

MINI-SYMPOSIUM:
ECONOMISTS IN PARLIAMENT
THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE
(1861-1922)

MASSIMO M. AUGELLO (*Università di Pisa*), PIERO BARUCCI
(*Università di Firenze*), TOMMASO FANFANI (*Università di Pisa*),
GUIDO MELIS (*Università di Roma «La Sapienza»*),
MARCO E. L. GUIDI (*Università di Pisa*)

1. FOREWORD by MASSIMO M. AUGELLO and MARCO E. L. GUIDI

THE mini-symposium that follows discusses two joint volumes of which the authors of the present note are the editors, on the role played by economists and economic science in parliamentary debates in Italy during the so-called 'liberal age'.¹ These volumes, published in 2002 and 2003, are largely based on the results of collective research on «The Economists in the Italian parliament, 1861-1922», supported by the Italian Ministry of University and Scientific Research for the years 1999-2001. This research, to which have contributed more than fifty Italian economists and historians of economic thought, has examined both the activities of the most eminent economists who became members of Parliament in the period extending from the political unification of the country to the rise of the fascist regime, and the main economic debates that marked the life of this institution, reflecting the dramatic problems that arose in an age of transition from an agriculturally-based country to an industrial society.

As to the structure of the books in which the results of this research are collected, volume I is devoted to the analysis of the main economic debates in parliament. The book is preceded by an introductory essay and is divided into three sections, each of which preceded by a short foreword. Section 1, introduced by Piero Bini and Daniela Parisi, deals with themes related to the modernisation of the Italian economic structure and the State intervention into the economy; section 2, introduced by Riccardo Faucci, focuses on public finance and the reformation of the administrative structures of the Italian State; finally, section 3, preceded by an introduction by Riccar-

1. M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento 1861-1922. Una storia dell'economia politica dell'Italia liberale. I*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2002; *Gli economisti in Parlamento 1861-1922. Una storia dell'economia politica dell'Italia liberale. II*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2003.

do Realfonzo, is devoted to the so-called 'Mezzogiorno question' (i.e., the relative under-development of the Southern part of Italy) and to the problems of Italian agriculture. Volume II is composed of an introductory essay and of 27 chapters, each examining in the light of original sources the scientific and parliamentary activities of the economists who sat in parliament in the liberal age.

One of the originalities of this research is that for the first time a systematic study of the parliamentary activities of economists was brought on through the analysis of parliamentary reports and of the papers and correspondence of the economists who sat in parliament. Its aim was understanding whether or not the participation of thirty academic economists and of many other well-known experts of economic science to parliamentary and government activities implied that there was some significant influence of the tenets of political economy on parliamentary debates and on the guidelines of economic policy dictated by the Government and the Parliament. Reciprocally, the research also studied the consequences of the parliamentary experience of many economists on the evolution of economics in Italy both from the point of view of the contents of theoretical inquiry and from that of the professionalisation of economics. But the research has also revealed that beyond cross-fertilization there was a widespread subjectively felt continuity between conceptions of the nature and scope of political economy and the political activity in which so many economists engaged themselves with a deep understanding of the importance of their mission. Throughout the liberal age, the economic science was considered as a science with practical, political implications: not a mere art, though, but certainly a *science of government*. Moreover, the Italian economists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century believed that political economy could contribute not only to elaborating the guidelines of economic policy and determining the path of economic development that the nation would follow. Political economy, as part of the education of the ruling elite and as a subject of debate in civil society, could also influence the overall building of the new State resulting from the unification of Italy and the cultural identity of the Italian nation.

This does not imply that the economists who sat in parliament always behaved consistently with this ideal, nor that they all shared the same economic paradigm. The period between 1961 and 1922 saw the transition from classical to marginalist economics, through the stage of positivistic and historicist political economy. Some economists endorsed laissez-faire views, whereas many others adopted a more interventionist stance. This was also the period in which social-

ist ideals pervaded the intellectual arena, also influencing the economic debate. However, the research on the Italian economists in parliament reveals that all of them shared the same belief in the wide ranging political implications of economic science. This explains the subtitle of the volumes, which alludes to the existence of a 'single' economic thought across the liberal period.

Still less do the above remarks imply that the economic policy of the Italian State was the result of the work of the economists or that their contribution was prominent in any sense. As many of the papers published in these books reveal, the legislative activity in the economic field was rather the product of the action and direction of an educated political class, composed of proprietors, men of letters and of law, whose intellectual background also included a basic familiarity with political economy. Moreover, as it was natural, the economic policy of the Italian state was more the result of a multifaceted political design than an applications of the tenets of economics.

The research on the Italian economists in Parliament has recently had a further interesting extension, thanks to a book containing ten papers from distinguished scholars, which examine other national cases in Europe, the United States of America and Japan.² This comparative analysis reveals itself essential to understanding the specificities of single national trajectories. Important differences emerge both as to the characteristics of MP economists and to their degree of involvement in politics in general, and in parliamentary activities in particular. In countries like France, Italy, and partially Belgium and Spain, for example, the leading economists in parliament were university professors, while in others like Greece, Portugal and Japan they were politicians and civil servants who had acquired an expertise in economics thanks to their specialised activity in the field of economic and fiscal legislation. Significantly, the specificities of American political culture systematically kept the economists outside parliament, while the British case is characterised by a gradual disengagement of economists from political activity during the nineteenth century, which became more radical with the introduction of marginalism. Certainly the publication of this book will stimulate further research on this topic at a national and international level.³ From the Italian viewpoint, it will favour a better understanding of the intellectual and professional characteristics of the Italian economists in their historical evolution, and of the peculiarities of the 'national style' of political economy.

2. M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *The Economist in Parliament in the Liberal Age*, London, Ashgate, forthcoming.

3. A group of historians coordinated by José Luis Cardoso and António Almodovar is currently engaged in a systematic study of the Portuguese case.

The contributions by three eminent scholars herewith published were presented during a debate held on February 3rd, 2004 in the library of the Senate of the Italian Republic, with an introduction by the President of the Senate, Professor Marcello Pera. Professor Piero Barucci discusses the role that a research on the economists in parliament plays in the reconstruction of the history of the Italian economic thought and of its institutionalisation; Professor Tommaso Fanfani considers the relationships between the activities of the economists in Parliament and the economic and political history of Italy in the liberal age; finally, Professor Guido Melis examines the books from the point of view of the institutional evolution of parliament and of the structures of the Italian State.

All these contributions raise many interesting questions to which it would be premature and perhaps not very useful to reply punctually. The remarks presented above can suffice as a general rejoinder to some doubts that such a topic of research, rather than its concrete results, may have generated in some observers. We are convinced that the present symposium will promote discussion on the evolution of economic thought in Italy between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, and they will stimulate new research on the role played by economists and economic science in the history of the Italian civil, intellectual and political life.

2. PIERO BARUCCI

THE last decade or so has seen a considerable flowering of research projects that have shed light on the various ways in which Italian economists have, over the course of time, transmitted their knowledge beyond the narrow circles of academic scholarship and illuminated the educated public on issues of concern to economists.

