

From corporatism to the “foundation of labour”: notes on political cultures across Fascist and Republican Italy

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Abstract: Until the mid-1930s, corporatism represented the main vehicle of self-representation that fascism gave to its own resolution of the crisis of the modern state; the investment in corporatism involved not only the attempt to build a new institutional architecture that regulated the relations between the State, the individual and society, but also the legal, economic and political debate. However, while the importance of corporatism decreased in the last years of the regime, the labour issue to which it was genetically linked found new impetus. After Liberation Day, the labour issue was not abandoned along with corporatism, but it was laid down in Article I of the Constitution. The aim of this paper is to acknowledge the political cultures that in interwar years faced the above-mentioned processes, with particular reference to the fascist “left”, the reformist socialists and, above all, Catholics of different orientations, in order to examine some features of the relationship between the labour issue and statehood across the 20th century.

Keywords: Italian fascism; Corporate State; social Catholicism; Labour; Republican Constitution.

Do corporativismo até a “fundação do trabalho”: observações das culturas políticas durante o Fascismo e a República Italiana

Resumo: Até meados de 1930, o corporativismo representou o veículo principal de ego-representação que o Fascismo apresentou para a sua própria resolução da crise do estado moderno; o investimento em corporativismo não só envolveu a tentativa de construir uma arquitetura institucional nova que regulava as relações entre o Estado, o indivíduo e a sociedade, mas também envolveu o debate legal, econômico e político. Porém, enquanto a importância do corporativismo desapareceu nos últimos anos do regime, o trabalho, assunto com o qual estava geneticamente ligado, encontrou um novo ímpeto. Depois do Dia da Libertação, a questão do trabalho não foi abandonada junto com o corporativismo; ela foi colocada no Artigo 1º da Constituição. O objetivo deste trabalho é o reconhecimento das culturas políticas que, nos anos entreguerras, enfrentaram os processos supracitados, com referência particular para a “esquerda” fascista, para os socialistas reformistas e, acima de tudo, para os Católicos de diferentes orientações, examinando algumas características da relação entre a questão trabalhista e o Estado em todo século XX.

Palavras-chave: Fascismo italiano; Estado corporativo; Catolicismo social; Trabalho; Constituição Republicana.

During the Fascist regime, the connection between the labour issue and corporatism took shape with the 1927 Labour Charter, which can be regarded as “the fundamental expression of the nature of Fascist work and of the Fascist surpassing of class conflict” (Bosworth, 2005, p. 227), and as the definition of the political and cultural horizon for the Italian corporate project. Its legal cornerstone was laid the previous year, with the enforcement of the “syndical and corporative laws” devised by former nationalist Minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco, who conceived the corporate structure as a hierarchical arrangement of several unions for workers (then “corporations”), mirrored by employers’ matching confederations and topped by the State, with the dedicated Ministry of Corporations and the new Labour court. Only one workers’ union for each production branch could be legally acknowledged and was chartered to sign with its counterpart a collective agreement, whose observation bonded both parts and was sanctioned by the law. Strikes and lockouts were banned, and after the subsequent dissolution of the free trade union CGdL (General Confederation of Labour), workers had access to Fascist unions only. The corporations not only disciplined and ultimately banned labour conflicts; they also were entrusted with the task of regulating and coordinating all aspects of national production, the theoretical assumption being the subordination of economic forces to the development of national power. This assumption was emphatically stated in the Labour Charter opening lines, where the nation was defined as a “moral, political and economic unity, fully accomplished in the fascist state”, and “an organism having ends, life, means of action superior in power and duration to those of the divided or grouped individuals who compose it”. The centrality of labour in the national perspective was stated subsequently: “work, in all its organizational and executive forms, intellectual, technical, manual, is a social duty. In this respect, and only in this context, it is protected by the State”.

On a transnational level, the Labour Charter was a driving force for the dissemination of fascist corporatist project (Pasetti, 2017, p. 60-77). Indeed, up to the mid-1930s, corporatism represented the main vehicle of self-representation for Italian fascism, especially where the advertisement of its particular brand of solution of the post-1929 slump was concerned. As argued in recent studies, the investment in corporatism involved not only the attempt to build a new institutional architecture to regulate relations between the State, the individual and the society, but it also involved the legal, economic and political debate on a large scale (Cassese, 2010; Gagliardi, 2010 and 2017; Stolzi, 2007; Santomassimo, 2006). Perhaps understandably, the impact of corporatism in the Italian political discourse stalled after the establishment of the corporations was completed in 1934 and began to fade after the belated imperial adventure with the aggression against Ethiopia in 1935. Meanwhile, on the international level, the Portuguese experience gained momentum (Pasetti, 2016, p. 230-247), in the context of a significant success of corporate projects, especially among authoritarian regimes (Dard, Deschamps, 2005; Musiedlak, 2010; Dard, 2011; Costa Pinto, Kallis, 2013; Costa Pinto, 2017).

