilities of the different police officers nor the exact sequence of events can be reconstructed. In his final report, the *questore* blamed the incident wholly and exclusively on the commanding *funzionario*. The only

⁵⁸ Because he feared a follow-up demonstration, for the next day the *questore* mobilized 164 policemen for the *prefettura* and 160 for other public buildings. In the following days, this force was gradually reduced, only to rise again to 240 on 7 May 1946. Because the combined forces of the police and the *carabinieri* were not sufficient for these stand-by units, the *questore* had to fall back on the students of the *carabinieri* NCO-school. See AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Disoccupati manifestazioni".

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.* for the reports of the *questore*, of the *vice questore*, who had been sent to the *prefettura* when the demonstration arrived there, and of the commanding *funzionario*. The main difference between them concerns the question when and by whom it was realized that the demonstration might turn dangerous and who at what time requested reinforcements.

visible consequence ensuing from the incident was that he increased the guard unit within the *prefettura* from 30 to 50 men.

Finally, the demonstration of 2 May 1946 shows that suggestions issuing from the center, such as the ideas put forward by the Minister of the Interior Romita about criminals, black marketeers and fascists acting as agents provocateurs at demonstrations of the unemployed, were immediately taken up at the periphery. The *vice questore* had been recognized by a group of demonstrators, who asked him to intercede on their behalf with the *guardia di finanza* to suspend their announced measures against illegal sales of cigarettes and other state monopoly products. The *vice questore* reported his impression that a large part of the demonstrators had been black marketeers and not *bona fide* unemployed. It was, however, generally known in Florence, and certainly to the police, that black marketeering and especially the (tax-free) sale of state monopoly products was one of the most important and often the only source of income for unemployed people.⁶¹ Nevertheless, this allusion by the *vice questore* made it possible for the *questore* to explain the invasion of the *prefettura* not only in terms of the errors of the *funzionario* in charge, but also of the presence of agents provocateurs. He wrote in his report to Rome (and only there can this observation be found) that shortly before the storming of the building there was a significant increase in the number of the demonstrators as they were joined by black marketeers.

2.2.3. *The Crisis of the Grand coalition in the Field of Public Order*

The Florentine *questura* supported the conspiracy theory, even though it was aware of the real reasons behind the escalation of the protests. There was no sign of an improvement in the unemployment problem. The tension between the partisans, prisoners of war and veterans on the one side, with their privileged access to state agencies and special benefits, and the ‘common’ unemployed on the other side, out of whose ranks the escalating protest developed during the year 1946, had existed since the early days of the movement of the unemployed.

⁶¹ A provincial meeting of the association of licensed sellers of monopoly goods on 22 February 1946 decided to suspend its threatened protests against the black market, giving as one of the reasons that for many of the unemployed the illegal sale of tobacco constituted the only means of subsistence. AS Firenze, Questura 410, fasc. “Associazione dei Rivenditori di Generi di Monopolio”.

The *questura* knew that the trade unions and the leadership of the associations and commissions of the unemployed had increasingly lost control of their members, as accusations of incompetence and ineffectiveness grew louder.⁶² This resulted in an increase in spontaneous meetings and demonstrations, which were not called by officially recognized organizations. These demonstrations became the real problem for the police, while those activities for the unemployed sponsored by officially recognized organizations were treated as routine events.⁶³ Blaming the spontaneous demonstrations, with their violent potential, on (fascist) agents provocateurs provided a lowest common denominator on which the Christian Democrats and the left-wing parties and trade unions could meet in their attitude towards social protest. However, it was increasingly inadequate in masking the growing differences in opinion regarding public order within the grand coalition. Against the autonomously organized unemployed, stigmatized by the agent provocateur theory as undemocratic, the police strengthened the military and offensive aspects of their tactic.

The *questura* took an unequivocal position concerning the spontaneous demonstrations of groups not controlled by officially recognized organizations. A general order issued on 5 August 1946 deplored the practice of spontaneous protests. Unauthorized demonstrations organized by people not belonging to recognized organizations were to be dissolved, without exception, while they were still in the process of formation.⁶⁴ It must be doubted, however, whether

⁶² On 8 August 1946, for instance, both the *commissariato* S. M. Novella and the *ufficio politico* reported that the leadership could not restrain the unemployed any longer. AS Firenze, fasc. "Disoccupati - manifestazioni".

⁶³ In June 1946, for instance, the trade unions carried out a campaign of "autoassunzione" without any incidents, which culminated in a large demonstration of the unemployed and employed workers together. The order for this demonstration, which the *questura* issued on 26 June 1946, shows that the police did not expect any difficulties with an organization like the *camera del lavoro*. The deployment of the police forces was to be "the least visible" and the policemen were to work together with the marshals of the trade unions. A stand-by unit of 100 *carabinieri* was kept inside Palazzo Vecchio, but the order stressed expressly that in no case should it be visible. Ibid.

⁶⁴ The *questura* especially emphasized the danger of infiltration among the masses of turbulent and lawless elements. Important too was the absence of people belonging to recognized organizations, capable of curbing eventual calls for disorder. AS Firenze, Questura 417, fasc. "Manifestazioni non autorizzati da parte di gruppi di persone non appartenenti ad

this order was applied to the full extent. In principle, it had been the position of the *questura* since October 1944, but the practice had been quite different. The *questura* was forced to reissue the order periodically. However, at this stage the police showed a more concerted effort to have the law respected.

As far as manpower and equipment was concerned, the Florentine police was increasingly able to use a 'heavy hand'. However, despite the mobilization of all available resources, it still did not manage to successfully control public order conflicts. Police intervention in a demonstration on 20 July 1946, from which the official workers' organizations had dissociated themselves, led to harsh attacks in the local press. In the course of this demonstration it became evident that the public order tactic of the Italian police (with the exception of the guarding of government buildings) was offensive in character. The use of military equipment, the number of policemen deployed, and the insistence of the *questura* to use these forces only '*in massa*' logically led to the forcible break up of the demonstration. The choice had become one between a *laissez-faire* attitude and massive intervention, with no middle course. Clear and unequivocal orders from the police leadership, with the support of the political authorities and a dominant part of public opinion for such intervention, became of decisive importance. Both, however, were not forthcoming during the period of the grand coalition governments.

Already on 19 July 1946 an 'uncontrolled' demonstration of the unemployed had taken place. A delegation was received by the prefect, and there were no incidents. For a follow-up demonstration expected for the next day, the *questore* ordered 50 *carabinieri* each for the *prefettura* and for the court house, 100 *carabinieri* for stand-by duty in the barracks, 50 policemen on stand-by in the *questura*, as well as all available policemen of the *compagnia mobile* - thus, a clear increase in deployed manpower since May. The *ufficio politico* was trusted with a patrolling services and the *commissariati* were called on to keep an eye on all markets, food depots and public buildings in their respective jurisdictions. The *questura* ordered the police to intervene promptly, with tact and energy, wherever necessary, in order to protect public order and prevent acts

organizzazioni riconosciuti - Divieto". Article 18 of the law on public security stipulated that the permission of the *questura* was necessary to hold a public demonstration.

of violence.⁶⁵ Even though 300 policemen were mobilized, the order had a moderate tone and indicated an intention to avoid an escalation. In practice, however, this translated into a *laissez faire* attitude in the face of the increased radicalism of the 'common' unemployed. Throughout the morning the police restricted themselves to the defense of public buildings, giving the demonstrators free reign on the streets and squares without intervening. Meanwhile the demonstrators blocked the traffic in the city center. Most of the shops and restaurants closed or were forced to close. The demonstrators then converged on the *prefettura*, where several incidents occurred with the large police units deployed there. Attempts to occupy the building of the *camera del lavoro* (a clear sign of dissatisfaction with the trade unions) and to block a power station were prevented by police intervention. Again a delegation was received in the *prefettura*, this time in the presence of the local trade union leadership. The prefect promised his "interessamento", but above all appealed to the responsibility and civic sense of the members of the delegation. He urged them to convince the demonstrators to desist from any ill-advised acts which would make police intervention necessary, with consequences that nobody would hope for.⁶⁶ This request by the prefect in the presence of the union leadership indicates the limits to compromise possible within the grand coalition in the field of public order.

In the afternoon the spontaneous incidents subsided, though the demonstrators again assembled in front of the *prefettura*. The prefect gave the order to disperse the demonstration, after a speech by the mayor of Florence, appealing to the crowd not to disturb public order any further, had been without effect.⁶⁷ The police charged the demonstrators with their batons, together with armored cars with mounted machine guns and truckloads of policemen armed with automatic weapons. In the course of this attack, more violent incidents occurred and several citizens had to be taken to hospital. Only the intervention of the trade union leaders and the Communist party secretary Rossi, with a proposal for a united demonstration of workers and the unemployed over the next days, calmed down the crowd so that no more incidents occurred, even though the demonstration continued.

