

**The Ciompi Revolt of 1378:
Socio-Political Constraints and Economic Demands of Workers
in Renaissance Florence**

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I. Introduction

In June of 1378, political tensions between the *Parte Guelpha* (supporters of the Papacy) and the Ghibellines (supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor) were on the rise in Italy. These tensions stemmed from the Parte Guelpha's use of proscriptions (either a death sentence or banishment/exile) and admonitions (denying one's eligibility for magisterial office) to rid Ghibellines (and whomever else they wanted for whatever reasons) from participation in the government. However, the Guelphs had been unable to prevent their Ghibelline adversary, Salvestro de' Medici, from obtaining the position of *Gonfaloniere* ("Standard-Bearer of Justice"), the most powerful position in the commune. By proposing an ultimately unsuccessful renewal of the anti-magnate Law of Ordinances, he was able to win the support of the *popolo minuto* ("little people"), who, at his bidding, ran around the city, burning and looting the houses of the Guelphs. By targeting specific families and also by allying themselves with the minor guilds, these "working poor" hoped to force negotiations for socio-economic and political reform upon the major-guildsmen. Instead, however, this forced the creation of a *balìa* (an oligarchic ruling committee of patricians), charged with suppressing the rioting throughout the city. With the city still high-strung, yet more rioting broke out in the following month.

The few days before July 21, 1378 were shrouded in conspiracy and plotting. Fearing that the *popolo minuto* were holding secret meetings all throughout the city, the government arrested some of their leaders, and, under torture, these "little people" confessed to plans of creating three new guilds and eliminating forced loan policies. While the Florentine government at that time was a republic in the most basic sense of the word, the seven major guilds controlled most of the political offices and refused to relinquish any of them. The existing government compelled subjects to render forced loans and pay high taxes while granting little-to-no representation in government for the members of the fourteen minor guilds and *sottoposti* ("non-guildsmen") in addition to more general exploitation in their work and private lives. As tensions arose throughout Florence, a major schism broke out between the seven major guilds and the fourteen minor guilds. The minor guilds wanted greater representation in the government while the *sottoposti* also submitted a demand for their own representation in government and a reduction or end of the public debt. In response to these demands, the major guilds and the *Signoria* made it even more difficult for either of these groups to obtain representation in government. Infuriated, the fourteen minor guilds allied themselves with the new formed "*Ciompi*" (wool workers). On July 21, 1378, after negotiations between the two sides failed, the *popolo minuto* and minor guildsmen decided to rebel violently against the Florentine government and took up arms to overthrow the *Signoria* and their government in an event that would be later known as

the Ciompi Revolt. While the Ciompi were subsequently defeated after a relatively short reign, their revolt exerted a long-term impact upon Florentine government that endured for centuries.

This paper aims to explore the Ciompi Revolt and its context, starting with the impact of the Black Death in 1348 on Florence and extending to the end of events of the Ciompi Revolt in 1382. As one of the most revolutionary times in history, the parallel impact of the Renaissance, especially in Florence, cannot be overstated. The Ciompi Revolt, which occurred relatively early within the Renaissance, arguably constituted the first “industrial” labor revolt and rebellion in history.¹ For all intents and purposes, it was relatively modest and lackadaisical in terms of the demands and desires of the Ciompi, who sought economic gains, but had no desire to reform the government from scratch. Certainly they did not want to end, rewrite, or draft a constitution. Instead, what the Ciompi really desired was some degree of political participation, however limited, within the Florentine communal government. Thus the socio-economic structure of Florence played a pivotal role in the revolt as the product of inter- and intra-class conflicts that were full of plots and conspiracies. The Ciompi Revolt was revolutionary because it drew from these class tensions in every aspect; these tensions forced changes within the socio-political and economic spheres. While it was not as extreme as some Marxist historians have claimed, without the class tensions in Florence this revolution might never have occurred. As it turned out in the end, however, the Ciompi Revolt established a new form of government with new social and political boundaries and, in the process, altered the economy of Florence by focusing upon the workers rather than solely upon their production.

II. The Revolt of the Ciompi

The Ciompi Revolt came in three phases: the reform, the revolt, and the reaction. While no sharp chronological divisions may be identified during this chaotic period of Florentine history, the different phases reflect more broadly the events that transpired in Florence during the months of June, July, and August of 1378, respectively. At first, the peaceful Ciompi simply wanted political recognition along with economic reform. By the end of the revolt in August 1378, however, they were using violence to achieve their goals, along with burning and looting. For one to understand how the Ciompi Revolt erupted and evolved, it may be helpful to consider not only what the Ciompi desired and how they initially planned to achieve their goals, but also to understand why the Ciompi ultimately rose up as rioters in response to the infighting among the Florentine elites. In part because the Parte Guelfa’s use of proscriptions and admonitions so angered their enemies, the Ghibelline notable, Salvestro de’ Medici championed the Ciompi, who ultimately rioted in mid-June as the phrase “Long live the People” echoed throughout the city.

While the wool workers had been around for a while and had become the backbone of the Florentine economy, the promise of higher wages and a better life was all too enticing for many

¹ I use the term “industrial” as a relative term, referring to textile workers and the conditions and work-lives within the guild system. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries was much different with its use of factories and machines.

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people – especially for males entering the city. Nonetheless, these workers entered the city with false expectations, for while wages were certainly increasing, so too were the debt and taxes of Florence. During the 1340s, the banking industry – for which Florence was known internationally – had collapsed (as it would do once again in the 1450s at the end of the Hundred Years’ War).² These banks were still owed a significant amount of money by both England and France, and their collapse was induced by the default on these loans in the 1340s, leading to increasingly hard times for the wool workers. In response to this, taxes skyrocketed in Florence.³ Additionally, with this collapse and its adverse impact on the wool workers, many workers were plagued with unemployment. In short, “although fully employed skilled workers (especially those with small households) did well between the plague and 1378,” John Najemy has noted, “debt, taxes, irregular employment, and large families kept many in poverty.”⁴

II.1. Deterioration of the Parte Guelpha, the Guelphs’ Conflict with the Ghibellines, and the War of the Eight Saints

