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ERP AID AND THE POLITICS OF PRODUCTIVITY
IN ITALY DURING THE 1950S

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Italy

This article evaluates the implementation and the effectiveness of US productivity policy in Italy at the beginning of the 1950's. After having reconstructed the factors motivating the American initiative - with reference to Charles Maier's theses - the concrete articulation of the policy will be analysed, in the context of the Marshall Plan, e.g. the technical aid programs and the 14 "tools" for productivity.

The effectiveness of these programs varied from country to country and prompted adaptations and reactions on a national basis, which have only now begun to be the object of historical research. This article examines, in the case of Italy, the reactions of the government and the major social forces (organizations of entrepreneurs, trade unions, and technicians) to the productivity policy promoted by the ECA. From this analysis the partial nature of the Italian interpretation of the American program appears evident, as well as the impediments and hesitations on both sides. In substance, the idea of a recovery based on the expansion of mass-consumption was rejected in favour of a return to the growth model of the 1920s. The ideology of productivity also met with lack of success: it was neither able to attract a widespread consensus, nor to contain Communism. This point, however, which concerns the short term, should also be seen from another point of view which takes long-term dynamics into consideration.

Marshall aid involved a modernization of industrial technologies and the organization of work, as well as a new orientation for Italian industrial culture. Slowly - much more slowly than in other countries - the inclination for change emerged. In addition to exports, the driving force behind postwar growth, the domestic market also expanded, thanks to state intervention. A number of firms adapted their production to this process, and in doing so, furthered it. In these cases, there was more room for modernizing proposals. Nevertheless, Italian society, as a whole, throughout the 1950s experienced a large-scale "forced accumulation" rather than a prosperity based upon productivity and mass consumption.

For this reason, any interpretation which emphasizes the americanization of national reality should be examined critically. The specificity of the Italian case, here examined, suggests that US productivity policy had only very partial success.

"We too can prosper"

- ERP Aid and the politics of productivity in

Italy during the 1950s

'L'Europa per sollevarsi ha bisogno di nuove idee, non di applicare, bene o male, quello che è stato fatto in America'

Adriano Olivetti

With the shift in historiographical interest from the vexed question of the origins of the Cold War to its impact upon contemporary societies, a key issue has been the nature (and limits) of the American postwar hegemony. This is no less knotty a problem, packed with interwoven economic, military and cultural implications that are hard to reduce to an unambiguous, linear scheme. One cannot avoid - even in a comparative setting - the special nature of this hegemony and of the ideology that moderated its 'command' aspects in practice. 'Politics of productivity' is the suggestive formula adopted by Charles Maier to define the main guiding motive of American approaches to the European societies after the Second World War (1). I shall attempt to set the implementation of this policy in a particular context, the Italian one, and offer a few conclusions on its incisiveness.

Maier's thesis can be summed up under three heads. First, he stresses the strong continuity of ideological approaches and political paradigms linking the periods after the First and after the Second World Wars. As they

had been thirty years before, the aims of material reconstruction in Europe were inseparable from those of social stabilization. However, the cultural baggage from which to draw adequate responses had become considerably enriched, starting with the debate on 'rationalization' in the 1920s. This thinking was common for a while to both shores of the Atlantic, from the second half of the thirties, brought to the US thanks largely to the migrant elites from Europe, with their intellectual commitment, which became political in the New Deal. The idea of 'rationalization' as a permanent response to economic depression and as ideal ground for settlement of disputes underwent a sharp pragmatic twist in the America of the 1930s, with the need for immediate answers to the tensions that had exploded in the great crisis. This was no mere interesting episode in cultural history. The New Deal, as Maier stresses, in all its complexity (and ambivalence), contained a concept of social engineering that was, as it were, destined for success.

Growth in productivity was secured through convergent action by the 'public hand' (in the labour market and in mobilizing financial resources) and by the 'private hand' (technical modernization, product standardization, scientific management). This growth was converted into a two-fold virtuous circle. On the one hand, it supported mass production, i.e. the creation of supply to cope with increasing demand; on the other, through redistribution of profits in wage increases, it supported a wider market of mass consumption. Productivity and consumption were the poles of a sequence able to restrain tension and give new cohesion to the social system. Productivity is a common interest of worker and employer in the daily life of the firm, just as economic growth is a goal that all subjects must desire, whatever their position vis-à-vis the market. Clearly, on both sides social control was pursued through a considerable deideologization of industrial conflicts.

The 'politics of productivity' was bipartisan in US political terms - among its proponents being the Democrat Harriman and the Republican Hoffman - despite the differing stresses on the role of the various subjects involved: public and private, unions and bosses. It secured increasing support among employers as it reduced the interventionism of the original New Deal, and from the unions since it left them considerable room for bargaining by suggesting the translation of wealth resulting from increased productivity into wage increases. While some intellectuals (and politicians) may have seen it as an undermining of Roosevelt's policies, at the Administration it seemed more the definition of a fixed - i.e. non-cyclical - terrain of autonomous powers. In fact, the politics of productivity called for a not inconsiderable institutional presence. The Agency, the institution called on to sustain the corporatist pluralism inherent in the plan, far from depriving the bureaucracy of power, definitively legitimized its function by extending its mediatory role (2).

The second outstanding point of Maier's interpretation, developed also by students of the war economy, is the decisive contribution to the politics of productivity offered by practical experimentation resulting from the war situation. What might have remained an episodic experiment linked to the great crisis, became daily practice in the US as early as 1941-5, and the daily bread of the Truman Administration's 'Fair Deal' (3). For this reason too, for the US policy to postwar Europe productivity drive simultaneously developed into a paradigm. Faced with the problems of the postwar situation, the administration delegated postwar planning to people and institutions linked in many ways to the politics of productivity of the later New Deal. The solution to the inextricable and largely incomprehensible European

problems seemed to lie primarily in a transposition of the economic and social mechanism that had overcome the crisis in the US.

What is questionable in this part of Maier's analysis - careful as he is to recall the precedents from the 1920s for this attitude towards the export of an economic and social 'model' - is the underestimation of motives related more directly to the dynamics of international relations in the interpretation of US postwar foreign policy (4). There is also perhaps an overestimation of internal consensus for the plan, especially in the years when North American public opinion returned to isolationism. What is certain is that it was the anti-Soviet priority and the 'red peril' within the European societies that rendered acceptable to the various branches of the US political system the idea that it was somehow necessary to 'reform capitalism' in the old continent. It was only in a backward society or one without redistribution of the benefits of growth to workers (and consumers) that communism could put down roots, undermining the societies and the international alliances from within and reopening the way to totalitarianism in Europe. This was the most consistent reasoning for those who believed in a 'technical' solution to social conflict and in democracy based not so much on mass political participation as on mass market participation, in the specific form of exponential growth in consumption (5). The economism of the politics of productivity, already clear in its impact on US society, is still more striking in the European social context; but this fact was to be picked up only later. In the late 1940s, the plan was if anything one of the few interpretive keys available to US officials and public opinion seeking to understand the dialectics of European society. The key had a twofold ideological appeal. It confirmed those who held it in their own perception of superiority. The conviction of offering Europe not just material benefits

(goods and technology), but also 'values', prolonged the dream of 'manifest destiny' and tended to transform officials into crusaders (6). On the other hand, the most sensitive continental interlocutor, the middle class shaken by the collapse of the pivotal ideologies of European civilization, the nationalisms, still mistrustful of socialism, saw it as restoring a set of traditional values reinterpreted in the light of practical success as daily displayed by American prosperity. Thus, through the interaction of several subjects, the politics of productivity was able to become the ideological cement for a hegemony with specific financial, economic, political and military repercussions, which we cannot go into here.

