

# Cooperation or Confrontation? The interaction between police forces and vigilante groups during the postwar years (1918-1923) in Barcelona

*Florian Grafl*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gerardo Doval, a well-known criminologist, was sent to Barcelona in March 1919 by the then Spanish Prime Minister Álvaro Figuero y Torres Mendieta, also known as Count Romanones, to take over the police department. On 8 April, shortly after his arrival in the Catalan metropolis, he reported his first impressions in the following letter:

*At my arrival, the police faced signs of disintegration, which were caused by complete negligence within the last four years. During that period, several police units formed up both within and outside the authorities, which stood in the way of the official police. The Captaincy General established its own police. They recruited its members from policemen, which had served the German Secret Service before. High-standing officials of the Captaincy General called for Bravo Portillo as person of their absolute trust. This policeman, apart from some positive qualities, is driven by impulsive powers, set free by a twittered, displeased system, which make it impossible for him to guarantee a matter-of-fact, objective investigation. Having been put on the throne of the Captaincy General today, he exploits his impunity to put forward unjustified accusations against citizens who without doubt are innocent. Based on these facts, I have rejected his integration into our police, despite the advocacy by the Captaincy General in that matter.<sup>1</sup>*

The person mentioned in this letter, Manuel Bravo Portillo, was born in 1878 in Manila on the Philippines, which back then was a Spanish colony. He came to Barcelona in 1909 where at first he joined the official police corps.<sup>2</sup> For several years, he did service in the fifth district, which also included the Barrio Chino, ('China Town'), the Barcelonian port area where it was said that most of the city's drug traffic and other criminal activities took place.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the year 1913, he replaced Francisco Martorell as the chief of the so-called 'Special unit to fight anarchism and syndicalism'.<sup>4</sup> He remained

<sup>1</sup> Cited in: Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, pp. 489-90. For the political career of Count Romanones see for example: Moreno Luzón, *Romanones, caciquismo y política*.

<sup>2</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 479.

<sup>3</sup> García Sanz, *España en la Gran Guerra*, pp. 209-10.

<sup>4</sup> González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio*, pp. 122-123.

inconspicuous until the beginning of 1918, when rumors began to spread that he would cooperate with the German Secret Service. In concrete, he was blamed by the Barcelonian workers' movement to have organized the assassination of José Alberto Barret, a powerful industrialist, who was supposed to produce goods for the Allied forces.<sup>5</sup> On 9 June, *Solidaridad Obrera* ('Workers' Solidarity'), the mouth pipe of the CNT, the dominant Barcelonian trade union, published documents which were supposed to prove that Bravo Portillo had passed information to the German Secret Service. That information was later used by the German navy to sink the Spanish ship *Mumbru*. As a result, the authorities finally felt obliged to act.<sup>6</sup> Bravo Portillo was suspended and remained in custody from June to December 1918, when he was admitted to bail.<sup>7</sup> Later the charges were dropped due to lack of evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Soon afterwards, he offered his services to Milans del Bosch, the Captain General of Catalonia. He became the leader of a small auxiliary police unit which the local press depicted as *Banda Negra* ('Black Gang') and which was established and supported by the *Federación Patronal* ('Employers' Association'), the association of Catalonia's most powerful employers.<sup>9</sup> The foundation of the group was mainly a result of the lack of trust in the official police forces. Furthermore, del Rey argues that the reason why exactly the *Federación Patronal* acted as the driving force behind the foundation of that unit was that this organization mainly consisted of entrepreneurs from the sectors where the CNT was most active and which so far had been mostly affected by the attacks on the entrepreneurs.<sup>10</sup>

## II. FIRST POPULAR POLICING ATTEMPTS IN BARCELONA AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Actually, the official Barcelonian police was not only just in a bad shape in the years before Doval's arrival as he argues in his letter, but had already been facing severe problems for decades which made it rather difficult to guarantee law and order in the city. Consequently, the Barcelonian upper class, which had the biggest interest to maintain the status quo in the city felt obliged to establish additional forces to maintain law and order. Their fears had grown considerably in the 1890s, when the city was struck by a series of anarchist bomb attacks. In the forthcoming years, two different types of popular police were established in Barcelona, which will be examined in this paper.

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<sup>5</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 480.

<sup>6</sup> García Sanz, *España en la Gran Guerra*, pp. 316-317.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, p. 298.

<sup>8</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 484.

<sup>9</sup> González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio*, p. 146, who states that this group was build up on the 9th April 1919, one day after the letter from Doval quoted above.

