Around noon on 15 May 1952, Teresa H., a fifteen-year-old servant girl, appeared before the Landpolizei station chief (Hauptwachtmeister) Nunner in the town of Töging am Inn in Upper Bavaria. Too young for the regular government-issued residence registration and identity card (the Personalausweis), Teresa was applying for a temporary ID document from the police in order to travel to a “youth rally” in Essen. Free transportation was somehow being made available for people from Töging and other country towns who wished to take part. His suspicions aroused, Nunner called the Munich Landpolizei headquarters, which informed him that the Essen “rally” was actually a meeting of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth), the youth arm of the German Communist Party (KPD). Teresa led Nunner to Xaver Hahn, the trip’s local organizer and publicist. At Hahn’s house later that day, the police detained a number of waiting youths and the driver of a bus that had arrived from the neighboring town of Neuötting. Hahn was interrogated at the Töging Landpolizei station, the bus was driven back under police escort to Neuötting, and the bus firm was placed under police observation. Hahn’s interrogation revealed that a stranger named Rohmann or Grohmann had provided him with money and posters announcing the trip. Rohmann/Grohmann’s trail grew cold, however, when the bus company owner could not provide any further information. The fate of Hahn was not recorded; nor do we know whether Teresa H. ever got her temporary identity document.¹

The American occupation had attempted to circumscribe German police activity to crime control and public safety. Teresa H.’s experience, however, highlights the way in which the Landpolizei was still

intimately involved in many aspects of both “administrative policing” and the surveillance of routine non-criminal community life into the 1950s. Into the period of the Federal Republic, the force continued to perform a variety of authoritarian functions quite distinct from the maintenance of basic public safety. This outcome was encouraged primarily because an official legal basis for a more limited concept of policing did not appear until 1954. A gap thus existed between the end of U.S. supervision in 1949 and the beginning of native efforts to reevaluate police operations from a legal and constitutional standpoint. The first years after 1949 were therefore a second phase in the transition to peacetime during which occupation regulations and practices were still operative. When new police laws did appear by the middle 1950s, they reflected a persistent ambiguity about the nature and purpose of the police force and its proper tasks. Despite a stated agenda of limiting police powers, the provisions of this new legislation in effect managed to subtly fossilize some of the conceptual overlaps that historically had linked police functions with the rest of the German state administration.

The persistence of a traditional basing structure joined legal ambiguity as an important factor encouraging the survival of traditional forms of police authoritarianism. Policemen in 1950s Bavaria remained scattered in small posts in hundreds of rural communities. Continual patrolling of the same area perpetuated the familiarity with the habits, interests, and conflicts among the settled inhabitants (and an attendant knowledge of changes in movement patterns, economic diversification, and the relations of traditional and non-traditional population groups) that had provided the foundation for authoritarian forms of policing in previous eras. Both legal ambiguity and ongoing close contact with the population would eventually encourage a tendency to deploy police power in the interests of conservative cultural defense against economic and demographic change.

From their far-flung network of local stations, policemen continued to enforce the compulsory registration of the identities and residence of the inhabitants of the communities they patrolled.2 Such activities were only one manifestation of the lingering attractions of an older police model. In the same tradition, police supervision of building, health, and other community regulations continued to be

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2 Fairchild, German Police, 37.