However, despite the diminished importance of the corporatist topic, the labour issue — to which it was originally linked — did not fade away. On the contrary, it found new momentum in the terminal years of the regime, as we will presently examine. The original connection between labour and the corporate project had provided the historical framework for promoting the labour issue in the Fascist political debate, then it loosened during wartime. This gap allowed the issue to undergo the major reversals which led to the fall of the Fascist regime, without being rejected or dismantled together with the dismantling of any reference to the corporate experience, too closely identified with the defeated regime to survive it. On the other hand, corporations were soon made the object of nostalgic regret by its epigones for having been, according to Camillo Pellizzi (2009), a “missed revolution”.

In perspective, the divergent trajectories described by corporation and labour account for the twisted process of the legitimization of the State in the social and economic ground, which is a major feature in the 20th-century western democracies’ historical experience. In Italy, the process started in late liberal era, passed through the fascist regime and World War II, and was decidedly undertaken at the outset of the new democratic republic. Indeed, after the Liberation in May 1945, having undergone a complex resemantization process, the labour issue re-emerged as an essential component of the political covenant which founded the democratic constitution that came into force in 1948 and is still effective. As a result of a broad convergence of the anti-fascist parties, whose representatives were elected in June 1946, the constitution was intended to guarantee solid and shared foundations for the new democratic regime; for this reason, the basic norms which should inspire it were enunciated in the form of 12 fundamental principles. Article 1 of the fundamental principles states that Italy is “a democratic republic, founded on labour”.

Due to the 70th anniversary of the Italian constitution, several new studies on the political and juridical background of the democratic state-building are now available (Urbinati, 2017; Salvati, 2017; Dogliani, Giorgi, 2017; Cazzetta, 2017; Cau, 2018). My intent is to tackle the subject from a different angle, and to look back at the metamorphic meanings assumed by the concept of labour among the main political cultures during the inter-war period (Cerasi, 2016b, p. 1-30), in order to re-examine the interconnection between corporations and labour throughout the political experience of fascism.

The civilization of labour

In late documents, labour was placed at the centre of fascist civilization (Landi, 1943), and was projected retrospectively as a defining feature in the origin of the fascist movement. The mythopoeia often recalled Mussolini’s topical speech to Dalmine industrial plant workers in 1919: “It is labour that in the trenches has consecrated its right to no longer be

fatigue, misery or despair, because it must become joy, pride, creation, conquest of men in the free and great homeland, within and beyond the borders” (Mussolini 1919 in Prosperetti, 1940, p. 730). Labour, in a distinct meaning, was also prominent in the Charter of the self-proclaimed Italian Regency of Carnaro, formed after the seizure of Yugoslav harbor Fiume/Rijeka by poet Gabriele D’Annunzio alongside a few seditious Italian military units. In the Charter, penned by syndicalist Alceste De Ambris, citizenship was based on the status of worker, but that status was accorded to anyone who contributed to the production process: therefore, the citizen was not a “worker” but, echoing the Sorelian tradition, a “producer”, active in all the economical branches. As a result, the Charter expressed a sort of early corporatism, the electoral body being conceived as a mirror of the productive structure (Bosworth, 2005, p. 113).

After the issue of the Labour Charter in 1927, the principles of corporatism and labour became closely intertwined, reciprocally entailed in the framework of the state refoundation. In the 1927 Charter, the function of labour was declared to be “a social duty”: “on this basis, and only on this basis, [labour] is protected by the State” (title II), the paramount purpose being the unity of production and the “development of national power”. In this perspective, the basis of the institutional framework was altered without a formal change in the constitution to adapt it to the new political regime; notably, the absence of a new constitution was a feature shared by Italian Fascism and Nazism (Mueller, 2012 [2011], p. 167). Labour, encompassed in the corporative project and placed at the foundation of the State, played, therefore, a constitutional role, even without the issuing of a new constitution. In the 1930s, this role was grasped by contemporary Catholic jurist Costantino Mortati — whose contribution would later have been decisive in the elaboration of the Republican Charter — by forging the concept of “constitution in a material sense” (Mangoni, 1990).