<sup>10</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 496, but the same author admits that only in one document the *Federación Patronal* admits a connection to Bravo Portillo, p. 494.

The first type of popular police resulted from the attempt by the political catalanism at the beginning of the century to establish an additional police which in contrast to the official police should be under the command of the local authorities. The spokesperson of the Catalan nationalists, Enrich Prat de la Riba, justified this measure in an article published in the catalanist daily newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya* ('The Voice of Catalonia') on 27 December 1906 in the following way: 'The Spanish police, as all institutions of the State, nowadays have become useless. A primitive instrument, a disused fossil. Trying to fight terrorism in Barcelona with it is similar to form up with lances and stones against a heavily armed army.'<sup>11</sup>

Influenced by the worldwide Sherlock-Homes-fever which had arisen from the novels by Arthur Conan Doyle, in July 1907 the 46-year old chief inspector of Scotland Yard, Charles Arrow, was hired. His job was to establish and to direct an independent police unit in Barcelona with the special task to investigate and prevent anarchist bomb attacks. Arrow neither spoke Spanish nor Catalan and his crime fighting methods differed a lot from those of the Spanish police and, as he had to realize step-by-step, could not be applied in Barcelona. Therefore, his commitment was soon doomed to failure.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the establishment of this official special police unit, nearly at the same time a group of police informers was made up, which should use their insider knowledge of the criminal milieu they predominantly stemmed from to gather information about forthcoming bomb attacks in order to prevent them. This gang was commanded by Joan Rull, who had been on demand for fifteen months due to his alleged participation in a bomb attack in September 1904. Since the policemen in Barcelona usually came from other regions of Spain and therefore did not know their operation area so well, the police depended on the assistance of snitches. This practice seemingly was so common during that period that every policeman cooperated with a multiplicity of informers and there were trials in which the police had to side with accused snitches to prevent them from conviction.<sup>13</sup> Since the postwar years, this had not changed much, and consequently, many snitches who had been uncovered were found dead on the Montjuïc or its surroundings.<sup>14</sup>

A similar group had already been established by the then civil governor Ventura Diaz in the year 1847. This group, which mainly consisted of former convicts, murderers, racketeers and professional counterfeiters and conducted numerous crimes, officially was under the command of the head of the police, but its true leader was a criminal.<sup>15</sup> 60 years later, the gang commanded by Joan Rull was not very successful neither. After a new series of bomb attacks had taken place in Barcelona from 24 December 1906 to 8 April 1907, Joan Rull, his brother Hermenegildo and his parents were arrested under the ac-

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in: González Calleja, *La Cataluña ingobernable*, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed examination of Charles Arrow's engagement in Barcelona consult: Herrerín López, *Anarquía, Dinamita y revolución* and González Calleja, *La Cataluña ingobernable*.

<sup>13</sup> Herrerín López, *Anarquía, Dinamita y revolución*, pp. 265-266. Those informers that were a valuable source for the police in Barcelona is already stated by Brennan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, pp. 72-73. Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona*, p. 80 shows that this fact was already well known to the contemporaries.

<sup>14</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 541. Planes, *Els Gàngsters de Barcelona*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Villar, *Historia y leyenda*, p. 64.

cusation that they themselves were responsible for this new series of bomb attacks. After the trial, which took more than one year, Joan Rull was executed on 8 August 1908.<sup>16</sup>

Five years after the execution of Joan Rull, the predecessor of Bravo Portillo as chief of the special unit to fight anarchism in Barcelona, Francisco Martorell, was accused by the Republican newspaper *El Progreso* ('The progress'), to have engaged a gang of informers.<sup>17</sup> This gang was established during a strike in the year 1913 and supposedly consisted only of four members, Lluís Mas Terrades, Frederic Roigé Navero, Amadeu Camprubí Soler and Maria Sanz Pau. All of them derived from the criminal milieu and together were involved in numerous criminal activities.<sup>18</sup> Like the examples described above, this gang was not very successful neither. Lluís Mas Terrades was severely wounded on 10 February 1914 in a shoot-out. When trying to take revenge, Mariano Sanz Pau was arrested and imprisoned.<sup>19</sup> Roigé together with Epifani Casas, who, as it seems, was also related to Martorell's gang, was hired by the direction of the factory *España Industrial* in Sants as strike-breaker and as a result was assassinated on 31 May 1917.<sup>20</sup>