We have by now acquired considerable knowledge concerning the early steps taken by Italian economists to organize their activities and establish themselves as an academic community. We know that they initially gained recognition within the world of the Academies, where they achieved the first significant acknowledgement of their status; subsequently – although not until the end of the 19th century – they were recognised within the sphere of university teaching, from which they had previously been excluded. Prior to that time, they had been restricted to working at a variety of cultural institutions or alternatively, where they had been acknowledged as *bona-fide* members of the university world, they had often been compelled to work as bed-fellows of lawyers or, more generally, jurists, reflecting the fact that

economists themselves had long simply been part of the overall body of jurists and lawyers.

In less than twenty years, a rich series of works devoted to the Chairs of political economy has come to occupy a prominent position in the Italian world of publishing. This body of knowledge has been further enhanced by a range of general-interest journals which have rapidly blossomed into specialized publications featuring essays by Italian economists. Attention has also focused on the academies and associations where the economists in question were active or through which they published their papers in official *Proceedings*, and considerable effort has been devoted to outlining the role they played in drawing up specialized dictionaries or encyclopaedias of a general nature and in promoting the circulation of economic ideas from and towards Italy. Taken together, these publications have built up an illuminating picture of the development of economic science in Italy. And now, with these two extensive books that gather together the results of an investigative survey promoted and coordinated by Massimo Augello and Marco Guidi, we have a wealth of information on the role played by Italian economists in the national Parliament, at least up to the era of Fascism. Work is now in progress to provide a picture of how the Italian economists contributed, through their handbooks, to shaping an approach to economic culture in Italy; at the same time, the on-going research is also seeking to shed light on the presence of Italian economists in the major daily newspapers, with reference to the various economic problems that came to the fore in the context of political or cultural debate in Italy.

This intense research activity has been conducted by a 'team' of scholars, in which large numbers of young researchers have played a major role, devoting themselves for years to studying and recomposing a complex pattern that has sometimes included interlocking regional developments as well. Their findings have built up a global view of the growth and expansion of economic culture in Italy.

As with all works of this kind, the contributions under analysis here present a wide range of approaches, which not infrequently differ both in method and quality. Such an outcome is inevitable in a team effort that aims to be all-encompassing and which draws upon a range of experience that is not naturally homogeneous.

These two collections open up a vast field of research that the economist cannot, alone, cultivate adequately. The subjects addressed concern the study of the manner in which economic policy decisions are made in a country founded on a modern parliamentary democracy, which features many different centres of decision-making and a mul-

tiplicity of actors, all playing a role within on-going debate and contributing in various ways to crucial choices.

The authors – and even more so, the editors – focus on the rise and evolution of the figure, typology and educational background of the economist, and highlight the changes that have come about over time in the way economic policy decisions have been shaped in Italy. The interaction between theoretical evolution, the parties, the centres of political decision-making, the trade unions and the state administration has not remained static but has undergone a number of variations. As a result, constantly evolving differences can be perceived in the process leading to identification of the problems to be addressed, as well as differences in available scientific knowledge, political recognition of possible solutions and the legislative outcomes.

The two books also afford some insight into such issues as the period when the role of the ‘economic advisor’ began to gain importance, how long the top echelons of the administrative bureaucracy fulfilled a crucial function in proposing concrete solutions to the economic policy of the country, and how ‘pressure groups’ or the public or private ‘circles’ that were instrumental in elaborating economic policy proposals gradually took shape. The books also shed light (or at least make it possible to gain some awareness) on the rise of *téchne* and operational procedures, and how these have undergone modification over time.

Today it is well known that the entire framework has become immensely more complex, especially over the past few decades. In this regard, the two books discussed here probably mark the closure of an era that was strikingly different from the present period. As far as the subsequent periods are concerned, certain aspects are known, but not systematically; consequently, we realise that this circuit connecting knowledge to legislative action has differed notably from case to case. However, the studies undertaken in these two books can be said to form part of the overarching research perspective that also extends to an inquiry into the role of the *economist in power* and that of the *economist in the Government*. It is to be hoped that this important research tradition, which has led to the appearance of the two fine works we celebrate today, can continue to be upheld in order to guarantee that Italy maintains the condition of pre-eminence for which it has long been acclaimed in this field. The studies published here are fully in line with this approach, forming part of the general inquiry into the process of interaction and cross-fertilisation between economic theory, economic thought, economic culture, the spread and

growing complexity of the latter, its influence on legislators, the role of pressure groups, the media and the law-making process.

This contribution is an impressive piece of research which continues the work undertaken above all at the Universities of Pisa and Florence. It is an accomplishment that establishes Italy as a model which, to date is truly unsurpassed and has no rivals worldwide. Research on the history of economic thought in Italy commands international esteem as one of the major authorities, at the cutting edge of scientific enquiry, at least in this field.

One should not be misled, however, into thinking that research of this type belongs purely to the world of *historical erudition*, commendable though the latter may be. Rather, the sphere of investigation can better be described as, on the one hand, the *sociology of knowledge*, which seeks to understand the process whereby economists acquired a growing body of knowledge and expertise, and on the other, the arduous route that led economists to throw off the fetters of academe and to imprint the most significant testimony of their activity at first on the early world of economy, and thereafter on the national political stage. This is an investigation which thus concerns itself with the most fundamental aspects of the interface between economic theory and economic policy, addressing such issues as the way an economic culture is forged, how it acquires complexity of structure and extends its influence, how and why it makes its impact felt on the activity of economic, social and entrepreneurial operators and the State Administration, and finally, how it affects the common reader and exerts its sway over the world of politics. Furthermore, the authors also train the spotlight on the important question of how the political class engages in a form of self-selection, how it is present in Parliament and/or within the executive.

These two massive collections are unparalleled in the breadth and wealth of materials illustrating the growing contribution of professional economists to the orientations and decisions of the Italian Parliament between 1861 and 1922. For while the literature on this subject boasts almost a century of results, in many cases quite significant, the issues have often been treated in reference to some period in the history of a country other than Italy (mainly Britain), or some particular author. In this respect Italy is a privileged country, by virtue of the praiseworthy project of the two Houses of Parliament or of scientific and cultural institutions aimed at re-publishing the Parliamentary Speeches by many economists.

