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The Italian Perspective*

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Social Europe as a Multilevel Governance : The Italian Perspective

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Abstract

The article deals with history and historiography of Social Europe, understood as integration of social forces (mainly the trade-unions) of the different European countries. The communitarian dimension of trade-unionism, indeed, is a topic more and more considered by historians. Starting from the first attempts of Europeanization of social dynamics in the '50s, the article follows the development of Social Europe through its different stages: the political approach to the "social affairs" in 1957-1964; the spreading of the need to establish an European trade-union movement; the "long tunnel" of 1974-1984; the renewed trade-unionist awareness which made emerge a "Social Europe"; the social protocols annexed to the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam. The article underlines the scarce capacity for initiative of an articulated European trade-union representation, but points out that social dimension has always accompanied the success of the stages for the European unification and the reasons of its expansion.

Keywords: European Trade-Unionism, Labour history, Social Europe, Trade Unions.

To understand the situation of social dynamics and actors within the European process of integration today we can question how much we learnt by the historical reflection, by now mature in Italy too, about existence and meaning of "Social Europe" (Ciampani, 2009; Ciampani & Gaglioglio, 2010).

To offer an appropriate answer to this more and more important need, we have once again to get a shared awareness on the matter, also in order to consider the nature of the contribution given by the Italian political and social actors to the emergence of the historical and ideal profile of the European integration (Ballini & Varsori, 2004).

It is known that some research paths emerged during the 1990s (Ciampani, 1995a), drawing attention on the social actors for the European unification and within the European unification, contributed to deepen the

knowledge of the political-institutional dynamics of European communities (Varsori, 2000) and allowed to recognize the proper spheres of the building of a Social Europe, as well as of its emergence through the *acquis communautaire* and the processes of European governance (Varsori, 2006a). The international community of scholars can aspire to elaborate more and more articulated and shared proposals of chronology's definition. The scientific feature of such studies, far from leading to an "alternative" view of the Europeanization processes, allowed to improve the framework of the historical reconstruction of integration with elements and profiles neglected until now (Varsori, 2001).

In this context of historical reconstruction, the particular Italian contribution to the building of the social dynamics of integration emerges, giving life to a widespread perception which traditionally considers Italy as a protagonist of the social animation of the community life. Starting from the larger and larger deepening of the evolution of trade-unionism and from the recognition of the different approaches to the European unification, it was possible to individuate labour paths and political reasons which oriented the position and the initiative of the Italian trade unions (Ciampani, 2009; Ciampani & Pellegrini, 2005). Thus the deep Europeanist position of the Cisl in front of the Schuman Plan (Ciampani, 2013), the strong tie of the Uil with the planning of the European social democracy (Ciampani, 2004) and, in the wake of the signature of the Treaty of Rome, the progressive acceptance of Cgil concerns the European integration (Del Biondo, 1997; Ciampani 2010), emerged. Such perspectives contended first with the pioneering and founding experience of the ECSC (Spierenburg & Poidevin, 1993; Ranieri & Tosi 2004) and, through the heated debate about the ECD (Preda, 1990; Ballini, 2009), after the agreements on the EU Single Market and the EURATOM, in the Sixties intertwined in a complex political process of dialogue between social actors and European Commission (Mechi, 2008).

Thus the peculiar viewing point of the Italian perspective allows to highlight in a completely paradigmatic way that the process of integration contributed to modify the European trade-unions, just when the participation of the trade-union movement in the community life outlined the social face of Europe, which at last took shape thanks to the establishment of the

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and to the Social Dialogue started by Delors (Ciampani, 2015a).

In order to give a synthetic content to the complex movement of research and European studies promoted at the beginning of the Nineties, after the weak attention paid until then by the historiography to the social and economic dynamics of the history of international and European relations (Varsori, 1992), we can agree that “Social Europe” appears not only as an ideal wished (and feared) by political actors and social players, but as a recognizable process of integration of the European reality, of which we can revisit the essential historical moments and the specific social-economic, politic and institutional features. In this sense, Italian historiography gave a significant contribution of deepening, which allowed to overtake some chronological setting, sometimes acritically borrowed from sociological or juridical-normative approaches. Moreover, it is possible to understand the evolution of Social Europe multi-level dynamics, both about the relations of the different actors involved in the process of political-institutional integration and about its deployment on different levels of action in a wider and wider European territorial area (Ciampani, 2015b). Actually we cannot imagine the contemporary Europe without considering economic-social challenges which affect it and which, therefore, should be addressed by the national ruling classes’ analysis, by the community establishment and by the protagonists of the international governance (Ganapini, 2007).