The bomb attacks and shoot-outs for which the gangs commanded by Martorell and Rull were responsible gave reason for the worker-friendly press to put violent or criminal acts, which one would normally suspect to be committed by militant trade unionists, down to policemen or informers under the service of the state. One striking example, that this practice was still frequent in the postwar years, is the coverage by *España Nueva* ('New Spain') on 11 March 1920 of a bomb attack in Barcelona. Surprisingly, according to the Madrilenian newspaper not the trade unions were responsible, but Francisco Martorell had to be blamed for the attack and the survey concluded with the words: 'Remember Rull!'<sup>21</sup>

### III. SOME THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON VIGILANTISM

Even though the two forms of popular police in Barcelona described above differed to some extent, they never the less can be described as 'collective vigilantes' according to the definition of the American political scientist David Kowalewski. As 'vigilantism', he classifies activities with the purpose to oppress deviance, i.e. attitudes which in a significant way deviate from the established social norms of a community. But in Kowlewski's opinion, it is not deviance itself, but only its abrupt growth which gives the impression that the authorities are overwhelmed. As a consequence, this lead to the sudden appearance of vigilantism as backlash. These theoretical considerations can well be applied to the Barce-

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed biography of Joan Rull, consult: Dalmau, *El Cas Rull*.

<sup>17</sup> Marinello Bonnefoy, *Sindicalismo y violencia*, p. 315. These accusations later were supported by leading figures of the worker's movement, see for example Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>18</sup> A detailed description of their criminal records is provided by Marinello Bonnefoy, *Sindicalismo y violencia*, pp. 316-319.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>21</sup> *España Nueva*, 11 March 1920, p. 1.

lona case which is studied in this paper. As Kowalewski further states, the acceptance of vigilante groups both by the state as well as by the society is rather ambiguous. On the one hand, the authorities support them by providing them with weapons, accommodation and information in order to be able to use violence against deviance without being directly involved. On the other hand, the shared interest of these two actors to curtail deviance can soon cease leading to violent rivalry between vigilantes and ordinary forces as the police. A similar ambiguity seems to prevail regarding the relation between vigilante groups and society. On the one hand, vigilante groups contribute to the containment of deviance. On the other hand, in doing so, they often perpetrate the law which puts them outside the social norms and makes their behavior deviant too.<sup>22</sup>

The apparent paradox to form these vigilante groups as for example in the case of Joan Rull and his accomplices with criminals actually makes a lot of sense since both parties profit from this alliance. For the police, the cooperation with criminals is effective because they already know them well and the criminals are already accustomed to use violence and weapons, so they are rather uninhibited in that aspect. By taking part in vigilant activities, the criminals can continue with their antisocial behavior without having to fear prosecution and instead can hope for recognition for their deeds. The main reason why vigilante groups nevertheless rather contribute to the escalation of violence than to its containment, as it will be shown in the case of Barcelona, is that by fighting violence with violence they become a mirror image of the deviant groups themselves. Due to the fact that the protection by the state saves them from persecution and the control of their activities in most cases is rather limited, the application of violence by them to an increasing degree gets out of control and more and more targets randomly selected innocent people as well.<sup>23</sup>

Although the first attempts to establish a popular police in Barcelona had been a complete failure, in the postwar years two very different types of popular police played an important role in the violent conflicts in the Catalan metropolis that will be closely examined in this paper. While the already mentioned *Banda Negra* only existed for about one year, the militia *Somatent* established itself as a significant additional law enforcement force until the end of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in 1929.

#### IV. THE MILITIA SOMATENT

On 19 August 1921, the local newspaper *El Diluvio* ('The Diluvian') reported a shootout between workers and a group of *Somatent*, which had taken place on the eve of the day before: 'According to official sources, shortly before 7 pm four workers appeared in the street *Horta de la Bomba* to encash the union contribution from the workers of the factory of Mr. Blay. According to the official sources, shortly afterwards, at the same place a few members of the *Somatent* appeared and demanded from those trying to encash the union contribution to abandon the street. One of the unionists fired a shot of his revolver

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<sup>22</sup> Kowalewski, 'Vigilantismus', pp. 426-428.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 431-433.

at the group of Somatent which responded the attack with a series of gunfire that caused panic among the residents and the passer-bys. The 34-year old Hilario Felipe Lazano and the 8-year old girl María Tarín were wounded.<sup>24</sup>