The books are both well constructed and based on an effective organisational plan. The first carefully investigates in considerable

detail the positions adopted by economists in Parliament with regard to some of the most important and controversial problems of the period. The second dwells on the contribution of individual economists. In this context, the list of figures whose work is analysed and discussed includes economists who may perhaps not be considered as being at the forefront of their field, but who were extremely active in Parliament where in numerous instances they played a crucial role, such as Gerolamo Boccoardo, Luigi Luzzatti (who was not strictly speaking an economist), Antonio Ciccone, Napoleone Colajanni (a statistician like Luigi Bodio), as well as G. Majorana, C. F. Ferraris, G. Alessio. One of the names to emerge as a towering figure – whose significance I had previously not fully appreciated – is that of P. Boselli, the most long-lived of Italian economists in Parliament, also holding the office of Prime Minister during a period of great trouble and turmoil for Italy, 1916-1917. A number of illustrious economists likewise make their appearance on the pages of this book, which highlights their lasting analytical contributions and outlines the various different ways in which they played an important role as members of Parliament or within the Government. I have in mind such thinkers as Antonio Scialoja, Marco Minghetti, Angelo Messedaglia, Fedele Lampertico, Francesco Saverio Nitti. Moreover, the book offers an in-depth analysis of three economists who were of the very highest level as theoreticians, while not achieving any great renown in politics, namely Francesco Ferrara, Maffeo Pantaleoni and Antonio De Viti de Marco.

By drawing systematically on the *Parliamentary Speeches*, which constitutes the major reference source cited by the authors of these two works, the presentation is enlivened with a sense of vividness and immediacy, enhancing the humanity of some of the economists profiled and revealing hitherto unknown facets of their activity. All of the articles set themselves the aim – in my view, successfully – of establishing a link between the theoretical positions of the individual economists and their involvement in the actual world of politics.

The two works both feature *Introductions*, by Massimo Augello and Marco Guidi. The *Introductions* are not only very extensive, incorporating the most recent acquisitions in this field, but they are also composed with a wide-ranging interdisciplinary approach that encompasses research in political science and the many strands of political debate over time. In effect, these two *Introductions* would deserve to be published separately because, in my view, they represent a contribution that calls for in-depth discussion and examination.

It is also worth noting that the *Introductions* make use of appropri-

ate quantitative techniques that demonstrate the parliamentary longevity of many of the economists (on average quite striking). Typically, they sat in Parliament for seven terms of government, but it was not unknown for some economists to be present in as many as sixteen terms of Parliament. With regard to these and other issues, the *Introductions* truly deserve an in-depth analysis in their own right inasmuch as they touch on highly specific aspects of method and content, and do so with significant and unusual personal insight, making them into genuine research contributions and a valid focus of discussion. I hope that the two authors will follow up on their announced intention of making the *Introductions* available in a specific edition.

3. TOMMASO FANFANI

WE owe much to those who have preceded us in our history. We owe respect to some intellectuals or persons committed to economic, social, political and civil life. But to understand their true importance, it is essential to acquaint ourselves with their ideas, professional commitment and role in the institutions. Our mission must be to delineate the elements that led to the growth of a nation through the activity of these protagonists. Studying men in their own time with a coherent, historical method yields a very general initial conclusion: historical knowledge does not hold formulas for the future, but it does offer the key to learning how to interpret the past and understand the present.

The first merit of the two works masterfully edited by Massimo Augello and Marco Guidi is that of basing their research tools on reconstructing the relationship between economic science and politics, that is to say between the scientific activity of the economists and their participation in Parliamentary debate. These two scholarly books illustrate the way the personality of the economists revealed itself in a particular interpretation of the relation between theoretical models and their application to the events of a historical period that was of crucial importance for Italy.

I will divide this critical note into two main parts: the first consists of a brief reflection on the methodological framework and the scientific organization of the work under discussion here, while the second calls attention to some of the main topics dealt with.

With regard to the first aspect, Massimo Augello and Marco Guidi have involved about forty scholars from several Italian universities, many of whom are eminent names in the history of economic thought. From their contributions there originate two very dense vol-

umes rich in material for reconstruction of the debate on theoretical models and their application to Italy's economic development in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Ideas are put forward that shape a historical reconstruction which has already been probed in some depth by others but now for the first time is systematically studied from the viewpoint of some of the major protagonists of political and parliamentary life, who were united by the circumstance of their being scholars of economics and politics at one and the same time.

A decade or so ago, Piero Barucci and his students began research on the history of the Italian economists, examining the origins of the economic disciplines in the universities and inquiring into the appearance of the first chairs of economics. Historians of economics had already conducted research on the origins of the Schools of Commerce and their transformation into Faculties of economics, but the birth of the chairs of economics had not yet been studied. The San Miniato Conference in 1986 was the point of arrival of these research studies.¹ Precise objectives were pursued during the convention, such as studying the economists' educational background, their role in the universities, and the contents of their courses. In addition, scholars like Bob Coats and William Barber² directed their interest to study of the relation between economists and political activity, but limited themselves to government or work in the public administration rather than exploring the specific relation between economists and Parliament. Compared to this British-American current of thought, the field of inquiry in the two works that we present here is richer in content and more imposing in its range of inquiry because it covers the actions and debates that drove the various generations of economists, from Francesco Ferrara to Maffeo Pantaleoni, Luigi Luzzatti, and Francesco Saverio Nitti, together with the entire group of academicians that populate these two volumes with their ideas and initiatives.

It is true that some of these figures have already been investigated in-depth: the works of Gabriella Gioli on Scialoja,³ of Riccardo Fauci on Francesco Ferrara,⁴ and of Paolo Pecorari on Luigi Luzzatti,⁵

1. Cf. M. M. AUGELLO, M. BIANCHINI, G. GIOLI, P. ROGGI, *Le cattedre di economia politica in Italia. La diffusione di una disciplina sospetta (1750-1900)*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988.

2. Cf. W. BARBER, *Breaking the Mould. The Development of Academic Economics in XIXth Century America*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1988.

3. G. GIOLI, *Il pensiero economico di Antonio Scialoja*, Pisa, Pacini, 1989.

4. R. FAUCCI, *L'economista scomodo. Vita e opere di Francesco Ferrara*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1995. On F. Ferrara, see. P. F. ASSO, P. BARUCCI, M. GANCI (eds), *Francesco Ferrara e il suo tempo*, Conference Proceedings, Palermo, 27-30 October 1988, Roma, Bancaria, 1990.

5. Cf. P. PECORARI, *Luigi Luzzatti economista e politico della Nuova Italia*, Napoli, ESI, 2003.

come to mind. Angelo Messedaglia, Francesco Saverio Nitti, Agostino Magliani⁶ and others have also been the subject of meetings and thorough and detailed research. But here we find a systematic treatment of all of the economists who had a seat in Parliament, from the Unification of Italy to the advent of Fascism.

The work probes many questions of various nature, both of method and content, beginning from the definition of 'economics' and 'economist', up to the identification of the essential problems of the period examined. The relation between economics and politics remains «a constant of the entire history of economic science»,⁷ an indissoluble bond made clear by the very name 'political economy' itself.

