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## The Policing Of Politics In Bologna, 1898-1914

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Although this paper concerns the policing of politics in Italy mainly between 1898 and 1914 [1], much of what my research on that period reveals is particularly relevant to studies on the later period of the Biennio Rosso and the rise of fascism.

My talk is based on a case-study of province of Bologna that I undertook for several years using as my main source reports and communications between the central government and the provincial police forces found in the Interior Ministry Police files of Central State Archive in Rome and among the Prefectoral Papers of Bologna State Archive, some of which will be directly referred to in the paper.

I want to look at how political movements were policed in Italy from the end of the 19th century, particularly the developing socialist movement. But I want to link this to another question, namely that of internal weaknesses characterizing the police in Liberal Italy. Recent research by several historians into policing in nineteenth century Italy has, indeed, suggested that law and order strategies and broader social policies were determined more by the practice of law and order enforcement itself (and an awareness of the strengths or weaknesses of the policing apparatus) than by purely political needs.[2]

A: I will start my paper by briefly outlining the most important aspects of the history of the Italian police.[3]

It is important to emphasize a problem of dualism and hierarchical conflict in Italian policing caused by the co-existence of two police forces, both founded in the pre-unification state of Piedmont. The Interior Ministry civilian police employed public security guards (*guardie di pubblica sicurezza*, founded in 1852) that constituted a mainly urban force, stationed in each provincial capital and in the larger towns.

Policing of rural areas was entrusted to a second yet effectively larger police force, the military police, *Carabinieri* (founded in 1814), which had postings in cities and towns but more importantly in almost every village in rural areas, where the Interior Ministry police had limited influence.

The *Carabinieri* formed an integral part of the army under the jurisdiction of the War Ministry in terms of recruitment, training, discipline and administration but were responsible to Interior Ministry for policing matters. They could be requested by the Interior Ministry for police duties. They were often used as reinforcements during strikes and demonstrations.

In practice the *Carabinieri* maintained a high level of autonomy from the Interior Ministry police, in spite of being accountable to it at each territorial level for matters of law and order. Often the Interior Ministry police had little idea of what was going on in rural areas of the province. Historically there has always been a state of rivalry between the two corps. In particular the civilian Interior Ministry police have felt a sense of inferiority towards the larger and more prestigious *Carabinieri*. Further conflict of hierarchy arose from the use of the army for policing matters in emergency situations (for example, widespread anti-government protests/strikes, etc.). The army/*Carabinieri* resented the manner in which the Interior Ministry police frequently expected them to supply reinforcements for policing purposes, often at short notice.

The Interior Ministry police were co-ordinated by the central government via the Prefect (a figure of Napoleonic origins) who combined two roles: provincial head of police and government administrator. Controversy surrounding the prefect lies in the powers he had over local government and political movements. Effectively he combined police and administrative powers to suffocate political opposition to the government. He was able to dissolve municipal councils and close political associations which posed a threat to public security. This role was also evident during election periods when the government ordered the prefect to use his powers to fight the election campaign to the advantage of its supporters.[4]

The role of the police in the Liberal state has been seen by many historians as restricting the political and personal freedoms embodied in the first Italian constitution, the Statuto Albertino of 1848 - considered one of the most liberal constitutions for its day. Policing was based on the enforcement of criminal and police codes, originating back to the pre-unification constitutional monarchy of Piedmont and beyond to the Napoleonic occupation. These codes allowed the police to severely restrict personal and political liberties. Policing practices were seen as mirroring a political class that felt that newly achieved Italian unity was threatened by both reactionary forces and developing democratic political movements.

In 1889 both codes were revised and remained in force until 1926, though there is some historical debate as to whether their revision made them more or less liberal. Richard Jensen argues in his recent publication on policing in 19th century Italy that the new codes represented a step in the direction of liberal progress bringing the abolition of the death penalty and the right to strike. Though many of the previous police powers were maintained in the codes, he argues that greater precision in the wording of the legislation as to the conditions by which they could be applied ensured less abuse by the police.[5]

Romano Canosa and Amedeo Santosuosso, claim, on the other hand, that the new codes accentuated the powers of the police to repress the developing socialist and anarchist movements. Several articles in these codes allowed the police and judiciary to repress the slightest form of political dissent.[6] Vivarelli and Neppi Modona note that the right to strike, for example, though legalized, left the police with wide powers of discretion in deciding whether or not the way in which a particular strike was conducted was legal.[7]

It needs to be emphasized that by the end of the 19th century the police system was technically outdated with insufficient training facilities, provided humiliating career and salary conditions for its employees but above all was numerically weak. Moreover, there was limited desire on the part of governments to invest in a stronger police apparatus due to lack of funding. During moments of emergency both regular forces and reinforcements were insufficient. If, for example, a strike broke out in Milan, reinforcements would have to be drawn from regular forces in other areas of the peninsula, which were subsequently left underpoliced.