This concatenation of themes and links had as its active centre the Marshall Plan. Not that the ERP - the devising of which was rather troubled and contradictory - was a direct translation of the project into practical economic policy; it was more the opportunity that partly set going, or gathered together, trends and fragments from a number of preexisting projects, and partly a constraint on the various interlocutors to adjust to it or react (7). By comparison with Maier's interpretation, close consideration of the ERP affair leads to still more insistence on the non-linearity of US policy and particularly the unhomogeneity of European response to the politics of productivity.

On the one hand, the plurality of American decision-making centres opened the road to differentiation in space and time of positions on the key questions: how to contain the Soviet Union and the communists; what social and political forces to favour in bilateral relations; whether to 'reform' or simply 'restore' capitalism. Responses in different countries and to different phases of the ERP cannot always be related back to the politics of productivity. European response varied more than US historians generally

tend to believe. There was an open reaction to the 'Americanization' of cultural, technological and social paradigms - to mention only three areas - now receiving attention from researchers (8). There was a less passive adaptation than believed, even where the politics of productivity seemed to meet with complete success, as in Britain and West Germany. We should therefore ask whether the option for productivity growth and the finding of institutions capable of predetermining the distribution of the benefits of growth owed more to the American plan or to preexisting political traditions and autonomous social strategies. Corporatist pluralism is, at bottom, a policy with European features (9). Anyway, the plan did not seem as new in every country as it did in Italy.

In the context of the Marshall Plan, the most consistent US pursuit of politics of productivity goes back to 1949. There is no doubt that the aim of 'self-sustaining' economic growth, present from the initial formulation of the programme in summer 1947, implied substantial modification also of trends in productivity of capital and labour in Europe. But the main stress was on restoring the balance of payments of the old continent; or rather, the individual national payment balances with the US. This immediately shifted attention to issues of rehabilitating internal finances, stabilizing prices and exchange rates, and restoring multilateralism in international trade. The international economic policy introduced by Bill Clayton - as more attentive historians have noted - moves in this direction, though not without contradictions (10). Given the impossibility of restoring the central position of Europe (and Britain) in the system of international trade, the US sought financial remedies for a structural imbalance. The result, in 1949, was an impasse, worse because it coincided with US trade cycle problems. The ECA and State Department economic experts - not always

in agreement on the assessment of European problems - faced with the umpteenth sterling crisis and the related European inability even to mutually coordinate distribution of ERP aid, shifted attention towards differences in productivity and different market sizes. The autumn 1949 currency readjustment was the precondition for an approach to the structural problems of European reconstruction. The demand and supply sides were faced simultaneously. Insistence on productivity was combined with the pressure for liberalization of trade. Productivity, standardization and expansion of consumption and liberalization of trade were part of a single line of action (11).

Economic motivations went together with social and political considerations. Between 1947 and 1949, the inflow of goods and the massive propaganda and financial intervention, both political and military (as in Greece), certainly shifted internal equilibria in favour of the conservative parties. But tensions were not at all lacking. The very strength of the larger communist parties in western Europe was notable. Their disintegration, hoped and striven for, came neither in Italy nor in France. In Italy political agitation even intensified, involving new areas such as the south. Here too, then, the logic of emergency intervention in support of other initiatives had to be transcended. To overcome the destabilizing forces, social relationships needed to be redesigned within a framework of development, instead of backwardness. 'Productivity' then became a true 'political philosophy'.

Confirmation of this development is to be sought within the ERP mechanism. Until autumn 1949, the illusion of a short-term solution to Europe's problems meant subordination of the Politics of productivity to other approaches. Apart from the propaganda dimension - analysed by D.W.

Ellwood - the task of transmitting the decisive impulse for modernization of managerial (and union) behaviour to the economic system was initially entrusted to the 'Technical Assistance' division of the ECA. Section 11a of the Economic Cooperation Act of 3 April 1948 provided for bilaterally coordinated initiatives in this direction. The ECA itself specified what was meant: study of ways of increasing productivity of industry and farming; study of conditions on the various internal and world markets, to facilitate sale of products; study of existing relationships between employers and workers 'and ways of utilizing workers' ideas to reduce production costs and improve social relationships'; organization of government departments with a view to financial reform and assignment of new economic powers; studies on development possibilities in colonies and dependent territories. As with other aspects of ERP legislation, here too the agency was overwhelmed with suggestions, linked not only with the above-mentioned general goals but with more specific needs and attitudes of Congress and internal pressure groups. The last point, for instance, showed US interest in using the resources of Europe's colonies more than a will to redefine what we now call north-south relationships. But apart from that, one should note the low financing provided for in the Act (6 million dollars in the first year), even regarding the task as defined; this allocation proved to be triple the actually used funds, with the disappointing result for the first year of the division's life of the reversion of 4 million dollars to the treasury (12).

Truman's state of the nation message of 20 January 1949, however, relaunched this line of action. Confirming the three major goals of US foreign policy as participation in the UN and consolidation of its role, development of the ERP and constitution of the Atlantic Pact, the President inserted a 'fourth point' in his own programme. The object was utilization,

in cooperation with other countries, in particular for development of natural resources in 'depressed areas' of the world and for improving standards of living, of America's accumulated technical progress. The transfer of technology and know-how was explicitly linked not only with bilateral relationships between administrations or public agencies, but with market mechanisms, i.e. US private investment abroad. In June 1949 the President asked Congress for a first appropriation for this of 45 million dollars. A few months earlier, 17 million dollars had been requested for technical assistance to European countries in the second year of the ERP. The problems of backward areas - rendered politically explosive by Asian events - were combined with Europe's, where material reconstruction was not leading to the hoped-for self-sustained growth. Hence the urgency of rethinking the previous year's figures (13). The programme of Technical Assistance to Europe, then, took off in autumn 1949, with striking differences in impact from country to country.

It is worthwhile looking at the extremes. In Britain, acceptance of the American programme seemed complete. In spring 1947, the Labour Party had already set the objective of increased productivity at the centre of its economic programme, as key to national reconstruction. "To increase national output, every worker must increase his own productivity. Labour Party members should help the Labour government to bring both workers and managers to meditate on collaboration for a society founded upon abundance instead of antagonism in a society characterized by restrictions'. Nevertheless, even in such seemingly ideologically prepared terrain for the central message of the US initiative, its specific terms met with mistrust and hostility. The proposal for a joint Anglo-American committee on productivity was long

opposed, not just by the Labour left but also by influential press organs and conservative political circles.