⁶⁵ AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Disoccupati - manifestazioni".

⁶⁶ Ibid., newspaper clipping, *Il Nuovo Corriere*, 21 July 1946.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

All local newspapers concurred in their criticism of the police: they had intervened too late, too violently, and without discrimination.⁶⁸ A report of the *compagnia interna* of the *carabinieri* dated 20 July 1946, which numbered the demonstrators at about 2,000, also suggests that it was at least in part the nature of the police intervention which provoked violent incidents:

Polizia et Arma disperdevano folla. Impiego autoblinde et uso sfollagente da parte Compagnia Celere P.S. suscitavano vivo risentimento tra dimostranti anche perchè alcuni di essi rimanevano contusi.⁶⁹

That morning the appearance of an armored car of the *celere* had provoked agitation among the demonstrators, leading to stone throwing against the policemen. The police leadership decided to remove the vehicle in order to prevent any escalation of violence. This incident, together with the criticism of the local press, reveals the basic problem in the strategy of the Florentine police with regard to demonstrations. The logical consequence of the use of military equipment on the one side and the insistence by the police leadership of deploying the policemen only '*in massa*' on the other side was that the only alternative for the police was to limit themselves to the defense of government buildings or to break up the demonstrations forcibly. If the police intervened with any intention other than that of dispersing the demonstration, they caused more violent incidents. At the same time, the local newspapers clearly reflect the desire of at least part of the population (for instance, the shopkeepers) for some kind of intervention by the police in order to protect public order. A clear change in climate is reflected by the fact that criticisms raised did not refer to presumed fascist tendencies, but deplored the incompetence of the police.

The 'grand coalition' put strict limits on the possible strategies of all actors: on the one side the criticism of the police intervention could not be framed as a general critique of the police, on the other side the condemnation of single acts of violence could not result in an ostracizing of all the demonstrators. Consequently the police leadership, the trade unions and the

⁶⁸ For newspaper clippings see AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Disoccupati manifestazioni".

⁶⁹ (Police and *carabinieri* dispersed the crowd. The use of armored cars and batons on the part of the *compagnia celere* of the police provoked intense bad feeling among the demonstrators, also because some of them suffered bruising.) Ibid.

political parties blamed the degeneration of the demonstration on fascist agents provocateurs. However, while the headline of *La Nazione del Popolo* reported disorders in the city center stirred up by provokers, the examples given in the article are hardly convincing.⁷⁰ Especially interesting in this context are the five detentions, made by the police. In a memorandum of the *ufficio politico* all five were accused of having provoked incidents at the demonstration. Three had previous records and 'confidential information' reported that one of them was a fanatical fascist.⁷¹ This memorandum should be compared with a hand-written account, which gives the reasons for the five arrests:

- 1) ... fermato mentre criticava l'operato della polizia che era in servizio d'ordine (arrested while criticizing the actions of the police on public order duty).
- 2) ... fermato perchè in una discussione tacciava fascista un agente (arrested because in a discussion he accused a policeman of being a fascist).
- 3) ... fermato ... perchè inveiva e cercava di dare uno schiaffo ad un agente (arrested because he railed at a policeman and tried to slap him in the face).
- 4) ... fermato mentre, come almeno lui asserisce, si trovava in un portone (arrested, at least as he asserts, while he was standing in a main entrance).
- 5) ... fermato da uno della Celere mentre si trovava in Via Gori (arrested by one of the *celere* while he was in Via Gori).⁷²

⁷⁰ According to *La Nazione del Popolo*, 21 July 1946, two fascists had been unmasked. Fascist provocation was (naturally) blamed for the attempted assault on the trade union building. According to the story, water had been thrown on the demonstrators from a window. While everybody assumed that the window was in the *camera del lavoro*, it actually belonged to the apartment of a fascist who threw the water on a group of men, presumably his accomplices, waiting for just that. *Ibid.* A far more convincing explanation for the attack on the building is the radicalization of the 'common' unemployed and their dissatisfaction with the results the union had gained for them.

⁷¹ AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Dimostrazioni di protesta contro la disoccupazione - identificazione elementi estranei perturbatori dell'ordine pubblico".

⁷² AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Disoccupati - manifestazioni".

This account again indicates that the escalation of violence at the demonstration was at least partly caused by the type of intervention carried out by the police force itself.

The potential differences of opinion within the 'grand coalition', are however apparent, notwithstanding the conspiracy theory. The view of the police leadership is contained in the monthly reports of the prefect and the *questore*. According to these reports, in consideration of the intense agitation among the unemployed, the police limited itself to "persuasive efforts" in the morning (of which there is no sign in the police reports) in order to avoid incidents. As these attempts remained unsuccessful, they received the order to disperse the crowd by force in the afternoon. The energetic intervention of the police managed in a very short time to break up the demonstration.⁷³ On the basis of these reports, the police operation had been completely normal and successful. A report of the Communist party or the trade unions probably would have stressed the intervention of the workers' leaders, which brought a brutal and futile police operation to an end. The objectives of the left and the right within the 'grand coalition' were not compatible and met only in the hostility against informal demonstrations arranged by unauthorized organizations. In the same way, the insistence on the work of fascist agents provocateurs was the only explanation acceptable to all members of the coalition to account for disruptive and violent demonstrations.

2.2.4. *Towards the 'Cold' Civil War Tactic'*

On the very evening of this demonstration the *questura* reacted with a further reinforcement of the police force detailed for public order duty and with a clear hardening of its attitude towards demonstrators. It called for the police to intervene with maximum rigour to disperse the demonstrators, and to arrest the most hot-headed.⁷⁴ Towards the summer of 1946 the Florentine *questura* established a narrowly-defined tactic. Except for the number of the men deployed, it issued practically identical orders for the agitation among the unemployed, which flared up again and again. Although it had become more organized and more flexible, it stayed within the corset of its original tactic,

⁷³ Report of the *questore*, 27 July 1946; report of the prefect, 31 July 1946. AS Firenze, Questura 427, fasc. "Situazione politica ed economica della provincia. Relazione mensile".

⁷⁴ AS Firenze, Questura 414, fasc. "Disoccupati - manifestazioni".

reinforced in its fundamental elements, as is shown by the order of 11 August 1946. Thirty *carabinieri* and 6 plainclothes policemen were each deployed in three public buildings of the city (Palazzo Strozzi, Palazzo del Tribunale, Palazzo della Prefettura). The plainclothes policemen had the task reconnoitering outside these buildings “in profondità”, to identify and report on eventual movements of the unemployed. The uniformed units were to be used *in massa* with the aim of preventing any acts of violence. All groups at all times had to stay in contact with the *questura* by telephone. Smaller groups were detailed as guards for exposed buildings. For emergencies, the motorized forces of the police were concentrated inside the *questura*, those of the *carabinieri* in their barracks. Independently of the other units, the *ufficio politico*, partly motorized, was to conduct patrol and liaison duties. Also the *commissariati* were on ‘information duty’ and had to immediately report any sign which might be of concern to public order. They were also responsible for the guarding of the markets and food depots.⁷⁵

The tactic of the *questura* was heavily based on the gathering of information by police units, which were not supposed to intervene but to report to the center. Further, the tactic only foresaw direct confrontation with the demonstrators by the three units of uniformed police (for the suppression of violence) or by the heavily armed motorized units (in the case of an emergency). There was a definite turn towards a fully developed ‘(cold) civil war tactic’, where the whole city became a potential enemy. From the secure strongholds of government buildings, scouts were sent forth into the territory of the enemy to find out about their movements. Gone were the exhortations to intervene with tact and to avoid needless confrontations. It should be stressed, however, that this was a logical evolution of the Italian police style from the first general order of the Florentine *questura* on the handling of demonstrations of October 1944. It took only small steps to reach the point of August 1946: an increase in manpower, the availability of heavy weapons, and clear orders to intervene ‘energetically’. The further development towards a ‘(cold) civil war tactic’, which to a certain extent only revived methods commonly used in earlier periods for controlling public order in Italy, can be synthesized as follows:

- the traditional centralized control was reinforced;

⁷⁵ Ibid.

- the traditionally strong emphasis on the gathering of (political) information, understood and/or justified as a preventive measure, increasingly took on the characteristics of espionage focused against a political enemy and largely lost any pretense of de-escalation.
- the traditional military character of the police was modernized with the introduction of heavily armed units for intimidation as well as for reactive and increasingly proactive repression, constantly keeping present the possibility of a 'hot' civil war scenario.