Strikes and demonstrations tended to be put down violently on account of a sense of vulnerability among both the police and government. Jensen argues that the military repression of riots in May 1898 in Milan (leaving 80 demonstrators dead and 450 injured) and the subsequent declaration of martial law in several provinces could have been avoided, if a larger number of better trained forces had been employed. He cites the example of the strengthening of the Rome police and the improvement of working conditions there in 1897, with the consequence that the city remained calm in 1898. Ironically, however, doing this had involved draining Milan of its forces, due to lack of funds to recruit more policemen.[8]

So it was a sense of weakness in the face of growing revolutionary movements which may have determined police and military brutality - which takes us back to my original reference to recent historiography. Contrary to earlier interpretations of policies of the Italian Liberal state which tended to attribute police and military brutality to a political design on the part of the government, Jensen, for example, argues that Liberal governments of both the 'Right' and the 'Left' only resorted to severely repressive measures when they felt that law and order could not be maintained otherwise. In practice periods of repression were alternated with periods of political freedom, in which the Liberal principles of the 1848 constitution were upheld as far as possible.<sup>[9]</sup> This is an argument that I will be addressing as we come on to the case-study itself.

B: The case-study of Bologna starts in the late 1890s set against the background of agricultural strikes, organized by the socialist movement and fought by the poorest and largest peasant class, the landless day labourers (*braccianti*). We will examine the role of the police in repressing agricultural strikes in the commune of Molinella, a centre of *braccianti* socialism in the north-east corner of the province, 30 miles from the city of Bologna. We will see how the prefect was able to use administrative powers to restrict the activities of organizations supporting the strikes and finally, how the repression of strikes mingled with wider government repression of a state of social unrest characterizing the peninsula in the spring of 1898.

The 1897 Molinella strike organized by the socialist *braccianti* leagues was the only successful one of the 1890s, the rest of which failed as a result of police and military repression, the persecution of union leaders and the closure of socialist associations. The success of the 1897 strike was blamed on the Prefect, Giovanni Giura, who was accused of having given in to the demands of the leagues too easily, which had led to an agreement between the parties concerned (with a reduction in daily working hours, wage increases and the right of the presence of union foremen in the work place). Giura was promptly transferred after the 1897 strike.<sup>[10]</sup>

Strikes broke out again in March 1898 when the employers refused to recognize the validity of the 1897 agreement and fixed lower wage rates for rice harvesters without consulting the *braccianti* organizations first. The new Prefect of Bologna, Francesco Serrao authorized such violations since he considered the 1897 agreement invalid because it had been forced upon the landowners by the socialist leagues. He ignored the fact that it had been negotiated under the auspices of the then prefect.<sup>[11]</sup>

During the strike *Carabinieri* and troops called to Molinella, under the guidance of Interior Ministry police commissioners, had to prevent acts of intimidation by strikers against non-union workers - employed to substitute the strikers - on the basis of articles 165/166 of the 1889 criminal code which stated that strikes were permitted as long as they were not accompanied by acts of intimidation or violence. Troops could also be used for harvest work if non-union *braccianti* were unavailable.

There were large numbers of arrests carried out for alleged acts of violence and intimidation by the strikers. We must, however, question the extent to which such arrests were legitimate. Articles in the local agrarian press (*La Gazzetta dell'Emilia*) insisted that large crowds of strikers intimidated free workers with threatening words.<sup>[12]</sup> However, police documents rarely cite specific cases of violence. A report in the local democratic paper, *Il Resto del Carlino*, even accused police witnesses of fabricating episodes of violence and intimidation<sup>[13]</sup> The police authorities for their part claimed that they were unable to rely on the evidence of witnesses since the victims of league intimidation were too frightened of suffering acts of vendetta. They were therefore forced to speak for the victims in court.<sup>[14]</sup>

As document 1 shows, however, it was enough for groups of strikers to be roaming around the countryside with suspected intent to urge their companions to join them for mass arrests to be carried out.

#### Document 1. Prefect of Bologna to Interior Minister, 28 March 1898

This morning a patrol of carabinieri and troops met a crowd of around ninety women in the Guarda area of Molinella. Having attempted in vain to persuade them to disperse, they took them to the Public Security Inspector there on mission, who thought it appropriate to release them after having made it clear to them that they should refrain from any form of demonstration in order not to impede the efforts of the authorities to settle disputes between the landowners and workers. Such words seem to have had the desired effect, at least for today.<sup>[15]</sup>

So, the archive evidence and press reports strongly suggest that though the criminal code permitted economic strikes, in practice the government was able to suffocate them through mass arrests by claiming that they were violent in character.

Those socialist institutions supporting the Molinella strike also risked persecution by the Prefect on the basis of articles in the criminal code prohibiting crimes against the state and on the basis of the prefect's own powers to close associations threatening public order. The socialist newspaper *Avanti!* was prosecuted for writing an article on 31 March in which it openly supported the Molinellese rice planters' strike, criticized the repressive attitude of the police and army and promoted public subscriptions to raise funding to help support the strike.<sup>[16]</sup>

Repression intensified in Molinella and other areas of the province as a state of nationwide anti-government protest reached Bologna, protest that had been brewing since the start of the year but which reached its climax in May 1898 as a result of the effects of an economic recession which had pushed up food prices. Though there were anti-government demonstrations in May in many towns and villages in the province, it is clear that measures by the government of Antonio Rudini against this were disproportionate to the limited extent of disorder. The country's leaders were evidently shocked by the state of rebellion in such areas as Milan and feared its spreading to other regions.