The following could constitute an initial element of reflection: What is the purpose of this study? Why was the need felt to reconstruct the presence of the economists in Parliament? Analogous studies have yet to be carried out in other countries, which are characterised by an economic history different from ours and which experienced an earlier onset of industrial maturity than was the case in Italy. The answer to these questions suggests an initial conclusion on the scientific commitment of Augello and Guidi: there were over thirty academic economists in Parliament in Italy during the period extending from the unification of the country to the advent of Fascism. The second of the two works studies these protagonists one-by-one, with an introduction that reconstructs their term of office in the different legislatures with data and tables and, even more importantly, with essays that reconstruct in depth their education, their ideas, the different schools of thought to which they subscribed, and their actions within and outside the halls of Parliament. As the book points out, these parliamentary economists represented about one third of the entire community of academic economists in the entire period examined. But recording the presence of the economists in Parliament – together with other professional figures, jurists in particular – and reconstructing the connections between their political contribution and their specific professional expertise also makes it possible to highlight the primacy of the young unified state. That is to say, a strong civil passion and commitment was felt among those who populated the university halls; they strove to contribute to the formulation of the laws and the definition of the rules that represented the founda-

6. Cf. A. GUENZI and D. IVONE (eds), *Politica economia amministrazione e finanza nell'opera di A. Magliani*, Napoli, Editoriale scientifica, 1997.

7. M. AUGELLO, «Introduzione», in *Gli economisti in Parlamento 1861-1922*, XVIII.

tion of the economic, social and civil growth of newly established Italy.

Personally, I have discovered with pleasure that in comparison to the experience of parliamentary representation in many other countries, Italy, «with more than thirty university professors of economics awarded a parliamentary mandate in the liberal age, with influential economists participating in the work of the Constituent Assembly during the postwar period, and with the innumerable parliamentary economists who have characterized and continue to characterize» the recent decades, is the country that has had the greatest number of academic economists in Parliament. In the light of these two books, this constellation is now better known, or rather, is less unknown. This consideration holds for the economists, but can also be extended to the other professional backgrounds and experiences that have, both in the past and the present, enriched the House and the Senate.

What was the economists' role in Parliament, *i.e.*, in the debates and the deliberations? What was the connection between economic science and policy making in the context of the two Houses? Was there a process of transmission between theoretical elaboration and practical application? These are some of the questions the work raises. But a word of caution is in order: such questions are not valid only for the past. They are enduring questions in the events of any society regulated by democratic representation.

Periodisation is another element to emerge from the two works. The period from 1861 to 1922 represents a long stretch of time. The subtitle specifies «A history of the political economy of liberal Italy»: but the use of the expression «of liberal Italy» instead of 'in liberal Italy' or 'in the liberal age' is of no minor significance. This prolonged period has generally been the subject of historical and economic analyses that have placed emphasis above all on the caesuras: the period of the historical right, period of the historical left, the age of *trasformismo*, the phase preparatory to economic development, the takeoff towards the end of the nineteenth century, the great war, the postwar era. Furthermore, it has consistently been underlined that this long-drawn-out period was characterized by non-homogeneous decisions springing from different theoretical and doctrinal codifications. In contrast, these two books construct a framework in which men are the protagonists who, through their ideas and actions, created a bond between the various stages even though the period as a whole may have been marked by deep-rooted discontinuities. Interventionist economists, *laissez-faire* economists, economists influenced by the German Historical School and economists concerned

with the social question made up a unique group that obeyed rules which often succeeded in overcoming any theoretical barrier. Many economists often found themselves working side-by-side in making decisions that differed sharply from the viewpoint of economic doctrine, yet they shared commitment and participation throughout the long decades from the unification of Italy to the advent of Fascism. Furthermore, albeit with some exceptions (Francesco Ferrara, to mention just one), the parliamentary economists were often prepared to seek a common ground and come to agreements, even sacrificing their own theoretical approach in the face of the needs resulting from political choices. Overall, the prevailing atmosphere was one of a commitment to creating conditions for the best possible development; thus the aim was to pursue the common welfare, or at least that which was considered as such. These two works provide eloquent documentation that in face of concrete questions, theoretical boundaries no longer represented insurmountable barriers. Take for instance the case of Luzzatti: Luzzatti the minister repudiated Luzzatti the economist, in the sense that the former was not capable – Paolo Pecorari writes elsewhere – «of setting up public finance organs in keeping with the ideas expressed by the latter».⁸ It was the priority they awarded to institutional offices and the government of the country, their striving towards the greater interest of the community as a whole, that unified the commitment by economists during the long period of liberal Italy.

As regards the specific contents of the two books, the topics deal with the debate on, and the formulation of, laws concerning the main problems of the period discussed, in particular the lengthy debates on credit and banks, taxation, duties and excise, protectionism, the question of the Mezzogiorno, the agrarian question, infrastructures (railways, ports), services, the Public Administration and, finally, the nationalization of insurance, telephones and railways carried out in the first decade of the twentieth century.

One aspect emerging from the two works is that the economists who sat in Parliament experienced difficulty in creating true synergies between economic science and politics. This does not mean that they failed to achieve results in some of the important questions mentioned above, but the transmission of ideas and proposals between the universe of economic science and that of political deliberations varied greatly from case to case. At times the results were of very little impact, at other times they may have been relatively modest and

8. P. PECORARI, *Luigi Luzzatti economista e politico della Nuova Italia*, 141.

only in a few cases – in particular when the economist-members of parliament held government offices or roles on the committees – did the economist's voice and thought manage to succeed in predominating. These two books do not shrink from noting that there were occasions when economists made only paltry or ineffectual contributions to parliamentary debate, or occasions when it became impossible for practical reasons or on account of political requirements to achieve a true bond between economic knowledge and policy making.

For example, as regards the debate concerning the law on the Banks of Issue – a law made necessary by the Italian financial crisis between 1887 and 1893 – Fedele Lampertico (among the most long-lived members of parliament) stated in 1893: «...a bill logically based on certain theoretical principles was decidedly impossible».⁹ Apropos of that same debate on the financial crisis, one can hardly fail to call to mind – in light of the latest events in the world of business and finance – Maffeo Pantaleoni's powerful essay «La caduta della Società generale di credito mobiliare», which appeared in the *Giornale degli economisti* in 1895. In retrospect – states Daniela Giaconi – Pantaleoni's essay almost seems like a warning to read between the lines in order to shed light on the process of construction of a banking system that the liberal economists had transformed into the symbol of all of the evils of the entire real economy».¹⁰ In the stormy debate on the reform of the Banks of Issue, Senator Boccardo accused the government of postponing the problems without solving them, because «those who were supposed to be dealing with them were holding parties and banquets». His speech included reflections on the «lack of confidence in the parliamentary institution, precise objections to the government», because the urgency of completing the measures, the compliance with «consolidated traditions even disregarding the logic of the theorems of economics» were deeper causes which, on the occasion of the banking law, distanced economists from the resolutions that had been professed.¹¹

Yet there were other occasions when the transmission was successful in addressing some of the major problems. For example, as regards the 1865 question of joining the Latin Monetary Union of 1865, economists supported the importance of this decision not only to consolidate diplomatic and commercial cohesion with the most important partners, such as France, «but also in the hopes of import-

9. D. GIACONI, «Dallo scandalo della Banca Romana alla fondazione della Banca d'Italia», in M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento*, 122.

10. *Ibidem*, 105.