However, to fully realize a '(cold) civil war tactic' a change in national politics was necessary.

The development towards a 'civil-war-tactic' is evident not only in relation to the unemployed, who might have been seen as particularly dangerous, but also to groups which had been able to count on special consideration before, like the housewives. Unrest at the food markets in Florence did not finish with the end of the war. In 1945 and 1946 incidents at the markets were provoked less by a lack of food than by excessive prices and the illegal sale of 'luxury food' like white bread. For a certain period there seems to have been a policy of 'tolerance' on the part of the police and the *vigili urbani*, which in part must have been caused by corruption but even more so by the desire to avoid 'trouble'.⁷⁶ Police intervention against violations of the rationing regulations were not necessarily popular and their prestige was not such that intervention was accepted, even if reluctantly. When in spring 1946 the efforts to put a stop to the black market were stepped up, patrols of both the *vigili urbani* and the *celere*, the riot police of the *questura*, were beaten up at the central market and forced to retreat. However, the police had definitely gone on the offensive.

Parallel to this increasing activity of the police force against the black market, its tolerance towards the protests of customers, i.e. housewives, diminished. A clear example is the attitude of the prefect and the police leadership in the case of a series of protests from 21 to 24 September 1946.

⁷⁶ AS Firenze, Questura 449, fasc. "Mercato nero del pane ed altri generi tesserati". The *vigili urbani* did not always intervene against illegal street traders; on the contrary, they collected a charge for the use of public soil from them. The police tolerated the illegal manufacturing of bread, if it was not white bread. In Florence one *colonello* and two NCOs of the *carabinieri* were arrested and convicted for illegal trade of flour. See the newspaper clippings from 19 July 1947, *ibid.*

During the first demonstration in front of the *prefettura* the prefect received a delegation of the demonstrators and promised to use his influence for a reduction of prices. However, he acted only after the Florentine housewives (after coordinated action against the sale of 'luxury bread' the next day) blocked the vegetable market, 'confiscated' perishable goods and delivered them to the city's hospitals. Special commissions, which the prefect established immediately, fixed prices at a lower level.

The police had known in advance about these planned actions, but intervened only after agreement had been reached. The police leadership made it clear that it would no longer tolerate spontaneous protests. It ordered a massive deployment of men at the markets (e.g. 100 men at the S. Ambrogio vegetable market) and motorized patrols in the city during the following days and weeks. The orders of the *questura* (again) refer to an exploitation of the negative economic situation by 'lawless elements' and stress that all acts of violence against people and property were to be prevented. The growing inclination towards a '(cold) civil war tactic' with indiscriminate intimidatory intentions and a trend towards proactive repressive intervention, is shown by the fact that the policemen were also supposed to intervene "in any case" ("comunque") to show the demonstrators that the police forces were watchful.⁷⁷ In this context the massive deployment of police at the markets and the heavily armed city patrols, which continued for weeks, take on a sense of collective intimidatory caution against the population of Florence. The spirit of the caution can be deduced from actions against individual demonstrators. On 24 September 1946 the police arrested two women because, according to them, they had shown signs of being among the most stirred up of the demonstrators. They were kept in the police station from 2 p.m. until 7 p.m., i.e. until after dark, and then released with the caution "a non compiere più altrimenti gesti inconsulti, o a partecipare a dimostrazioni pericolose per la pubblica quiete".⁷⁸

2.3. Phase III: Completion: The Police in a Cold Civil War

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, *ordinanza* of the *questura*, 24 and 25 September 1946.

⁷⁸ (... to not perform again otherwise ill-advised deeds, or to participate in demonstrations hazardous to the public peace.) AS Firenze, *Questura* 450, fasc. "Panettieri - Sciopero", report of the responsible *funzionario* to the *questore* dated 24 September 1946.

The 'ditching of the left' in summer 1947, i.e. the end of the 'grand coalition', which had dominated national government in the first years after the war, was the official start of the cold war in Italy, with important consequences for the police forces.⁷⁹ It provided a definite signal for the completion of the move towards a fully developed '(cold) civil war tactic' in the protection of public order, including a further strengthening of central control over the police forces. Minister of the Interior Scelba gave the police a clear political direction against the political parties and the associated organizations of the working-class movement.⁸⁰

2.3.1. Which Side Are You On?

The relationship between the new opposition parties and the Florentine *questura* immediately and substantially worsened with this 'ditching of the left'. The *questura* prohibited the putting up of a wall poster critical of the new government because it "sounded offense" to the ministers in office.⁸¹ An indication of a new policy of public order may also be seen in the increased attention given to strikes and to the trade unions. In the monthly reports of the Florentine prefect on the political situation of the province, a clearly negative and politicized picture of the CGIL is painted for the first time on 30 September

⁷⁹ Jenkins 1988, attempts an analysis of these influences. His remarks on Italy (especially p. 147 on the response to the assassination attempt on Togliatti), however, are not completely convincing.

⁸⁰ Canosa 1976, 118, affirms that although the direction of the Socialist Minister of the Interior Romita was anything but 'soft', contrary to his successors, especially Scelba, he did not see demonstrators as enemies to be destroyed. It was, however, Romita and not, as commonly believed, Scelba, who organized the *celere* as a riot squad. On Mario Scelba see Marino 1995, especially pp. 115-174. As far as the organization of the police was concerned, Scelba was not an innovator, with the exception of having constituted the first *corpo speciale* of the republic in the fight against the Sicilian bandit Giuliano (ibid., 104). On the impressive growth of the Italian police forces under Scelba, especially in the years 1947/48 see Canosa 1976, 132.

⁸¹ On 14 July 1947 the Communist party organized a demonstration in the provincial town of Empoli to protest against this act of censorship. The *questura* sent strong reinforcements of policemen, defined by the main speaker as a provocation which, however, the parties of the masses would not take up. Monthly report of the *questore*, 31 July 1947, AS Firenze, Questura 536, fasc. "Situazione politica ed economica della provincia".

1947.⁸² The report accused the trade unions of being completely in the hands of the Communists and of pursuing a purely political objective, i.e. the fall of the government, under the pretext of economic demands. In the following months the accusations against the CGIL mounted. As the prefect and the *questore* reported, the trade unions tried to impede the work of the government or to make it downright impossible by orchestrated industrial action.⁸³

It is not this analysis in itself which leads to the conviction that the *prefettura* and the *questura* were politically aligned in a biased manner, but the clearly partisan way in which it was presented. This attitude became even more pronounced after the electoral triumph of the Christian Democrats in April 1948. In his report of 30 June 1948 the Florentine prefect lamented that even before the government had time to fulfill its promises, the agitation of the workers had upset the life of the country. Economic and social problems, like unemployment and the cost of living, surely existed, “ma non è con la violenza, con la sommosa, col disordine o con la bacchetta magica che si risolvono tali problemi. Si dia tempo e tranquillità al Governo per lavorare.”⁸⁴ In his report for October 1948 the prefect wrote of badly concealed subversive designs advocated by the professional agitators of the CGIL under the pretext of economic claims.⁸⁵ This strongly ideological position against the organizations and political parties of the working-class movement was also rampant among the police. In his *Enciclopedia di Polizia* Luigi Salerno claims that under the influence of Karl Marx (from which, according to him, they tried to escape at

⁸² The *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* at that time was still a unitary trade union, but the drift towards a splitting up had become evident immediately after the ‘ditching of the left’. The split finally occurred in the wake of the general strike after the assassination attempt on Togliatti. The Christian Democratic trade unionists formed the CISL, their laic colleagues the UIL, while the Communists and Socialists remained within the CGIL.

⁸³ See AS Firenze, Questura 536, fasc. “Situazione politica ed economica della provincia”.

⁸⁴ (... but it is certainly not with violence, with insurrection, with disorder or with a magic wand that one resolves such problems. Give the government time and tranquillity so that it can work.) AS Firenze, Questura 536, fasc. “Relazioni mensili del Prefetto, 1946 ott. - 1948 dic.”.

⁸⁵ The prefect warmly welcomed the split of the CGIL and the foundation of the “free trade unions”. Ibid.

first) the trade unions changed from a defensive to an offensive organization and became the instrument of political parties and of class struggle, also giving themselves up to manifestations of violence with the characteristics of revolt (Salerno 1952, 786).⁸⁶

In the practical work of the police, this shift in policy was translated into continuous police intervention in labor conflicts in order to safeguard the “libertà di lavoro” (freedom to work). Each side felt increasingly provoked by the other. Clashes between the police and demonstrators or strikers became more and more ‘physical’. When the *celere* of the Florentine police was sent to the nearby town of Pistoia to clear road blocks in that province during a general strike, it came to a shoot out between demonstrators and police, with tear gas (by the police), hand grenades and knives (by the demonstrators) also used. Six demonstrators suffered gunshot wounds, three policemen stab wounds and their officer was slightly wounded by a hand grenade.