No historian has reconstructed the long diplomatic bargaining leading to the birth of the Anglo-American Council of Productivity (AACP), but the British objections to it are well known. Fear of breach of industrial secrets by American technicians and proud emphasis that transatlantic economic superiority depended on quite other factors than modernity of plant and technologies (not to mention the widespread conviction of the inferiority of US trade unions, offered as a model) were part of a more complex attitude of coldness towards the whole of US international economic policy (14).

Accepted chiefly for political reasons - thanks to the decisive commitment of Stafford Cripps - the AACP soon became the starting point for similar initiatives in France and Germany. While in France the 'productivity campaign' was an integral part of the modernization programme pursued by Monnet and the Commissariat Général au Plan (15), in Germany its institutional and programmatic features suggest considerable continuity with the 'rationalizing' ideologies and initiatives of the 1920s (16). In both cases, as in Britain, the American programme, though assimilated, was reinterpreted and redefined in unequivocally specific national terms. Insistence on the 'Mitbestimmung' aspects of a productivity programme in Germany, or British officiousness over national supervision even of research done by foreign technicians, are significant indicators.

And Italy? "The CIR-ERP and the Italian delegation for economic cooperation, together with the ECA mission to Italy, have for some time been studying problems related to technical assistance, in particular analysing the main factors blocking growth of productivity in Italy, and have drawn up

a full programme for coordinating ERP technical assistance in our country" (17). From the political viewpoint, Italian commitment had not been lacking, especially through the lively interest shown by the country right from the first talks on the ERP - with firms, public bodies, unions and employers' associations - in developing technical and scientific exchange. The list of sectors that were to be covered by coordination through the committee and its sub-committees is long: study and divulgation of technical procedures, technical missions to the US and other ERP countries, meetings with American technicians in Italy etc. But as the national commitment became more defined, the complex of motives and aims publicized by the ECA shrank to the bare bones of not much more than modest support for the flow of know-how that some Italian and US firms had already developed, not only after the war, but even in the '20s and '30s. The first ECA appropriation, of 1 million dollars to be drawn from the Technical Assistance Fund on presentation of particular programmes, and 500 million Italian lire of the Interim Aid for costs in local currency, were significant but hardly overwhelming amounts. Enough to finance study trips to the US by experts from the Bank of Italy, Finance Ministry, main agricultural administrations but not to set going the virtuous circle of adaptation of new technologies and new organizational models - productivity growth - that all felt would soon solve the Italian economy's basic imbalance vis-à-vis the US (18).

This is not to underplay the importance of the first steps in the US technical assistance programme, thanks to which, essentially, Italian trade unionism consolidated its transatlantic cultural and economic links. US trips by 'democratic trade unionists' were indeed to be the ECA's most publicized outcome, not only inside Italy, but also in the annual report to Congress on technical assistance activity (19).

The Italian 'underestimation' of the TA programme, clear from the outset, was to become still more evident in later years.

In January 1951, the ECA had authorized expenditure of 19.8 million dollars by the sixteen member countries of the OEEC. 46% of these funds were used, but the average concealed highly divergent national results. In some countries, where the productivity campaign was accepted and adapted to overall planning of economic and technical resources for reconstruction, the average was reached; where technical assistance had early come to mean support for defence programmes - as in Greece and to some extent Germany - the proportion of appropriations spent was higher. By contrast, Italy spent only 15.1% of the sums available. In the area of industrial productivity studies, Italian capacity to use the sums earmarked was still less. In the decisive sector, at least according to declarations by the relevant authorities, of studies on use of Italian labour abroad, expenditure was no more than 21,500 dollars out of 456,400 authorized, all for costs of US trips (20). While the interministerial committee's official publications refrained from comment, there were bitter reactions from public opinion. "That the purpose was primarily tourism," wrote E. Massaccesi in "Mondo Economico" of the trips, "was often all too apparent." The difference between the 'productivity' of technical assistance in Britain and Italy was striking, reflecting differing overall government attitudes to development promotion (21).

The ECA mission to Italy itself found the experience of technical assistance disappointing by comparison with the intentions. Criticism began as soon as the unsatisfactory results of the first year came out. In spring 1949, in parallel with the critical readjustment to the Country Study generally attributed to Hoffman, mission chief Zellerbach gave E.H. Biddle

the job of redefining the tasks of the technical assistance programme in Italy. These tasks were to be the organizational support to the 'turn round' in Italian economic policy hoped for in the country study. Biddle's report stressed the mission's unanimity on the need for 'administrative reform', to make the results of Italian reconstruction last: a reform involving both incisive tax policy and efficient tax administration within a framework of organic coordination at ministerial level of economic policy. Technical assistance was to play a leading role in modernizing Italian administrative machinery, eliminating its authoritarian centralism and bureaucratic rigidity. This meant bringing the productivity 'message' from Washington to the heart of the public and private economic structure. Given the lack of progress, unease returned. The impression is - as can be read in a summary note from the ECA Technical Assistance Division in Washington of October 1950 - that the Italian government never had any clear idea of technical assistance as investment in overall economic policy. The study of the US tax system by experts from the relevant Italian ministry, it stressed, brought no significant changes to the fiscal reform bill being discussed by Parliament. The research into US national accounting criteria had not improved Italian statistics.

The meagre results and the patent uninterest of the Italian interlocutors - from Confindustria to government - did not stop US determination in this direction (22).

The 14 tools for productivity.

While in the first phase of the Marshall Plan productivity increases had been perceived as essential for giving European economic reconstruction independence and prospects, once the international situation became dominated by the Korean War such increases became still more urgent. The danger of a new conflict in Europe had shifted US attention entirely to the question of continental defence. ERP aid itself was subordinated to rearmament. This could not be achieved in economies stifled by obsolescence or plant underutilization. On the other hand, the only way not to make military expenditure impinge on civil consumption and cramp the current upswing with new sacrifices was to raise labour productivity considerably. "Guns and butter" were reconcilable - as the US example showed once again - in this very way. Hence a thoroughgoing escalation of the productivity drive.

The new ECA administrator, W. Foster, made this point the centre of the Marshall Plan's last phase. The Mutual Security Agency, in charge of post-ERP military aid programmes, confirmed this position in subsequent years.

The '14 points for productivity' were the programme for this turn round. Europe's material reconstruction was almost complete, was the basic thesis, but prospects still seemed uncertain, and not merely because of the latent danger of renewed conflict. There was a persisting fragility in the Western economic mechanism that should be opposed by a decisive qualitative leap in the dynamics of investments and consumption. It was again stressed that the path to follow was adaptation of American technologies and organizational models in Europe.

The national productivity centres to be set up in each country on the basis of the positive experience with the Anglo-American Council for Productivity were the keystone of the whole proposal (23). This institution would bring together the interests involved in the productivity effort, but also be an effective agency in daily operations: in a word, the 'central nervous system controlling the efforts at increasing productive efficiency'. It 'should favour collaboration among industrial managers, workers and the government, and is to be regarded as a permanent institution to pursue the national productivity programme after the end of the Marshall Plan', says point 1. Once again, however, the means seemed disproportionate to the ends: exchange of technical information (points 2, 7, 12, 13 and 14), studies on standardization (point 3), exchange of technical consultants (point 4) and trade union experts (point (9), product analysis and supply of samples (points 5 and 6), professional training programmes (point 8) and technical assistance missions (points 10 and 11) (24).