11. *Ibidem*, 122.

ing order and development from the outside». It was a time-limited choice since the internal political scenario then shifted towards industrialization and the international picture likewise began to change, culminating in the eventual breakup of the Union, but in this case the economists who addressed this problem in Parliament managed for the most part to establish a link of continuity between their theoretical bases and the deliberations reached.¹²

Other problems dealt with by the editors and authors of the essays include public finance after Unification and throughout the entire period, the fiscal and financial structure, the setting up of infrastructures, the question of the Mezzogiorno, the agrarian question, and the move towards gradual industrialization. On all these aspects, the economists' theoretical elaboration is highlighted. Moreover, the studies included in these two books are not limited to describing or searching for a connection between the different levels of thought: they often delve much deeper, drawing new interpretations of the economic process from investigation of the individual economists' thoughts.

For an illuminating example of the innovative significance of the two works, it is interesting to focus on a significant case that is dealt with extensively in both books: namely, the problem of customs protectionism and, more generally, of State intervention in the economy. This is a widely debated topic and indeed it was one of the most important in the history (not only economic and social) of Italy during the liberal age. Protectionism was set in motion in as a driving force in the decade in which Agostino Magliani was minister, with provisions regarding taxes and with the customs tariffs of 1878 and 1887. These decisions were a direct result of the policy espoused by Agostino Depretis, formulated in 1875 and put into effect by means of the so-called 'parliamentary revolution' of 1876, with which the Left won the majority. That turning point marked a change in direction in the government of the country and in the development model, which began to move towards an industrial economy. By virtue of Depretis' new approach, Parliament and the community of economists were now faced with a fundamental question, one that was by no means easy to solve: is state intervention in the economy legitimate? A large part of the debate in the closing decades of the XIX century developed around this question, which constituted the nub of the various different answers springing from different theoretical conceptions. This far-reaching issue is treated at great length in the two works, includ-

12. E. MASINI, «Le differenti fasi di negoziazione dell'Unione Monetaria Latina», in M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento*, 146.

ing the volte-face by the protagonists, or rather, the overcoming of positions at first totally hostile to state intervention and the subsequent adoption of milder, if not exactly favourable, positions. In some cases, orthodox laissez-faire ideas were transformed into positions that accepted the supplementary or subsidiary function of the State as a means of redress for failures in the activity of the private sector. Other economists felt that the State's intervention was justified by the needs. Finally, some regarded the State's action as essential for the growth and economic equilibrium of the country. In other words, the dispute on customs and commercial policy choices and the conflicting positions of some of the parliamentary economists can be read as the progressive crisis of «every utopia of development that is a mirror image of the Ricardian theorem of comparative costs, with the resulting crisis of the laissez-faire model that had dominated up to then – not only as an 'ideological shell', but also as the result of the convergent agricultural, financial and commercial interests that had become consolidated as a governing group in the country».¹³

To understand the ability of the two works reviewed here to offer an innovative reading of the period under discussion, it should be recalled that according to a well-established historical interpretation, the decisions regarding customs and financial issues made in 1878 and 1887 have been described as the outcome of a precise economic model of industrial development, which combined the interests of the agricultural estates in Southern Italy (favoured by the import duties on wheat) with the interests of the industrialists in the North (who benefited from the import duties on mechanical and textile products). However, Antonio Magliulo's essay in the first book, which studies the position of the economists in Parliament on this topic, provides a different and more detailed explanation than the traditional account. In his view, the legislation on customs and excise derived from the conscious decision by the Government of the time to reach a compromise on economic policy. As Bini and Parisi explain in their comments on this essay, «In order to put into effect a more expansive fiscal and monetary policy than would have been allowed by the constraints imposed by the stability of the exchange rate and by the balancing of the public budget», the governments «entrusted the provisions on customs and excise with the task of guaranteeing the feasibility of a balanced relationship between monetary reserves and circulation. Thus their protectionism should not be branded as a mess-up, nor should it be suspected of being the blatant expression of

13. P. PECORARI, *Luigi Luzzatti economista e politico della Nuova Italia*, 69-70.

the strong powers of the time». Instead it should be seen as «a second best solution that was still compatible with the classical development strategy and, on the empirical level, as an unfortunate provision, i.e. one that was doomed to failure in that the historical-economic conditions of the time were unable to offer a favourable breeding ground to produce the positive results it could have been expected to achieve». ¹⁴ The claim put forward in this statement is certainly likely to spark lively debate. On the question of protectionism, the first fifteen years of post-unification policy were characterized by the predominance of a 'classical' theory and economic culture. The 1878 tariff dealt the first blow to the free trade system. Later on, when the objective was to further industrial achievement and it also became necessary to address the social question, there seemed to prevail a «tendency towards politics for politics' sake, that is to say, preference was awarded to ... the primary requirement of political contingencies ... designed to focus attention on the direct effects» of policies, emphasizing «short instead of medium-long term considerations». ¹⁵

The three sections of the first book («Economic Development and Public Enterprise», «Finance and Administration» and «The Agrarian Question and the Question of the Mezzogiorno») and the essays in the second work, the latter being devoted – as I have already mentioned – to analysis of twenty seven among the more than thirty economists taken into consideration, thus contain all of the main problems characteristic of the political and civil life of liberal Italy. These essays provide interpretations and construals that are rich in insights and originality, partly with the declared goal of overcoming the separation between external and internal history, between the history of analysis and the history of thought that was introduced by Schumpeter. For the economist, the very fact of being a member of parliament and thus being called upon to examine the problems of public life leads economic science beyond the confines of self-referentiality; the world of economics is brought out into the open, and is compelled to engage in debate beyond the realms of academe and the sectorial journals. A spontaneous transmission is created or can be created, determined by the fact that the member of parliament who is also an economist or jurist or who has a different professional background implicitly transfers the constitutive elements of his profession into his political action. For the economist who is a university professor, as for the jurist or philosopher, is there coherence or a trade-off between theoretical and

14. P. BINI and D. PARISI, *Sulla via dello sviluppo*, in M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento*, 19.

15. *Ibidem*, p. 20.

political positions? The various essays raise this query. At times, as documented with precise references, deliberations derived from economic science are supported and adopted. More often the deliberations only apparently derive from economic theory, while they perhaps result from more spontaneous and immediate cultural and social influences in which the circumstance of being an economist remains a cultural component of the member of parliament, whereas that which emerges is instead of a different nature.

Resuming the discussion of the contents, with regard to the battle against illiteracy and the effort in favour of education, some of the economists in Parliament championed d'Azeglio's recommendation to «forge the Italians» which, translated, meant basing the educational system on the humanist disciplines and on the written and oral practice of the national language. In 1870, Scialoja condemned all forms of regionalism, labelling regionalism as the «main cause of the failure of the germ of a national conscience to take root».¹⁶ Others set technical priorities, like Alessandro Rossi, who maintained that modern industry required training based in mechanics, chemistry and the economic and administrative sciences.¹⁷ Still others, like the economist Giulio Alessio later on, were convinced that «education does not represent a form of investment first in individual capital and subsequently in social capital», since they regarded education as «unproductive culture, little better than a form of waste».¹⁸ These are barely intelligible positions, backwards-looking, to use a euphemism. The oscillation of positions for and against public education can be seen as the outcome of oscillations between growth and recession: in a period of crisis, young people are more oriented towards study and university; during periods of expansion and favourable employment, the trend is inverted. The economists in Parliament appeared, as it were, to reflect the temporal oscillations of economic trends.