In a climate of polarization, an ever clearer political positioning of the police went hand in hand with physical confrontations. In the war of images, the left-wing parties were on the defensive. The post-war resistance coalition, in which the Communists had played a dominant role, both in numbers and rhetoric, had definitely broken down. Images dear to the left-wing parties were soundly refuted. When the policemen wounded in Pistoia were interviewed in hospital, their first reaction was: “Non dica la solita frase ‘il sangue è scorso fra fratelli’ tanto sono balle alle quali più nessuno crede.”⁸⁷ If the left did not want to condemn the police as a whole, its own attacks had to be directed against

⁸⁶ On the importance of this work for police training, especially for officers and *funzionari* see Lehner 1978, 33ff. A similarly hostile attitude towards the working-class movement was also displayed by a semi-official manual for the *guardia regia*, the Italian police corps of the early 1920s (Donati 1977, 494, fn. 95). On the ‘radical anti-trade-union culture’ of Minister of the Interior Scelba see Marino 1995, 138. Prime Minister De Gasperi saw strikes as a crime against the economy and considered the fact that he had to accept their legality as the fatal consequence of an error of the Constitution (ibid., 139).

⁸⁷ (“Don’t say the usual phrase ‘blood flowed between brothers’; that’s crap, anyway, that nobody believes any more.”) See newspaper clipping, *Il Mattino dell’Italia Centrale*, 11 January 1948. AS Firenze, Questura 486, fasc. “Bonelle di Pistoia - Incidenti fra polizia e dimostranti”. All attempts by the Communist party to reach the policemen with leaflets or newspaper articles used a ‘trade union approach’, i.e. they defined them as fellow workers and promised economic advantages under a Communist government.

scapegoats. The *Fronte del Lavoro* protested against the use of batons against peaceful demonstrators and, against better knowledge, defined it as an Americanism without precedent in the methods of the Italian police.⁸⁸

2.3.2. *The Elections of April 1948: Preparation for Civil War*

The final showdown, for which both sides prepared, was to take place with the political elections scheduled for April 1948. In their operations, especially during the election campaign and its aftermath, the police clearly showed their new role as one of the armed forces in a ('cold') civil war situation. General orders were given by the Ministry of the Interior on 18 March 1948. During the election days all police services were to be reduced to a minimum. Only 20 per cent of the police and the *carabinieri* were assigned to normal duties, the rest were detailed exclusively for the election. For guard duty at the polling stations, the police force was to be supplemented by 50 per cent of the *guardia di finanza*, and by subsidiary police forces like the forest guards, the municipal *vigili urbani*, the private *guardie giurate*, and by soldiers from the regular army. The ministry also requested that as many patrols as possible be carried out of the territory of each province. To a large extent, the significance of these patrols was to give a general and indiscriminate caution with an intimidatory intent.

Se i servizi fissi hanno una loro insopprimibile funzione preventiva, l'importanza dei servizi mobili deve considerarsi prevalente, non soltanto per il compito che deve essere loro affidato di collegamento e di pronto intervento in caso di necessità, ma anche per gli effetti psicologici che un intenso pattugliamento nei punti più sensibili comporta, contribuendo a creare ed a mantenere un clima di sicurezza e di ordine.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ The left blamed police brutality for the escalation of violence in Pistoia. The local secretary of the *camera del lavoro* also protested against the uncivil and humiliating use of police batons. At first both the wounded demonstrators and policemen were in the same hospital, but the policemen were soon transferred to Florence because of the continuous threats they received. According to the left-wing newspaper *Il Nuovo Corriere* of 11 January 1948 the police attacked the road block without any prior warning and immediately started to shoot at the crowd with automatic weapons. The demonstrators did not use hand grenades, but responded to the firing and threw back the tear gas bombs. See *ibid.*

⁸⁹ (If the stationary services have an insuppressible preventive function, the mobile services must be considered of primary importance, not only for the task entrusted to them of liaison and immediate intervention in the case of necessity, but also for the psychological

Large and heavily armed reserve units of the police, the *carabinieri* and the regular army were put on stand-by on a regional level. Except for emergencies, these reserves could not be called in on a provincial level, but only on a regional one, and only then with the prior agreement of the ministry. Apart from the islands, only in the central regions of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany was a regional authority (the prefects of Bologna and of Florence) set up. It was authorized to order the deployment of the reserve units directly, with the obligation to inform the ministry immediately.⁹⁰ The reason given for establishing this authority for Tuscany was the particular political situation of the region which, according to the ministry, presented “characteristics of homogeneity or interdependence” among the individual provinces. This only thinly veiled the political motivation of facilitating the intervention of the armed forces in the two regions where the Communist party had its strongholds.

The ministry feared some kind of ‘surprise’ by the Communists before, during or after the election. It probably felt its fears confirmed by the international situation, especially the Communist coup d’état in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, and by alarming reports about the internal political situation. Since the end of the war there had been rumors about hidden weapons and a secret military structure within the Communist party (PCI). The PCI was accused of putting forward a front which showed acceptance of the democratic parliamentary republic while maintaining a secret structure working for the Bolshevik revolution (Di Loreto 1991). Without doubt parts of the leadership and the rank and file were dissatisfied with Togliatti’s moderatism in practical politics. One can also safely assume that the PCI did have certain secret structures. However, reports of the police, the *carabinieri* and the secret services, which all reinforced the notion of the PCI as a monolithical party of dedicated cadres with a military structure amounting to a huge and well-trained secret army, should be treated with extreme caution (Marino 1995, 129). In fact, not even the Minister of the Interior Scelba was convinced (*ibid.*, 118). Most

effects which intense patrolling in the most sensitive points has, contributing to create and to maintain a climate of security and order.) Minister to the prefects, 18 March 1948. AS Firenze, Questura 001, 30/I, pezzo 2, 1948, Elezioni politiche, fasc. “Disposizioni Ministeriali e di Massima. Irregolarità. Brogli”.

⁹⁰ Interior ministry to the Tuscan prefects, 31 March 1948, AS Firenze, Questura 001, 30/I, pezzo 2, Elezioni politiche 1948, fasc. 4 “Elezioni Politiche 1948. Forze di Polizia occorrenti”.

importantly, the presumed secret structure, the 'real' soul of the PCI, never went into action, not even in emotionally difficult situations like the post-election period of April 1948 or after the assassination attempt on Togliatti a few months later. However, in April 1948 the ministry prepared for the worst.

On the local level, the often anonymous information received by the *questura* bore no relation to reality. According to the reports:

- 30,000 heavily armed Communist partisans stood ready to march in the region of Tuscany alone;
- the PCI planned to falsify ballots, giving them (already filled out) to uncertain voters and offering them money for taking a clean ballot out of the polling station;
- the PCI had falsified the electoral lists of Florence;
- 'subversive elements' planned attacks on isolated polling stations and on the transport of the ballot boxes;
- the 'democratic popular front' (the united electoral list of Communists and Socialists) had organized the throwing of small and harmless hand grenades, especially in the bigger cities, in order to create panic and abstention from voting.

Before, during and after the election nothing of this nature happened; only one doctor was arrested under the accusation of having provided false certificates for supposedly blind people in need of an escort. Raids for hidden arms, carried out by the police and *carabinieri* in the city and the province of Florence only a few days before the election, enraged Communist militants, but were largely fruitless.

The *questura* prepared for the police intervention during the election on the basis of the alarming reports received. It issued two general orders, one for the 'hot' phase of the election campaign and the other for the two days of voting. Both orders were to a large extent copies of those issued in 1946 for the election of the Constitutional Assembly. In 1948, however, the police seem to have been more politically involved in a partisan way than in 1946. In both of the 1948 orders, the *questura* stressed the importance of absolute political neutrality. The first one, however, closed with the affirmation that he firmly believed that the Italian people, not unworthy of its millenary civilization, would know to choose the path of liberty and the rebirth of the *patria*. Single daily orders issuing from the *questura* appear to confirm a certain bias in police

intervention: a climate hostile to the left definitely dominated. During the days of the election all offers of help from the left-wing spectrum, even if only to provide sandwiches and cigarettes for the policemen on duty, were rejected. The police were even ordered to completely ignore agreements between all political parties for the control of public order during the days of the election.⁹¹

The surveillance of election meetings, as with the election campaign in general, did not cause problems in Florence. The election meetings of the Christian Democrats, it seems, came in for special protection. This was even more the case for the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*. When the secretary of the party, Giorgio Almirante, was kept from speaking by a hostile crowd in Piazza Signoria, the prefect harshly criticized the police and ordered a severe inquiry. The *questura* had, however, prepared for every eventuality. It had not been able to prove its effectiveness in this case because Almirante had given up the idea of speaking and had accepted the mayor's offer to hold an election meeting indoors at a later hour.⁹² The attitude of the prefect and the *questore* is significant because at the same time the Ministry of the Interior had notified the prefects and *questori* that the electoral propaganda of the MSI had openly taken on an apologetic attitude towards fascism. It affirmed that the government did not intend to tolerate these attacks against the law and deplored the inactivity of the local authorities.⁹³

These episodes, however, do not go beyond a 'normal' partiality of the Italian police. In fact, police intervention in election times was probably more biased before fascism than in 1948. The election of April 1948 was important because of another aspect of police intervention, i.e. the concrete and practical

⁹¹ Examples taken from the files of the Florentine *questura* on the election of April 1948.