After the first studies which in Italy drew attention on the political and economic relevance of the social aspects of Europe in the wake of World War II (Romero, 1989; Formigoni, 1991; Guasconi, 1999), the historiographical interest toward the social dynamics of the integration process seems to have been stimulated by the individuation and by the definition of the concept of “trade union diplomacy” – the action exercised by States on the national unions to achieve goals of foreign policy (Ciampani, 1998), and by the finding within the historical process of the beginning of real “international relations” of the social actors, such as those promoted by the greatest trade-unions of Europe (Ciampani, 2006).

Thus it was possible to understand and to confirm the outcomes which the international historiography was achieving in the reflection on the un-

ions within the Cold War. Converging with the MacShane's studies, indeed, trade-union divisions no longer appeared as the mere social consequence of a geopolitical contraposition among blocs, but as one of the factors which made the bipolar confrontation a clash between opposed views of the political, social and economic life (MacShane, 1992; Antonioli et al., 1999). In a perspective different from the North-European "Labour history", the Italian studies on the evolution of the international presence of trade union confederations were renewed in the belief that in the second half of the XX century they had begun to modify the previous internationalist approach (Ciampani, 2002). To bring into focus this complex and articulated passage, historiography revealed the need for new paths of reconstruction and interpretation of the international trade-union organizations (Pasture, 1999; Dolvik, 1999; Degimbe, 1999; Savoini, 2000, Carew et al., 2000; Friso, 2000).

In this context, the specific features of the internal interplay of the West-European trade union experience emerged (Ciampani, 1995a); that is also why a study of the socio-economic dynamics and of their actors within European integration was requested, since the Fifties, by emphasizing the way they contribute to create an "other way for Europe" besides the political-institutional way, which until then was almost the sole subject of the historical analysis. The need of analysing position and international strategies of national trade-unions (Ciampani, 2000; Iuso, 2001), as well as, the European projection of employers' associations (Segreto, 2000; 2006; Petrini, 2004), highlighted the opportunity to locate and exploit archives useful to increase the knowledge of the European integration process (Ciampani, 1995b).

Within the Italian research, from time to time a pressing process urged the archival investigation and the interpretation of its outcome, achieving significant results for the historical knowledge of the process of development of the European trade-union representation. First this allowed the most accurate historiography to increase the "summary" of the traditional readings of the European integration's history (Saba, 1997). Finally, within this field of studies it was possible to individuate at least three central points for the understanding of the paths of European unification, which highlight the absolute relevance of social dynamics and actors: the access of the trade-union representation to the decision-making process of a supra-

national body like the ECSC and the use of the social measures contained by the 1952 Treaty (Mehi, 1999; 2000); the reasons of the foundation, the growth and the limits of the European economic and social committee (Varsori, 2000); the development of the European process of professional training, which resulted in the establishment of the CEDEFOP (Petrini, 2004; Varsori, 2006c).

It was not a mere updating of the issue, to be taken into account within a general reading of the European integration process: the effect produced by the investigation on social dimension has soon influenced the research on social and political aspects. In some cases the result of such research directed the decision to investigate and re-read some well-known events, such as the 1969 Conference of The Hague (Guasconi, 2007); in other cases they led to enhance some biographical profiles, such as that of the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, which renews worthy lines of historical research (Becherucci, 2008). These studies, moreover, unavoidably lead to renew the general interpretative profiles of integration process, for example drawing the attention of the scientific community, and more in general of the European ruling class, on the question of the European social policy as a historical problem (Ciampani, 2008).

Therefore the European social-political conjuncture in which the above mentioned investigation started, between the signature of the Social Protocol of Maastricht and its enclosing in the Treaty of Amsterdam, has certainly eased the attention of the historians for "Social Europe". However the historical studies, also for the link with a serious archive research, did not emphasize the features of the present. On the contrary, with an outcome with many methodological implications, they agreed in individuating the origin of "Social Europe" within the establishment of the ECSC (Ranieri & Tosi, 2004)

Thus not only the connection between the rise of social dimension and the birth of integration process has been highlighted, but also the foundation for reaching an historical-critic understanding of the elements which influenced its evolution has been emphasized. The same difficult period in which "Social Europe" took shape (between the establishment of the ETUC at the beginning of the Seventies and the implementation of the Single European Act at the end of the Eighties), provide for a confirmation of the

above mentioned historical results. If, in the first time, the political need for integration enables the social dynamics at community level, in the following decades it is possible to see their increasing value in support of the European political initiatives.