Apart from the prohibition of all public meetings and demonstrations, measures of 'prevention' were applied against those liable to commit crimes, showing that Rudini's government interpreted the demonstrations as having been encouraged by individuals, particularly anarchists, who wished to set off revolution. Lists were compiled of individuals who had previously been condemned for crimes against the state, anarchist and socialist leaders, all of whom were to be arrested and where possible sent to internal exile (*domicilio coatto*).<sup>[17]</sup> *Domicilio coatto* was one of the most illiberal police powers of 'prevention' of crime (ie. as opposed to 'repression' of crime once committed) along with the institution of *ammonizione* (special surveillance) both of which allowed the police to control the movements of habitual criminals and political offenders on the basis of suspected crime only, without having to go through the courts.<sup>[18]</sup>

Approximately 250 arrests were carried out throughout the province for various crimes against the state of which 143 in Molinella. Molinella's socialist leaders were arrested or sought after by the police for their alleged role in encouraging demonstrations.<sup>[19]</sup>

The above repression was accompanied by the closure of associations accused of encouraging demonstrations, among which the Anarcho-Socialist Federation of Romagna, dissolved on 11 May for promoting violent demonstrations and for other past crimes (See Document 2).

#### Document 2. Prefectoral Decree, Bologna, 11 May 1898.

Given the presence in Imola of a society under the name of the Anarcho-Socialist Federation of Romagna of which all Anarcho-Socialist groups in the region are affiliates;

Given that this society has made itself known through the following acts: 1: a notice published in November 1896 against the white paper on domicilio coatto and impeached by the judicial authorities. 2: the circular sent to supporting parties on 7 February of this year in order to encourage protests against the application of Article 248 against the Anarchists. 3: a notice addressed "To the Italian People" on 12 March of this year distributed to different Anarcho-Socialist groups. In this notice, also published, like the above-mentioned circular, in the Anarchist newspaper L'Agitazione, subversive theories were propagated and party affiliates were urged to form associations;

Given that individuals noted for their anarchist principles belong to the above-mentioned Federation and given that the riotous demonstrations which have taken place during that last few days in several communes of the Imolese district are attributed to these individuals, such that several of them have been arrested and prosecuted;

Given that the above society aims solely to subvert the existing social order and violate private property, such that it constitutes a permanent danger to public tranquillity;

In view of the report of the Sub-prefect of Imola;

In view of Article 3 of the Provincial and Communal Act and Article 251 of the penal code;

The Anarcho-Socialist Federation of Romagna with its headquarters in Imola is dissolved for reasons of public security and order.

Offenders against this decree will be punished by law.

The Sub-prefect of Imola is ordered to enforce this decree.<sup>[20]</sup>

Some of the laws cited in the document need to be explained. Article 3 of the provincial and communal act allowed the prefect to close associations which posed a threat to public order and security. Article 251 of the criminal code punished with a 6-18 month sentence those belonging to a subversive association. Article 248 of the criminal code punished with up to five years' imprisonment those forming an association aiming to commit crimes against the state. It seems also that the Prefect took advantage of the period of social unrest in order to close an association which had been impossible to close previously. Note also the tendency to incriminate the association above all on the grounds of criticism of legislation as opposed to solid actions against the state.

There is little evidence to suggest that the majority of those arrested in May 1898 were actually condemned for the crimes of which they were accused, demonstrating an over-reaction by government forces. Data available, though incomplete, suggests that there was a high percentage of acquittals for lack of evidence. In June 1898, for example, socialist leaders in Baricella were acquitted by Bologna's criminal court from the charge of having organized public demonstrations against the cost of bread and flour in May and having formed an association with the aim of provoking a rebellion.<sup>[21]</sup>

I want at this point to consider the question of whether there is a link between police repression in the province of Bologna and institutional problems of numerical weaknesses, as emphasized by Jensen with reference to the Milan repression.

From the autumn and winter of 1897 the Bolognese authorities were worried that their forces were inadequate for handling revolutionary agitations. This was not helped by the fact that from the winter of 1897 prefects were ordered by a frightened government to beware of revolutionary initiatives and to maintain order at all costs. They were held personally responsible for their actions by the government, yet when it came to being sufficiently equipped to do this the government was less disposed. On account of a lack of police and army reinforcements nationally, prefects were told not to exaggerate in their constant wiring to the War Ministry for troops.<sup>[22]</sup> Extra forces, if granted, were only temporary, often leaving other areas exposed, hence the difficulty of keeping reinforcements permanently in one area.

In May 1898 as the state of general unrest heightened in Bologna, the Prefect complained of the constant departure of Carabinieri reinforcements for other parts of Italy where trouble had broken out, even though they were still needed in Bologna. He added that as a result of this the consequences could be tragic, given the necessity of adopting harsh repressive measures to make up for weaknesses.<sup>[23]</sup> However, the prefect later reported that there had been no serious disorders or casualties during the anti-government demonstrations<sup>[24]</sup>, suggesting that the police had maintained control of the situation without adopting brutal measures, though clearly the arbitrary nature of mass arrests was demonstrated by the fact that they were not always justified in court. This suggests that the police had over-reacted on account of fear of not being able to control the situation adequately otherwise.