⁹² AS Firenze, Questura 001, 30/I, pezzo 3, Elezioni politiche 1948, fasc. 1 "Comizi elettorali in Firenze", sottfasc. "MSI - Comizi", prefect to *questore*, 15 April 1948. The prefect asked the *questore* for "the specific indication of the *funzionario* responsible for the serious disparagement of the prestige of the police in the eyes of the public". The *questura* had ordered six *funzionari* and 220 men to Piazza Signoria, an additional 300 were on stand-by. Most of the policemen were deployed at all the entrances to the square which in case of incidents were to be blocked to facilitate the arrest of trouble-makers. See *ibid.*, order dated 15 April 1948.

⁹³ Telegram, 26 March 1948, AS Firenze, Questura 001, 30/I, pezzo 2, Elezioni politiche 1948, fasc. "Disposizioni Ministeriali e di Massima. Irregolarità. Brogli".

preparations for civil war. A closer look at the orders of 1946 and 1948 reveals small but significant differences. In the order for the election campaign of 1948, the *questore* stressed three points:

- bring the number of available policemen to the absolute maximum by reducing all other services to a minimum;
- increase patrols to a maximum in order to provide a 24-hour control of the territory;
- maximize the information services with special emphasis on the '*fiduciari*' (informants).

In the corresponding order of 1946 the insistence on the gathering of information, especially any reference to '*fiduciari*', is lacking. In March 1948 the *questura* wrote that every *funzionario* had to know how to create for himself an information network outside the police force. This went beyond the traditional expectation of the *questura* to be informed about 'everything'. Now the whole police, and not only specialized units like the political branch, were supposed to use espionage methods. Even though not explicitly mentioned in the order, it is also clear from the context that this type of information-gathering was focused against a political enemy.

The paramilitary aspects of the *questura*'s planning confirm that the police in 1948 were preparing for more than just an election. The order dated 11 April 1948 insisted on the importance of continuous and heavily armed patrols of the province so that everybody had the sensation that the authorities were very vigilant regarding the freedom of the citizens. It also contained a detailed plan for the recall of all men from outlying posts and polling stations in the case of serious disorder.⁹⁴ The *questore* also ordered that all vehicles and all petrol reserves be concentrated in the interior courtyard of the *questura* building. The correspondence between the regional military command and the police leadership shows that the *questura* had developed detailed plans for a 'hot' civil war situation; they had for instance carried out defensive construction work at the police barracks and organized the construction of mobile street blocks, etc.⁹⁵ The end of the election did not mean the end of tension. The heavy patrols of the province and all other 'preventive measures' continued throughout the months of April and May.

Although the type of intervention exercised by the heavily armed police units during the election period of April 1948 was restricted to patrols of the territory and stand-by duty,

⁹⁴ Orders of the *questura*, 15 March 1948 and 11 April 1948, AS Firenze, *Questura* 001, 30/I, pezzo 2, Elezioni politiche 1948, fasc. "Elezioni Politiche. Ordinanze di Servizio". The patrols throughout the province were in part declared as maneuvers and were conducted by heavily armed policemen with armored cars and sometimes tanks.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, fasc. 6 "Automezzi e carburante: fabbisogno e richieste", correspondence March and April.

they were undoubtedly prepared for deployment should a 'hot' civil war situation develop. This is evident from an episode in March 1948. In talks with British politicians about the Italian police, the Italian Defense Minister Pacciardi expressed the hope that the Western powers would not press the Soviet satellite states, principally Bulgaria, for information regarding their paramilitary organizations with a view to accusing them of violations of peace treaties, i.e. the restrictions imposed on their armed forces. Pacciardi feared that if these states were accused, the Soviets would undoubtedly retaliate by making accusations regarding the Italian police. He himself defined the Italian police as an effective and well equipped fighting unit with battle training appropriate for the quelling of civil disturbances. Already in February the American Embassy in Rome had arrived at the same definition.⁹⁶

2.3.3. *The General Strike of July 1948: Intervention in Order to Defeat*

On 14 July 1948 a right-wing student attempted to assassinate the Communist party leader Palmiro Togliatti, who suffered dangerous gunshot wounds. The immediate reference made by the left was to the assassination of the Socialist member of parliament Matteotti by the fascists in 1924. The communist weekly *Toscana Nuova* on 14 July 1948 accused Prime Minister De Gasperi of a policy of connivance with the fascists. Especially under attack was the Minister of the Interior Scelba, accused of failing to protect the liberty and integrity of the citizens while being quick to beat and imprison workers. The Communist paper called for the resignation of Scelba, punishment of the failed assassin and those behind the attempt, and the immediate suppression of all fascist movements.⁹⁷

The Italian government completely rejected this kind of argument and suspected that it concealed an attempt to provoke the Communist uprising which had not materialized in April. The declaration of a two-day general strike for the defense of democracy called by the CGIL was taken as a first indication in that direction. Minister of the Interior Scelba ordered in a telegram:

Essendo prevedibili reazioni siano immediatamente adottate misure estremo rigore perchè reazioni stesse vengano contenute opportunamente stop Tentativi violenze contro sedi partiti aut persone devono essere impedito ogni mezzo stop Secondo necessità disporgansi divieto pubbliche manifestazioni stop Episodio doloroso con

⁹⁶ NA Washington, RG 59, 865.105, London to Secretary of State, 24 March 1948; *ibid.*, Embassy Rome to Secretary of State, 2 April 1948.

⁹⁷ Newspaper clipping, AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. "Attentato all'On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni", sottofasc. 6. The leadership of the PCI in a first reaction called for the "resignation of the government of disharmony and hunger; the government of civil war" (Di Loreto 1991, 296).

responsabilità individuale già accertata non può costituire motivo per turbare vita Paese aut ritorno violenze fazioni stop⁹⁸

Immediately after the arrival of the telegram, the Florentine *questura* declared “rigorosissima permanenza” for all police forces. Police units were sent to government buildings, radio stations, and so on, but also to the headquarters of all center and right-wing political parties, including those of the extreme right. The party headquarters were to be defended against any act or attempt of devastation or violence. In addition to specific tasks, the *questura* expected from all offices an “intelligent service of observation”, including by means of *fiduciari*, in order to detect any sign which might “be of interest to public order”. In this *ordinanza*, the *questore* defined the general idea behind the police tactic.

Il concetto è di mantenere sempre a disposizione considerevoli forze di manovra e di urto, senza disperdere la forza in inefficaci servizi periferici che potrebbero esporre i pochi elementi della Forza Pubblica ad aggressioni spiacevoli da parte di eventuali forze preponderanti.⁹⁹

In language and philosophy this was a tactic for a civil war formulated by a force prepared for exactly that kind of situation. Later in the day the *questura*, at the suggestion of the prefect, ordered heavily armed and motorized patrols of the city from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ (“Reactions being foreseeable, adopt immediately extremely rigorous measures so that these reactions are opportunely contained stop Attempts of violence against party headquarters or people have to be prevented by any means stop According to necessity, ban public demonstrations stop Painful episode with individual responsibility already ascertained cannot constitute motive for disturbing the life of the country or return to violence of factions stop”) AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. “Attentato all’On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni”, sottofasc. Nr. 8.

⁹⁹ (“The concept is to always maintain considerable forces at disposition for maneuver and attack, without scattering the force in ineffective peripheral services, which could expose the small numbers of policemen to unpleasant aggressions on the part of eventual predominant forces.”) Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See *ibid.* As occurred after the election in April, the mobilization of the police continued after the general strike. See *ibid.*, sottofasc. 3.