During the 1930s, thus, the labour topic assumed a fundamental role in the legitimation of the corporatist state. In 1936, Bruno Biagi, former undersecretary of the Corporations, and one of the associates and collaborators of Giuseppe Bottai, the main political interpreter of the corporate project, proclaimed the advent of the “Fascist civilization of labour” on the occasion of April 21st, Rome’s anniversary of founding and fascist Labour Day. The new era “does not end with the most advanced social legislation, nor does it end with the established legal framework of labour relations, which is also profoundly innovative in nature, but takes concrete form in a radical transformation of relations between social categories, and between these and the State, inspired by the new concept of labour, as social duty and as subject of the economy” (Biagi, 1939 [1936], p. 24-27). In fact, “in the fascist conception, the protection of labour [...] is assumed as a fundamental task by a totalitarian State” (Biagi, 1939 [1936], p. 26). An indirect indication of the growing importance attributed to labour as a founding concept of Fascist civilization can also be found in the School Charter issued in 1939 by Minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai. In its title I, it reads: “The Fascist School by virtue

of study, conceived as a formation of maturity, implements the principle of the people's culture, inspired by the eternal values of the Italian race and its civilization; and grafts it, by virtue of labour, into the concrete activity of trades, arts, professions, sciences, weapons" (Amore Bianco, 2017). Bottai, in the entry *Corporativismo* published in the first Appendix of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1938), explained how the assumption of social forces within the state structure had solved the problem of the crisis of the modern state, unable to interpret "the new social reality produced in contemporary reality". In this "constitutional" perspective, labour founded corporatism and corporatism transformed the state: "Corporatism, facing the problem in its essence, supports the need for an organization of economic and social forces, their classification in the legal and political order of the state". Therefore, "in the state community the individual realizes his whole self; the indivisible unity of the human personality necessarily leads to giving a moral and political qualification to every economic determination" (Bottai, 1938). In the entry "labour" of the Dictionary of Politics of the PNF (National Fascist Party) it is declared that, for Fascism, work contains both an intrinsic social vocation and an ethical component: echoing Bottai, "for Fascism, labour means the full realization of man's social personality, the very essence of his sociality", and therefore, "the fascist revolution, the first in history, with the corporative State fully achieves the solution of the problem of labour both on the ethical and political levels, as well as on the social and economic levels", achieving the true "civilization of labour" (Prosperetti, 1940, p. 725-730).

In the second half of the 1930s, at the end of the Ethiopia campaign, a growing importance of the labour issue with respect to the corporatist one could be detected in the political debate (Parlato, 2000, p. 177-199). Following its emergence through the fascist public discourse is neither simple nor linear. Partly, the difficulty is due to the fact that labour was originally the point of reference for the Trade unions members of the fascist regime, such as Edmondo Rossoni, main representative of fascist anti-socialist trade unionism, whose influence had been thwarted in 1928 by the so-called "*sbloccamento*", the downsizing of the amalgamated Fascist Unions into several different branches, commanded by Mussolini in order to submit it to the Party. The relationship between trade unionists such as Rossoni, or Tullio Cianetti and Luigi Razza, and the proper "corporatist" members of the regime — the so-called "fascist left" gathered around Giuseppe Bottai — was not easy. Corporatism was a major asset for the regime and, in the early 1930s, it had been constantly in the limelight, but, as mentioned above, the actual establishment of the corporatist framework in 1934, after years of passionate debate, brought about a quantum of dissatisfaction. In this perspective, to brandish the labour issue, which fascist trade unionists never relinquished, was a leverage for them to regain access to the frontline of the political debate.

Another reason for labour during Fascism not being an easy matter of cultural investigation is that it carried an array of diverse meanings, which increased its interest for the historical reconstruction. It even had a technocratic tinge, apparent not only in the direct knowledge

of James Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* proved by renewed intellectual Camillo Pellizzi (Brezzi, Longo, 2003; Salvati, 2009), but apparent also in less prominent journalists as Luigi Fontanelli, young director of the daily Fascist syndical newspaper *Il lavoro fascista*, who, in his *Logic of the Corporation*, saw the future development of the corporate society in the advent of technique. "Having established that technique is the highest expression of labour (i.e. that the technician is the worker who has arrived — with his work — at the highest points of command in the production process)", the new corporate state will be based on technique, "putting it directly — through the corporation — in immediate contact with the State". "Tomorrow we will say: The corporation is made up of labour that takes place in a hierarchical order" (Fontanelli, 1934, p. 87-88). But, on the whole, the labour topic was a recipient for spurious aspects and motives: in the late 1930s, after the sanctions brought about by the invasion of Ethiopia, it was a key element of the anti-plutocratic argument intertwined with the relaunch of the "anti-bourgeois" campaign, intimately connected with the anti-Semitic persecutions. This unsettling feature ultimately prevailed during the war (Amore Bianco, 2018). Initiatives based on a mystique of labour flourished: such as the large display dedicated to the "civilization of labour" in the context of the Exhibition of 1942 at EUR, culminating in the iconic eponymous building — that was, the Palace of the civilization of Labour — now the Palace of Italian civilization opened in 1938 (Carli, 2016, p. 315-324).