The start of what is now considered the Ciompi Revolt originated not through tensions from the lower classes, but was actually due to increasing tensions within the Parte Guelpha itself. These tensions were compounded by the Guelph Party’s conflict with the Ghibellines and the Avignon Papacy. Florence itself had always maintained that it was a Guelph city. From the 1350s to the 1370s, it was the Guelphs, led by the Albizzi family amongst other prominent Guelph families, who ruled Florence.⁵ Feeling undermined and underrepresented were the Ghibellines, who barely had any say in governmental affairs. This was in large part accomplished through the Parte Guelpha’s use of proscriptions (sentences of death or exile) and admonitions (denying opponents the right to hold a magisterial office). In practice, this meant that they had “the right to determine who were true Guelphs, [and] could exclude from civic office those it deemed to lack this essential requirement.”⁶ In so doing, the Guelph Party was “warning anyone of whom it disapproved that, should he accept a position which the statutes reserved for Guelphs, he would incur the penalties for violating them. In this way, those who dominated the ‘Parte’ hoped to retain their power to act as guardians of what they regarded as the traditional interests of Florence.”⁷ It can be concluded that the Parte Guelpha intended to retain its control of the Florentine government. The conflict between the Guelph Party and the Ghibellines, in fact, reflected a division between factions within the upper class. Most, if not all, of those belonging

² Richard C. Trexler, “Follow the Flag: The Ciompi Revolt Seen from the Streets,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 46, No. 2 (1984): 9.

³ John Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 144.

⁴ Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 160.

⁵ Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 146.

⁶ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi: Including the Chronicle Attributed to Alamanno Acciaiuoli, the Anonymous Additions to It, the So-Called First Anonymous Chronicle and the Chronicle of Ser Nofri di ser Piero delle Riformagioni*, ed. and trans. Rosemary Kantor and Louis Green (Clayton, Australia: Dept. of History, Monash University, 1991), 2.

⁷ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 3.

to these two political parties were adversaries within Florence – adversaries with considerable wealth, status, and power at stake. This not only upset the actual Ghibellines but also many others who were not because even people who were merely suspected, but not actually Ghibellines, were losing offices and positions within the government. Steaming for revenge and awaiting their opportunity to usurp the Guelphs, the Ghibellines' opportunity come to fruition when the Guelphs in Florence declared a war against the papacy in 1375.

In the year of 1375, a Guelph-led Florence declared war against the Avignon papacy – mistakenly known today as the “War of the Eight Saints” because of the longstanding confusion of the “Eight Saints” with the “Eight of War.” As noted above, the Guelphs, avid supporters of a *Roman* papacy, had appointed a *balia* of eight men to orchestrate this war. These men, known as the Eight of War (*Otto della Guerra*), heeded the call for this fight against the papacy. Opposing the *Otto della Guerra* was Pope Gregory XI, head of the Avignon papacy, who resided in Avignon, but governed Italy through legates. The poor treatment of the Italian people by the legates ultimately led to open rebellion and a union of the Italian city-states. However, as Florence was punished for the eight men's actions and placed under an interdict, the city began to crumble at the seams. It soon became clear that the *Otto della Guerra* and the captains of the Parte Guelpha, all of whom were Guelphs themselves, were going to collide. The Guelph captains' power to proscribe or admonish leading citizens gave them near total control over Florentine politics. At the same time, however, the leading members of the Parte Guelpha seemed to be alienating themselves from Florentine society. In addition to this, the war was becoming increasingly unpopular, and so, too, were both the *Otto della Preti* and the *Otto della Guerra*. The Guelph captains' power culminated when, on April 22, 1378, they proscribed the spice merchant, Giovanni Dini, who was one of the *Otto della Guerra* leading the war against the Avignon papacy.⁸ The conflicting tensions within the Guelphs of Florentine society opened a window of opportunity for the Ghibellines. As opportunity knocked, Salvestro de' Medici, rose to the highest position in the Florentine government: Standard-Bearer of Justice.

II.2. The Ciompi “Reform”

The importance of Salvestro de' Medici's election as Gonfaloniere of Justice, the highest position in Florentine government, cannot be understated. Salvestro's rise to this position seems peculiar, mostly due to the fact that he was an adversary to Parte Guelpha. However, he was not the only new person to take a leading position in Signoria in May and June of 1378. This term would be a tumultuous one, riddled with conspiracy and, eventually, violence. An important point to note here is that none of these priors belonged to the wool guild, despite the fact that its membership comprised nearly one-third of Florence's population during this time. The priors' inability to understand Salvestro's motives as well as the desires and demands of the Ciompi would ultimately led to an insurrection like none that Florence had ever witnessed before.

Salvestro de' Medici knew that opposing the Parte Guelpha while they were still at full strength would be futile. Instead, the contemporary chronicler Marchione di Coppo Stefani

⁸ Robert Fredona, “Political Conspiracy in Florence, 1340-1382” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2010), 91.

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reports, he had a secret plan with his allies, who met at the house of Luigi de Lippo Aldobrandini.⁹ This is where they hatched a plot that would cause upheaval and violence throughout the streets of Florence. The Parte Guelpha probably knew of the secret meeting, for they “immediately met at the Palace of the Parte [Guelpha] and straight away summoned all the heads of the ‘grandi’ families who favoured the measures which supported the Parte, nearly all of them with breastplate and knives and some with daggers hidden at either side.”¹⁰ According to Stefani’s *Florentine Chronicle*, the Guelph’s standard-bearer, Lapo da Castiglionchio, went to the Palazzo Vecchio accompanied by over thirty armed men to hear the proposition of Salvestro de Medici.

The rise of Salvestro de Medici came with many consequences, not only for the Parte Guelpha, but also for Florence as a whole. Historian Samuel Cohn observed that, “on June 1378, Salvestro de’ Medici and others from the merchant-elite families sparked a constitutional struggle that challenged the Guelph Party’s control and manipulation of government elections through its denunciations [*ammonitti*] of those drawn from the purses [elected] for office.”¹¹ As Salvestro started his two-month term, he took immediate action to curb the Parte Guelpha’s power through his decision to “reform the state and rein in the Law of Admonition.”¹² He also “called for a renewal of the old Ordinances of Justice . . . Originally passed at the end of the thirteenth century to eliminate from government those families labeled as magnates, . . . the Ordinances were still officially the law of the land, even if they had largely fallen into disuse.”¹³ These actions were taken to limit the Parte Guelfa’s leading families’ power by declaring them magnates, which by law meant that they were ineligible to participate in the government. Despite having promised to support these reforms, the councils of the Twelve Good Men and Sixteen Standard-Bearers (which contained many citizens belonging to magnate families) in the end refused to renew the Ordinances of Justice. Upon receiving the news that his proposal had not passed, Salvestro stood up and declared, “Wise people of the council, today I wanted to cleanse this city of the wicked tyranny of powerful men, but I am not allowed to do so because my companions and the colleges will not consent to it. . . . And as I am not obeyed in my desire to do good, I consider myself no longer prior, nor gonfaloniere. I therefore intend to go home. Choose another gonfaloniere in my place and do it with God’s grace.”¹⁴

Seeing the leading figure of the government about to resign his position within days of assuming his post caused a public commotion. Unwilling to let the Salvestro resign, chaos broke

⁹ Marchione di Coppo Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 76.