C: I will now look at the Giolittian policing strategy used to deal with strikes. Giovanni Giolitti, from 1901 Interior Minister in Giuseppe Zanardelli's Liberal Left government, which was supported by the reformist leadership of the PSI under Filippo Turati, believed that the government should not automatically repress economic strikes if workers' grievances were justified and they were not accompanied by acts of violence. I argue in this section of the paper that the new policing strategy was only partly successful so that conflict between the police and the working class movement at the local level persisted.

If we examine documents concerning Molinella's braccianti strike of April-May 1901, we may observe a definite change in the manner in which the government expected strikes to be policed. See documents 3, 4 and 5 below:

#### Document 3. Interior Minister to Prefect of Bologna, 23 April 1901.

Should a strike break out, send me a report immediately, indicating the exact causes and, if the result of a wage dispute, the exact wage currently received, the number of hours worked and what the strikers themselves propose.

#### Document 4. Interior Minister to Prefect of Bologna, 9 May 1901.

I am proudly confident of your good work. Please use your influence to convince those Molinella landowners who refuse to come to agreements of the gravity of their intransigence. Recommend all to act with maximum prudence, since, should pacts for harvesting be agreed, serious dangers will have been avoided and a big step in the direction of spiritual pacification will have been made. Please keep me informed of all matters each day, particularly those concerning Molinella.

#### Document 5. Interior Minister to Prefect of Bologna, 5 May 1901.

You know that I have faith in you and I am sure that you will succeed in overcoming the present difficulties. Would you please see the Right Honourable Bissolati and convince him of the necessity of preventing any violence, including among the workers themselves. In any case, you may request whatever forces you require, since public order and the right to work must be maintained at all costs.<sup>[25]</sup>

In the case of economic strikes, Giolitti, rather than ordering prefects to resort to immediate repressive measures, was clearly interested to know whether strikers' grievances were justified, hence his request for details of strikes, wage figures, etc. He was prepared to pressurize employers into granting wage

increases if in his opinion increases were justified. He expected prefects to persuade employers to comply with worker demands and ordered them not to provide employers with troops for harvesting or the protection of non-union workers, if wage levels were unreasonably low. We should also note from the documents the role played by socialist parliamentary deputies in dissuading strikers from resorting to acts of violence or making unreasonable demands.

Giolitti's idea was to encourage negotiation between employer and worker representatives with the help of the mediation of the prefect and socialist deputies in order to prevent strikes from disintegrating into a state of violence requiring repressive measures. The prefect had the delicate job of encouraging concessions to the working class organizations where deserved but this did not mean that the police were expected to tolerate violence. If talks failed and the situation started to move towards violence, troops and carabinieri reinforcements were expected to be present as a deterrent but, as the Bolognese Prefect told the police commissioner of Molinella, they were not to repress strikes with mass arrests unless genuine acts of violence took place. [26] In legislative terms this represented a more accurate interpretation of articles 165/166 of the 1889 criminal code rather than a change in legislation.

The question remains how willing prefects or the police were to follow Giolitti's directives. A letter from the socialist deputy, Leonida Bissolati, to Giolitti suggests that they were not:

#### Document 6. Right Hon. Bissolati to Giolitti, 18 May 1901.

Honourable Giolitti

In Molinella today another two workers were arrested, one of whom was a member of the Workers' Commission. Such arrests are carried out by the Public Security forces as soon as one worker goes up to another to persuade him to support the strike.

The authorities in that place, who have been used to using arbitrary methods since 1897, believe it is their duty to prevent strike propaganda even if it is without violence or threats.

In the hamlet of Alberino (Molinella) a few days ago nine women who had addressed eighteen men and women from the public roadway and invited them to stop work, were arrested for offences against the right to work. How can one talk of violence or threats in this case? I must inform you, Honourable Giolitti, that I went to the place concerned and listened to testimonies of the men themselves that no threats had been made.

Tomorrow, the Right Honourable Talamo will probably speak on this matter. The neutrality of the government should consist of the exercise of its power in defence of order only when the law is broken. Peaceful incitement to striking is not a crime; but neither the prefect, nor the police delegates nor the carabinieri seem to think that this is the case, since they have evidently taken upon themselves the duty of supporting the interests of the landowners - as they have always done.

I do not wish to question your position on this matter or to criticize your internal budget - since I understand that You are not responsible for such violations of the law committed by the police.

However, I would be grateful if you would make it known in Bologna that your position is a neutral one and precisely that.