The Somatent, which are mentioned in the article just quoted, was a kind of vigilante group that can be traced back to medieval times. The expression 'Somatent' derives from the Catalan phrase 'So metent' which can be translated as 'Be on guard'. Their motto was 'Pau, Pau, sempre Pau' which means 'Peace, peace, always peace'. Therefore, we can assume that the idea behind the foundation of the Somatent was to create a kind of civil guard to guarantee law and order. At first, the Somatent was established in the Catalan countryside to protect the people from robbers. Like many Catalan manners and traditions, the Somatent suffered repressions by the Spanish Crown since 1640, the year when a Catalan uprising had been put down. Only in the second half of the 19th century, when – thanks to the growing Catalanism – many Catalan traditions were revived, the Somatent started to regain significance in the rural areas of Catalonia.<sup>25</sup>

The first time the Somatent were employed in Barcelona on a large scale was the Canadenca strike in 1919. Canadenca was an electric company which produced most of the steam used in Barcelona and therefore, the strike left the city for some weeks in darkness and led to an almost complete standstill. In March 1919, about 8000 Somatent patrolled the streets of Barcelona. They were armed with guns and their recognition feature was a red bracelet.<sup>26</sup> Their task was to guard the trams, to control suspicious persons and to force the shops and stores to reopen.<sup>27</sup> The members of the Somatent in Barcelona at first had been mainly upper class, but later more and more people from the middle class joined. Conditions of admissions were the Spanish citizenship, an age of at least 22 years, having lived at least one year in Barcelona and the proof to have a profession or to be a proprietor. Furthermore, it was necessary to be a 'man of recognized morality and noble manners'.<sup>28</sup> Every member had to make sure to bring his own gun and only the leaders were allowed to be armed with pistols.<sup>29</sup> The Somatent in Barcelona were locally organized in the city district and every barrio, the smaller organization unit of the districts, has its own leader.<sup>30</sup>

Analyzing the cases in which the Somatent were involved in acts of violence from the end of the First World War to the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in 1923, one can draw

<sup>24</sup> El Diluvio, 19 April 1921, p. 16. Solidaridad Obrera a few years later published a series of articles under the headline 'Chronology of white terror' to reveal the crimes against the working class. In this series, the incident is not depicted as a shoot-out but rather as an ambush by the Somatent, Solidaridad Obrera, 11 August 1923, p. 2. Only a few days later, the same newspaper reported another violent assault, in which a worker was brutally beaten up by two members of the Somatent, Solidaridad Obrera, 15 August 1923, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> González Calleja, *Del Rey, La defensa armada*, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> Huertas Claveria, *Obrers a Catalunya*, p. 189, González Calleja, 'El ejército y orden público', p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, p. 298.

<sup>28</sup> González Calleja, *Del Rey, La defensa armada*, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

the following conclusions: There were no violent incidents between the Somatent and the Guardia Civil ('Civil Guard'), the official police during that period of time. It seems that both organizations were closely working together and there is no evidence for any kind of rivalry. In contrary, the tasks of the Somatent were quite similar to those of the Guardia Civil, so it seems that the Somatent were acting as a kind of auxiliary unit to the official police forces. This is also proven by the fact that as well as ordinary policemen, members of the Somatent often were injured or even killed by the attempt to arrest suspects. On the other hand, it is striking that there were many reports that members of the Somatent by accident wounded or even killed people who they suspected to be robbers.<sup>31</sup>

The appearance of the Somatent in Barcelona in 1919 is comparable to the 'Unions Civiques' in France and the 'Citizen's Guards' in Great Britain, vigilante groups which also were employed for the first time on a larger scale in the big strikes in the postwar years.<sup>32</sup> Dirk Schumann, who has studied the German case, states that 'Einwohnerwehren' in Germany also were founded shortly after the First World War and in 1919 had grown to about 400,000 members. Their social profile was quite restrict and they almost exclusively included professions as land owners, teachers and other civil servants, business people while few workers joined this paramilitary group.<sup>33</sup>

After the Canadencia strike, the Somatent had another heyday in the summer 1923, when they reappeared regularly in the streets in the summer 1923. The reason was that armed robberies in Barcelona at that time had become frequent and in order to prevent them, the Somatent patrolled the streets.<sup>34</sup> After his military coup in September 1923, Miguel Primo de Rivera established vigilante groups similar to the Somatent in all regions of Spain.<sup>35</sup> With the fall of the dictator, the influence of the Somatent decreased. Nevertheless, on the eve of the Second Republic, which began in April 1931, the Somatent still had 22,000 members all over Spain.<sup>36</sup> But at the beginning of the Second Republic, the Somatent were dissolved and only continued to exist in the rural areas of Catalonia.<sup>37</sup> At the end of the Second Republic, there was a vigilante group in Barcelona similar to the Somatent called *Acció Ciudadana* ('Civil Action'), but it never gained as much popularity as the Somatent.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 75, González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio*, p. 88.