Socialist corporatism and catholic labourism

Of course, labour was at the very heart of the socialist perspective, and played also an essential role in the Catholic social thinking. Some intersections with Fascism can be traced, insofar as the representation of interests was the subject matter of a variety of stances, that crossed transversally different political traditions (Cerasi, 2017, p. I-II; Gagliardi, 2016b). The organization and representation of interests is referred to as "corporatism" by Anglo-Saxon usage: this usage encompasses the historical and institutional experience of authoritarian corporatism, "*corporativismo*" in Italian and other Latin languages (Cerasi, 2016a), somehow clouding the area of reformist socialism and its labourist section, which particularly in the pre-war period harboured a number of corporatist and guild socialist designs. In 1910, the federal secretary of the CGdL, Rinaldo Rigola, argued for the foundation of a labour party (Partito del Lavoro), which was to be formed of Trade unions representatives, possibly drawn among the different branches of the industrial production. The new political party was supposed to participate in the general elections and, when in parliament, its members were supposed to constitute their own group, autonomous from the Socialist party and rather in competition with it for the political leadership of the workers' movement (Rigola, 1910; Furiozzi, 1997; Mattera, 2011). The Labour party scheme followed a decade of intense discussions, researches and projects among the reformist socialists, such as Giovanni

Montemartini, Angiolo Cabrini and Filippo Turati, about the representation of interests and the inception of intermediary bodies in a corporatist perspective; surveys were undertaken and bills were proposed regarding the competences of arbitration tribunals, the tasks of advisory bodies, such as the Labour Council, and especially the authority of trade unions regarding collective bargaining (Passaniti, 2008): thus, addressing the relationship between the economic-social modernization and the transformation of the State.

After World War I, an attempt was made to create a Labour Parliament, resulting from the transformation of the Labour Council into the second representative Chamber (Baldesi, 1919). Bills were presented to that effect by ministers Arturo Labriola and Mario Abbiate, backed by the progressive sector of the Confederation of Italian employers (Confindustria) and its representative Dante Ferraris; the bills did not pass, given the disagreement of Prime minister Giovanni Giolitti and the opposition of the most conservative and anti-socialist part of the industrial employers, which were starting to look at the Blackshirts as an effective means to defeat the socialist party, the worker movement and the trade unions. Nonetheless, Rigola, an admirer of G.D.H. Cole's Guild Socialism (Torreggiani, 2018), continued for a while to advocate for the transformation of the Parliament in a corporate chamber for the representation of labour and organized interests (Rigola, 1921). Later, Rigola did not overtly endorse Fascist corporatism, but, after the dissolution of the CGdL, he was allowed to retain his cultural organization (the National Association for the Questions of Labour), linked to the Genoese journal *Il Lavoro* edited by former reformist Giuseppe Canepa. This labour-reformist-corporatist area sought convergences, albeit tactical, with the fascist corporate State-building, thus attracting discredit from the exiled anti-fascist left and being disowned by union leaders in exile as Bruno Buozzi as a pro-fascist. Given its ineffectiveness and its entanglement with Fascist corporatism, this area was actually kept at bay during the anti-fascist struggle culminating in the Liberation and the Republican Constitution; however, its course proves how different political stances could intersect around the labour and corporatism issue (Musso, 2015; Loreto, 2015).

Another much wide and complex area of intersection was the Catholic social doctrine. Its Italian 19th-century champion, economist and sociologist Giuseppe Toniolo, was one of the inspirers and contributors of seminal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which tackled the labour issue and outlined the direction to be followed by Catholic social thinkers in 1891. Toniolo pointed out in various essays the fundamental importance of labour as the cornerstone for the reconstruction of modern society in the light of Catholic and Christian principles. Labourers and manual workers were to be acknowledged their social respectability, because "properly manual Christian work [...] was at the origin of the regeneration of pagan society in Christ" (Toniolo, 1957 [1903]). His political perspective was the advent of a pluralist "Christian democracy", based on a network of trade unions and organization of interests, whose corporatist institutions were to counterbalance the authority of the State; his