If you would like to speak to me I am available tomorrow (Sunday): I am considering returning to Molinella again in the evening. With kind regards. [27]

Another problem associated with the Giolittian police strategy lay in the fact that the attitude of the government towards strikes frequently changed since it depended on both the relationship between the government and the PSI and on the economic situation. Things started to go wrong in the Giolitti-Turati alliance from 1902, for example, when the government became less willing to support strikes since it felt that too many work stoppages during the previous year had caused an economic slump. [28]

The alliance between Giolitti and the reformist socialists was put into further jeopardy when revolutionary elements in the PSI encouraged general strikes, which amounted to forms of revolutionary experimentation, and union boycotting tactics in the countryside against employers and non-union workers, tactics which often reached violent proportions. In Bologna the period 1904-1906 saw limited government mediation in disputes, and the Prefect tended to support the employers in strikes. The policy was reversed again from the autumn of 1906 as the PSI moved towards a more moderate leadership once again. [29]

There was clearly a high risk that the police and prefects might be disoriented by frequent change in government policies and by the fact that legislation on strikes was not changed under Giolitti; instead state officials were expected to interpret the law differently according to the political requirements of the moment. Many also found having to negotiate with union representatives socially humiliating, sometimes leading to tensions, as document 7 demonstrates:

#### Document 7. Prime Minister to Prefect of Bologna, 20 January 1904.

May I remind you of the absolute necessity of treating unemployed workers in a most compliant manner since they are not enemies but hungry people for whom it is the government's duty to do as much as possible. [30]

The document refers to an incident in which a commission of unemployed workers entered the prefecture in order to have an audience with the prefect, who threw them out of his office, threatening to turn the troops on them, an incident even deplored by the local conservative press. [31]

Closely connected with the above problems were traditional weaknesses characterizing the Italian police that had not been solved in spite of apparent legislative moves to do so under Giolitti. Laws increasing the number of Guardie and Carabinieri and improving their career possibilities were passed. In particular, legislation attempted to give public security guards equal status to the Carabinieri with better career conditions, salary increases, improved pension schemes and modern methods of training. [32] Yet, police numbers remained well below the prescribed figures, suggesting that legislative increases did not take account of the frequent need for reinforcements in policing and that the provisions of such legislation were not supported by sufficient funding or recruitment drives.

The situation was particularly serious from 1909 for the policing of crime in Bologna. In November the Prefect complained that there were only 272 out of 310 public security guards assigned to Bologna, since the city council was unable to pay for accommodation for the outstanding 38. Moreover, the guards were frequently removed from Bologna since they were needed elsewhere as reinforcements, leaving in practice 60 guards available for street duties. The government replied that no extra guards could be provided since over a thousand were lacking nationally. Carabinieri numbers were also reported to be insufficient. [33]

The Giolittian period saw the usual problem of having to handle strikes and demonstrations with temporary reinforcements taken from other areas, which

were subsequently underpoliced. During general strikes in major Italian cities there were often incidents of small, isolated groups of inexperienced guards or carabinieri opening fire on crowds of demonstrators to defend themselves from stone-throwers. Though police massacres were frequently debated in parliament and Giolitti promised measures to improve policing conditions, most of his projects were not put into effect due to lack of funding.[34]

Though Bologna did not figure among cities where police massacres occurred, documentation concerning measures to police the general strike of 1904 demonstrates that the inability of the Prefect, Dall'Oglio, to handle the situation as Giolitti required encouraged conflict. Look at documents 8 and 9, for example:

#### Document 8. Prime Minister to Prefect of Bologna, 17 September 1904.

I seriously recommend that any conflict between the authorities and the strikers be completely avoided. Total tolerance is necessary, since it is a movement which cannot last, given its small scale.

#### Document 9. Prefect of Bologna to Prime Minister, 17 September 1904.

The situation here is becoming serious. Acts of violence are beginning to take place and I am embarrassed at the lack of Public Security police, since many public security guards and carabinieri have been sent to other cities. I will have to resort to using troops, though their numbers are inadequate. In the meantime I would be grateful if Your Excellency would urge the War Ministry to grant fifty soldiers from the Royal Engineers to assign to the gasometer furnace in order to guarantee the maintenance of public lighting.[35]

As evident from document 8, one should note the tendency of Giolitti to order limited contact between demonstrators and the police and army during general strikes. The aim behind this was to avoid acts of provocation between the two sides which might encourage conflict. Yet, as we can see from document 9 Dall'Oglio was afraid to follow the Prime Minister's directives. There were in fact casualties among demonstrators as police officers using troops tried to break up a demonstration before it had even begun.[36]

D: The concluding part of the paper is concerned with the development of methods of policing and solutions to problems of public order which in many respects may be considered a precursor of similar though far more widespread manifestations of the fascist squads from 1920.

1) In the Bolognese countryside the period leading up to the First World War saw the development of a phenomenon of private solutions of vigilantism to cope with strikes by employers who were angry at Giolitti's more relaxed, less intransigent attitude. They often had the support of individual policemen in this! In 1911 members of the Bolognese Agrarian Association, representing the most intransigent agrarian employers, began to evict socialist sharecroppers, violate pacts previously signed with the unions and employ non-union workers protected by armed volunteers.[37]

In September 1911, the Bolognese Federation of Agricultural Workers sent Giolitti a report claiming that its members were the victims of frequent pact violations and acts of provocation and intimidation by bands of armed strikebreakers, recruited by the agrarians from among workers dismissed from the socialist unions and 'the sons of the most detested bourgeois families'. Moreover, the report continued, such criminal behaviour was ignored if not encouraged by the police. The Carabinieri commander in the village of Sala Bolognese was alleged to have condoned the murder of a bracciante by his employer, while another carabinieri in nearby San Pietro in Casale had shot and killed a striker.[38]