It was hard for even the most favourably disposed commentators to discern how these 'channels' might have helped 'the ECA's efforts to secure fair distribution of the benefits deriving from higher output volume, among labour, the consumer, the employer and management', in Foster's words. "Mondo Economico", the most authoritative Italian technical journal, commented: "In fact this is likely much ado about nothing. Technical assistance will perhaps be developed, productivity centres will be set up, conferences will meet ...". The US could not share this scepticism, especially since the 'productivity drive' was seen as the most incisive response, also in propaganda terms, to the pacifist tendencies running through European public opinion, more or less inspired by the left. In fact avoiding the 'guns or butter' dilemma, the productivity philosophy kept

alive the collective expectation of widespread prosperity. The direct appeal to labour to produce weapons of extermination, a few years after the end of a war, was useless, since it could help only the adversary. The idea of 'armed prosperity' was much more attractive. This meant an extension of the cooperation amongst social forces already tried out during reconstruction. Once again, the employer was called upon to free himself from the traditional mental habits of a blind accumulator of wealth, while the unions were to emphasize their 'natural' vocation for cooperation in the firm.

'Productivity in the proper sense does not mean more goods with less labour, but more goods at lower prices with more labour better paid. Paradoxically, this does not mean cutting profits; on the contrary, experience has taught that greater output at lower cost can even increase profit, as long as cost reductions are made to benefit the consumer'. This was the summary message to readers of "Produttività" from L. Dayton, head of the MSA mission to Italy.

The consensus that met this phase too of the productivity campaign should not be underestimated. The first to give support were the forerunners of scientific management, like F. Mauro, whose first edition of 'The US seen by an engineer' rapidly sold out, or T. Bianchi, who saw 'productivity' as an update of 'Fordism'. Also receptive, however, were the Catholic circles, especially in Milan, engaged on adapting Christian social culture to the times. Padre Gemelli stressed the difference between productivity ideology and Taylorism, seeing the first as freeing man from domination by the machine, thanks to the stress on the 'human factor'.

According to G. Moro Visconti, productivity, understood this way, could correct 'the distortion in income distribution which, while compressing the spending power of the masses of workers who are the bulk of the consumers,

has favoured production of luxury goods while essential items are still short'. It was, in short, the approach to solving the social question; the time when 'labour takes on the meaning of prayer' was approaching. Few, however, took the message quite so widely (25).

The first body to be put to the test was the government. Response from the executive was extremely slow, despite repeated pressure on the Prime Minister by the US agencies and Embassy between autumn 1950 and October 1951.

De Gasperi's constant concern was to restrain interference by the 'reforming' ally. This should be seen as evidence not of abstract claims of autonomous sovereignty, but of specific resolve to check economic policy lines foreign to his own, rather conservative, plan (26). The eventual acceptance of the US request for specific commitments does not refute this assessment. The National Productivity Committee was born neither as a body for coordinating government economic policy - as US officials and Italian CISL trade unionists had hoped - nor as a private body as advocated by the social sectors interested in productivity. No outside centre was possible for that concertation of interests that De Gasperi saw as the exclusive prerogative of the executive. Accordingly, the NPC, by contrast with what happened in France and Britain, was an emanation of the prime minister's office. The powers laid down by the decree of 22 October 1951 setting it up were modelled on those of the technical assistance committee of the CIR, with one single significant specification. The committee was to 'formulate a general action programme to improve productivity, indicating practical measures for implementing the programme itself with regard also to emphasizing the human factor in firms, with particular reference to better use of labour, professional training and in general the elevation of the working

classes'. No mention of policies to support technological innovation or of repercussions of investment on consumption. The Committee was an exclusively consultative body - without legal personality or organizational structure - transitory (three year term) and without independent financial resources. Just as significant was the reduction in the body's representativity. Of its 37 members, 8 represented employers and 8 the unions. Then there were three representatives of craft unions and small industries. These were flanked by no less than 13 experts appointed by the ministries and the prime minister. Despite the exclusive reference to labour productivity, the committee's composition was unbalanced, against the unions. This contradiction, though denounced by the CISL that claimed responsibility for promoting the NPC, was reproduced at peripheral level. At the centre the committee was an appendix to the CIR secretariat; locally, the productivity centres were emanations of the Chambers of Commerce (27).

The successive amendments to this structure confirmed the largely irrelevant nature of the body by comparison with other countries' centres. The NPC was to ease import of new organizational methods, nothing more: a sort of quango for scientific management.

In substance, the institutional solution confirmed that the government's economic policy was operating on a different wavelength. Also different from that of its US interlocutors was its idea of participation in decision-making by representatives of interests. A similar difference was noted by industrial circles. Confindustria representatives, very favourable, as was said, to promoting circulation of technical knowledge and very understanding as regards import of US technology, did not hide their mistrust of the American 'crusade' in favour of productivity. The position repeatedly expressed by Angelo Costa, with little variation but increasing polemical

vigour, calls for a less superficial explanation than usually given. The central issue for the industry representatives in those years was cohesion of their own interest block. Costa's hostility to 'useless and harmful didactic attitudes' by the Americans is to be explained as perception of a disruptive element vis-à-vis the painstaking sectoral mending operation being carried out by the Confindustria as an intrinsic part of the stress on productivity and technological innovation. In his speech to the Congress of US and European employers in New York, Costa repeated that the American model of prosperity was not applicable to a backward, overpopulated national context like the Italian, without fear of implicitly contradicting the affirmations of Valleta and Pirelli to the same congress. The objective was a line on which big and small firms could converge, along with the most backward, closed elements on the country's manufacturing scene, not merely the most direct beneficiaries of ERP aid and of advanced technology imported under the Marshall Plan. For the same reason, Costa had not hesitated to associate the criticisms by Dayton in 1950 with 'subversive communism'; or Finance Minister Vanoni's specific opposition with the 'confused' anti-capitalist message of La Pira. No one - he said - was better able than the entrepreneurs to establish an efficient combination of the productive factors in a firm. Productivity could be sustained by the State through easy credit terms for firms and giving exporters the same benefits as in competing countries. This was the tough response to those who instead proposed sharper taxation and closer attention to economic policy on the internal market as pivotal to a different idea of 'productivity'. The difference from the 'American dirigisme' goes further. By comparison with the NPC, Costa was against any notion of institutionalizing collaboration between the social partners, even for productivity. Workers would share the benefits of greater

productivity solely as consumers. The rejection of 'joint committees' and company productivity agreements was matched by the hollow undermining of the national committee at the centre and of the provincial committees at the periphery. This opposition recalls the tones of the victorious battle waged against the 'consigli di gestione' and technical committees repeatedly proposed even by the industry ministries between 1945 and 1951. The rejection of dirigisme inspired a brutal frankness. Not that this excluded positive relationships with US businessmen themselves at strictly economic or technical levels. At ideological level, however, Costa tends to counterpose the philosophy of 'entrepreneur privatism' to that of productivity; this is how the study conventions on economics and industrial policy promoted by the business organization have to be understood (28).