religious horizon was to claim the modern world, in its entirety, to the providential design; Catholics were called to a militant commitment to “inform, impregnate and saturate all the institutes and manifestations of civilization with the idea and the vital essence of Catholicism: Establishing everything in Christ [*Instaurare omnia in Christo*]”: the promotion of labour in a corporatist perspective was instrumental to that purpose (Cerasi, 2014). Toniolo encouraged the organization of Catholic, or “white”, worker’s unions, the study of social and economic issues in the Catholic Social Studies Association (*Unione cattolica per gli studi sociali*), promoted the Catholic social weeks (*Settimane sociali cattoliche*), founded the influential journal *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze sociali e discipline ausiliarie*, mentored a number of pupils and scholars, and, on the whole, he was the forerunner of every form of Catholics’ commitment in social and political life. Of course, when confronted with the Fascist experience, stances assumed a wide array of attitudes and positions: thus the complexity of the historical reconstruction.

One of Toniolo’s former assistants and collaborators, Jesuit father Angelo Brucculeri, in the 1930s, endorsed Fascist corporatism, embracing the authoritarian purpose of the regime, while rigidly observing the papal indications. In his profile, the contradictions of the Catholic social doctrine are apparent. Brucculeri approached Toniolo during the 1910s; he participated in the first Catholic social week, favoured the Toniolian conception of the ethical foundation of social life, encompassing the labour dimension in an organicist perspective. A military chaplain, a Jesuit since 1920 and collaborator of the pontifical organ *La Civiltà Cattolica*, he then established himself as a supporter of an organicist corporatism, founded on an ethical naturalism which was close to the “integral corporatism” professed by prominent Fascist economist Gino Arias. Meanwhile, in the 1920s, he was deeply interested in the processing of Malines’ Social Code. After the issue of Pius XI’s version of the labour and corporatist issue with encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Brucculeri’s attempt was to strike a balance between the postulates of Malines’ Social Code, of the *Quadragesimo Anno* and those of the fascist corporate order, noting above all their affinities: “This is the building created by fascism. Do not we see in it any coincidence with the social doctrines and directives promoted by Christianity?” (Brucculeri, 1934, p. 151), thus trying to fasten, upon first principles, a bond — those between Fascism and Catholics — which was strong, but also tactical for both sides and susceptible to adjustments. His somehow drastic stance did not help him to disentangle from the embrace with Fascism, and after its downfall Brucculeri’s influence severely decreased; after the Liberation in 1945, he laboriously sought to accept the democratic principles and tried to propose himself as official interpreter of the thought of Pope Pacelli, supporting the need for pluralism of trade unions in the opposite direction to the social-communist dominance in the unitary CGIL, but without regaining the previous prominent position, failing to overcome the rift caused by the collapse of fascism.

The hazards of merging too closely with the Fascist corporative perspective were not irrelevant for the most perceptive among Catholic intellectuals and future politicians. The

view about corporatism of young professor of economics at Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and editor of the *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, Amintore Fanfani, was more nuanced. In the early 1930s, Fanfani — who later became one of the foremost political figures in the Christian Democratic party, Minister of Labour, several times Prime minister — although initially close to Arias' integral corporatism (as well as Brucculeri), argued with the Jesuit Father, judging his organicist perspective laughable. Fanfani aimed at the most ambitious goal of making the corporatism of Catholics carefully distinguishable from that of Fascism: in a letter to his mentor, Father Agostino Gemelli, he declared that “on the subject of the corporate economy we must not receive other writings than those we could prepare, when appropriate, by ourselves. Since this is a subject of special importance and responsibility, it is good that the opinions of others do not fall on us” (Michelagnoli, 2010, p. 44). Therefore, his stance was, on the one hand, to overtly seek a convergence with scholars of the regime, publicly adhering to its order (Fanfani, 1936a), and, on the other hand, to carefully draw a definition of his own recognizable ground, particularly with regard to topics, such as corporatism and labour, already part of the Catholic social doctrine. This design was undertaken both at a scientific level, by the elaboration of his own economic theory, and at a more didactic one, by publishing short essays and reviews in his journal, or authoring largely distributed textbooks on the meaning of corporatism (Fanfani, 1936b).

The importance of the Catholic side of the corporatist debate is now slowly entering the non-confessional field of historical research, as well as its contribution to the transition from Fascism to the Italian democratic republic, both in the resumption of trade union actions and practices (Craveri, 1977), and in the rethinking of legal paradigms focusing in the valorization of intermediate bodies, carried on in the Constituent Assembly by prominent politicians and jurists such as Giuseppe Dossetti and Mortati, (Grossi, 2000, p. 296). New studies are underway on Amintore Fanfani and his role in the recovery of Catholic corporatism, which in the post-war period took shape through the representation of interests of both Trade unions and entrepreneurial organizations under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour and its economic and managerial action.