Though the police authorities expressed concern about agrarian intransigence, in practice they tended to justify it as inevitable in the face of violent league activities. Moreover, clear evidence shows that telegrams which the socialist leader of Molinella, Giuseppe Massarenti, sent to the socialist press on the phenomenon of strikebreaker violence were blocked by the Prefect.[39]

Political pressures too may have discouraged the Prefect from openly condemning or putting a stop to police and agrarian brutality, especially since the employers were able to justify their actions on the grounds of weak police intervention, a result, the agrarian press claimed, of a situation in which the police had become hesitant in their repression of socialist violence on account of Giolitti's support of the socialist cause.[40]

Individual policemen may have moved over to supporting the most intransigent agrarian employers in acts of vigilantism against the leagues because they felt disoriented and exposed by new policing strategies which limited their previous powers. They may also have been influenced by the agrarian press which tended to pressurize the police authorities into carrying out more determined repression of league activities, exaggerating the extent of socialist violence or criticizing the police forces for their weaknesses. In July 1907 the Prefect had to encourage the police commissioner of Molinella not to be discouraged by a personal attack he had received in the *Gazzetta dell'Emilia* for alleged lack of opposition to the socialist leagues.[41]

Such agrarian practices amounted to a dress rehearsal for the more widespread employment of fascist squads in the face of a far more serious loss of control over law and order in the countryside by the police forces during the Biennio Rosso

2) Another phenomenon unique to Bologna deserving our attention was the use by the Questore of members of public to form citizens' patrols (Pattuglie Cittadine) for the policing of crime in the city in order to overcome the problem of insufficient police forces. This practice dated back to the policing of Papal States at the start of nineteenth century, as outlined by Hughes.[42] Groups of armed pattuglianti (patrollers) accompanied by policemen carried out night duties in various districts of the city but during moments of emergency, such as large-scale strikes and demonstrations, extra volunteers could be recruited.

In spite of claims in literature produced by patrol members to the valuable contribution they had made to the maintenance of law and order in Bologna,[43] there is also a possible link between such initiatives and episodes of political violence. For example, the general strike of May 1906 (proclaimed in reaction to the killing of workers by the police during a similar demonstration in Turin) saw the use of citizens' patrols, the ranks of which swelled with volunteers for the occasion, to put down alleged acts of violence and vandalism by left-wing demonstrators. Yet not only the socialist press but also reports of the Prefect too suggest that the action of the patrols was outside the control of the police and amounted to a form of counter-revolutionary reaction against the socialists on the orders of the Mayor. Look at the next document.

#### Document 10. Prefect of Bologna to Interior Minister, 10 May 1906.

Among citizens reactionary feeling against violent strikers intensely developing. Citizens themselves carried out arrests also to the approval of police forces whom they cheered enthusiastically.[44]

In a later report to the Interior Minister, the prefect praised the action of the citizens for the valuable assistance they had given to the police in repressing violence and carrying out two hundred citizens' arrests.[45] Yet, reports in the local socialist press interpreted such action as amounting to the promotion of civil war by young members of the wealthier classes who had joined the patrols and alongside policemen and carabinieri used the repression of the general strike as a pretext for venting their anger on harmless workers. An *Avanti!* report, for example, accused young monarchists, "christian democrats" and local merchants of provoking the demonstrators with the protection of the police.[46]



Limited availability of information among archive documents and press sources means that a verdict cannot at this stage be reached on the political implications of the use of citizens' patrols. Even if the action of the patrols was perhaps justified by violence and vandalism caused by the most radical demonstrators, which even the socialist press admitted to,<sup>[47]</sup> the danger of such an initiative lies in the development of a culture of accepting the use of private citizens by the police whether officially or spontaneously to overcome problems of maintaining law and order.

Though it would be wrong to suggest that episodes such as that of May 1906 were the norm, from 1914 onwards there were an increasing number of incidents where citizens 'policed' socialist manifestations. This often amounted to uncontrolled vigilantism or political violence - and in this sense there is a link between this phenomenon and the development of fascism.

For example, the revolutionary disturbances of June 1914 centred in Romagna and the Marches known as Red Week saw the involvement of private citizens in the repression of allegedly violent socialist demonstrations in Bologna, indirectly prompted, it seems, by government orders. A telegram from the Prime Minister, Antonio Salandra, to the Prefect urged the co-operation of citizens in the maintenance of law and order, on account of limited policing and military resources. In practice, however, this amounted to uncontrolled counter-revolutionary processions resulting in serious casualties. On more than one occasion the police had to protect workers from the beatings of nationalists.<sup>[48]</sup>

Following World War I, the Biennio Rosso of 1919 and 1920, characterized by extensive strikes and demonstrations, saw the involvement of paramilitary groups and civilian committees in the substitution of strikers and the maintenance of law and order. Again, documentation suggests that as in 1914 this amounted to more than mere crime prevention. Once again it seems that conflict was indirectly prompted by government policy. In July 1919 the Prime Minister Nitti had to remind prefects that when he had stated that he needed to be able to count on the support of morally upright Italian citizens in helping the police maintain order during general strikes, he had not intended such initiatives to degenerate into political counter-demonstrations. These had, indeed, involved the newly founded paramilitary *fasci di combattimento*.<sup>[49]</sup>

## Conclusion: What do I hope to have demonstrated in this talk?

I have attempted very briefly to present you with a picture of the policing of politics in Italy at the provincial level from the late 1890s. I have demonstrated the use made of police and prefectural powers to suffocate left-wing political activities but I have also argued that, as asserted in recent historiographical interpretations of nineteenth century Italy, lack of resources, insufficient numbers of policemen and archaic facilities remain an important factor when evaluating the level of success of policing strategies at the start of the twentieth century. This is particularly evident from that date, as an attempt on the part of a new political class to show greater concern for problems of a social nature and to allow greater political freedom was in part jeopardized by failure to adequately reform the police system.