Finally, the recent historiography and the considerations raised by it allow to define the two essential features of Social Europe as subject of historical investigation. We need, first of all, to consider the progressive introduction of European social actors into the communitarian decision-making process on labour, as well as the social participation in their implementation in several concerned sectors and fields of activity, within local, regional and national areas. This issue appears to be tied with phenomena which in Europe, since the end of World War II, problematically arose at national level (think to the difficult process of programming and concertation in Italy) as well as at international level (as is highlighted by the evolution of the ERP Plan within the OEEC and later within the OCDE). Secondly, we have to adequately evaluate the important *acquis communautaire* of social measures established under the pressure of the access of social parties to the life of the European communities and of the request of competences on the matter of “social policy” by the community bodies. Around this issue, in which private-collective suggestions and publicistic interventions are intertwined, the problematic of an eventual European welfare and the need for a larger social governance beside the EU’s government are connected.

These two elements allow to welcome the profile assumed by Social Europe and the plurality of levels which contribute to define it. Its historical path, from the Schumann Plan of 1950 to the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997, presents significant moments of discontinuity and a substantial alternation between the emergence of the social actors in the process of integration and the restoration of the rule of the intergovernmental politics on the social-economic dynamics (Varsori, 2005).

If the first participation in a supranational body in the history of the European trade-unionism certainly contributed to the birth of a social dimension of Europe in the ECSC (1950-1957), the starting phase of the EEC saw the attempt to use a political approach to the “social affairs”, which soon revealed its limits (1957-1964). The intense activity connected to the fusion of the executives of the treaties and the demand of an European

leading role in the second half of the Sixties allowed the spreading of the need to establish an European trade-union movement and to involve it in addressing the problems of the economic and social development of integration (1965-1974). The internal and external weakness of the trade-unionist proposal, still in progress, tied with a renewed political tension among governments within a “long tunnel” (1974-1984). The Delors Commission and a renewed trade-unionist awareness made emerge a “Social Europe” which by then would correspond to the complex dynamics of interdependence of the a single European market launched towards the economic and monetary unification (1984-1997).

Even considering the sequence of these five historical phases, it seems perceivable the articulation of Social Europe on different levels, which demand to be investigated within the interdependencies which can be properly individuated as international social relations. It is easily identifiable, along the whole concerned period, a first action plan connected to the political initiative promoted in the international relations by social players such as the trade-unions: it involves not only the national confederation of several countries, but also the international and continental trade-union organizations. Think to the confrontation, after World War II, between the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU) and the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CISC). Moreover, over the years the strategic dynamics internal to each of these confederations were different. As regards the most dynamic and vital confederations, the ICFTU, it is possible to recognize the development of different perspectives of international “politics” in its regional bodies, first in the European Regional Organization (ERO/ICFTU). Within this body a serious controversy arose between the group of the trade unions of the countries in favour of the integration process (tied among them first in the form of the *Committee of the XXI* unions member of the ECSC, and later, since 1958, in the European trade-union Secretariat) and that of the supporters of the European area of free trade, led by the British. Consider, moreover, the complex political-international issue which, in this trade union sector, led to the passage from the ECFTU/ICFTU, created in 1969, to the birth of the ECTU which, being the result of an unification with the Christian trade-unionism, could not re-

main, in form and substance, a regional body of the ICFTU. Think, finally, to the growing level of dialogue of these organizations with the governments and the national States, with the supranational institutions, with the Community bodies, with the entities of the international economic-financial system in the wake of Bretton Woods.