In the city and province of Florence, public order does not seem to have been in danger.¹⁰¹ In a first report to the ministry, the prefect confirmed that the leadership of the “partiti estrema sinistra” (i.e. the Communists and the Socialists) and the majority of militants and workers showed a sense of moderation, and that only minority groups threatened violence. The official meetings of the left transpired without incident. The prefect had consented to a demonstration in Piazza Signoria, at which the speakers attacked the government as being morally responsible for the assassination attempt, but asked the 4,000 participants to stay calm and wait for further orders from the center. Similar demonstrations were held in Prato and Empoli.¹⁰² These were the last legal public meetings to take place for some time. The following day the prefect prohibited all meetings and public demonstrations as well as public gatherings.¹⁰³

Violent incidents in Florence were few and of limited importance. According to the local political authorities and the police leadership, however, this was due to their immediate intervention and not to the moderation of the left. On the evening of 14 July 1948 the *questura* commended the Florentine police on their intervention. It was only due to the “promptness, the decisiveness and the tact of the police forces” that dangerous incidents had been avoided. Before the police could arrive, the headquarters of the neo-fascist party, the MSI, was invaded and devastated. One group of demonstrators also invaded the offices of the industrialists’ association, destroying a table and a franking

¹⁰¹ On the general situation in Italy see Di Loreto 1991, 291 ff, who speaks of an Italy on the brink of armed conflict; Marino 1995, 126 ff. emphasizes a maximum state of tension which remained close to a revolutionary explosion. It must be stressed that the popular reaction to the assassination attempt was spontaneous, defensive in character (the shooting was interpreted as the beginning of an attack on the left), and restricted to the North. However, the response was not even uniform there and spectacular action was restricted to Genoa, Turin, Venice, and Abbadia San Salvatore in central Italy. Six policemen and 11 demonstrators were killed. The Communist leadership did not try to exploit this movement, but on the contrary to control it. Case studies have shown that this holds true also for the local leadership, but that this behavior did not prevent accusations of armed insurrection, as the initial appreciation of state authorities rapidly vanished (Grillo 1994).

¹⁰² Reports prefect to Rome, 14 and 15 July 1948, AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. “Attentato all’On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni”, sottofasc. Nr. 8.

¹⁰³ Ibid., sottofasc. Nr. 7.

machine. In the city several fascists or presumed fascists were beaten up.¹⁰⁴ The gravest incident occurred in the afternoon when four brothers were attacked as presumed fascists. The situation became dangerous when the rumor spread that the brothers had fired on the crowd. The police, who had to be sent a second unit as reinforcement, used batons and tear gas and finally fired in the air with their machine guns. The approximately 2,000 demonstrators attacked by throwing stones. According to the police, they also used pistols and hand grenades.¹⁰⁵ Eleven policemen were hurt by the stone throwing, but all were able to continue service. Eight demonstrators were also wounded, two by gunshots.

On the following day the police went on the offensive against the general strike, which was supposed to last until twelve o'clock on July 16. The *questura*, which prosecuted all attempts by the left to hand out leaflets, authorized the distribution of leaflets by the Republican party, the Christian faction of the trade unions, and the Social Democratic party, all three of which, while condemning the assassination attempt, stigmatized the 'extreme left' and called for an end to the general strike after 24 hours. The *questore* ordered the immediate breaking up of any kind of demonstration. He also ordered the police to intervene against the "compact and numerous groups of cyclists" which, according to him, were patrolling the city and keeping tabs on whether shops and offices were closed, with the aim of intimidating morally or even with violence. This form of intimidation was to be absolutely eradicated. However,

¹⁰⁴ According to a report dated 15 July 1948 of the *commissariato* S. Giovanni, whose territory included most of the centre city, seven people were beaten up as presumed fascists. AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. "Attentato all'On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni", sottofasc. Nr. 1.

¹⁰⁵ In the final report of the *questore* of 5 August 1948 the presumed use of hand grenades and guns by the demonstrators is very much downgraded: "... si udiva il fragore di una bomba od altro ordigno esplosivo ... nonchè un colpo di pistola" (one heard the din of a bomb or another explosive device ... and also the shot of a pistol). AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. "Attentato all'On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni", sottofasc. Nr. 8. The pistol was supposed to have been fired from the post office, one of the buildings occupied by the police in the morning.

considering the relation of force between heavily armed police patrols and groups of cyclists, it is not that clear who was intimidating whom.¹⁰⁶

For the morning of 16 July, the *questore* ordered observation measures, especially for the industrial zone, stressing that the “liberty to work” had to be protected under all circumstances. His final report dated 5 August 1948 reveals that the last phrase translated into an offensive strategy. According to the *questore*, having had the clear sensation that the great majority of workers and clerks were tired of striking and intended to return to work straight away, he issued precise instructions for the protection of the ‘liberty to work’, i.e. to proceed with the arrest of people standing in front of the entrances of banks, offices, shops and factories, on the pretext of controlling the good course of the strike, but in reality in order to morally intimidate and prevent the return to work of the workers and clerks.¹⁰⁷ On this basis, the police arrested 48 people and could report that the strike had practically ended by 10 o’clock, i.e. two hours before it was due to end.¹⁰⁸ By employing proactive repression techniques against picket lines, the police had put into practice yet another element of their ‘(cold) civil war tactic’.

There are several indications, however, that public order was never really in danger in Florence. By 24 July 1948 only 7 people had been arrested in connection with the general strike, 13 more had been charged without arrest.¹⁰⁹ No policeman had been seriously hurt, only 10 of the *comando gruppo* and 11 of the *reparto mobile* had been slightly wounded, most of them by stone

¹⁰⁶ The heavily armed patrols of the *compagnia mobile* of the police with about 70 men each in the afternoon of 15 July arrested four cyclists, who according to the police were part of organized squads with the evident aim of intimidating those shops and offices which did not intend to participate in the strike. Report *compagnia mobile*, 16 July 1948, *ibid.*, sottofasc. 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, sottofasc. 8.

¹⁰⁸ In reality, it seems that the police managed to force the opening of the banks and offices, bars and restaurants in the center of the city, but not of the industrial plants in the periphery.

¹⁰⁹ Report of the *questura*, in AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. “Attentato all’On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni”, sottofasc. Nr. 8. Most of the legal proceedings were for unauthorized meetings and unauthorized distribution of leaflets.

throwing.¹¹⁰ More incidents seem to have occurred in the surrounding province, but none of them created problems for the police.¹¹¹ Even these violent acts and road blocks were isolated and individual affairs, without any coordination. This is implicitly acknowledged in the monthly report of the prefect, even though he also expounded on the impressive organization and presumed paramilitary structures of the Communist party. According to him, the police forces in the province had been sufficient to deal with the situation in Florence city, but that certainly in the case of an insurrectional movement, well prepared and carried out simultaneously everywhere, they might be insufficient to keep ahead of well-trained masses, perhaps even sustained materially and morally from abroad. Inadequate forces might result in a collapse in the rural centers and in the more distant municipalities which could in a second moment also reverberate in the main cities of the province, with a reflux of thousands of rebels. Implicit in this report is the admission that the July events in the province of Florence lacked all characteristics of a revolutionary uprising or insurrection.¹¹² However, up to several months after the strike the Ministry of the Interior continued to order new investigations and more detailed reports on the basis of letters sent directly to Rome by anonymous authors. These letters lamented the inactivity of the police during the days of the emergency and denounced crimes by the left, for which nobody had been made responsible. According to the police reports from Florence, the information given in these letters was pure invention.¹¹³

It was not the real situation in Florence on 14 - 16 July, but national if not international politics that decided further developments, as they had determined the police intervention on the days of the strike. On 20 and 21 July the Minister of the Interior sent telegrams ordering rigorous punishment for the grave crimes committed according to him (unlawful imprisonment, road blocks, attacks

¹¹⁰ Ibid., sottofasc. Nr. 5, *questura* to ministry, 26 July 1948.

¹¹¹ See f.i. the report of the *compagnia esterna 2a* of the *carabinieri*, 22 July 1948. Ibid., sottofasc. Nr. 1.

¹¹² Monthly report of the prefect, 31 July 1948, AS Firenze, Questura 536, fasc. "Relazioni mensili del Prefetto 1946 ott. - 1948 dic."