Moreover, I have tried to show a link between such institutional weaknesses and the development of private initiatives to solve problems of law and order. Such practices may, of course, be considered part and parcel of broader clientelistic administrative tendencies in post-unification Italy in which it was not unusual, for example, for state officials to resort to the help of private citizens, even criminals, when fighting elections. The activities of the 'citizens' patrols' and armed guards in the province of Bologna at the start of the twentieth century indicated the existence of a 'culture' in which the police increasingly relied on or were tolerant of private forms of policing in which there was often lack of distinction between legitimate crime repression and political violence, the full implications of which would become evident from 1919 with the founding of the fascist movement.

## Notes

1. For a more detailed account of the policing of Bologna between 1898 and 1914, see my articles, 'Law and Order in Giolittian Italy: A Case-Study of the Province of Bologna', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 25, 381-408; 'Istituzioni e ordine pubblico nell'Italia giolittiana. Le forze di polizia in provincia di Bologna', *Italia Contemporanea*, No. 177 (1989), 5-26; and Chapters 2 and 3 of my book, *The Italian Police and the Rise of Fascism. A Case Study of the Province of Bologna, 1897-1925*, Praeger Publishers, in process of publication)
2. Here I am referring in particular to the recent works of: John A. Davis, *Conflict and Control. Law and Order in Nineteenth Century Italy* (London:Macmillan, 1988), Steven C. Hughes, *Crime, Disorder and the Risorgimento. The Politics of Policing in Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Richard Bach Jensen, *Liberty and Order: The Theory and Practice of Italian Public Security Policy, 1848 to the Crisis of the 1890s* (New York: Garland, 1991).
3. For the history and development of the Italian police system, see Romano Canosa, *La polizia in Italia dal 1945 a oggi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976); Angelo D'Orsi, *La Polizia. Le forze dell'ordine pubblico italiano* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972); Robert C. Fried, *The Italian Prefects. A Study in Administrative Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale Press, 1963); Giuseppe Renato, 'Gli ordinamenti della Pubblica Sicurezza', in *Divisione Affari Legislativi e Documentazione della Pubblica Sicurezza* (ed.), *Cento anni di amministrazione italiana* (Rome 1962), 331-70.
4. Fried, *The Italian Prefects*, 42, 67, 122-4, 134.
5. Jensen, *Liberty and Order*, 59-62.
6. Romano Canosa and Amedeo Santosuosso, *Magistrati, anarchici e socialisti (alla fine dell'ottocento in Italia)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981), 9, 31, 107, 116-18, 120-1, 128-35.
7. Roberto Vivarelli, 'La frattura fra "paese legale" e "paese reale" in', Isabella Zanni Rosiello (ed.), *Gli apparati statali dall'unità al fascismo* (Bologna: Feltrinelli, 1976), 318-36 (326); Guido Neppi Modona, *Sciopero, potere politico e magistratura* (Bari: De Donato, 1969), 42, 71-2.
8. Jensen, *Liberty and Order*, 144-51, 169.
9. *Ibid.*, 77, 178-80.
10. Nazario Sauro Onofri, '1913-22, un decennio storico per Bologna: dalla rivoluzione rossa alla reazione nera' in Casali (ed.), *Bologna 1920*, 57-92 (61-2, 88); Anthony L. Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites and Italian Fascism. The Province of Bologna. 1901-26* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 59-60; Franco Cavazza, *Le agitazioni agrarie in provincia di Bologna dal 1910 al 1920* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1940), 73-4; Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisioni Affari Generali e Riservati (henceforth ACS.PS), 1905, B. 24, Interior Ministry Director General of Police (*Direttore Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza*) to Prime Minister, 9 July 1897.
11. *Il Resto del Carlino*, 31 March 1898; Archivio di Stato di Bologna, Gabinetto Prefettura (henceforth ASB.GP), 1898, Cat. 6, *Operai disoccupati*, Prefect of Bologna to Interior Minister, 17 May 1898.
12. *La Gazzetta dell'Emilia*, 31 March 1898.