Many other themes are addressed, such as those discussed in the «Finance and Administration» section where, among others, Riccardo Faucci reconstructs the question of State accountancy and of the budget in liberal Italy, and Raffaele Teti the regulation of joint-stock companies. More generally, the interpretations and positions of economists and jurists on the problems of administration, reform of the local councils, military spending and intellectual property overlap and complement one another in this section.

16. M. F. GALLIFANTE, *L'insegnamento tecnico nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento*, in M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento*, 228.

17. S. S. SPALLETI, *Economisti e istruzione*, in M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento*, 196.

18. *Ibidem*, 195.

The question of the Mezzogiorno and the agrarian question, which interlace with the debate on the customs policy and thus on protectionism, are given extensive coverage in these two works. The enquiry centres on such issues as the relationship between North and South at the moment of Unification and the manner and extent to which unification and the protectionist decisions, in particular the 1868 tax on flour and the 1878 and 1887 customs taxes, affected development. The question of the Mezzogiorno formed one of the battlegrounds between the different schools of economic thought: on one side the so-called 'Lombard-Venetian' economists, followers of the Historical School – «the Germanists», as Francesco Ferrara called them –, on the other the supporters of laissez-faire. The battle raged on the opposing fronts consisting of Francesco Ferrara's Adam Smith Society versus the Association for the Advance of Economic Studies headed by Scialoja, Lampertico, Cossa and Luzzatti. In Antonio De Viti de Marco's renowned theory, the 1887 tariff generated the 'question of the Mezzogiorno'. De Viti's speeches in parliamentary halls were fired by civil passion, denouncing State intervention and seeking to demonstrate that protectionism had triggered the crisis of the southern agricultural estates, which were penalized by the increase in the price of manufactured products. In terms of agricultural prices, De Viti maintained, there was a rise in the price of grain, but this was offset by a consequent drop in real salaries.¹⁹

Customs duties and tariffs generated the question of the mezzogiorno. 1891, the year marking the death of Stefano Jacini and the promulgation of the first social encyclical, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, was also the year that saw the establishment of the parliamentary committee for examination of the fiscal and tax policy, headed by De Viti. The tariffs – De Viti de Marco argued – were so high that they reduced customs revenue and indirectly generated an increase in the cost of living. During those same years, Pantaleoni argued that protectionism was the prime cause of economic crises: «State intervention inevitably ends up generating a distortion in the rational allocation of production factors»; «...your grain tax is a tool by which you create a small but influential class that lives at the expense of others».²⁰

Defenders of free trade and interventionists clashed sharply, while until the early years of the twentieth century the Catholic and socialist components, still poorly represented in Parliament, remained on

19. R. REALFONZO, *Il sottosviluppo del Mezzogiorno*, in M. M. AUGELLO and M. E. L. GUIDI (eds), *La scienza economica in Parlamento*, 384.

20. *Ibidem*, 385.

the fringe of the main activity. Once Catholic and socialist representatives finally entered into the halls of Parliament, the debate on the social question was enlivened and new solutions were proposed.

Napoleone Colajanni, who in the course of his parliamentary activity underwent a transition from a position critical of the protectionist strategy to a more favourable attitude, clashed with De Viti and Pantaleoni by denying the connection between the backwardness of the South and the protectionist policy. On the contrary, the backwardness of the Mezzogiorno was to be explained by its lack of industrialization and by the dominant rural mafia that held sway over the public administration. Luzzatti was of the same opinion, likewise vigorously defending the 1887 customs tariff in Parliament and regarding it as a favourable move for the Southern economy. In 1900, Francesco Saverio Nitti published the renowned essay *Nord e Sud*; Luigi Luzzati, repeatedly citing Nitti's article, stated in Parliament on 9 December 1901: «Naples cannot only be a large inn, a great museum ... an important centre for national and international affairs ... Naples is or will become industrial, or it will be unable to exist economically». ²¹ Nitti's anti-free trade and interventionist attitude hinged on the weaknesses of Naples and of the Mezzogiorno: the lack of iron and coal and the presence of an unproductive and inept ruling class. Thus he formulated an intervention plan that was to be based on a process of top-down modernization. The 1904 law for the development of Naples was Nitti's great masterpiece, as Rosario Patalano recalls in the first volume.

The issue of emigration is also one of the themes dealt with in the two books. The answers given in the parliamentary speeches are various in nature, including the structural proposal that concentrated on the drive towards industrialization as a means to discourage the tendency to flee from Italy.

A final parliamentary debate that deserves to be highlighted concerns the so-called moral question. In 1892 there had been a scandal involving the Banca Romana – one of the Banks of Issue – while in subsequent years it was the events surrounding the corruption blighting the southern ruling class that created a stir. Once again, De Viti attributed the evil to state intervention. In 1888, Colajanni published *Corruzione politica*, where the cause of the immorality was singled out as residing in the administrative structure, in particular in the centralization of power, which «increases the administrators' discretion and, consequently, causes an increase in abuse». ²² In 1901, Colajanni stated

21. *Ibidem*, 387.

22. *Ibidem*, 392.

in Parliament that «the southerners' attitude of acquiescence and feebleness in the face of corruption» was due to the «low level of income and poor level of education» and also underlined the «responsibilities of the political class, which has widely used electoral corruption instead of fighting it». Nitti also spoke on this issue, accusing the government of being «the most important member of the Mafia». Angelo Majorana stressed the lack of credibility of public institutions: «it is not enough to be honest, it is also necessary to appear so». ²³ «In his opinion, corruption was caused by poverty, which generated further poverty in a sequence of underdevelopment-immorality-underdevelopment that is the vicious circle of poverty». Nitti was convinced that industrialization leads to reduced unemployment and increases general educational levels. «Nitti laid the blame on intellectuals, condemning the excessive proliferation of law-making – which leads to uncertainty with regard to the legal order and increases discretion – and criticized the patronage system and the parasitism of the rural bourgeoisie in the Mezzogiorno. He strongly spoke out against the decline of the quality of politicians».

I would like to conclude by mentioning a reflection offered by the President of the Senate, Marcello Pera, in the «Introduction» to the two books. By highlighting the dominant political and social problems in the life of our country during the long period studied and at the same time underlining the scientific controversies between economists and the role they played: «these works embody a systematic survey ... illustrating the fertile exchange between university chair and parliamentary desk».