¹¹³ As an example see the report of the *commissariato* Empoli, 21 August 1948, and of the prefect, 16 September 1948, in AS Firenze, Questura 487, fasc.: "Empoli. Anonimo riguardanti fatti di violenza avvenuti durante lo sciopero del 15 luglio. Indagini".

against the 'freedom to work' and the freedom of the press as well as against the circulation of trains) "quale che fosse carica aut qualifica sindacale ricoperta" of those responsible.¹¹⁴ By 10 August 1948 90 men and 22 women were in Florentine prisons in connection with the strike.¹¹⁵ Repression was widespread and could be provoked by minimal causes. In the days and months after the general strike, the Florentine police used a mimeographed caution, which read:

... il quale viene diffidato a tenere buona condotta in genere e a non dar luogo a rilievi, con l'avvertimento che saranno adottati più rigorosi provvedimenti a di lui carico, salvo la denuncia per i reati di cui si rendesse responsabile, qualora in occasione di eventuali futuri disordini venisse nuovamente fermato per atteggiamenti provocatori o di incitamento alla disobbedienza alle Leggi o per attentati alla libertà di lavoro, anche in occasione di scioperi.¹¹⁶

This caution was specifically issued on 29 July 1948 against a man whose friend had twice made a "pernacchio" (deprecatory noises) at the cinema, first when De Gasperi was shown at the mass in honor of two policemen killed at Abbadia S. Salvatore and second when police cars were shown in action. According to *La Nazione Italiana* of 31 July 1948, later the two friends and a third person were officially charged with vilification of the armed forces.¹¹⁷

2.3.4. *The Politicization of Police Intervention and the Polarization of Public Opinion*

The shift in public order interventions of the police towards a fully developed '(cold) civil war tactic' were accompanied by a growing politicization

¹¹⁴ (... whatever may have been the trade union position or qualification covered.) AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. "Attentato all'On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni", sottofasc. Nr. 8. On this "circolare Scelba" see also Canosa, op. cit., p. 129.

¹¹⁵ Newspaper clipping of *La Nazione Italiana*, ibid., sottofasc. Nr. 6.

¹¹⁶ ("... is being cautioned to keep good conduct in general and not to give rise to remarks, with the warning that more rigorous measures will be adopted against him, save the charge for crimes for which he might make himself responsible, if in occasion of future disorders he were again arrested for having a provocative attitude or for incitement to disobedience of the law or for attacks against the 'freedom to work', also in occasion of strikes.") AS Firenze, Questura 489, fasc. "Rustignoli"; 486, fasc. "Chiarini".

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

of police intervention and a corresponding polarization of public opinion about police intervention. This development started before 1948, and also involved groups, whose protests had earlier met with special tolerance. The protest actions of the tuberculosis patients in Careggi had continued throughout 1946. The *questura* reacted by sending reinforcements to the local *commissariato* and ordered the responsible *funzionario* to prevent acts of violence, but with the necessary tact.¹¹⁸ In the summer of 1947, i.e. shortly after the left-wing parties had been pushed out of government, the police unsuccessfully tried to force the transfer of a member of the *commissione interna*, i.e. the commission representing the interests of the patients, with the intervention of 30 men of the *celere* inside the sanatorium.¹¹⁹ This eventually led to "decisive" police intervention against protesting patients in June and July 1948. After an agreement reached in Rome on 9 April 1948 between the government and the *Unione lavoratori tubercolotici* and especially after the electoral victory of the Christian Democrats in April 1948 further protests were not tolerated.

The protest of the tuberculosis patients in the Careggi hospital in the summer of 1948 seems to have been directed against the transfer of the women to another hospital. Against the plans for this transfer the women themselves had protested in the local press because they did not want to be treated by doctors they did not know. The director of the sanatorium in Careggi, however, wanted the transfer for moral reasons. The first 32 female patients, transferred on 21 June 1948, were those who in the opinion of the doctors had "spiccate simpatie per i ricoverati" (marked sympathies for the [male] patients). According to a report by the director, this problem was the only reason for the protests which broke out as a result: those members of the *commissione interna*, who later became ringleaders, convened an assembly of the patients that day and proposed to force the return of the women by keeping the sanatorium in a state of constant unrest, with protests against the quality of the food and the medical treatment. This was exactly what happened, according to the director of the sanatorium, when the members of the *commissione interna* and about 70 patients protested on 23 June 1948. For him, the demand for better food was only a pretext and the request to substitute the *minestra* with freshly prepared *pasta al*

¹¹⁸ See the *ordinanza* of the *questura*, 16 October 1946. AS Firenze, Questura 479, fasc. "Careggi - sanatorio - agitazione fra i ricoverati".

¹¹⁹ See *ibid.*, the report of the *commissariato* Rifredi 14 June 1947.

burro was refused. The 'ringleaders', however, had incited the other patients to the protest "o meglio moto di ribellione che si erano proposti di inscenare a qualunque costo" (or, better, rebellion which they had proposed to stage at any cost). For the director of the sanatorium, political radicalism went hand in hand with moral decay and criminality. The protesters broke into the store room and prepared the *pasta al burro* themselves.¹²⁰

The first report of the *questore* about the incident was neutral or even positive towards the protests and did not differ from similar ones of previous years. It was based entirely on the report of the two *funzionari* who had been called to the sanatorium immediately after the protests. According to them, the food was in fact barely edible.¹²¹ The conflict within the sanatorium, however, could no longer be settled peacefully because the director had decided to bring the agitation among the patients to an end once and for all. In this he was supported by the prefect. The two members of the *commissione interna*, who had been identified as the 'ringleaders', were to be transferred to Volterra, a town some distance from Florence. This made another intervention of the police necessary because the two, backed by other patients, refused to leave. The attempts of the *commissariato* Rifredi to convince the patients proved unsuccessful. After consultation with the *questura*, the *celere* was called. They charged the patients with their batons and proceeded with the arrest of the two 'ringleaders' and two other patients "che si dimostravano accesi e riottosi".¹²²

In the atmosphere of the summer of 1948, and it is important to reiterate that this was before the assassination attempt on Togliatti and the general strike, not one but several versions of reality existed. These different versions can be found in newspapers with conflicting political orientations as well as in different

¹²⁰ According to the director, the food to a large extent ended up in the trash cans because most patients had already eaten before the protest started. See *ibid.*, report of the *direttore sanitario*, 24 June 48.

¹²¹ "... apparentemente poco mangiabile." *Ibid.*, report dated 24 June 1948.

¹²² (".. who showed themselves to be excitable and unruly.") *Ibid.*, report of the *commissariato* Rifredi to the *Questura*, 1 July 1948. The intervention of the *celere* was justified with foreseeable incidents or acts of violence. Disciplined and without any incident, the patients of the sanatorium had already protested against the transfer of the members of the *commissione interna* on 28 June 1948. See *ibid.*, report of the *commissariato* Rifredi from the same day.

police reports. Not only the legitimacy and justification of the protests, but even the immediate causes are presented differently. Depending on the political alignment of the newspapers or the proximity of the police offices to the political center, these were attacks of subversives against law and order and moral values, protests of ill people against neglect, or acts of resistance against the 'bosses' organized by representatives of the proletariat.

Among the different police reports, those of the *commissariato* Rifredi to the *questura* are critical of both sides involved. The report of 1 July 1948 closes with the suggestion that in the interests of public order and to avoid future incidents it might be best to replace the director of the sanatorium. Among the patients there was "extreme discontent" towards him because of his rigid behavior and his neglect of them as a doctor. There is no hint of these circumstances in the prefect's report to the ministry. In his report dated 2 July 1948, the political aspects dominate: with the polarization of the cold war the protests of patients, at least if they were members of a *commissione interna*, were subversive. The draft of the report, which survives in the files of the Florentine *questura*, contained the conclusion that the protests had been arranged by the extreme left (meaning the Socialist and the Communist parties) with the intention of creating trouble for the national government. In the final version the criticism made by parts of the press of the "decisive and firm attitude of the police" was dismissed as "parte del sistema, ormai noto, della stampa comunista, intesa a denigrare il Governo e le istituzioni, per partito preso".¹²³

According to their political alignment, the newspaper articles collected by the *questura* largely fall into a scheme of total condemnation of one side or the other.¹²⁴ Not only were the reports on the course of the protests and the police intervention politically biased, but there was not even agreement on the background or the history of the protests nor about the aims of the prefect and the *questura*. *Il Nuovo Corriere* (the newspaper of the allies, which they had given over to the City of Florence; the prefect defined it as a Communist paper) reported the dynamics of the incident in a neutral manner, but characterized the intervention of the *celere* as brutal and emphasized that several patients had been

¹²³ ("... part of the system, by now well known, of the communist press, intended of set purpose to denigrate the government and the institutions.") Ibid.

¹²⁴ See *ibid.* for the articles from 2 July 1948 of *Il Nuovo Corriere*, *L'Unità*, *Il Pomeriggio*, *Il Mattino dell'Italia Centrale*.

hit by police batons. *L'Unità* opened with the headline "A disgusting scene of violence". No mention at all was made of the protests against the bad food or the transfer of the women to another hospital. This daily paper of the Communist party attributed the transfer of the two patients to Volterra exclusively to their activities in the *commissione interna*, i.e. the incident was seen as an industrial conflict with the state intervening on the side of the bosses.