<sup>32</sup> Schumann, *Gewalterfahrungen*, p. 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> Schumann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik*, p. 74.

<sup>34</sup> *El Diluvio*, 11 August 1923, S. 8-9. An example of an armed robbery which was frustrated by the Somatent is documented in *El Diluvio*, 21 October 1923, p. 15, *El Noticiero Universal*, 23 August 1923, p. 6 and 22 October 1923, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> The function of the Somatent during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera is analyzed in Ben-Ami, *El cirujano de hierro*.

<sup>36</sup> Blaney, 'Keeping order in republican Spain', p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> Rodríguez Cámara, *II República*, p. 43. In the year 1934 *El Diario de Barcelona* ('The Barcelonian Daily') in two articles announced a reintroduction of the Somatent, which as it seems, at the end did not take place (*El Diario de Barcelona*, 17 May 1934, p. 6 and 14 October 1934, S. 13-14).

<sup>38</sup> This view is expressed for example in *El Correo Catalán* ('The Catalan Post'), 4 January 1935, p. 1.

## V. THE BANDA NEGRA

Manuel Casal Gómez, who was a police inspector in Barcelona in the first decades of the 20th century in Barcelona, later published a book in which he mainly tried to reveal the racketeerings of the Banda Negra.<sup>39</sup> The first victim of the gang was presumably Pablo Sabater, the president of the trade union of the dyers which at that time were on strike for higher salaries.<sup>40</sup> Manuel Casal Gómez described the assassination of Sabater on 17 July 1919 as follows:

*Between half past two and three o'clock in the morning, a luxurious, glossy car appeared in the Calle de Mallorca. It stops in front of the beer factory 'Bohemia' and three persons get off, looking like hangmen. One of them, tall and elegantly dressed. [...] shouts: 'We are already there'. He turns to the other persons and commands them imperiously to ring at street number 274 and arrest in due form Pablo Sabater, president of the trade union of the dyers. [...]. The detainee staggers, tortured by the terrible pain which is caused by the handcuffs on his wrists. At the street, the three men take and hustle him like a bale of straw in the interior of the car. With the spotlights turned off, the car heads for the Carretera de Montcada. [...] In the middle of the Carretera de Montcada, close to the Torre Baró, the car stops his racy drive with a full breaking next to the ditch and the three evildoers, who have been inside the car, command the detainee to get out of it, threatening him with his Star-Pistols. [...] 'Don't kill me! I beg you mercy for the sake of your mothers, of your children! Have a heart! Have a heart!' he begs on his knees. But those grim, cruel and satanic men throw him violently in the ditch and all three of them shoot simultaneously at the handcuffed, defenseless unfortunate. [...] The murderers, having accomplished the atrocious, outrageous, monstrous deed, get in the luxurious, glossy car and, bursting of satisfaction, return into the illuminated city [...].<sup>41</sup>*

This assassination caused a huge setback for the labor movement in Barcelona, since Sabater was a person of note, which for example is illustrated by the fact that he was described as 'father figure' by Ricardo Sanz who himself later became a labour leader. According to him, it has been mainly Sabater's merit that the dyers had become one of the strongest and best-organized trade unions in Barcelona.<sup>42</sup> Sabater only had been released

<sup>39</sup> After the restructuring of the police in Barcelona in the year 1917, Manuel Casal Gómez had been, as Bravo Portillo, the head of one of the ten police stations in the city (El Correo Catalán, 29 August 1922, p. 3).

<sup>40</sup> The strike of the dyers in July 1919 is mentioned by Abad de Santallán, Contribución a la historia, p. 241.

<sup>41</sup> Casal Gómez, La 'Banda Negra'. The assassination was also covered extensively in the local press, for example in El Diluvio, 23 July 1919, p. 9; 24 July 1919, p. 9; 25 July 1919, p. 9; 27 July 1919, p. 9; as well El Noticiero Universal, 20 July 1919, p. 3, 31 July 1919, p. 4; 6 August 1919, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Sanz, El sindicalismo español, p. 109. Federica Montseny in her autobiography also remembers Sabater as 'central figure in the labour movement during that period of time' (Montseny, Mis primeros cuarenta años, p. 33).