One question remains open at the conclusion of this work and of the effort of interpretation contained therein: in the end, did the economists in Parliament contribute to the building of a modern Italy? Did they contribute to the building of the best Italy possible in that historical context? It is indisputable that, even if there were advancements with regard to efficiency and productive and social modernization, we can retrospectively testify to persistent delays and deficiencies. Electoral representation was slow to come: it was not until 1912 that the law on universal male suffrage was approved; the formulation and approval of the laws on education, schooling, and technical-scientific training were late in arriving, hindering the general advancement of knowledge and educational awareness in Italy; the nationalizations could not be counted upon to guarantee market efficiency and modernization. On the other hand, the railways complet-

23. *Ibidem*, 392-393.

ed the national network as early as the end of the century and the industrial sector achieved top-ranking positions on the international scene. Yet compared to other advanced countries, Peninsular Italy's backwardness was, overall, extremely accentuated: efforts were made to bridge the gap, important results were achieved, but the disparity could not always be overcome.

It seems to me that, having examined the sectors of organized social, civil and economic life one by one, there emerges a chiaroscuro scenario of strengths and weaknesses, a scenario that the work edited by Augello and Guidi outlines and defines in areas that up to now had remained partially unexplored.

The difficulty in keeping politics separate from economics can clearly be perceived. But perhaps, one could conclude, the best situation is that there should be no distinction since, in the Aristotelian approach, politics and economics both answer the question: for man, what constitutes the good? Aristotle characterises politics as the science that proposes to give a philosophical answer to this question and which deals with man as a being capable of acting consciously and freely, in view of an end.

But is this not the same aim as that of ethics? And might it not also be that of economics as well? And is it not likewise the aim of politics?

4. GUIDO MELIS

THE book examined here (two volumes, over 1280 pages, 55 contributions by various authors) can be interpreted from a number of different perspectives, offering a wealth of material for debate that goes far beyond mere historiographic reflection. For reasons of conciseness, here I will indicate no more than three possible readings – naturally with heartfelt apologies to the editors and the authors for the unforgivable incompleteness of this approach.

The first possible reading, in my view, is based on *parliamentary history* in the true sense of the term. A brief premise is in order here. For some time, parliamentary historiography in Italy has been in the throes of a delicate transition phase. Since the decline of the traditional and long-established approach – which placed emphasis on reconstruction of political debate in Parliament and focused above all on individual leading figures, or parliamentary parties and their dialectical interaction – a different manner of conceiving of the history of Parliament has been taking shape. However, this change in attitude is very gradual and is only partially reflected in recent overviews,

even in those of considerable importance such as the recent *Storia*, edited by Luciano Violante and published by Einaudi. The new approach involves shifting to an appreciation of parliamentary history which – if I may be permitted such a phrase – is more ‘internal’ and ‘Parliamentary’ in the true sense of the term, highlighting the manner of functioning of what some (signally Ettore Ciccotti in the early 1900s) called «the law factory».

Numerous new factors are taken into consideration in this innovative line of analysis: first and foremost the geographic, social and professional composition of the parliamentary bodies, applying the method devised by English parliamentary historiography in the 1960s, as well as the manner and characteristics of the education received by Members of Parliament prior to their election to Parliament, and the network of interests – whether of their electoral college or not – which formed the centre of MPs’ attention and which they were frequently called upon to address during the course of their institutional activity. Also featuring as part of the new approach – and this too represents an aspect that can no longer be overlooked – is attention to the specific work of Parliament, that is to say, the quantity of the normative provisions and the quality and typology of the legislative product, the timing and manner of parliamentary work, work in the parliamentary offices (and subsequently in the committees), the specific modes of public speaking in Parliament (parliamentary rhetoric, the style and language of speeches delivered to Parliament, how often the Government or specifically the Prime Minister intervened in Parliamentary debate). Naturally, attention also focuses on the contents most frequently involved in debate, inquiring into what kind of themes (whether national or local, for example) Parliament dealt with as part of its institutional routine.

Within this new framework (in which the sources are often equally new), the investigation increasingly seeks to reconstruct the cultural and professional backgrounds present in the Liberal Parliament, and their direct or indirect influence on legislative activity. This raises such questions as: what matters did economists concretely deal with when they were actually working in the halls of Parliament? What specific content did they contribute by virtue of their specialist knowledge? And what link can be traced between this parliamentary activity and the scientific elaboration arising from their professorial experience and their participation in doctrinal debate? These are questions which, in the present case, concern economists but which could equally well apply, for instance, to academic jurists (in this regard, recall the fundamental works by Giulio Cianferotti) or physi-

cians, scientists, engineers, army officers, men of letters or humanists in general.

The basic argument put forward in this book, which I believe to have been fully demonstrated by the sequence of essays gathered together therein – is that the cultural approach displayed by economists active in Parliament made a specific contribution to overall parliamentary activity, and that this contribution was in many cases manifested incisively through the particular proposals they introduced or championed. Thus economists in Parliament were at times directly involved in shaping the legislative orientations of the Government or, through their presence in parliamentary debates, they were able to make suggestions concerning the introduction of specific policies or influence the course of parliamentary affairs by virtue of the criticism – and often vigorous opposition – they expressed through their constant ‘militant’ presence in debate within the two Houses.

The picture that emerges from this reading, despite the distinctions carefully noted by the authors themselves and the editors, is one of a sort of all-party lobby, or more properly speaking a specific ‘culture of economy’, which appears to have taken part in parliamentary elaboration through the classic and over-arching route of the political discourse of the liberal era.

On this point, I will offer further reflections below. But I would first like to point out that such a picture gives rise to a new appreciation of parliamentary history, which, at least as regards this period, reveals itself as one of the places – if not *the* place – where different strands of thought proceeding from the ruling class came together and were composed into a unified approach, through integration among the various proposals deriving from the specific cultural backgrounds of the parliamentary groupings.

A second possible reading refers more directly to the *history of the economists*, the latter being considered as a group with distinct characteristics. The economists as they appear in these two dense works by Augello and Guidi are divided into at least two fundamental subgroups:

- the subgroup of economists close to the government (or governments, as numerous different governments, with a variety of political orientations, succeeded one another during the period considered); the figures forming part of this subgroup were predominantly of a ‘practical’ persuasion, linked to the new sciences of government and administrations that came to the fore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century;
- the subgroup of opposition economists, who used the parliamen-

tary tribune as a means of subjecting government policy to strong criticism, offering an alternative view of an ideal development of the economy in contrast to the prevailing tenets of capitalist expansion in Italy, which they deemed to be mainly negative.