Completely different was the account of the conservative newspaper *Il Pomeriggio*, which in its headline promised the truth about the causes of the protest. The only reason for the agitation among the patients was the excessive freedom they enjoyed. Endangering both themselves and others, they left the sanatorium whenever they wished to visit the local bars. The relationships between some of the men and women were "not the most lawful nor the most moral", with damaging effects once more to the health of the patients. Whenever the director tried to curtail these excessive freedoms, strangely enough the food turned bad. The two patients who were to be transferred to Volterra were described as being among the most riotous of the ill and part of the "cricca sobillatrice" (instigating clique). According to *Il Pomeriggio* the *celere* did not use any force during its intervention. For the best interests of the patients, in the sanatorium of Careggi, as throughout the country, discipline and punctuality had to return.

3. Conclusion

In just three years the Italian police developed from a disoriented force uncertain about its role in a democracy and the tactic to be employed in public order cases to a force with strong paramilitary elements, ready to intervene without any qualms about public criticism and employing a '(cold) civil war tactic': strong central control; constant surveillance which routinely utilized espionage methods focused on the political enemy; the deployment of heavily armed paramilitary units for intimidation, and proactive as well as reactive repression. Decisions regarding the equipment and training of the police were made with the scenario of a 'hot' civil war constantly present, with the police acting as a part of the armed forces.

What was needed to bring the Italian police up to the standard reached in 1948 was an increase in personnel, the supply of heavy equipment and, most importantly, an unambiguous and clear political direction, which had been provided since the summer of 1947 by Minister of the Interior Scelba. The rapid consolidation of the post-war Italian police, however, was only possible because most of the elements of the '(cold) civil war tactic' were part of the Italian police tradition and the traditional Italian state response to popular protest. It was for this reason that the police adapted easily to the cold war situation, as it had to fascism before. As the fascist secret political police, the OVRA, had been the logical supplementary element for the particular needs of Mussolini's dictatorship, the *celere*, a paramilitary unit for the control of the *piazza*, was the one for those of the 'protected democracy' of the cold war years. The high number of civilians killed by the Italian police during their intervention at public demonstrations – at least 109 in the period of Scelba's tenure as Minister of the Interior from 1947 to 1954 (Marino 1995, 169) – should however not be blamed only on the political course of the Minister or on certain traditions in the state response to popular protest. An additional reason were the organizational and operative weaknesses of the Italian police system, clearly evident after the fall of the fascist regime, to which defects in training and equipment must be added (Sannino 1985, 471ff.). Even after the considerable strengthening of the police, operated by Minister Scelba exclusively in terms of manpower and material, these weaknesses remained visible behind the image of strength transmitted by the *celere*.

These weaknesses find their expression also in the tension within the self-image of the police between the explicitly paramilitary way in which they presented themselves to the public, more than evident in *'Polizia Moderna'*, the official monthly of the Italian police, and the professed conception of police work concerning the protection of public order as consisting of observation and prevention, with few acts of repression (Roddi 1953, 59). In the cold war years this tension did not produce open contradictions, because more than at the service of a 'protected' democracy, the police found itself at the service of a 'limited' democracy. Against the internal political enemy, all police forces routinely used a 'preventive' approach based on the traditional possibility to use a large number of administrative measures on the basis of pure suspicion (Canosa 1976, 83), further extended by the public security law of 1926. On the basis of this fascist law the police enjoyed extensive powers of intervention, which they could use at their discretion in order to prohibit leaflets and posters, rallies and demonstrations of the PCI. These powers were also activated against social protest. A particularly problematic instrument used by the police forces in this context was the caution (*diffida*) with clear intent to intimidate, pronounced against activists who had managed not to break any law or administrative rule.¹²⁵ Political tension certainly existed, both on a national and

¹²⁵ During a strike of farmworkers and sharecroppers in the province of Florence in November 1948, the *carabinieri* station of Rufina, after having learned the names of those most active in the propaganda in favor of the strike from "notizie confidenziali", cautioned these individuals on 25 November 1948 to abstain from any kind of direct or indirect action related with the liberty to work and to strike. If only the most insignificant complaint were heard against them, they would be held responsible for anything which might happen. ("... perchè si astengano in modo assoluto da qualsiasi azione, sia diretta che indiretta, relativa alla libertà di lavoro e di sciopero. Ai predetti è stato fatto presente che se nei loro riguardi venisse fatta una minima lamentela, saranno ritenuti responsabili di tutto ciò che accadesse".) According to a report of the compagnia esterna 1a dei carabinieri dated 1 December 1948, the *carabinieri* of Regello cautioned three individuals, who tried to convince sharecroppers to strike in way which, although not against the law, was not perfectly in accordance with the established freedoms. ("... sorpresi dai militari dell'Arma a svolgere verso coloni mezzadri attività che, pur non integrando gli estremi del reato di violenza privata, tendeva tuttavia ad indurre, in modo non perfettamente consono al regime delle instaurate libertà, a far loro sospendere il lavoro.") A report of the same company dated 5 May 1949 contains the information that the subsidiary *carabinieri* stations had always charged all those responsible for attacks against the 'liberty to work' and had in this way achieved a far less numerous participation in strikes. ("... tanto da aver conseguito una meno numerosa adesione agli scioperi ed alle agitazioni da parte degli operai, coloni e braccianti.") AS Firenze, Questura 525, fasc. "Difesa della libertà sindacale.

international level, which explained special precautions. However, as Scelba's methods on the national level bordered on an attack on the democratic freedoms and fundamental rights guaranteed by the Italian Constitution (Marino 1995, 155), so did quite a few of the methods which the police on the local level used to control public order.

The 'energetic' intervention of the police force and its ever more evident one-sidedness led to a growing polarization of opinion within the population. The leadership probably approved of this development. In the period immediately after the liberation of Florence, the police had found themselves in the awkward position of trying to present themselves and being officially celebrated as part of the resistance movement, only to be attacked as fascists when problems with the public arose. After the intervention during the general strike in July 1948 the police were lauded and criticized by the 'right' people. In his monthly report of 31 July 1948, the prefect reported that the open and widespread manifestations of sympathy towards the police revealed complete trust in the police forces and that their prestige was growing ever stronger.¹²⁶ In the weeks following the general strike, donations of more than 500.000 liras were made in Florence for the families of the two policemen killed in the nearby province of Siena.¹²⁷

Initially the left had tried to contribute to this movement with a subscription for all victims of the general strike. Following the negative reactions, for instance in the government press, the name for this subscription was changed to "Pro vittime di Scelba".¹²⁸ Within this political subculture the image of the police as an enemy of the working-class movement and a tool of the Christian Democratic government, based on numerous experiences with the

¹²⁶ "Aperte manifestazioni di simpatia, verificatesi ovunque all'indirizzo della Polizia, rivelano uno stato d'animo di piena fiducia nelle forze dell'ordine, il cui prestigio si va sempre più rafforzando." AS Firenze, Questura 536, fasc. "Relazioni mensili del Prefetto, 1946 ott. - 1948 dic."

¹²⁷ AS Firenze, Questura 488, fasc. "Offerte - elargizioni e premi ad agenti di PS (o familiari) feriti e caduti in servizio". In its communications to the press, the *questura* especially mentioned small contributions by 'the people', e.g. by "a modest worker" or by a seven year-old child. See *ibid.*, newspaper clippings from 21 July and 28 July 1948.

¹²⁸ See AS Firenze, Questura 477, fasc. "Attentato all'On. Togliatti - Manifestazioni", sottofasc. 6, especially *Il Mattino dell'Italia Centrale* of 28 August 1948.

kind of 'preventive' measures mentioned above, was cemented for the coming years, if not decades. This image also infected the perception of the police in activities, which had nothing to do with politics, but reflected a 'social' role.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Reporting on the flood of November 1949, *L'Unità* accused the police of having hindered the distribution of food and clothing organized by the Communists and their organizations. *La Nazione Italiana*, on the contrary, lauded the police for their heroic work, saving widows and children and staying in their offices with the water up to waist level. See AS Firenze, Questura 512, fasc. "Allagamenti in Provincia causati da straripamenti fiumi", newspaper clippings of 28 and 29 November, 1949. The reporting reflects the clear division of the country. Except for blaming the government for negligence, the Communist daily centered all its attention on the work of the "democratic" municipal governments and the collateral organizations of the PCI, for instance the *Unione Donne Italiane*. The "heroic" and "human interest" stories had as protagonists workers and Communist activists. *La Nazione Italiana*, on the contrary, reported on the efforts of the prefect and the government bureaucracy, of the police and the army, i.e. the "authorities", and on the voluntary initiatives of Catholic organizations.

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