¹⁰ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 79.

¹¹ Samuel Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France, Flanders* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2004), 202.

¹² Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and trans. James Hankins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3:5.

¹³ Guido Ruggiero, *The Renaissance in Italy: A Social and Cultural History of the Rinascimento* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 159.

¹⁴ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 8-9.

out within the Councilmen of the Twelve and Sixteen. Machiavelli reports, “Many of the noble citizens were threatened in opprobrious language; and an artificer seized Carlo Strozzi by the throat, and would undoubtedly murdered him, but was with difficulty prevented by those around.”¹⁵ As frustration rose throughout the room, many of the Twelve and Sixteen Councilmen were arguing, and little was accomplished. Even within the powerful and elite of Florentine society, there was no agreement. It was through the rash actions of one Councilmen, Benedetto di Nerozzo degli Alberti, who ran to the window and shouted out “Long live the people, Long live Liberty!,”¹⁶ that commotion was stirred not just within the upper-level people of society, but now within the ranks of the *popolo minuto* as well.

Outside of the palace, however, guildsmen and *popolo minuto* reacted more tentatively. This rather peculiar scenario suggests that the *popolo minuto* were unsure about the direction in which the political elites were taking them. The people of Florence went home that night and slept under wakeful and stressful tension. The next morning, shops were closed and guards were placed all throughout the city. This was done due to the fear that the *popolo* might mount an insurrection. Although hoping not only to maintain control over the *popolo*, but also over their actions, the patricians of the city in fact incited revolt. Several chroniclers recorded what they witnessed over the next few days. Alamanno Acciaiuoli observed:

On Sunday, all the guilds gathered together in their shops, and then each artisan was in his own shop. They elected certain representatives, one for each guild.

On Monday morning the colleges assembled early in the signoria and the representatives also came. All that day they stayed with the priors and their colleges, discussing and framing certain laws. But that day nothing could be decided, for they could not reach agreement.

Thus on Tuesday, the guilds began to arm themselves, according to the order given by several citizens in their own guild shops. The guild banners were unfurled. This action was brought to the attention of the priors and the colleges. They immediately chose the Ninety-six. When the council was summoned and the Ninety-six chosen, an uproar arose in the square and people with the guild banners shouted, ‘Long live the people.’ Therefore the council decided to turn over general authority to the priors and the colleges, to the captains of the Party, to the ten of liberty (‘dieci della libertà’), to the eight of guard (‘otto della guardia’) and to the guild representatives.¹⁷

Seeing that not much had been accomplished and that the Parte Guelpha continued to dominate the government, riots soon broke out. The homes of many Florentines would soon be consumed by flames. These riots began on June 21, 1378. Although not nearly as violent as those of the

¹⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *History of Florence and of the Affairs of Italy: From the Earliest Times to the Death of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, trans. Peter Smith (Gloucester, Mass.: Harper and Row, 1974), 122.

¹⁶ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 8.

¹⁷ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 9.

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following day, they nevertheless played an important part at the beginning of creating a collective identity for the *popolo minuto* and breaking the social constraints that had held in place within society. This can be seen through both the guilds' election of members to represent them as constituents, and through the rising of the *popolo minuto* as a physical force, wreaking havoc among the homes and leaders of the Guelph Party.

The rioting continued and even intensified over the next two days. In his *Florentine Chronicle* (ca. 1378-early 1380s), the contemporary chronicler Marchione di Coppo Stefani recorded the events that took place in Florence over these next few days:

. . . On the said Tuesday at the third hour, a disturbance broke out and, hoisting their standards, the guilds rushed to arms and came to the Piazza of the Priors. The first to move was the guild of the furriers. . . . But I believe that it was a true judgment that none except for those listed below had [his house] either burnt down, touched or robbed. The first were messer Lapo da Castiglionchio's houses, his loggia and those of his kinsmen, which were on the Piazza of the Ponte Rubaconte opposite the house of the sons of messer Jacopo dagli Alberti, in which there was little to rob, because in the night and morning everything had been removed except for what was in wood or bedding. He had fled to Santa Croce where, it was rumoured, when he heard that his house had been put to the flames, he said 'Now wait for St John's day, now Piero di Filippo, St John's day will be yours.' And dressed as a friar he followed the bank of the Arno and reached the Casentino.¹⁸

Stefani recorded a very vivid and detailed depiction of the rioting that took place in Florence in late June 1378. The astonishing detail provided in his *Florentine Chronicle* indicates that the Ciompi targeted the Parte Guelpha's leaders' houses. Thus the resulting insurrection suggests that Salvestro and his allies were exploiting the *popolo minuto* as they targeted their enemies and used the common people to achieve their ends. In addition to the looting and burning, the *popolo minuto* also freed prisoners in the city, which is the only part for which Salvestro and his allies, more than likely, did not plan. Again, in Stefani's words: "And then they rushed to the Stinche and released all the prisoners, doing great harm both to the commune and to the citizens . . . , and burnt it down."¹⁹ Acciaiuoli adds, "And when they finished this looting and burning the 'popolo minuto' and the guildsmen went and broke into the commune's jail and, acting under the orders of Bardo di Guglielmo Altoviti, they let free all the prisoners. Bardo had two of his nephews in jail; they were his sister's son: one was Alesso Baldovinetti and the other Andrea delle Botti."²⁰

In addition to the freeing of political prisoners, the War Commission (The Eight of War) hired a man not from Florence, but one from the town of Poggibonsi, Checco di Iacopo da

¹⁸ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 78.

¹⁹ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 78-79.

²⁰ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 10.

Poggibonsi, to lead this later charge around the city to burn down the houses of notable Parte members. This created an even more intense environment, seeing that two friars were later killed in this rioting. Additionally, the *popolo minuto* broke into a church and began looting it. This foreshadows an eventual breaking away from the order and structure of Salvestro and his allies. The *popolo minuto* were really beginning to test the limits and see what they could actually accomplish independently.