This attitude of the business association considerably affected the success of the American initiative and the behaviour of other Italian interlocutors. The 'politics of productivity' particularly challenged the 'free' trade unions. Acceptance of this terrain, especially by the CISL, has often been attributed to the influence of American union ideologies on that confederation. This assessment may be shared with two reservations. The first is chronological: the assimilation of a complex heritage - or parts of it - like that of US trade unionism is a quite slow and contradictory process. The ideological binder of the confederation, especially at the level of intermediate cadres, was for years to be almost exclusively anti-communism, along with the religious appeal, or at least political support for the relative majority party. The second reservation is logical: acceptance of the terrain of productivity proposed by the ECA was an immediate adaptation of the item to a vague, embryonic prospective strategy of its own

(29). This was evident right from the third General Council of the confederation, held in Bari in January 1951.

The Korean situation and the priority on productivity were on that occasion interpreted as circumstances favouring a reallocation of the union within the political and economic system. 'It might be easier,' says Pastore's report, 'in an emergency situation to secure recognition of the workers' right to responsible cooperation in leading the public economy and the economy of the firm than to secure a bigger share in distribution of the value of the product' (30). The logic is clear. The aim of higher labour productivity can be reached with union support, for an exchange: not wage increases but institutionalization of union participation in economic policy decisions. This is far from the US plan, as American labour attaches involved did not fail to point out. The CISL showed its basic subordination to the free trade orthodoxy that sees wage increases as a permanent cause of financial instability. It also reveals a deeper wish. The legitimacy the confederation was not getting from social relationships was sought institutionally. Thus, the CISL did not condemn the discrimination among various trade union organizations explicitly allowed by Article 3 of the decree setting up the NPC. After 1952 the confederation's documents contain criticism of the shortcomings of national economic policy, but simultaneously an illusion persists: these shortcomings can be overcome through a voluntarist appeal to the other side for "cooperation" (31). The bodies indicated for conciliating interests are more specific: the joint production committees, at company level, and the National Productivity Committee, on a strict parity basis, at the centre. The former were of course rejected by the Confindustria, but were never to become an object of trade union demands (32). Over a period of two years, any faith in a government attitude

favourable to labour demands was lost. Hence emerged the option for bargaining aimed at linking wages to productivity growth (General Council at Ladispoli)(33). The Confindustria and the executive, on the other hand, always welcomed the announcement of willingness to cooperate at company level by the CISL, contrasting it with the CGIL's 'non-collaboration'.

This union's retreat from an interpretation of its own of productivity politics to an acceptance of a subordinate position within the firm and in the political system was clear. The support for the experiment of 'demonstrative firms' promoted by the NCP was that the lowest point of the 'free' unions 'alignment' on the initiatives of government and also of the employers. The adoption in 1952 of the 'demonstrative firms' programme gave a new dimension, of importance locally, to the NPC's activity. In addition to Vicenza, also involved in the joint action by the NPC and the Mutual Security Agency were Palermo, Salerno, Pisa and Monza.

The Vicenza experience is worth considering, even summarily. The aim was to show the advantages achievable in a firm, in terms of increased production and improved internal relationships, from systematic application of the new methodologies, consisting in organizational advice to management, training of leaders at all levels, simplification of work and education of employees. 'The American technicians assisting the NPC', an official publication pointed out, 'stated that this was the method whereby the US had overcome the 1929-32 crisis and adapted the productive framework to the enormous growth in output necessitated by intervention in the Second World War'. It went on, 'the benefit from the cost reductions secured was divided threeways: to the firm through increased profit, to the worker through productivity bonuses, to the consumer through price cuts. The resulting gain in purchasing power and hence in consumption and standard of living of a

large part of the population had reactivated production, eliminated most unemployment and brought an end to a crisis whose consequences might have been disastrous' (34). The experiment had involved the firms of Laverda, Sartori, Ceccato, Zambon, and later Beaupain, Campagnolo, ILMA, Saccardo and the government installation of Recoaro.

Over a year and a half, the NPC technicians, along with 240 from the firms, developed the 'training within industry' programme according to the traditional scheme: human relations at work, employee education, improvement in work methods, bilateral communications, safety, arrangement of machines, flow of work, internal transport, simplification of work. Outside advice to management, on the other hand, concerned the general organization of production, industrial accounting, the measurement of productivity, i.e. time and methods, and marketing.

The rather frequent speeches by Ceccato and Laverda to meetings on productivity - often held at Vicenza, which had become not just the location of one of the most important American military bases in Italy, but also the Italian capital of the productivity drive - leave no room for uncertainty about the successive experiment. The industrial assessments were welcomed by the US press, at the suggestion of the mission to Italy. In 'Time', R. Christopher drew a rosy picture: employment in the demonstrative firms had increased, production was up 23% and wages up 10% thanks to productivity bonuses. Prices were down. The political results, continued the author, were no less: in 1953 the CGIL had 4 delegates out of 7 at Ceccato; by 1954 2 had gone over to the CSIL, which now controlled the internal committee. Productivity was confirmed as the best weapon against communism.

However, there was another side to the experiment, deliberately conducted in a weakly unionized area, which is worth dwelling on.

Ceccato did not treat its turners, fitters etc. as 'skilled workers', and the wages of 'semi-skilled labourers' were less than 8 lire per hour. Overtime was paid 'outside the pay packet', to avoid insurance contributions. Avoidance of the overtime rate itself was frequent. The apprentices' contract - they were many in the Vicenza firm - gave them 10-15,000 lire per month for 9 or more hours daily work. Individual bonuses did not exceed 60-70% of pay. As in many other small and medium firms in the country, little of the contract could be said to have been respected (35).

E. Landolfi recalled in the columns of the social democratic newspaper 'La Giustizia' that the basis of the 'human relations' in the firm remained the fear of sacking. A further negative assessment comes from an impeccable source, Adriano Olivetti, who recalls, referring to the introduction of a 'suggestion box' in the firm: 'in one of the biggest of these works, a suggestion from a worker that saved the firm 400,000 lire per year was rewarded with the derisory lump sum payment of 10,000 lire. Another suggestion that saved 2 million was rewarded with less than 20,000 lire. This shows clearly how the American methods were applied in ridiculous fashion by the Italian organization that ought to have been specialized in their adoption' (36). Olivetti's criticism raised a hornet's nest of polemic on the NPC's role, just when even the 'free' unions were most clearly dissociating themselves from the 'superexploitation experiments' - the UIL's term - of Vicenza.

'The workers' organizations,' asserted Viglianesi, UIL leader at the productivity meeting in July 1953, 'are often forced on to the defensive by the employers' line, which is not always orthodox as regards the guiding spirit of the campaign to increase productivity, and by the absentee position of government, either incapable or uninterested in energetically

encouraging employers to observe a principle they freely accept, formal membership in the campaign to increase productivity'.

His position repeated an executive resolution of January. Worker participation in the benefits of increased productivity was regarded as inseparable not just from institutionalization of 'reciprocal' consultation at company level, but - be it noted - from a freeze on dismissals and from absolute respect for labour contract, social insurance laws and the specific agreements in the demonstrative firms. The Mutual Security Agency was also asked for guarantees that it would subordinate increases in orders to Italian firms to specific commitments in that direction (37).