It ought to be stressed that the variety of positions that Catholics assumed towards Fascism and its corporatism was wide. Part of social Catholics maintained their democratic orientation even during Fascism. In the early 1930s, Alcide De Gasperi — the future Secretary of the Christian Democrats and Prime minister in the post-war years — after being arrested for anti-fascism, was confined as a librarian to the Vatican Library. In various writings, he had tried to distance himself from fascist corporatism, albeit indirectly. After the completion of the corporatist institutional layout, in 1934, he published an essay in pontifical *Illustrazione Vaticana* on the constitution and functions of corporations, aiming to outline “with the greatest possible fidelity” what the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* taught Catholics with regard to the corporate State. De Gasperi particularly underlined how, in the papal

encyclical, corporatism was supposed to be based on “corporations understood as natural societies, with their own rights, in a similar way to the Municipalities”. Highlighting the role of the municipalities involved an implicit but basic reject of the hierarchical statism, which constituted the framework of Fascist corporatism. In essence, he tried to sustain how the papal encyclical did not constitute a viaticum for the edification of corporatism willed by Fascism, nor by any other political system (although, in other passages, he saw the experiences of Belgium, France and Spain closer to the social doctrine of the Church). In his words: “In these cornerstones of the encyclical, there is no talk of the political function that is attributed to the corporations nor of the political structure of the State. Therefore, when we speak of ‘Corporate State according to the *Quadragesimo Anno*’ we mean social and economic order, not a political system” (De Gasperi, 1955 [1934], p. 155-183). Consequently, corporatism was not, under any circumstance, to be considered as completely overlapping the Fascist experience, but should be reckoned as apt to adapt itself to different political systems: in this perspective, it has been noted how De Gasperi, albeit briefly, after the Liberation took into account the possibility of a democratic version of corporatism (Cau, 2009, p. 5-31).

The multi-faceted attitude of Catholics towards Fascist corporatism was, of course, even more complex when seen in a transnational dimension. One attempt made by the young corporatist intellectuals gathered in Bottai’s circle to connect with contemporaries French intellectuals of diverse political leanings was to devote the 3rd Conference of Corporatist Studies to an Italian-French debate on the subject. The previous two corporative conferences (held respectively in Rome, 1930, and in Ferrara, 1932), had been of great momentum, and particularly with the second in Ferrara the apex of the national debate about Fascist corporatism was attained. The 3rd Conference, albeit a somehow low-key enterprise due to diminished appeal of the corporatist topic, was organized in Rome by Bottai’s assistant Agostino Nasti in May, 1935, under the aegis of the Fascist Institute of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Among the invited speakers, most of them syndicalist intellectuals and representatives of youth intellectual groups, were several Catholics, such as corporatist Georges Viance, member of the *Fédération Nationale Catholique*, reactionary Robert Aron, editor of *Jeune Droite* journal *Ordre Nouveau*, and personalist philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, editor of *Esprit* (Sternhell, 1984, p. 1141-1180; Nacci, 1986, p. 7-29; Simand, 1988, p. 55-76; Speech, 1990; Parlato, 1990; Chatriot, 2005, p. 173-196; Dard, 2010, p. 67-102). The conference aimed at dispelling the aura of organic medieval society still persisting around the corporatist discourse — which mainly appealed the traditionalist, authoritarian side, such as Viance and Aron —, and at corroborating a “modern” and totalitarian vision of the corporatist state (by counteracting, on this topic, the penetrating and far-reaching criticisms expressed by anti-fascist scholar Luis Rosenstock-Franck and his mentor Gaetano Salvemini: Rosenstock-Franck, 1934; Salvemini, 1936). The lively discussion did not entirely fulfill the

goals. On the whole, the French did not completely endorse the Fascist corporatist system; their positions were very nuanced, but the main stumbling block to an unrestrained approval of Fascist corporatism was the prominent role that the State played in its arrangement. Especially on the Catholics' side, the integration between the corporate structure and the state was not considered desirable: "It is the form of your state that does not convince me" (Aron in Parlato, 1990, p. 115). Even Emmanuel Mounier, who also in his journal *Esprit* had previously promoted a wide discussion on the brand of corporatism achieved by Italian fascism, rejected the "primacy of the State", which in his view was prone to shift into the "tyranny of the majority", echoing the abhorred Rousseauian "general will" (Mounier, in Parlato, 1990, p. 143).

Even the Italian-French conference, therefore, indicated that one of the main concerns of Catholics was the question of statehood, and its role in Fascist corporatism.

Statehood , corporations, Fascism

For the formation of the Catholic ruling class during the 1930s (Moro, 1979; Piva, 2003), the encounter/confrontation with Fascism about corporatism was relevant.