These first-hand and contemporary accounts record the actions taken by the people of Florence in late June 1378. Much damage was done to the city and the houses of the Parte Guelpha's leaders. Unable to rein in the *popolo minuto* on that day, it was evident that the Parte leaders need to make some sort of change. The night before St. John's Day, a holiday in Florence celebrating the memory of the martyr St. John the Baptist, the Parte Guelpha hatched a plan. In this, they hoped to exploit the *popolo minuto* by redirecting them at the Ghibellines. The chronicler Stefani details this plan:

It was discovered from inquires made later that Piero di Filippo was to have in his house, on St John's eve, . . . [conspirators, which] had decided to raise a cry, form ranks and overrun the city, immediately going to the Palace of the Priors, taking it without opposition, and afterwards overrunning the city, shouting "Long live the people and the Guelph party." They were to lead to the populace to the houses of the "admonished", the Ghibellines, and to certain of their enemies, and then reform the government of the city in their own way, restricting it, they said, to sixty men.²¹

This plan, so they thought, was fool-proof. Perhaps it might have gone their way. But it can sufficiently be concluded that if Stefani was able to learn of this plan, so was Salvestro. Before the Parte could act, Salvestro and his allies launched a preemptive strike. In a daring attempt, and one that launched the Ciompi into action, Salvestro championed himself and his allies as leaders of the *popolo minuto*. As champions of the *popolo minuto*, Salvestro and his followers were able to initiate attacks on the Parte Guelpha. This kept the Parte preoccupied and on their heels, unable to fend off these attacks. Because of this, Salvestro utilized this time to re-promulgate some existing laws. These included "a law that any citizen who had been admonished by the captains of the Parte as a Ghibelline or who was suspect to the Parte Guelpha since 1357 could and would be restored to his rights if he acquired two-thirds of the beans [votes] of those present. . . But whoever was thus restored could not himself, and neither could his relatives, hold office until an interval of three years had elapsed."²² In addition to this, they "declared Messer Lapo de Castiglionchio and his associates rebels, and, with him, many others who were universally hated."²³ Thus Salvestro was able to remake the laws and decisions that the Parte had controlled for the past several decades. But what he did not expect was how out of

²¹ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 78.

²² Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 11.

²³ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 118.

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control the *popolo minuto* would become. The chronicler Nofri di ser Piero delle Riformagioni explained just how the *popolo minuto* got its start and very pointedly blamed a select few for what would occur in the upcoming months:

Once this was done [the burning of the Parte's houses], they gave the order for the unrest to stop, and it largely began to quiet down. But the crowd, when it is moved, oftentimes does not stop when those who incited it want it to do so. This is what happened to the city of Florence. The people did not stop where Tommaso di Marco degli Strozzi, messer Salvestro de' Medici, messer Benedetto degli Alberti, Giovanni Dini and other instigators of such evil and scandal would have wanted it to stop; they continued, till in the end everyone ended up badly.²⁴

In the aftermath of these violent riots in June, much had been done to limit more rioting. This included the creation of a *baliá* of eighty men who went about repairing the city. This *baliá* was finally able to stifle nearly all of the Guelph Party's influence. In doing so, the transfer of power was complete; Salvestro and his allies seemingly had won. It appeared that the violence was going to diminish after the new leaders of the commune "issued a ban stating that no one should carry offensive or defensive weapons."²⁵ The ban was ineffective, however, because "the shops were not opened, nor did the citizens lay down their arms, but continued to patrol the city in great numbers."²⁶ While the Eighty believed that the riots were going to subside, they actually began to unite around the guildsmen and would continue. This was based on the creation of the *popolo minuto*'s identity outside of the social constraints that had previously served as the customary law guiding Florence.

On July 1, 1378, the new Priors came into office and Luigi di messer Piero Guicciardini became the new Gonfaloniere of Justice.²⁷ The new Signoria was credited with creating a stable environment in Florence: "Everyone praised the priors and the colleges for their work. Every day the situation in the city improved. There was peace and quiet without any disturbance for ten days."²⁸ And although the new Priors and the Gonfaloniere formed the new Signoria and succeeded in quelling the riots in the city, the Eight still held most of the control in Florence. The two groups hoped to collaborate and create a new and stable government, but that was not to be the case.

Over the course of the next few days, the situation began to deteriorate within the city. First, on the 5th of July, the Parte Guelpha, still reeling from the rapid descent from leaders of the government to a limited part in government, "requested that many of the citizens in the Guelph

²⁴ Chronicle of Nofri di ser Piero delle Riformagioni, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 61.

²⁵ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 212.

²⁶ Machiavelli, *History of Florence*, trans. Smith, 124.

²⁷ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 12.

²⁸ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 12.

Party should try to restore the party's good image [and] refrain from fighting, rioting, and acts of arson."²⁹ This, they hoped, would show that blame was only that of the captains belonging to the Parte and not the Guelphs as a whole. It also shows that they were going to try again to win over the mass number of people in Florence to their cause despite their mistakes. Seeing this, the Florentine government took the decision into their own hands, deciding "that no one could be barred from office-holding while in office but only after a certain amount of time and only with serious matters could such an inquiry be made, and if no sound grounds were found, the person could not be condemned as a Ghibelline; rather it must be proven that the suspect was in fact a Ghibelline."³⁰ This was a slap in the face to the Parte because now all their enemies were able to petition for their reinstatement into government. This meant that their popularity, despite their best attempts, was going to continue to diminish. The captains of the Parte were soon at the behest of the guilds and Florentine government: "Today, 8 July 1378, all the leaders of the guilds assembled in the Palace of the Guelph Party in front of their captains to make several demands. The captains answered to the councilors and their leaders, saying they were willing to do anything they asked, and everyone was in agreement; our city remained in peace and harmony."³¹ But this peace and harmony would not last very long.

After their work in June, the minor guilds hoped to receive more voice within government. These minor guilds "had displayed a distinct solidarity while helping the major guildsmen crush the Parte; after those disturbances, they began to agitate for an increased share of government offices."³² While the minor guildsmen were initially happy with this result, it soon began to change as they realized that they actually would have more power if they aligned themselves with the wool guild.³³ Machiavelli, too, asserts that those "who had shown themselves boldest feared that, with the greater differences quieted and composed, they would be punished for the mistakes committed by them and that, as always happens to them, they would be abandoned by those who had incited them to do evil."³⁴ Clearly they feared that Salvestro and his allies – the ones who had first initiated the rioting that led to the fall of the Parte Guelpha – might forsake them.

This provides another reason why the *popolo minuto* – the plebs as Machiavelli so called them – began to band together. This was based on the fact that, "the *minuti* heard a rumor that the new government for July-August, headed by a Standard Bearer from Oltrarno [the quarter of Santo Spirito], had brought in foreign executioners to punish them for the activities in June."³⁵ The *popolo minuto*, who were also in this case the *sottoposti*, were scared that the Florentine government was going to have them punished for their actions. This fear is generally attributed

²⁹ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 212.

