

ABSTRACT

Besana Claudio, Locatelli Andrea-Maria (Université catholique del Sacro Cuore Milan) : *The Italian Business Associations and their relations with the Superior Council for Labour (1880-1923)*

The research considers the Italian historiography that has focused on the debate on the establishment of the Superior Council for Labour (SCL): the “liberal reformers” and the “liberal right wing” expressed their approval but also the reformist socialism. Historiography also discussed the conditioning exercised by the Upper House with the attribution to the government for appointing the members of the SCL. Firstly, our research highlights that the business world complained for the under-representation granted to the enterprises; Secondly, the BA in Turin didn't like the new organ while the Milan associations have taken part with their exponents. Finally, we consider the biographical profiles of the industrial representatives and we point out that the attendance was qualified. For the Socialist unionists the SCL was a significant opportunity to advance proposals but some businessmen were present and especially some entrepreneurs of Lombardy: Rubini, Silvio Crespi, Egildo Carugati and their connections with Business Associations. Another example was Raimondo Targetti: entrepreneur in Milan who was a member of the Board of the *Confindustria* in 1920. Moreover, the research considers the relationship between the Presidents of the Chamber of Trade and the SCL: an entrepreneur of Milan, Angelo Salmoiraghi, was the President of *Unione delle Camere di Commercio italiane*. Cesare Saldini was the exponent of industry that gave the most important contribution to the SCL. He was professor at university, a town councilor in the reformist city governments, a board member of companies and, then, Rector of the Polytechnic and Senator of the Kingdom. He has been a member of the SCL from 1904 to 1922. He was a member of the “reformist business élite” in Milan, a man with a liberal and positivist culture. He looked favorably to the social reforms carried out by the reformist socialism and to the recognition of trade unions in the institutional system.

The activity of the SCL regarded the social legislation and the collective bargaining. In the SCL the dialogue between the employers and the trade unionists occurred in a positive political context. However, the minutes of the meetings highlight the proposals of the entrepreneurs that the previous researches had not considered. Moreover, the dialogue was operative for the mutual understanding among entrepreneurs and unionists of the same city, Milan (f.e. Saldini and Turati). The collaboration continued when it exploded the social conflict.

After the WWI, Catholics and socialists pointed out the transformation of the Council from an advisory to a deliberative organ but the “liberal establishment” (Luigi Einaudi) admitted only a proposal function for the SCL. The absence of sources in the Archives of *Confindustria* does not allow to reconstruct the positions of the BA about the transformation of the SCL in a “Parliament of the Work”. The SCL was suppressed by the first government of Mussolini. The new power decided a bureaucratic deregulation with a strengthening of the executive. The research highlights that the “reformist circles” of both sides had been marginalized when the social conflict was turned in a political confrontation. At the same time, the Fascism took care of the industrial relations but the issue was linked to the goals of the industrial production such as supported by the business community.