Productivity had been interpreted by these political and trade union elements as a power idea 'destined to polarize around itself /the/ less backward forces of capital and labour'. But two years after adoption of the programme, it had to be concluded that these forces 'are still linked to the extreme positions of conservative monopoly capitalism and of anti-productivity communist unionism' (38).

At the second national congress, the CISL recognized, speaking through Pastore, that the productivity increase achieved over the four years from 1951 to 1954 had meant 'absolutely no increase in worker incomes', while the NPC 'had created essentially nothing new' (39).

Basically, Italy was repeating what had happened in most European countries involved in the productivity drive. A phase of full union cooperation, elsewhere reluctantly granted but in Italy accentuated by the search for legitimacy by the 'free' elements, much in the minority in firms, was followed by gradual autonomization of trade union action.

During 1953 the 'free' unions proved increasingly sceptical about the productivity campaign. The DGB was openly opposed to the German productivity

committee, and similar criticism of their national centres had come from the French and Belgian organizations. In the Scandinavian countries, instead, union involvement in the whole of economic planning had brought a different attitude to technological innovation and to changes in work organization at company level (40).

Essentially, the unions saw the decline of what we would today call the 'neocorporatist' intent inherent in the programme, noted even by its promoters: 'This productivity affair,' commented an MSA representative, F.A. Baird, 'has simplified itself in our hands; it has diminished in size as it got more concrete, till it assumed the outlines and dimensions of an honest problem of technique and of scientific work organization'. Why? The US reports did not manage to go beyond noting many organizational shortcomings. There was no autocritical idea of a 'technocratic' approach, partial and abstract. However, the same question was put to circles more open to the productivity philosophy. E. Massacesi commented that there had been a move 'from a technical problem, to arrive at structural reforms able to transform the old capitalist system into a modern, more alive, more social system'. But the overall political dimension implied by that transformation had been lost sight of. Without organic economic action by the state, even an increase in industrial productivity is unreachable. Had productivity and production not perhaps been confused? 'On the path of productivity,' wrote "Mondo Economico", 'in the sense of improvements to plant and productive processes, there does not seem much possibility in the present state of affairs, at least in Italy, to advance. Our need now is more for raw materials and for outlets, and especially for a global economic policy that would allow firms to produce at full capacity " (41).

Harsh criticism of the limitations of the Italian version of the productivity drive came from public opinion not aligned on left-wing positions. Like the CGIL, concerned to counterpose to the productivity campaign at company level a fight for full use of the productive capacity of the whole economic system, "Mondo Economico" seemed, however, to underestimate what was actually happening in firms.

Stressing the limits of the productivity campaign, as we have done so far, and the gap between American plan and national 'adaptation', should not mean ignoring the ongoing technical modernization and rationalization of work organization. If the 'reform of capitalism' in Europe, and specifically in Italy, hoped for by Washington was not happening because of the ERP and post-ERP aid, it is nevertheless true that thanks to that aid, profound changes at microeconomic level were initiating bigger shifts. Ultimately, the productivity campaign missed the more ambitious general aims, but opened the path to a considerable renewal of industrial and cultural practice in the country. The mass consumption boom was instead to arrive later, with marked national peculiarities. The prosperity - hoped for by the ECA - was not to deaden nor de-ideologize the conflict, and indeed was, incredibly, to coexist with growth in support for the left.

Technical progress, productivity and consumption.

In the Marshall Plan's first year, the portion of aid consisting of credit to industry to purchase machinery from the United States was absorbed with difficulty. Apart from the undeniable complexity inherent in the IMI-ERP procedures, this worrying result was brought about by the uncertainty prevailing in Italian firms. The cases of FIAT and of nationalized iron and steel - like those of other complexes that had immediately moved towards modernization and expansion from the late 30s - should not be generalized. For its part, government economic policy did not define functional priorities for a rapid and coordinated process of 'reequipping' the industrial apparatus.

In 1949-50, however, this began to change. American encouragement connected with the Country Study played an important, though not exclusive, part here. The prospect of reopening the Italian economy to international competition and the guarantees of social stability offered by the Einaudi-Pella line probably had greater effect in motivating more tendency to invest. It is certain that there were positive effects on the whole programming of the aid, with considerable growth in imports of plant from the US. The slogan 'less macaroni, more machinery' was becoming a reality (42).

Over a three-year period, investment in new equipment involved all the large and medium sized firms in the country. The import of machinery presupposed exchange of technical information and expansion of financial and commercial relationships between Italian and US firms.

Here are some examples of firms, confined to IMI-ERP requests for machinery. Steel and engineering have received the proper historiographical attention. In the latter sector, apart from FIAT, outstanding examples are

Innocenti and Piaggio, which imported through ERP the complete equipment for scribing, pressing, fitting, welding and checking for the entire shell for the Lambretta and the Vespa, in addition to diecasting installations and automatic lathes used in various production sectors. Purchases by Alfa Romeo, Bianchi, Lancia and Singer were of similar scope. The same is true of Necchi, the productive restructuring of which, exemplary in the light engineering sector, found decisive support from machinery imported through grants (43).

The textile industry too contained a sizeable proportion of producers engaged in modernization. Examples are Bemberg, TESIT, Caprotti, Jucker, SIFAC, Magnani e Tedeschi, or the Manifatture Cotoniere Meridionali, which imported automatic looms, winding frames and weft replenishers, bleaching installations, etc. (44).

Developments in the energy sector were still more striking. Under the ERP, Agip and other oil firms bought exploration drilling, well drilling, oil cracking, gas and methane cracking plants. Like oil refining, the broadcasting industry was sustained in its expansion mainly by this type of import credit.

The electrical industry, one of the greatest beneficiaries of the IMI-ERP credit section, bought the large turbo-generating sets not produced in Italy, but also special machinery (condensers, pre-heaters, ash catchers etc.) for new power stations under construction.

The electrical engineering industry deserves separate treatment. Ercole Marelli established a direct relationship with Westinghouse and other companies, enabling it to catch up on the technological lag discovered at the end of the war. This approach was also encouraged by the simultaneous dropping out of the traditional German suppliers - so much so that Siemens

Italiana itself was among the major purchasers of special machines from the US - but this does not mean that it was a case of episodic relationships (45).

From these productive sectors to the tyre industry - CEAT and Pirelli were in the forefront of adaptation to the new mixing techniques perfected in the US - to the paper industry (Burgo), printing (Mondadori, Poligrafico dello Stato, etc.), in all cases mentioned, ERP imports represented only a part of the inflow of new plant. Purchases on the Italian market were often of no less importance.

However, we wish to concentrate not so much on the size of the process as on its quality. Imports covered a rather diversified range of machinery, from the simple comptometer - which in a few years' time was also being produced nationally - to the continuous rolling train, from automatic lathes to numerical controllers. Some basic characteristics with strong implications for productivity growth can however be traced.

The engineering industry - but the situation is similar in other sectors - was tending to change definitively from an assembly industry to continuous production. This characteristic, present from the outset in textile, chemical, paper and oil installations, was further perfected there.

The introduction of conveyor belts - or their widespread distribution, since there were some during the war - implied a new dimension in the organization of production (46). The new machines changed not only the quality of work but its overall organization. Nor did rationalization spare the administrative functions, even if initially concentrated elsewhere (47).