³⁰ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 212-213.

³¹ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 213.

³² Trexler, "Follow the Flag," 367.

³³ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 215.

³⁴ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 120.

³⁵ Richard Trexler, *The Workers of Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, SUNY Binghamton, 1993), 67.

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as the leading cause for the *popolo minuto* uniting together. In addition to this, they felt that this was another step in the unfair treatment they received in Florentine society, for they were not allowed to have a voice in government because they were not members of the guild but rather subjects.

Realizing that they could work together to achieve a larger (or in the case of the *sottoposti*, an initial) voice within the government, the two groups – the minor guilds (*arte minori*) and the *popolo minuto* – united together against the major guildsmen (*arte maggiori*). Such a revolutionary move had previously been unknown in Florence, yet an alliance between the minor guilds and *popolo minuto* would give them a distinct numerical advantage over their opponents. And the *popolo minuto* would now be allied with the Ciompi, for the wool workers were ones who were recognized as uniting with the minor guilds. This was a clear break from the social structure, stratification, and constraints of Florentine society. Never before this had the *popolo minuto*, the *sottoposti*, or the Ciompi been so directly involved in making political decisions nor had they heretofore played a role within the government.

It is easy to see why the Ciompi were the ones to rise up. They were the largest and most populous guild in Florence, and yet they had no voice in the city's government. According to Machiavelli, "The lower classes, then, the subordinates not only of the woolen, but also of the other arts, were discontented, from the causes just mentioned; and their apprehension of punishment for their burnings and robberies they had committed, did not tend to compose them."³⁶ That very night, the Ciompi were beginning their nocturnal meetings. Bruni says, "the city mob, mostly poor men from the lowest class, already aroused by the discords amongst the greater citizens, began to hold nocturnal meetings and to discuss how they might lay claim to offices for themselves; and in the end they agreed to seek a guild of their own in the city and a place on the priorate." In these, it can be concluded that the *sottoposti* and *popolo minuto* had unifying goals – ones that the minor guilds would help them achieve. These goals, as Martin Breaugh points out, "aimed at democratizing the political system and the operation of the trade guilds by making the treatment of Florence's various social strata more egalitarian."³⁷ It was from these nocturnal meetings that the government sparked the populace of Florence into a frenzy.

On the afternoon of July 28, 1378, an informant reported on these nocturnal to the priors. In his reports, he spoke of these meetings and told the priors that in order to learn more about this, they must capture "someone named Simoncino, . . . (who) can tell you all about the planned conspiracy and what was planned."³⁸ The priors brought in Simoncino and he confessed to planning to riot at nine in the morning the next day. This was due to the threat of hanging by a brutal police official named ser Nuto from Città di Castello. He gave the names of others who had met at the *Spedale de Preti* (hospital of the priests) in Via San Gallo. In addition to these, he

³⁶ Machiavelli, *History of Florence*, trans. Smith, 128.

³⁷ Martin Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience: A Discontinuous History of Political Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 14.

³⁸ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 15.

confessed that men from good families, guildsmen, and those proscribed had joined the *sottoposti* in this cause; this included Giovanni Dini, a spice merchant who was previously part of the *Otto della Guerra* until the Parte Guelpha proscribed him.

When the priors asked Simoncino why the people wanted to rebel, he replied, “The carders, the wool combers and beaters, the dyers, the tanners, the washers and others who were subject to the wool guild (‘arte della lana’) no longer want to be subject to them and do not want their official to exist for them not to have anything to do with him. . . . And they also want a part in the ruling of the city. And they want any theft and arson committed against them not to be held against them.”³⁹ The priors, it seemed, were not as worried about what the Ciompi wanted so much as stamping out the leaders of this cause. Instead of having a discussion about the misfortunes and mistreatment of the subjects of Lana guild, they interrogated Simoncino for information on the leaders. The Priors probably felt that if they could take out the leaders, then the rioting could be brought to an end. Such thinking, however, was in error, as they would find out later in Simoncino’s testimony.

Deciding that this was not enough, the priors decided to escalate their tactics. They used torture. According to Fredona, “Simoncino broke under the pain of the *stappado* (*parecchi tratti* of rope) and added one crucial element to his earlier description of the plot: ‘that the leader and organizer of the conspiracy was Salvestro di messer Alamanno de’ Medici.”⁴⁰ This had a major impact upon the priors, for none of them suspected that the former Standard-Bearer himself was involved in the insurrection of the *sottoposti* and Ciompi. Two others later confirmed this, and the priors sent someone to retrieve Salvestro so they could hear his testimony:

The clever Salvestro, however, was able to escape a worse fate through diplomacy. Upon hearing his testimony, “The merciful priors honestly reproved and pardoned him, although some wanted to treat him otherwise.”⁴¹ In his testimony, Salvestro referred to these people “minuti” and “people hardly worth mentioning.” This shows clear distinction between Salvestro (and thus the patricians of the city) from the lower-end classes of Florentine society. And while Salvestro might have been saying this just to make his testimony sound more convincing, it seems far likely that this reflected his true feelings, given as it was under duress.

In addition to the shocking revelation surrounding Salvestro, Simoncino revealed plans detailing the revolt throughout the city:

The first to rise up would be those people from Camaldoli and from San Friano. The bells of the Carmine and San Friano would ring and then those of San Piero Gattolino and those of San Niccolo and of Orgissanti, of Santo Stefano a Ponte, of San Piero Maggiore and of San Lorenzo. Four groups would then gather: one in San Spirito, with a thousand men or more;

³⁹ Chronicle attributed to Acciaioli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 15.

⁴⁰ Accioui, quoted in Fredona, “Political Conspiracy in Florence, 1340-1382,” 107.

⁴¹ Chronicle attributed to Acciaioli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 17.

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another in Santo Stefano a Ponte, with 400 or more men; another in San Piero Maggiore, with 800 or more; and the last in San Lorenzo, would be innumerable.⁴²

The mass had developed a complex way of organizing and communicating. Using the ringing of church bells and the lighting of torches from church towers, they planned their movement meticulously. The large masses of people recorded by Simoncino certainly alarmed the priors, for they dispatched 230 lancers into the Piazza at dawn.

