

**«Hegemony is born in the factory».
*The politics of productivity in postwar Italy and the parable of 'Fordism'***

«Hegemony here is born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries». This is one of the most iconic quotes from Antonio Gramsci's 22nd Prison Notebook, *Americanism and Fordism* (1934). In his view, in the US «it was relatively easy to rationalise production and labour by a skilful combination of force [...] and persuasion [...], and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production». More than a study of Detroit or the US, though, Gramsci's was a strategy to analyse Fascism, the structural backwardness of the Italian economy, its petty nationalism, and the way it was mirrored in intellectuals.

The notion of Fordism has often been applied to a different period, subsequent to Gramsci's death, coinciding with Italy's most intense economic development within the general framework of a cycle of international hegemony under clear US leadership. It is arguable that those who have tried to do so by directly applying Gramsci - the French economists of the *école de la régulation* in the first place - have done it with more than a few stretches; on a more general level, the idea of the postwar years as 'fordist' stuck and is commonly used in history and social sciences to define the features of an era.

My paper aims at investigating the politics of industrial relations in postwar Italy. Therefore, it moves the Gramscian question of 'hegemony being born in the factory' to a different context: the period of Italy's postwar reconstruction and of economic changes so deep that they were to be remembered as the "economic miracle". In his 1977 classic essay *The politics of productivity: foundations of American international economic policy after World War II*, Charles S. Maier has emphasised that recovery programs in postwar Europe had their own 'politics of productivity', in which the US (administration, business, and trade unions, in different but converging ways) projected recent domestic experience in an economic foreign policy strategy. Maier underscored how Wilsonian «eschatology of peaceful prosperity», though fuelled by growing anti-communism, was not a sufficient explanation: «the stress on productivity and economic growth arose out of the very terms in which Americans resolved their own organization of economic power», the terms on which, in depression and war, «agreement on production and efficiency had helped bridge deep divisions at home». Maier's interpretation has been developed and consolidated by a growing body of scholarship. Perhaps not every historian accepting the idea of politics of productivity would also subscribe to the one that production relations are social relations with a political scope in themselves, which also implies the degree and ways they are politicised or de-politicised. In this perspective, politics of productivity entail what, drawing on a classic of social theory (Michael Burawoy), it is possible to call politics of production.

In the case of postwar Italy, aims and ideals of prosperity and social peace were defined by national and international political divides as much as hindered by them. On the one side, American authorities and Italian ruling parties quarrelled on the implementation of Marshal Plan funds. On the other hand, the presence and evolution of the strongest Communist Party in Western Europe and of a trade union confederation led by Socialists and Communists held a deeply ambivalent position. Far from being overcome by economic progress, in the short and medium run Italian

Communism managed to reinvent itself in it, contesting underdevelopment and the contradictions of development, but also as the main governing party in some of the most prosperous and industrialised regions. Not that party politics, or even the vicissitudes of organised labour, include all political aspects of production, as outbreaks of protest outside of established patterns will show in the 1960s - and as scholarship on women's factory work, underrepresented in trade unions as in labour history, has underscored in recent years. In sum, hegemony proved to be never achieved, always contested: different hegemonic projects competed in a national context, each shaped and constrained by international networks and allegiances

In contrast to Gramsci's quote, a deep connection developed between social relations centred on industrial production (within and without the factory) and the role played by "professional political and ideological intermediaries" - in a way, the industrial age's own intellectuals: managers, experts in human engineering, labor scholars, and labor leaders. The aim of this research is, therefore, to investigate the activity of these intellectuals and their attitude towards the ever-evolving world of production. I propose to interpret it also as a competition for hegemony both within and without the factories. Since it concerned the "politics of productivity", it involved not only political actors, but also unions, managers, labor experts, and, in a way, the representatives of innovative social sciences such as industrial sociology and labor law. While a label such as "Americanization" appears inadequate, views of American technologies and industrial relations, whether they were perceived or real, were essential in defining the attitude towards mass production, its ongoing changes, and their possible outcomes. In my research therefore I intend to study the discourse concerning factory issues, by concentrating on a few selected figures from different fields, on how they concealed or emphasized the political dimension of production, and, last but not least, on how they were engaged in the "translation" of American models and experiences: Vittorio Valletta and the management of Fiat, trade unionists from CGIL and CISL, and labor experts Gino Giugni and Luciano Gallino.

Probably, few of them would have applied the notion of 'Fordism' to the industrial development, social struggles, and debates they were taking part to: nevertheless - or precisely because of this - it can provide a useful starting point.