One example, an electronics firm, may us give an impression. The technological modernization made possible between 1949 and 1951 by ERP credits was considerable. Introduction of a simple loudspeaker assembly line, with a

tunnel oven for drying the glue, instead of the line with no conveyor belt and traditional oven, brought an increase in hourly production of 64%. The efficiency of another production stage was tripled through purchase of a continuous wire twisting machine with foot controls, by comparison with the old hand winder. The automatic presses and punches brought increases varying from 24 to 150 per cent. There was an increase of no less than seven times in the amount of work possible, thanks to an automatic machine for cutting and fitting the ends of connecting wires. But investment in new technologies was not everything. Design and control, division of sectors and work methods all changed together. The 'human factor' was dealt with in three directions. Above all, there was an adaptation to Italian circumstances of employee assessment, successfully tried out by similar US firms. Dual job evaluation was introduced, for the individual and for tasks broken down into sequences. For the former, the foreman was asked to report on performance, attitudes, keenness etc. The centrality of the foreman was confirmed by the second approach consisting in the recording and study of time and methods. The same initiative was aimed at reducing job insecurity for the employee, resulting from the continuing seasonality of the productive cycle. In one year, overall production of this firm rose 25% (48).

There are therefore many sides to company rationalization: from the introduction of new machinery to the planning of production, from the restructuring of internal transport to the organization of purchasing, from automation of sector management to the adoption of modern marketing techniques (49). These profoundly changed the social roles not only of skilled workers or traditional white-collar workers, but also of middle management. Technical reviews and congresses within an industry interchanged thinking on the first rationalization experiments. The success of some firms opened the

road to others. Of course, the NPC and the ECA mission to Italy followed or were at the centre of many initiatives. Others were spread by an original network of technical advice centres and institutes, semi-public or private in nature. The bibliography gives an idea here of the deep undertow pulling at the traditional industrial culture and sowing the seeds of subsequent renewal. New installations and new organizational models went hand in hand. From this microeconomic viewpoint, the American-launched productivity drive seems to have given the hoped for fruit.

Total productivity in Italy rose faster than in almost any other Western economy. Between 1951 and 1955 the average annual rate of growth in labour productivity in industry was 6.4%, against 3.7% for the US and 3.1% for Britain (1949-55) (50). Even with technological modernization, there was however a fundamental difference between the Italian and the US paths to prosperity.

Across the Atlantic, the benefits of productivity, redistributed as wage increases, filtered back through consumption, encouraging new productive investment. The structure of the labour market pushed research into suitable ways of increasing labour output in one specific direction: labour saving investments.

The insistence on capital investment in new technologies once the phase of adaptation to international standards was passed, could not be shared by the Italian businessman. He was conditioned by a totally unfavourable capital market, by a highly elastic labour market and a restricted consumer market. To labour-saving investment, hard to amortize in the short-term in these circumstances, and a bearer of new social tensions, he always preferred productivity increases brought by fuller use of existing productive capacity, by economies of scale, by simple speed-ups, etc. (51).

Without enormous commitments to capital intensification in mechanization processes and automation of fixed installations, it was still possible to secure success. The special structure of the labour market allowed this 'short cut', and even allowed, at least up to a certain point, avoidance of redistribution to workers of the benefits of increased productivity. Not that all businessmen acted thus; but this situation did open the way to a rather broad spread in employer attitudes and consequent territorial and sectorial dualisms, typical of the 1950s.

The resulting stagnation in real wages had a counterpart that productivity theorists cannot help judging negatively: the limitation of the internal market. The low standard of living went with low consumption. It was for more dynamic management to adapt the quantity and quality of product to this trend, at least somewhat, while looking outside the national market for demand capable of sustaining growth in supply.

This choice - with emphases differing through time and between firms - was not the result of thinking behind a desk. It can instead be seen as an empirical return to a 'model of growth' already tested successfully by many textile, engineering, food and chemical firms after the first world war. In the 1920s, a restricted internal market and a labour market position favourable to demand had coincided with international opening by the Italian economy. Thirty years later what had to be done was adapt a rather broader productive apparatus to similar lines. In this effort, rather varied theoretical approaches and practical experiences converged; but they were all unanimous in seeing as foreign to Italian reality and hence 'naive' the model of growth proposed by the American productivity drive. The Bank of Italy and the Treasury, engaged in consolidating the currency reserves, to the advantage of exporters but the detriment of any driving economic policy

domestically, and individual industrialists, involved in containing labour costs by means old and new, were pursuing essentially the same goal (52).

The partial acceptance of the US programme thus results not from misunderstanding the message but from a different strategic option related to the Italian economy's place in postwar Europe.

Clearly, the first to go beyond this partiality were the employers most committed to standardized production, which needs a mass market. Pirelli was already maintaining in 1952 that there was no 'contrast between a policy of full support to exports and one of stiffening the internal market', and Valletta, in 1954, was still more explicit: 'Growth in industrial productivity has no meaning unless directed at higher standards of living for the people' (53). But up to the middle of the decade, the prevalent attitude towards expansion of internal consumption was the opposite (54). Nevertheless the problem of the internal market was rather more worrying in Italy than in any other OEEC member country. Already during the Marshall Plan, Italy was slower to get back to 1938 indices, unexciting as those were in the history of the country. It was not until 1951 that private consumption per head equalled 1929 values. In particular, food consumption expressed in constant values was equal to 1,473 lire as against the 1,526 of 1929. The rise since 1946 - 965 lire - was clear, but the goal of alignment on average European expenditure was still far off. Spending on food was 56% of average income in 1938, but rose to 64% in the ERP years. Essentially, this item represented two-thirds of income for an Italian, as against a quarter for an American (55).

Other types of spending had shown very slight increases. In 1951, clothing was 16.3% of all spending, against 15% in 1938. By contrast, because of war damage, the number of rooms per head had gone down. Even the

increase in luxury consumption - which made some critics deny that living standards were simply at subsistence level - was from a basis of prewar autarkic restrictions.

In big towns family consumption seems to rise steadily between 1951 and 1954 at an average annual rate of 4.7%. After that year's crisis, there were considerable improvements in consumption of 'recreational and cultural goods and services' - the television 'boom' came in 1957 - and in car purchase. But in 1958 a Doxa study showed that 84% of Italian families had neither a television nor a refrigerator nor a washing machine. Two out of three white collar and almost all blue collar and agricultural workers had none of the three. In 1957 a worker's average monthly wage was still below the 70,000 lire necessary, according to ISTAT, to maintain an average family. There was unsatisfied desire to consume: Doxa found that only 1% of workers had a car, but 65% wanted one.

The colour magazines spread the image of the electric cooker, the washing machine, even the airconditioner. The vacuum cleaner, 'recently invented, has been welcomed because of its real usefulness', we are told by 'star' Milly Vitale, who adds 'today, apart from the vacuum cleaner, no house should lack a washing machine and a refrigerator. In America these items are so common that no housewife could live without them.' In America ...'; but in Italy the housewife's problems were different: how to make an old pair of shoes last one more year, how to pay for firewood or coal for the winter. There is no need to go as far as the dramatic portrayals of social reality in the big Italian towns produced by the parliamentary enquiry into poverty to get a fair picture of the standard of living and consumption in the 1950s.