But a man named Niccolò degli Oriuoli, who was manning the palace clock, had heard of the priors plans and ran home, yelling “To arms, to arms; the priors are bent on slaughter. . . Arm yourselves, bad people; if not, you shall all die.”⁴³ Now aware of not only the prior’s plans but also of their torture of Simoncino, the people were enraged. They were willing to fight with violence and bloodshed in mind to avenge Simoncino and others who had been wronged. They sought to limit the ability of the Ser Nuto to execute and hang them, and to achieve their demands of participation within government through the creation of new guilds.

II.3. The Ciompi “Revolt”

On the morning of July 21, 1378 (different chroniclers and contemporaries detail different days, such as the 19 and 20 of July, in their writings), the Palazzo Vecchio had been densely packed with people. On one side, only about 80 or so of the 230 lancers had shown up to defend the priors and quell the Ciompi and *sottoposti*. On the other side, members of the fourteen minor guilds, the *sottoposti*, and the Ciompi severely outnumbered the lancers. They dominated the Piazza and knew that their numbers were superior; thus they moved when they had a clear and distinct upper hand. Shouting the very same phrase that had stirred the *popolo minuto* into a frenzy the previous month – “Long live the people” – the Ciompi won the Piazza. In doing so, the priors were trapped within their palace. They had little alternative but to listen to the demands of the Ciompi.

The Ciompi’s first action was to “demand with threats the return of the captives.”⁴⁴ When this was not done quickly enough, the Ciompi stormed the city towards the home of Luigi di Messer Piero Guicciardini, the current Standard-Bearer of Justice in Florence. Together, the Ciompi burned down his house and those of his relatives, hoping to make their point. It worked, and the Signoria handed over four prisoners that were being held at the Palace.⁴⁵ But this did not stop the Ciompi, for they were not done burning the residences of those whom they saw as opposing them. It is especially important that while the Ciompi burned down houses of these people, they did not loot and rob them like they had in the June burnings. This was probably due to the fact that the Ciompi wanted to distinguish themselves from the June burnings, which were done out of retribution and revenge rather than politics.

⁴² Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 16.

⁴³ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 17.

⁴⁴ Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, 3:7.

⁴⁵ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 217.

As a result of the mass arson, the Ciompi feared repercussions for their actions. That very evening they knighted over sixty people, including Salvestro de Medici and seven of the Eight of War.⁴⁶ It might at first glance seem odd that the Ciompi knighted, almost exclusively, citizens belonging to the upper-class of Florentine society, and yet, there was a certain logic in their action. Indeed, they hoped that by doing this that they would gain the protection of these people so that the priors and the Florentine government would not punish them. The upper-class citizens did not resist because, if they had done so, the Ciompi would have more than likely burned their residences along with those of their relatives. Even more peculiar in this knighting was the fact that the current Standard-Bearer, Luigi Guicciardini, was also knighted. The Ciompi had just burned the homes of Luigi and his relatives, yet they knighted him on the basis that they now held power over the most politically powerful person in Florence. This connects in tandem with Robert Fredona, who notes in his dissertation chapter, “Conspiracy and Tumult of the Ciompi,” that it is “entirely possible that Salvestro de’ Medici and Tommaso Strozzi themselves co-orchestrated the knighting ceremony (or, almost certainly, the early stages of it) along with the leaders of the *popolo minuto*, selecting for the new dignity their friends, allies, and fellow conspirators.”⁴⁷ Both the upper-class citizens and the Ciompi thus gained much from this knighting, in addition to its being a show of power.

But the Ciompi were not even remotely done with their demands and violent means. On the next day, they stormed the Palazzo Vecchio again. Seeing that they were by themselves, its guards departed (or perhaps even some joined the Ciompi) the Palazzo and went to defend their own homes rather than the priors. Unopposed, the Ciompi made demands upon the priors. One of the first demands was that the police official, Ser Nuto, be delivered to the people. Fearing for their own lives, they sent Ser Nuto to the Ciompi, who promptly “was hanged, dismembered and cut into tiny pieces which some took home in lumps weighing less than half an ounce.”⁴⁸ The priors, in order to quell this uprising, sent four people out to negotiate with the Ciompi, but instead they helped to fuel the riots taking place outside the Podesta’s Palace. The number of the people grew to the thousands and on the morrow and overnight, seeing that they could not leave the Palace, the priors fortified themselves within it. They “were determined to defend themselves valorously rather than leave the palace.”⁴⁹ The next morning, rain poured from the skies – so much that no one in Florence could ever remember that much falling. Perhaps this was foreshadowing the dreary days that the priors would face in the coming days.

The priors made one last attempt to understand the wishes of the Ciompi. They sent representatives to meet with “the heads of the plebs, with the syndics of the guilds and certain citizens” to figure out “what they wanted to demand from the Signoria.”⁵⁰ These petitions had been prepared and the Ciompi were ready to announce their demands. In the *Chronicle* attributed

⁴⁶ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 83.

⁴⁷ Fredona, “Political Conspiracy in Florence, 1340-1382,” 124.

⁴⁸ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 85.

⁴⁹ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 20.

⁵⁰ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 126.

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to Alamanno Acciaiuoli,⁵¹ the author defines twenty-eight clear and concise demands of the Ciompi, and notes that these were just the requests that he could remember off the top of his head. Similarly, Machiavelli sums it up as:

The Wool guild could no longer have a foreign judge; that three new guild corporations be formed, one for the carders and dyers, another for the barbers, double makers, tailors, and such mechanical arts, and the third for lesser people; and that from these three new guilds there would always be two Signori and from the fourteen lesser guilds three; that the Signoria should provide houses where these guilds could meet.⁵²

The demands of the Ciompi were relatively modest compared to how extreme they might have been. After the burning and looting that had taken place, the Florentine government would be ill advised to turn this down, for if they did not, Florence would likely become a battleground – one that would be bathed in blood. Knowing they had the upper hand, the Ciompi were structuring the government so that they would be able to rival the major and minor guilds for political power. This was the most ambitious element of their demands. They had always borne the costs of society; now they were going to reap the benefits. With this new structure, they desired to be political and social equals, regardless of class or wealth.