The first subgroup – the ‘practically oriented’ economists – features not only personalities with a distinctly political vocation (consider the figure of Nitti, to take the most illustrious example, but Luzzatti could arguably be included in the same category), but also economists holding administrative posts, such as Luigi Bodio and the extensive group of statisticians (from Morpurgo to Bosco di Ruffino, from Carlo Francesco Ferraris – a multifaceted figure exhibiting a variety of concomitant profiles – to Rodolfo Benini). Within this subgroup, those with ‘political’ leanings implemented their methodology and their cultural approach as economists directly within the essence of political discourse, taking on leadership functions, while the statisticians embodied a valuable route towards the integration of economic knowledge within the actual offices of the State. Throughout the liberal age, the ‘political’ group played a decisive role, literally dictating the government’s economic policy lines (suffice it to reflect on the role of Nitti as minister of Agriculture, industry and trade during the long Giolitti ministry prior to World War I, or that of Agostino Magliani as Minister of Finance); at the same time economists subsumed here under the second grouping – that of the ‘administrators’ or ‘statisticians’ – were of immeasurable importance in forging the bureaucracy of the highest level ever enjoyed by united Italy, only to be sidelined and dispersed from the early twentieth century onwards, when the model that became predominant within the administration of the State was one which was monolithically inspired by the culture of administrative law and was intolerant of rival cultures. But in their heyday, despite the contraposition between the two groupings, a bond of close cooperation was constantly maintained: to take just one example, one may point to the dialogue between Nitti, as Minister, and Alberto Beneduce and Vincenzo Giuffrida, as State officials, which enabled them to engage in joint work on designing and setting up the INA-monopole life insurance project that eventually gave rise to the 1912 law. Hence in this as in many other cases, Parliament in the broad sense could call upon a brain-trust of economists-officials whole-heartedly committed to the concrete elaboration of governmental policies that would subsequently be submitted to the assessment of the two Houses.

Let us now turn to the second sub-group, that of the opposition economists. Here one finds the personalities that were perhaps the

most eminent of the period, the great liberals and the great Mezzogiorno scholars: Francesco Ferrara, De Viti de Marco, Fortunato, Pantaleoni, to some extent Napoleone Colajanni, Luigi Einaudi himself in his early period.

In the main, these opposition economists (but caution should be exercised in formulating this definition) performed a somewhat peculiar role: they announced their task as that of safeguarding liberal economic orthodoxy, they favoured an outspoken tone of argument and, to a considerably greater extent than did economists of other persuasions, they directed their attention preferentially to the major foreign models, contrasting them with the Italian situation. In effect, the opposition economists embody one of the paradoxes of the liberal age: the paradox whereby the overwhelming proportion of the best of academic economic culture of liberal convictions (albeit often abstractly liberal) remained constantly in the opposition as compared to the experience of liberal government during its most successful period.

This theme is well known, and has long constituted one of the crucial points addressed in economic historiography, for instance in the context of the historiography of the Giolittian age and the anti-Giolittism of the intellectuals. The divorce of liberal culture from the experience of government was to lead, during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, to two concomitant weaknesses: on the one hand, the weakness of the Giolittian hegemony, incapable as it proved to be of securing the lasting support of the country's most prestigious intellectual circles and therefore, perhaps for this very reason, doomed to achieve only temporary and predominantly political and administrative consolidation; and on the other hand, the weakness of the corporation of economists themselves, who were ultimately excluded or excluded themselves from a position of leadership (and often from interpretation or even from any serious understanding) in the major transformations taking place in the real economy of the country during those formidable first fifteen years of the twentieth century.

A potential third reading can also be discerned, concerning the overall role played by economic culture, *the science of data and numbers*, during the first sixty years of united Italy in the context of the education and cultural development of the ruling class. These were the years, at least from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, when positivism reigned supreme. But these were also, more generally (and in this case starting from almost immediately after unification) the years of the discovery of Italy through the great statistical

surveys, of the establishment of the national accounting system set up with the first accountancy law dating from 1869, accompanied by the advent of a new era of professional expertise in the form of accountants. Furthermore, this was also the period that saw the great path-breaking studies on the agrarian and industrial situation, the genesis of a national credit system with the first and second generation banks, the creation of the great economic libraries and the golden age of journals. A perusal of the parliamentary proceedings, to which the authors of the book have devoted great attention, reveals a striking picture of the amazing range and immense profundity of the citations, the wealth of explicitly economic documentation evoked by the members of parliament – in short, the immanence of the economic datum in Parliamentary debate of that era. One might go so far as to say that perhaps in no other subsequent era did this come about with such continuity and systematicity.

Corresponding to the centrality of the economy in parliamentary debate – and thus within political discourse as a whole during the liberal era – stands a characteristic that was shared by many of the economists mentioned in this book: namely, they were polyvalent figures who took central stage, as it were, in many different performances at the same time. They were typical exponents of the kind of figure Riccardo Faucci was one of the first to describe as an osmosis between politics and administration (but I would add, in this case: politics-culture-administration), in the sense that they combined a solid cultural background, rooted in knowledge of the classics of political economy, with a strong awareness of practical requirements. Certainly, they were *cathedra* figures, but equally, as we have seen, men of government and administration, presidents or influential members of Parliamentary or Government select committees, advocates of the formation of economic associations, founders of banks and commercial companies, directors and editors (if not in fact actual publishers) of journals that addressed a broader readership than merely the academic dimension and which aspired to be veritable organisational organs of that ‘party of the intellectuals’ which was extremely lively and active in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in the final two decades.

Another topic that features in the pages of this book is the State administration. An administration that was led by men of elevated educational background, in what was perhaps its most fertile period. Here one finds some of the monumental achievements of those early times: the administration of the economic ministries (in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, industry and trade, which became the

great economic ministry of the liberal State) and of the select committees, the administrative organisation of the ministerial libraries – where not a few of these intellectuals extended their education and thence found an opening towards their natural career prospects – and the State's activity in the field of publishing (the precious grey literature which, in those pioneering years, constituted the first gathering of economic information deriving from a public source).

On reading about these experiences, which the authors have examined in depth, one keenly senses that it was a composite picture where every crucial link fitted smoothly into the whole: academic teaching and scientific research radiating from the university Chairs, active membership of journals and publication of topical articles, editorials in the main national daily newspapers, constructive mobilisation of the resources of the administration, activity forming part of the work of the committees and the legislative offices, participation in parliamentary debate.

This felicitous convergence of activities was, however, doomed to be short-lived. As early as the Giolittian age many of these synergies began to fade. The first alarm bell was sounded by the crisis of public statistics, announced in no uncertain terms by Nitti in several memorable speeches to the Chamber of Deputies. The impending demise was further heralded, in the first decade of the twentieth century, by the growing predominance of an exclusively juridical background within the cultural horizon of the administrative staff, leading to a tendency to snub (and even reject in open competitions) the other types of expertise that had hitherto been present, in particular economic knowledge and skills. Finally, the objective effects of the enlargement of the political arena following the introduction of male universal suffrage and proportional representation became a very powerful force, above all after the first world war. More specifically, Parliament was transformed into a Parliament of the parties, and what in the liberal Parliament had long been conceived as the rights of expertise, educational experience and competence were gradually sidelined, in the name of the rights of politics.

This is not to say that economists were thereafter totally driven out of Parliamentary activity: on the contrary, they were still destined to exercise considerable power in the subsequent phases as well. But that fruitful bond between the elaboration of economic science, the organs of the state administration and the halls of parliamentary debate would never again achieve such significance. Or at least, not with the intensity and constructive outcome that characterised the liberal era.