The slow, troubled growth in instalment selling, on which there is no lack of valuable studies, is a rebuke to a climate scarcely shaken by innovative ferments (56).

The sewing machine, the scooter, the versatile 'Proteus' electric fan which 'at the touch of a switch adapts to many household uses', were the first material signs of a change which was, with production of the first mass car, to make the link to the years of the 'miracle'. Industry adapted to a restricted market, consumption refused to line up with the 'American model', the ideology and propaganda of 'we too can prosper' came daily up against the reality of a country which, more than the welfare of the American way of life, knew the sacrifices of a very Italian style "forced accumulation".

Italy in the 1950s: a half Americanized society

The productivity drive, though supported by the response that the 'American myth' was always met with in the Italian consciousness - thanks to propaganda, to the recollections of emigration, to the memory of liberation or to the 'colonization of the unconscious' brought about by the mass media, broke down against reality rather than against opposing ideologies. This does not mean underestimating the social impact of the systematic opposition from the left to the whole initiative. The point is that the opposition's argument found more than one piece of confirmation from everyday life. Productivity was often nothing but 'superexploitation', 'human relations' were reduced in practice to 'pats on the back', the ideology of 'welfare' really seemed like a decoy, while rearmament and unemployment were in full swing (57).

There is no doubt that the left's perception of all the phases of the process considered here is oversimplistic. Everything is brought down to a manifestation of transatlantic imperialism pure and simple. 'Non-collaboration' is a proud reassertion of a comprehensive refusal, the more sterile for being inflexibly bound up with the defence of jobs and skills irrevocably lost in the ongoing industrial restructuring.

The justified demand for full use of the country's productive capacities - well to the fore in the Piano del Lavoro and the struggles driving from it - shaded progressively off into a morally impeccable but minority protest. It has been called prisoner of a 'stagnationist' assessment of the Italian economy and society. The dualisms were not received as such: the crisis of one industry or firm was a rebuke to a destiny of decline and decay common to the whole of Italian capitalism. Accordingly,

the company action of the unions was underestimated and the decentralization of claims rejected. The criticism of the 'free' trade unions, accused of at best exasperating corporatism and social particularism, left no room for prospects of recomposition, still less for attempts at diversification of industrial action as such. Certainly, the CGIL was the big social protagonist in those years of the 1950s: firstly, it was its positions and initiatives - the production conferences, the 'white papers' on work conditions and on civil rights in the factory, the disputes themselves - that were the measure not only for the 'free' trade unions but also for the Confindustria and the promoters of the productivity campaign (58). Nevertheless, the union failed to catch the meaning of the ongoing restructuring and the link with the emergent new professional figures.

These are known facts that were to be underlined by the tortured process of revision in the later '50s, with attention mainly directed at new types of wages linked to profit assessment and to work organization (59).

These limits in the meantime made possible local and sectoral successes of the 'productivity policies' themselves. It is not the 'demonstrative firms' that should be referred to, but those firms, public and private, that had managed to combine a strategy increasingly oriented to expanding the internal market and mass consumption with a personnel policy going beyond the 'suggestion box' and the introduction of the 'factory chaplain' (60). It was the company reformism in the ENI or IRI group firms - not to mention the Olivetti 'factory community' - involving job evaluation and Christmas gift packs, staff attitude selection and holiday camps, productivity bonuses and house journals (61). Faced with all this, the union was often disarmed; just as on a more general scale it suffered the negative counterblows of the

widespread mobilization of technical staff achieved, essentially at its expense, through the US initiative.

The ECA and MSA continually drew attention to the need to privilege these groups as the 'mediator' par excellence of the technical and political message going out to the firm.

The composition of the National Productivity Committee (of its subcommittees and work groups), of the peripheral centres and plant productivity groups always stressed technical 'capacities'. It is to these, more than to workers or employers, that the NPC's own publicity ends up being addressed, like that of the other institutes for applied research on company training. One example out of many is the review 'Produttività', which after its first five years of life had 61% of readership in middle and top management of industrial firms; in Lombardy and Piedmont, 50% of subscribers (62).

Let us now consider the individual initiatives from this particular point of view. For instance, the spread of training through adaptation of the TWI (training within industry) method is known to have been aimed principally at creating a new type of foreman. The American 'foreman' was to be given a not merely professional but also cultural counterpart. The mediator of the relationship between trade and management was no longer the 'master craftsman' selected among the workers for seniority and experience and legitimized in their eyes thereby, but the recently graduated technician, trained in the company schools and otherwise subject to the firm's hierarchies (63).

Involvement of middle management was pursued systematically: the technical assistance missions to the US had many participants called 'technicians', as being those entrusted the key role of daily adaptation of technologies and organizational models imported from the US within the firm.

On this aspect, the ECA and NPC secured a success that is still more striking when one considers the failure met with by each of the endeavours to mobilize intellectuals in favour of the Marshall Plan.

To give one example, the ERP Propaganda Committee had organized meetings and events that met no response by comparison with the enormous cultural mobilization achieved by the left in the years of the Labour Plan, the reconstruction of the South and - why not? - the defence of the Italian cinema from US cultural imperialism. The 'liberty bell' or the competition for an ERP poster were poor stuff in comparison. By contrast, the productivity campaign, in years of relative decline of the left's cultural initiative, mobilized new and broader intellectual strata. Moving directly from their place in the productive process, it utilized their centrality in the process of modernization and democratic stabilization of the country (64).

Modernization and democratic stabilization were the ultimate objectives of the politics of productivity. Attracted by this combination, intellectuals and technicians, trade unionists and employers interpreted the productivity campaign quite diversely, sometimes minimizing it and sometimes in full convergence with the US plan. To that extent, Italy was no different from other European countries. Instead, it showed marked national peculiarities in the type of impact that these interpretations (and resulting initiatives) had on society. Even on the eve of the 'miracle' which was to change the face of the country and the weight of the prevailing ideologies, all the protagonists ended up dissatisfied with the years of the productivity drive.

The seed had been sown, but modernization, while certainly under way, followed paths remote from those proposed. More than the US New Deal, it

recalled the Italian 1920s. The differences were of course plain, but in no way reassuring. Now it was not Fascist repression but 'market laws' that guaranteed the virtuous spiral of low wages - exports - accumulation. The real novelty by comparison with the past, the consolidation of democracy and respect for civil liberties, was paradoxically entrusted - in the darkest years of centrism - to the objective role of those opposition forces long portrayed as destabilisatory.

Those were two things to think about. Perhaps all this is why the petering out of the productivity campaign left none to bewail it, on either side of the Atlantic.

Pier Paolo D'Attorre

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NOTES

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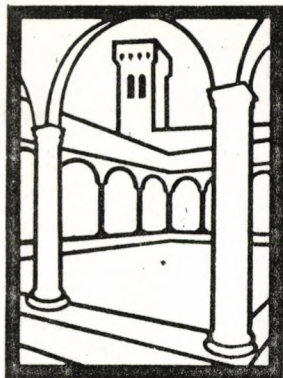
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