Immediately afterwards, the People's Council met and passed these demands, leaving it up to the Council of Commune to pass these and make them active in Florentine society. The voices outside from the Ciompi in the Piazza were so loud that the councilmen could scarcely hear themselves. The measure was passed but one prior, Guerriante di Matteo Marignolli, went to check the door to make sure the Ciompi were not entering. In all actuality, he lied and tried to leave, but as the Ciompi saw him departing, this united them together. They started yelling "Let them all come down, for we no longer want them to be priors." Tommaso di Marco degli Strozzi entered the Palace and told the priors of the betrayal and lying of Marignolli and that "it is for this reason the 'popolo' and the guildsmen want you to go home." The priors were shocked. They had agreed to the demands of the Ciompi, yet now they faced an alternative that no one previously could have imagined: leave and no longer be part of Florence's government, or risk the burnings of their homes and those of their relatives in addition to threats of having their families and children murdered in front of them. And so only the Eight remained in the palace.⁵³

With only the Eight, some servants, and a few other people remaining inside the Palace, the Ciompi stormed the Palace of the Podestà. Upon entering, one of their ranks named Michele di Lando asked his companions, "Do you want me to handle your affairs?" to which they replied

⁵¹ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 21-24.

⁵² Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 126.

⁵³ Chronicle attributed to Acciaiuoli, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 25.

in the affirmative.⁵⁴ Michele di Lando, a comber, was of a humble origin, and he was “barefoot and scantily clothed.”⁵⁵ Yet, on this day, he became the Standard-Bearer of Justice and Podestà. Immediately upon becoming the Standard-Bearer, “he publicly commanded that no one burn or steal anything.”⁵⁶ After calming the city, he set about making changes to the government and politics of Florence as he saw fit. This included “making and unmaking decisions, holding the keys, locking the city, writing letters and giving orders on his own behalf.”⁵⁷ Additionally, it was the Eight of War who were determined to pick the next priors of the city to join di Lando on the Signoria, but di Lando was one step ahead of them. He created the Signoria: four priors from the lesser plebs, two from the greater guilds and two from the lesser guilds.⁵⁸ Thus, he chose the new priors by himself.

Obviously the Eight of War felt that they had been outmaneuvered and deceived by Michele di Lando. But that was of minimum concern to di Lando, who picked the Council of the Sixteen Standard-Bearers and the Twelve Good Men (Council of the Buonomini). Thus, Michele di Lando had complete control of the government. And while the Florentine government was still republican in form, it was now authoritarian in control. Each of these new members of the government “came to the rostrum as had been the custom of other priors and each was sworn into office” and “all swore never to work against the prevailing regime; and so each swore to God’s honour.”⁵⁹ In doing this, they created three new guilds. Now nearly 13,000 men were members of guilds in contrast to the previous total membership of 4,000–5,000. Every male of working age who was now a member of a major or minor guild could potentially participate in government.⁶⁰

This new government was not perfect in any sense. First of all, the upper-level citizens and major guilds that had so long played a role in the defense of Florence were not a part of this new government – at least physically. Michele di Lando knew that he would need some sort of military defense, so, in order to reinforce to Ciompi and the *popolo minuto*, he commissioned 1500 crossbowmen, many of whom had company-commanders who belonged to the upper-levels of the Florentine social hierarchy.⁶¹ In addition, rather than being employed as wool workers, they were professional soldiers.⁶² Despite the logic in di Lando’s action and its efficacy for the city, their appointment angered the Ciompi, who had worked hard to show themselves capable of handling themselves.

⁵⁴ Chronicle of Nofri di ser Piero delle Riformagioni, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 64.

⁵⁵ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 127.

⁵⁶ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 128.

⁵⁷ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 86.

⁵⁸ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 128.

⁵⁹ First Anonymous Chronicle, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 41.

⁶⁰ Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 165.

⁶¹ First Anonymous Chronicle, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 41.

⁶² Richard Trexler, “Neighbors and Comrades: The Revolutionaries of Florence, 1378.” *Social Analysis* 14 (December 1983): 85.

II.4. The “Reaction” to the Ciompi Revolt

In August, the Signori decided to work on a new “scrutiny” (a list of guild members who were eligible for public office) that was drawn up with the intention of retaining the Standard-Bearer of Justice within the three newly-created guilds rather than allowing the major and minor guilds to control this important office. This satisfied the new guilds, but apparently sparked the beginning of a union between the major and minor guilds that would emerge in the weeks ahead. These were not the only tensions, however, for others were rising within the Ciompi as well. The Ciompi were breaking down into factions, and many of these factions were separating over their beliefs and ideals on how best to run the commune. This is, in part, due to the fact that Michele di Lando and his government were ruling with an iron fist, even against the very people they had sworn to protect. The dissatisfied and angry Ciompi responded in the best way they could: they created a new *balìa* of eight men, two from each quarter to represent them as they presented a new petition to Lando’s government. The priors agreed to sign it, but Michele di Lando refused and had one of the representatives imprisoned.⁶³

With two factions of the Ciompi squaring off, the first moves were made by the *popolo* as they entered the Piazza della Signoria, completely surrounded Palazzo Vecchio, and forced their petition onto the di Lando government. The petition declared that knights (comprised of nobles and powerful burghers) could no longer hold office, much like the Law of Admonition had formerly restricted magnates. Messer Luca di Totto da Panzano again read the petition before the commune and the *popolo*, who accepted it to everyone’s satisfaction. In addition, Luca became a spokesman for the *popolo* bearing the official title of *popolano* (“man of the people”).⁶⁴ He became their captain and worked with the new *balìa* of eight – the Eight of Santa Maria Novella – on behalf of the *popolo minuto*.⁶⁵ But this was short lived, as he attempted to use the *popolo minuto* to extract his revenge upon Ghibellines by burning and looting their houses. Hearing of this, the *popolo minuto* rejected Luca and by the next day he had fled Florence for fear of his life. The *popolo minuto* returned to Santa Maria Novella to debate their next move.

While debating their next move, a new Signoria was drawn up through a process. The Ciompi and other *popolo minuto* occupying the Piazza either cried out, “We don’t want him, tear it up, tear it up,” or else “Good, good.”⁶⁶ Although the priors had long been considered to be the most powerful men in the city, these new priors were confronted by the Eight of Santa Maria Novella who had been elected by the *popolo minuto*. According to Bruni, the power of the Eight stemmed from “fear . . . and certain great men joined them, not without deference.”⁶⁷ Machiavelli reported further that they had “ministers and orders that gave them reputation and

⁶³ First Anonymous Chronicle, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 45.

⁶⁴ First Anonymous Chronicle, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 46.

⁶⁵ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 92.

⁶⁶ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 93.

⁶⁷ Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, 3:11.

reverence.”⁶⁸ Regardless of the source of their power, they clearly posed a serious challenge to Michele di Lando and his government.