from prison three weeks before, after he had been absolved of the assassination attempt on the entrepreneur Trinchet.<sup>43</sup> Already in February the year before, he had been suspected to be involved in the assassination of the directory of a factory and was on demand together with eight other suspects.<sup>44</sup> For this reason presumably Sabater was on a black list together with six other persons, from whom only José Castillo is known, who was murdered only a few days later than Sabater.<sup>45</sup> A very similar attempted murder as the one Sabater fell victim to in which the perpetrators masqueraded as policemen had already taken place on 23 April, leaving the secretary of the trade union of building trades, Pedro Masoni, wounded, while the perpetrators were able to escape.<sup>46</sup>

In May 1922, nearly three years after the assassination of Sabater, Luis Fernández was accused but finally released due to lack of evidence. Nevertheless during the trial he admitted that shortly before the deed he had left France, where he already had collaborated with the police as well. When he arrived in Barcelona, he was provided with accommodation by Bravo Portillo and in return was in charge of spying workers, presumably to prevent strikes.<sup>47</sup> Even though nobody was sentenced for the assassination of Sabater at the end, it is likely that Ángel Pestaña and other authors rightly claim that the gang of Bravo Portillo was responsible for Sabater's death.<sup>48</sup>

In comparison to the already mentioned gangs of Joan Rull and Francisco Martorell, Bravo Portillo's auxiliary police was much bigger and better organized. It was subdivided into three small groups. The task of the members of the first group was to gather information, the second group infiltrated the working class community and the members of the third group acted as agent provocateurs in factories and other working places.<sup>49</sup> The claim that the Banda Negra also carried out contract killings and in doing so was responsible for several assassination attempts on leading figures of the worker's movement seems exaggerated, since only the assassination of Pablo Sabater can be attributed to this

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<sup>43</sup> Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona*, p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> *El Diluvio*, 22 February 1918, morning edition, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 71. The assassination of Castillo is described by Balcells, *Violència social i poder polític*, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> The assassination is documented in *España Nueva*, 9 July 1919, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> The trial against Fernández García is covered in *El Diluvio*, 26 April 1922, p. 14 and 12 May 1922, p. 27; as well as *El Correo Catalán*, 12 May 1922, p. 1-2. and *La Publicidad* ('The Public'), morning edition, 12 May 1922, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Pestaña, *Lo que aprendí*, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio*, p. 146. Casal Gómez, *La 'Banda Negra'*, p. 108.

gang.<sup>50</sup> All members got weapons and a daily payment.<sup>51</sup> If any of them wanted to leave the gang, he was threatened.<sup>52</sup>

Although many sources claim that the gang consisted of 50 to 60 members, Ángel Pestaña's estimate of 15 to 20 members seems more realistic given the fact that few of their members later became known publicly.<sup>53</sup> All sources agree that the head of the part of the gang which was responsible for the violent acts was Antonio Soler, a former convict from Mallorca.<sup>54</sup> The other members of the gang were recruited from the lower classes and the criminal milieu as well.<sup>55</sup> Among the members of the gang were also Epifanio Casas and Mariano Sanz, who, as it seems, already had been at the service of Francisco Martorell.<sup>56</sup>

As the members of the gang of Martorell about five years before, the Banda Negra became the target of assassination attempts as well. The leader of the gang, Manuel Bravo Portillo, was shot on 8 September 1919, probably by someone belonging to the action groups of the CNT.<sup>57</sup> Only twelve days later, Eduardo Ferrer, who also was a supposed member of the Banda Negra and had been involved in the assassination of Pablo Sabater, suffered the same fate.<sup>58</sup> Especially the murder of Bravo Portillo was warmly welcomed by the Barcelonian working class because they hoped that after his death the Banda Negra would be dissolved.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The claim that it would have been the task of the Banda Negra to eliminate activists of the labour movement is formulated by Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 59 and Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona*, p. 106. In contrast, del Rey argues that the gang besides the assassinations already mentioned only was responsible for one or two deaths and several injuries until its dissolution in May 1920. But these causalities did not result from assassinations or assassination attempts but rather from shoot-outs between members of the Banda Negra and the action groups of the CNT (*Del Rey, Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 518).

<sup>51</sup> According to Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 59 the weapons were provided by a military called Perales on the authority of Bravo Portillo. Concerning the payment, Serrano, *La ciudad de las bombas*, p. 172-173 and Ventura Subirats, 'La verdadera personalidad', p. 114 gave the figure of 50 pesetas, while Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 58 and Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 66 only gave 15, which nevertheless would have been a much higher salary than an average qualified worker at that time would receive.

<sup>52</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 64.

<sup>53</sup> Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona*, p. 38. According to Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 117, the gang had 70 members.

<sup>54</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 61, Ventura Subirats, 'La verdadera personalidad', p. 112, Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona*, p. 106 and Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 66.