It is worth reminding that after the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* of 1931, and more so after the *Patti Lateranensi* (1929), which brought to an end the estrangement of Italian Catholics from the Italian Liberal State ordered by pope Pius IX in 1874, and marked the entry of Catholics in full title in the political life, the encounter with Fascism also encompassed a fierce competition for cultural and political hegemony over the Italian society. In this perspective, it is still to be fully acknowledged the importance of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, founded by father Agostino Gemelli and enjoying the special papal favour (Mangoni, 1986). Gemelli's overall goal was to win back the Italian society to Catholic principles; the reconquest was to be achieved by various means, but one essential tool was forging in his University a group of young Catholic intellectual-politicians, equipped for the challenges of the times (such as Amintore Fanfani, Francesco Vito, Giacomo Delitala, Francesco Rovelli, Francesco Olgiati, Marcello Boldrini). Having emerged victorious, together with his pupils and collaborators, from the anti-idealist and anti-Gentilian battle (Tarquini, 2009; Pazzaglia, 2012), thus contributing to undermine the influence of the previous chief intellectual of the regime, Gemelli could aspire to a national role. The role, in short, of guiding Catholic intellectuals in the Italian society reconciled with — and inside — Fascism, competing first of all with one of the principal acquisitions of the regime: corporatism, to be interpreted in the light of the Catholic Magisterium. Even when politically supporting Fascism without reserve — as Gemelli and Fanfani did — their position can be said to be in competition with Fascism in the use of key instruments of governance of society: this appeared to be

particularly cogent after the *Quadragesimo anno*, which claimed to the Catholic social doctrine the primacy in overcoming the liberal individualistic atomism and in encouraging the social dimension of organized life.

In 1935, Father Gemelli organized at his University a special series of lectures dedicated to the “fundamental problems of the corporate state”. Gemelli himself introduced the proceedings, reckoning with the controversial quality of the subject: “Given the various opinions that deal with these questions, the doubt could arise in us about the convenience, or not, of entering into a discussion”; but he resolved on the affirmative, convinced that “Catholic scholars can, by virtue of the fundamental principles of Catholicism, make a useful contribution to the development of Corporatism” (Gemelli, 1935, p. VIII/ XII). It is apparent, through Gemelli’s introduction, that Catholics have accepted the positive reality of the existing State; since it took shape in the Fascist regime, its prominent feature was the corporate structure, which Catholics were familiar with, and so were particularly equipped to discuss. Arguably, through corporatism, the historical convergence between Catholics and the State occurred. Exactly because it was as a realization of Catholic social doctrine — an expression used more frequently than corporatism, especially in the early 1930s — corporatism could be placed under scrutiny, discussed, and partly endorsed.

An indirect indication, and perhaps for this reason even more significant, of the encounter between Italian Catholics and Statehood through corporatism can be found in the commentary on the *Semaine Social* held in Angers in July, 1935, dedicated to the corporate organization, whose proceedings were promptly published and had wide circulation (*L’Organisation Corporative*, 1935). The report, drawn up by a young graduate, Giusto Geremia, while noting “warm accents of sympathy for Italy and sincere acknowledgments of Fascist achievements”, deemed them to be “not unconditional” and therefore subject to criticism. Geremia (later Fanfani’s particular secretary), conceded that “French Catholics have a duty to adapt corporatism to the French national temperament, traditions and particular needs of France”, but also stated that

“Corporatism expresses an idea that has an exact and precise meaning, that any people who apply it must respect and do. It is order, discipline, hierarchy and therefore implies the concepts of authority, command, empire, otherwise you would have an economic organization equal to that you wanted to overcome, you put a palliative, a semblance of novelty and revolution”.

He continued:

“Many are the states, beyond Italy, that in these times have installed a so-called corporative order, but often the essence and the spirit are missing, it is a return to medieval corporations that cannot be called the quintessence of perfection. At present, the State has assumed a well-defined and unmistakable structure,

and nobody so powerful that it can overwhelm and oppress it is conceivable. But French Catholics, if not explicitly at least indirectly, advocate the creation of corporate groupings capable of achieving such absurdity”.

And further on, with even greater clarity: “One can in no way neglect the factor State, if one does not want to lose oneself in illusion and grope in the dark” (Geremia, 1936, p. 402-406).