13. *Il Resto del Carlino* , 31 March 1898.
14. ASB.GP, 1898, *Operai disoccupati* , Police Inspector of Molinella to Prefect of Bologna, 25 March 1898.
15. In ASB.GP, 1898, *Operai disoccupati* .
16. ASB.GP, 1898, *Operai disoccupati* , Prefect of Bologna to Prime Minister, 31 March 1898; *Avanti!*, 31 March 1898.
17. ASB.GP, 1898, Cat. 2, *Uscieri di Questura* , Prime Minister to Prefects, 2 May 1898, 3 May 1898; ASB.GP, 1898, Cat. 6, *Agitazioni tumultuose* , 6th Army Corps Commander to Prefects of Bologna, Modena, Ferrara, Ravenna and Forli, 6 May 1898, 6th Army Corps Commander to Prefect of Bologna, 9 May 1898.
18. For more details on *domicilio coatto* and *ammonizione* , see Jensen, *Liberty and Order* , 32-4, Davis, *Conflict and Control* , 217-26.
19. ASB.GP, 1898, *Agitazioni tumultuose* , list of those arrested and tried for crimes committed between 1 January and 20 May 1898; ASB.GP, 1898, *Operai disoccupati*, *Carabinieri* of Molinella to Prefect of Bologna, 18 May 1898.
20. In ASB.GP, 1898, Cat. 7, *Partito socialista, persone affiliate*.
21. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero Giustizia e Grazia, 1898, B. 103, f. 35, *Tumulti popolari* (Bologna), Bologna's Public Prosecutor to Justice Minister, 7 June 1898.
22. ASB.GP, 1898, *Agitazioni tumultuose* , Prime Minister to Prefects, 24 January 1898, Prime Minister to Italian Prefects, 10 May 1898.
23. *Ibid.*, Prefect of Bologna to 6th Army Corps Commander, 5 May 1898.
24. *Ibid.*, Prefect of Bologna to Director General of Police, 18 May 1898.
25. Documents 3, 4 and 5 may be found in ASB.GP, Cat. 6, 1901, *Agitazioni...Molinella e altri comuni*.
26. ASB.GP, 1901, *Agitazioni operaie* , Prefect of Bologna to Delegate of Molinella, 10 June 1901 (in folder marked 10 May 1901).
27. In ACS.PS, 1901, B. 2.
28. Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites* , 88-9.
29. ASB.GP, 1907, Cat. 7, *Partiti politici* , Prefect of Bologna to Interior Minister, 7 May 1907, *Questore* to Prefect of Bologna, 7 March 1907.
30. In ASB.GP, 1904, Cat. 6, *Agitazioni operaie* .
31. *Il Giornale di Bologna* , 21 and 23 January 1904.
32. Jensen, *Liberty and Order* , 176-7; Renato, 'Gli ordinamenti', 348.
33. ASB.GP, 1909, Cat. 2, *Pratica generale dell'amministrazione di pubblica sicurezza*, *Questore* to Prefect of Bologna, 9 November 1909, Director General of Police to Prefect of Bologna, 15 November 1909, *Questore* to Prefect of Bologna, 17 April 1909.
34. Fiorenza Fiorentino, *Ordine pubblico nell'eta giolittiana* (Rome: Carecas, 1978), 40.
35. Documents in ASB.GP, 1904, *Agitazioni operaie*.
36. *Avanti!*, 21 September 1904.
37. Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites* , 166, 184-92.
38. ASB.GP, 1911, Cat. 6, *Agitazioni operaie* , Federterra: 'Memoriale a Giovanni Giolitti', 14 September 1911.
39. *Ibid.*, Prefect of Bologna to Mayor of Sala Bolognese 22 June 1911; ASB.GP, 1911, Cat. 4-5, *Amministrazione comunali, elezioni politiche* , telegram from Massarenti to *Avanti!*, 21 June 1911, Prefect of Bologna to Post and Telegraph Office Director (*Direttore Ufficio Poste Telegrafi*), 17 August 1911, *Questore* to Prefect of Bologna, 14 November 1911.
40. ACS.PS, 1911, B. 23, *Questore* to Prefect of Bologna, 22 September 1911; ASB.GP, 1911, *Agitazioni operaie* , Prime Minister to Prefect of Bologna, marked September 1922; *L'Agraria Bolognese* , 30 August 1911.
41. ASB.GP, 1907, Cat. 7, *Agitazioni operaie* , Prefect of Bologna to Delegate of Molinella, 19 July 1907.
42. Hughes, *Crime, Disorder and the Risorgimento* , 102-6, 160-63, 246-47.
43. For literature on the history of Bologna's citizens' patrols, see Ettore Stanzani, *Il corpo delle pattuglie cittadine, 1820-1961* (Bologna 1962) and Nestore Morini, *Le Pattuglie Cittadine di Bologna, MDCCCXX-MDCCCXX* (Bologna 1920).
44. ASB.GP, 1906, Cat. 6, *Avvenimenti straordinari* , Prefect of Bologna to Interior Minister, 10 May 1906.
45. *Ibid.*, Prefect to Stefani Press Agency, 9 May 1906, Prefect of Bologna to Director General of Police, 9 and 10 May 1906.
46. *Avanti!*, 12 May 1906.
47. See articles in local reformist socialist weekly, *La Squilla* , 13 and 19 May 1906.
48. *L'Avvenire d'Italia* , 12 June 1914; ASB.GP, 1914, Cat. 6, *Agitazioni operaie a Molinella e Ancona* , Prime Minister to Italian Prefects, 10 June 1914.
49. ASB.GP, 1919, Cat. 6, *Scioperi*, Prime Minister to Italian Prefects, 14 and 19 July 1919; Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Ufficio Cifra, Prime Minister to Prefect of Bologna, 19 July 1919.

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