<sup>55</sup> Ventura Subirats, 'La verdadera personalidad', p. 112, Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 117 and Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Marinello, *Sindicalismo y violencia*, p. 319.

<sup>57</sup> The assassination of Bravo Portillo was extensively covered in the local press, for example *La Publicidad*, 3 September 1919, p. 3; *El Diluvio*, 6 September 1919, p. 10-1; 7 September 1919, p. 9; 9 September 1919, p. 7; 12 September 1919, p. 9; as well as *El Noticiero Universal* ('The Universal Correspondent'), 5 September 1919, p. 7; 6 September 1919, p. 5; 19 September 1919, p. 5; 6 September 1919, p. 23.

<sup>58</sup> The assassination of Ferrer is documented in *La Publicidad*, 18 September 1919, p. 3 and *España Nueva*, 18 September 1919, p. 2. In the same newspaper, two articles on his life were published, *España Nueva*, 23 September 1919, p. 1 and 24 September 1919, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 60.

Instead, Rudolf Stallmann took over. He had come to Barcelona in September 1918 as a spy in the course of the First World War, pretended to be of aristocratic origin and called himself 'Baron von König'.<sup>60</sup> After the death of Bravo Portillo, Stallmann got into contact with the *Federación Patronal*, but the employers' association refused to support him as they had backed Bravo Portillo and the head of the police, Arlegui, on 22 December ordered a house search at Stallmann's place. After having had a conversation, as it seems, both came to terms and the *Banda Negra* under the lead of Stallmann became a kind of auxiliary police that was allowed to execute searches and to detain syndicalists.<sup>61</sup> This turn seems a bit surprising, since Doval, who was cited at the beginning of this paper, about half a year after his arrival in Barcelona complained in one of his reports that the official police and Stallmann's gang would compete with and hate each other.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Stallmann's gang was supposed to blackmail entrepreneurs. The British writer Gerald Brenan who was one of the first foreign authors who after the Civil War wrote on the history of Spain went further and asserted that the gang even shot entrepreneurs who refused to pay. This, however, is not documented in the sources available.<sup>63</sup>

Rudolf Stallmann and Antonio Soler barely escaped assassination attempts.<sup>64</sup> On the 23 April 1920 the *Banda Negra* was involved in a shoot-out with an action group of the CNT, after which one member of the *Banda Negra*, Bernardo Armengol, got arrested. In prison, he gave a detailed report on the *Banda Negra*, which enabled the CNT to hunt down its members.<sup>65</sup> Only a few days later, close to Ronda de Sant Antoni at a place called 'Peso de la Paja', which was used by the *Banda Negra* regularly for its meetings, another shoot-out took place. Two members of the gang, Pedro Torrents Capdevila and Mariano Sanz got wounded and an activist of the CNT was shot.<sup>66</sup>

These incidents caused huge protests, which made the *Federación Patronal* distance itself publicly from the *Banda Negra*. Therefore, Tomás Benet, the representative of the *Federación Patronal* in Madrid, on 17 May 1920 wrote a letter to the newspaper *El País* (The Country), which was published two days later. In this letter, he insisted that the employers' organization never had cooperated with Stallmann and would disapprove his measures. One week later Stallmann responded to Benet with a letter which was made official by the Madrilenian newspaper *El Sol* ('The Sun') only on 11 June. In this letter, Stallmann refers to himself as the leader of the *Policia Patronal* ('Police of the employers')

<sup>60</sup> Casal Gómez, *La 'Banda Negra'* as well as *Del Rey, Proprietarios y patronos*.

<sup>61</sup> *Del Rey, Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 514.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>63</sup> Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 72-73. On contrast, for example Romero Salvadó, "Si vis pacem", p. 180-81 only states that the gang tried to blackmail entrepreneurs.

<sup>64</sup> The assassination attempt on Stallmann is described by Calderon, *Memorias de un terrorista*, p. 278, while the assassination of Antonio Soler is mentioned by Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, p. 324.