Coming back to Gemelli’s 1935 introduction, it is also worth noticing that, albeit having come to terms with the Fascist state, with respect to the economic and the political dimension, the primacy was accorded to the ethical dimension, which was superordinate to both. This was, of course, his rendition of neo-Thomistic principles. In his words: “the fundamental point is precisely this: ethics offers the means so that political action and economic activity, contemplating and integrating the means of individuals with social interests, may lead to the realization of a new society in which Italy, Benito Mussolini hopes, indicates the fundamental lines” (Gemelli, 1935, p. XII). In other words, it was the ethical dimension, that is to say its being oriented towards precise ends, that made the fascist State a superior historical form, compared to the “agnostic, secular and Jacobin State”, the abhorred 19th-century Liberal state.

Framed in its historical background, this position entailed that, of the historical experience of the Fascist and corporate state, its most peculiar and “constitutional” feature was particularly appreciated: in a juridical perspective, it consisted in its intention to combine the “realistic” recognition of social bodies with their hierarchical disposition in the frame of the authoritarian State and its ends (Stolzi, 2009, p. 164-165). The Fascist corporate State expressed its specific objectives: it intended to become an instrument of hierarchical integration of the associative phenomena that had emerged in the social dimension within the structure of the State, so that the new public power could shape the society according to its ends (Stolzi, 2012, p. 499).

With the theme of the acceptance of statehood by Catholics through corporatism and the primacy of ethics, we can return to the question posed at the beginning, of the relationship between corporation and labour.

After Liberation Day, the most distinctive structural elements of the Fascist corporatism-building were considered unacceptable in the new anti-fascist context. Therefore, economists rejected the instruments of state intervention in the economy, even in the toughest years of post-war reconstruction (Fauci, 1985, p. 405-421), and jurists abstained to reproduce any feature of the corporate framework, even in dire economic conditions and faced with increasing social conflicts (Cazzetta, 2007, p. 171-290). However, it is also acknowledged that important residues of the previous corporatist construction can be found in the twofold role that the new Republican constitution ascribed to the Trade unions. Indeed, it establishes the “bipolarity of the Trade unions, as a free subject of self-protection in a sphere of private law,

and as a subject of a public function” (Romagnoli, 2009, p. 176). These residues are all the more significant in a juridical perspective, in that one of the salient features of 20th-century Constitutions have been reckoned in their being a procedure of reading, interpreting and reshaping the society (Grossi, 2012, p. 27).

As we have seen, this same “demiurgic” vocation was also typical of the corporatist experience of Fascism, insofar as it intended to integrate the associative and organized parts of the society into the hierarchical structure of the State, so that they might be “converted into as many instruments of ‘active’ and constant culture of the new public power, of a power that was now called upon to confer an authentically juridical — that is, organized — face on the social moment” (Stolzi, 2009, p. 164-65). Even during Fascism, the associative and organized parts of the society to be integrated in the corporatist state were the Trade unions and other labour-related institutions. Organized labour was the main recipient (albeit a passive and defeated one) of the corporatist state. This even allowed, within the authoritarian context of the corporate order, a “modest presence” of the economic forces and of organized labour: “the totalitarian State was internally quite articulate, undergoing and registering, to some extent, the pressures of those forces” (Grossi, 2000, p. 178). From a transnational point of view, it has also been observed that “for the totalitarianism of the twentieth century, it is productive labour that is celebrated as an instrument of the authoritarian integration of the masses in the State” (Costa, 2009, p. 28). Of course, from the point of view of citizenship, totalitarian states integrated organized productive labour, provided that it was deprived of its subjectivity, and that it was considered a duty — as we have seen in the Labour Charter — and not a right in itself. After 1945, these features have been acknowledged by the new constitutions, particularly with the principle of social citizenship (Urbinati, 2017; Salvati, 2017). In the Italian case, it is particularly evident that in laying the foundations of the constitutional pact, the social citizenship was a feature pertaining to the productive labour (Romagnoli, 2009).

In conclusion: it is not intended here to argue that there is a linear continuity between the ambiguous “labour” outcome of the fascist regime and the “labour” on which the Republican Constitution intended to found the new democratic society, making it the decisive ground for guaranteeing citizenship and forming social rights (Dogliani, Giorgi 2017; Cazzetta, 2017). What is suggested, instead, is that across the transition from late Fascism to Republic, the labour issue detached itself from its interweaving with corporatism, through complex processes of resemantization which are still largely to be investigated. Also, it is suggested that it may be worth reflecting on the way in which different political cultures, and above all the Catholic in its different nuances, have been facing the corporatist experience, and its peculiar brand of integration of organized labour into the State. Finally, it is suggested that it may be worth further investigating the way in which this “meeting with the State” transfused itself into the Constitution: on the assumption that, in the central phase of the 20th century, the labour issue formed, to a large extent, the fundamental issue of statehood.

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