With tensions increasing, two representatives of the Ciompi went to Michele di Lando to talk, thinking that they had the upper hand due to their large numbers and the power of the Eight of Santa Maria Novella. Michele di Lando, after listening to them for some time, became increasingly annoyed. In a brash act, he told them he would be right back and instead armed himself, asking, “Where are the traitors?”⁶⁹ Then he “rushed at them, slashing and wounding one of them in the face and spearing the other with the point of this weapon.”⁷⁰ Michele di Lando now was acting as the *de facto* ruler of Florence, as his power consumed him.

The Ciompi soon realized that he no longer represented their interests. Knowing that the Ciompi would now become enraged, he moved quickly. That same day, di Lando himself rode out on horseback and alone attempted to clear the Piazza della Signoria of the Ciompi, who were chanting the very same phrase used in the past tumults: “Long live the People.”⁷¹ It worked, and he cleared the Ciompi, if only momentarily from the Piazza. This enabled the guildsmen to enter the Piazza, swelling their numbers. A bloody fight ensued.⁷² Another tactic was used on August 31st when the *popolo minuto* and Ciompi refused to give up their banner of the Angel. Instead di Lando decreed that, under the threat of losing their feet, they must be under their guild banner while in the Piazza. Now clearly identified as distinct from the guilds, members of the Ciompi and *popolo minuto* came under fierce assault:

Here they [the Ciompi] stood quietly. Then the innkeeper’s guild, that is the butchers, and those with the golden banner, put themselves in front of these people and formed a huge barrier of shields, as they had been ordered to do. For when they received a sign from the palace, they were to strike. This happened at nine o’clock of the same evening. The ‘popolo’ defended itself vigorously. . . . When those traitorous gentlemen, called by their guild name, and the members of the wool guild, saw that the ‘popolo’ would not let itself be crushed, they threw many stones and arrows on to them, they thought themselves done for. So they turned around to flee, but were crushed and driven out. Many were killed and wounded on that day.”⁷³

This account shows that the bond within the Ciompi was strong, and that they were defeated more by betrayal rather than by the physical prowess of the guilds. According to another account however, a brigade of crossbowmen drew their bows, prompting the guilds to call them treacherous. Well-armed, the guilds were simply able to defeat the Ciompi.⁷⁴ This demonstrates

⁶⁸ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 129.

⁶⁹ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 96.

⁷⁰ Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, 3:13.

⁷¹ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 96.

⁷² Trexler, “Follow the Flag,” 384-385.

⁷³ First Anonymous Chronicle, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 48.

⁷⁴ Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, 229.

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that the guilds and the government relied more upon brute strength, and that was how they won the day. The Ciompi were massacred that day, and the betrayal of Michele di Lando would forever be remembered.

The next day, September 1, 1378, a new Signoria was elected. Two Ciompi were included in it; but when armed citizens entered and protested this, the two Ciompi were replaced with guildsmen. This left Michele di Lando (and five others) as the only Ciompi within the government.⁷⁵ With these people taking power, it was also declared on this day that the twenty-fourth guild of Ciompi should be disbanded while the other two were to be maintained. Afterwards, the government restructured itself, deciding that “no Ciompi was to hold office Five priors were to be drawn from these sixteen [minor] guilds and four from the seven major or employer’s guilds. The Standard-bearer of Justice was to be chosen alternately from these groups of five and four priors, the first being from the five.”⁷⁶ Two things can be concluded from this reorganization of the government. The first is that no Ciompi could hold office. This effectively ended the Ciompi Revolt and brought it back to how it all had begun in June, namely, as a power struggle between the guildsmen. This leads to a second conclusion, which is that the major guilds were not going to be content with the minor guilds receiving more positions in every political body of the Florentine government. Ultimately, this would invoke yet another power struggle, one that would bring Michele di Lando’s downfall. Salvestro de’ Medici would come to power and rule Florence as a virtual dictator until the return of the Guelfs to power four years later.

III. The Lasting Impact of the Ciompi Revolt: What Did They Gain and Lose?

The Ciompi Revolt lasted until 1382. After the events in late August and early September, certain elements of the Ciompi Regime held strong. The most intriguing part is that Salvestro de Medici, the one whose colleagues considered at fault for the entire revolt, became effectively the dictator of Florence from mid-September 1378 until 1382. According to Robert Fredona, the entire Ciompi Revolt was “a secret plan set in motion by Salvestro and his allies.”⁷⁷ This seems difficult to believe, for no one at the time could have predicted how the events over the next three months would turn out. Yet, somehow, Salvestro de Medici ended up controlling all of Florence for nearly four years. He lost his power only when the Guelph faction came back to Florence, ousting him in the process. With the return of the Guelphs, the twenty-second and twenty-third guilds were also disbanded, and the government returned to the structure it had held prior to June 1378.

Despite the return of the old form of government, it is safe to say that the Ciompi Revolt played a pivotal role in Florentine politics and society for centuries afterwards. First and foremost, it would leave a rift between the major and minor guilds that would continue to exist in

⁷⁵ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Banfield and Mansfield, 130.

⁷⁶ Stefani, *Florentine Chronicle*, in *Chronicles of the Tumult of the Ciompi*, ed. and trans. Kantor/Green, 98.

⁷⁷ Fredona, “Political Conspiracy in Florence, 1340-1382,” 149.

socio-political terms. The major guildsmen, who were wealthy but more importantly had a high social status, would often come to blows with the minor guilds, whose status as *gente nuova* strictly meant that they were only in these guilds because of their increasing wealth. Socio-political status and wealth often conflict and, due to their actions within the Ciompi Revolt, the guilds would continue their rift well after it. Additionally, Florence's powerful elites and government had been increasing their fear over time that the Ciompi and lower classes were always plotting against them and would revolt once again. This led to a more authoritarian oligarchic government, one that would continue to suppress the lower classes. Perhaps the most important impact of the Ciompi Revolt stems from Salvestro de Medici. As dictator, he was the first from the Medici house to control the government of Florence. During the next century his descendants, now prominent bankers, would establish a dynasty that would, in effect, rule Florence behind the scenes, even though, despite their near total control of Florentine politics through their enormous wealth and personal influence, they would carefully manage their public image by refusing to hold public office themselves.

It is easy to argue that this paper focuses on the exploitation of the Ciompi and the *popolo minuto* by the upper-class citizens. But this paper argues that the exploitation was due to the class stratification and structure within Florence. The hegemony and deference of the Ciompi were due to the social constraints that tied and bound them at the heels of the patricians and magnates of Florentine society. It is clear that their exploitation was a product of this social stratification and constraints. When these constraints were broken, the Ciompi united and were able to form a new identity – one that was far different from the previous one. Ultimately, if it were not for these constraints and the tensions emanating from the social hierarchy, the Ciompi Revolt might never have occurred.

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