<sup>66</sup> A report of an eye-witness was published in *El Sol*, 30 April 1920, p. 1. A detailed description is provided by Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 74-76 and Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, S. 122-123. Nearly two years later, Restituto Gómez, Alberto Manzano Casabalter and José Berros Sánchez were on trial for their participation in the shoot-out, *El Diluvio*, 16 March 1922, p. 19.

and claimed that the Federación Patronal would have promised him 200,000 pesetas in the case that something would happen to him. Furthermore, he announced in this letter that his group had been dissolved two weeks before on the grounds that he could cooperate any longer with the president of the employers' association Fèlix Graupera, who was said to be hostile to Germans.<sup>67</sup> At the beginning of June, the Minister of State instructed Salvatierra, the governor of Barcelona who until then had supported Stallmann, to detain him. Stallmann voluntarily turned himself in to the police on 3 June and at the end of the month was expelled from Spain.<sup>68</sup>

After the expulsion of Stallmann the Banda Negra quickly fell apart. Some of its members fled from Barcelona, among them Antonio Soler, who was assassinated on his flight.<sup>69</sup> Only two gang members who remained in Barcelona were sentenced for their deeds.<sup>70</sup> Other members of the gang were shot. Pedro Torrens, who had been wounded in the shoot-out at the end of April, was killed only a couple of weeks later.<sup>71</sup> Mariano Sans, Julio Laporta and Ernesto Queralt, all of them supposed members of the Banda Negra, were assassinated as well and on 19 May 1923, Bernardo Armengol, the last remaining member of the Banda Negra, suffered the same faith.<sup>72</sup>

In summer 1922 some of the local Barcelonian newspapers reported that several industrialists would have restarted to support a gang similar to the Banda Negra, in which Pere Màrtir Homs would have a leading position.<sup>73</sup> Homs was a lawyer who in the past had defended activists of the CNT at court but later, as it seems, had switched sides.<sup>74</sup> The gang was made responsible for having murdered the moderate labor leader Salvador Seguí.<sup>75</sup> Homs was supposed to have actively taken part in some of the assassinations of this gang and later he also became the target of an assassination attempt himself.<sup>76</sup> About ten years later, in the time of the Second Spanish Republic, the head of the police in Barcelona, Miguel Badia, tried to establish a similar auxiliary police as the Banda Negra, but his attempt broke down due to the personal intervention of civil governor Lluís Companys, who was afraid that this measure would initiate a new wave of pistolero.

<sup>67</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 517. The correspondence between Benet and Stallmann is documented in *El Fructador* 19 June 1920.

<sup>68</sup> Pradas Baena, *L'Anarquisme i les Iluites*, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> Del Rey, *Proprietarios y patronos*, p. 518. Both *España Nueva*, 28 March 1920, p. 3 and Casal Gómez, *La 'Banda Negra'*, p. 153, assume that several members of the gang fled to other countries. The assassination of Soler is reported in *El Correo Catalán*, 21 July 1920, p. 3. Leon Ignacio, *Años*, p. 126-127 states that there were also other reports which claimed that Soler would have survived his flight.

<sup>70</sup> Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 126-127.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125. The trial is documented in *El Noticiero Universal*, 3 April 1922, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Leon Ignacio, *Los años del pistolero*, p. 126-127, p. 135, p. 142, p. 169 and p. 282.

<sup>73</sup> Termes, *Historia del anarquismo*, p. 326. According to Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 120, Homs not only planned the assassination of workers but armed robberies as well.

<sup>74</sup> García Oliver, *El ecos de los pasos*, p. 72.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, p. 347.

<sup>76</sup> An assassination attempt, in which Homs was supposed to be involved, is reported by *El Noticiero Universal*, 26 April 1923, p. 14 and 27 April 1923, p. 7. The assassination attempt on Homs, in which one policeman was killed, is documented in *El Noticiero Universal*, 4 June 1923, p. 12.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Summing up, one may conclude that the popular and auxiliary polices which acted in Barcelona in the postwar years very well correlate with the theoretical considerations concerning 'collective vigilantes' by the American political scientist David Kowalewski. The militia Somatent as well as the Banda Negra were established to support the police, who obviously was not in the condition to guarantee law and order in such a conflict-laden city as Barcelona during that time. But both the Somatent as well as the Banda Negra rather contributed to the escalation of violence, confirming the thesis of Kowalewski that vigilantes often abscond from the control of the authorities and as a consequence use violent measures in an inappropriate way. While the Somatent during the strike of Canadencia and the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera to some extent helped to maintain law and order, the Banda Negra, especially after the assassination of their first leader Manuel Bravo Portillo, more and more became an obscure force which was not manageable by the authorities anymore. This development to some extent only was consistent, given the fact that while the Somatent mainly consisted of middle-aged men from Barcelonian middle and upper class who were eager to maintain the status quo in the city, the members of the Banda Negra mainly were recruited from the criminal milieu. As a consequence, the Banda Negra more and more became similar to the forces it was build up to fight against. In general, it cannot be denied that all attempts of popular policing in Barcelona from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century until the beginning of the Civil War were a complete failure which only sharpened the conflicts in the city rather than calming them down.

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