A second development level of Social Europe is featured by the involvement of the social parties in the Europeanist action and in the Community institutions, more or less consciously eased by the multiplication of the trading venues and of the promotion of juridical-normative instruments, considered opportune to make the rights operational, as well as the social measures related to ECSC, EEC and EURATOM, until the Treaty of Amsterdam which enclosed the social protocol. This way a social Europe constituted by communitarian “places” more or less formalized (from the working groups to the sectoral summits) which have the task to survey the evolution of the working conditions in the member countries and some aspects of their legislation, from which decisions and regulations affecting the national social-economic dynamics take place. Besides the venues indicated by the Treaties themselves, such as the Advisory Committee of the ECSC and the following European Economic and Social Committee, we can mention at least the role of the tripartite conferences among ministries of Labour, Commission, employers’ (public and private) and trade-unions’ representation. The first of them, in April 1970, represented an arrival point and, at same time, the beginning of a relevant path, as demonstrated by the following establishment of a permanent Committee on employment (Savoini, 2000; Degimbe, 1999; Guasconi, 2006). Along with the strengthening of other “places” of Social Europe (think to the mentioned European Centre for Professional Training), there were Community strategies (from the Social Dialogue to the extraordinary summit on employment until the agenda of Lisboa), and framework agreements on specific issues (in particular for agriculture) and on general issues about some modalities of the working relations (from the parental leave to the part-time work until the telework).

Beside this institutional and normative level, there is a third development of Social Europe in the multiform process of local, regional, sectoral, national, interregional, transnational and cross-border social process in the Member States of the EU. It seems a still indefinable phenomenon for the historical studies, both for its recent development and for the lack of identi-

fication of its dynamism. However, some research can open a path to reach a better understanding of this more and more relevant level of action. While a still neglected approach is that of the European trade-unions groups by sector, once again investigations appears to use the two features of Social Europe: the participation of the social actors in the processes of governance and the instruments of the Community policies. In this direction archival research and interpretative analysis moved towards the inter-regional trade-unions councils, born for the first time in 1976 among unions of bordering Member States; at same level new studies are addressing the Social Fund after the reforms of the first half of the Seventies (Ciampani & Clari, 2012). They are processes of governance of the labour market connected to development policies acting in an independent way. The opening of research projects on the experience of the European Works Councils, born after the 1994 directive, could contribute to highlight the important connection of these process with the social-economic grow of the EU.

Considering the historiographical results about process and wideness of the rise of Social Europe, we can try to deepen the way with which the establishment of an European trade union movement influenced the political-institutional form of Europe, while the integration process was contributing to modify the attitudes of the West-Europe national trade unions. Italian events can offer, in this perspective, an interesting point of view to shed light on the intertwine of trade union reasons and political needs along the interrelation which connects the internal debate to the European choice of Italy (Varsori, 2006b).

Finally, Italian experience led us to a further reflection on the sense of the path towards the establishment of Social Europe. First, it must be considered that in the historiographical analysis we have to distinguish between the adhesion or opposition approach to its establishment among those who assumed it for party political reasons or trade-union reasons and those who committed in easing or opposing it for political tradition or for trade-union paths. Such opportune distinction can tell many things about the meaning of the interdependence relation between national and European dimension, about the meaning of the expectation to obtain at European level what was unreachable on the national level.

Moreover, it can suggest the size of the deepness of the historical processes which led, at the beginning of the Nineties, to rethink the relations between political and social in the European social-political tradition and which appears to make Social Europe a paradigm for other regional areas, where processes of market unification precede the political integration. At the hearth of these “views” of Social Europe it appears to stand, once again, the need and the perspective pointed out by Emil Noel to Malfatti in June 1970, when it considered that trade union leaders “desiderano partecipare veramente all’elaborazione dei principali orientamenti politici della Commissione. I rappresentanti degli industriali si sono espressi fino ad ora in maniera meno forte su questo punto. Si tratterà di una profonda modifica della nozione e dello stile dei rapporti tra attori sociali e Commissione, che darà loro quella intensità che hanno nella maggior parte degli stati membri” (quoted in Guasconi, 2004, p. 159).

Certainly, Social Europe, which cannot be understood without evaluating reasons and value of the birth of the ETUC, of the social dialogue and of the Maastricht social protocol, appears not to fully develop the ability of private-collective regulation through forms of governance. This highlights the weakness of the European entrepreneurs’ association (national and sectoral) and a scarce capacity for initiative of an articulated European trade-union representation (Tilly, 2012; Borońska–Hryniewiecka, 2012). In spite of all its limits, however, it appears to be not only defined in its main historical features, but also bound to re-affirm a special relation among social and political dimensions, considering that over time social dimension has always accompanied the success of the stages for the European unification and the reasons of its expansion.

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