

**TOTAL WAR AND SOCIAL REFORM:
ADMINISTRATING WORK, POPULATION AND LIFE
IN THE «RAVA COMMITTEE» PLAN (1918)**

*GUERRA TOTAL Y REFORMA SOCIAL:
AVANCES ADMINISTRATIVOS, COMPOSICIÓN
Y DESARROLLO DE LA «COMISIÓN RAVA» (1918)*

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ABSTRACT: The article focuses on the most important Committee for the reform of the Italian welfare state during the twentieth century: the “Rava Committee”. It conducts a first time prosopographical study of its members aiming to analyse the ideas and proposals of social reform as well as the agents. The article begins by bringing to light the educational background of the components of the Committee, highlighting the central role of statistical knowledge. Then, it explores its professional composition, which excludes the subaltern classes, as well as the political culture of the members. Finally, the prosopography shows the features of a reform area which crosses traditional political organizations. It is a sort of irregular cloud unified by the aim to address the social question with reforms and therefore to prevent the fracture of society.

KEYWORDS: Warfare/Welfare; State building; Origins of Fascism; Prosopography

RESUMEN. *El artículo se centra en la Comisión más importante para la reforma del estado de bienestar italiano durante el siglo XX: la “Comisión Rava”. Lleva a cabo por primera vez un estudio prosopográfico de sus miembros con el objetivo de analizar las ideas y propuestas de la reforma social, así como sus agentes. En su parte inicial, el artículo saca a la luz los antecedentes educativos de los componentes de la Comisión, destacando el papel central del conocimiento estadístico. Luego explora la composición profesional que excluye a las clases subalternas y, para después profundizar en la cultura política de los comisionados. Finalmente, el análisis en clave prosopográfica muestra el influjo de la corriente reformadora palpable en organizaciones políticas tradicionales. Es una especie de nube heterogénea, homogeneizada por el objetivo de abordar la cuestión social con reformas y, por lo tanto, evita la fractura de la sociedad.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Guerra; Bienestar; Construcción del Estado; Orígenes del Fascismo; Prosopografía.*

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The problems of post-war are the problems of the war and the problem of the war is the most important problem of the post-war.

Vittorio Scialoja 1918¹

Introduction

Until World War One, Italian social legislation displayed unmistakable elements of fragility the analysis of which is meaningful only in comparative perspective, that is, in relation to what occurred elsewhere. Jens Alber's data regarding the main contours of the framework of the European «welfare state» – its set of provisions – beginning in the 1880s are extremely helpful for painting this picture. Under the various models already emerging in this period,² in 1915 the average percentage of the active population covered by protection against accidents, illness, unemployment, disability and old age was almost 43% in Germany, 37% in Sweden, 36.3% in the United Kingdom, 30.8% in Denmark, 17.8% in Finland, 13% in Austria, 11.5% in France and only 4.8% in Italy.³

In light of the country's recent unification in 1861, this figure necessarily stems from and sheds light on the process of state building at that time, which played out through competition between the various post-unification political elites as they debated how to best interpret the purpose and responsibilities of the state. Judging from Alber's data, Sabino Cassese is right when arguing that the «social question» – together with all its corollaries – was relatively neglected as a short-term concern of state-building in favour of other objectives considered more pressing.⁴ At the same time, however, and this is a point scholars have often overlooked,⁵ questions of social welfare went far beyond lines in the budget, so laboriously balanced in 1876, or the mere unfolding of the material structures of the state (administration in the sense of bureaucracy, taxation, the army, etc.). They also entailed a much more relevant matter: the recognition of the state by its citizens. In other words, the way in which elites dealt with

¹ Scialoja, 1918, p. 6

² On the insurances in Europe: M. Dreyfus, 2009.

³ Alber, 1983, p. 220. On Spain, some data in: Pons Pons, Silvestre Rodríguez, 2010.

⁴ Cassese, 2014, pp. 40-64.

⁵ Patriarca, 1996.

the «social question» called into question the relationship between the state and its citizens and, more specifically, the extent to which citizens perceived the new state as more legitimate, reassuring and welcoming than the political forms that had preceded it.

Ultimately, like an enormous crack in the newly formed clay comprising the physical and symbolic «body» of the state,⁶ the «social question» shaped the entire sequence of events of the unified Italian state from its birth until the dawn of the Great War. Furthermore, the complexity and compelling character of this issue made of it one of the major problems continuously plaguing liberal political elites.⁷

In fact, while much of the political platform of Fascism was indeed based on propaganda linking work and nation, the institutional shift towards «great social reform» took place years earlier. In the unprecedented and irreversible reconfiguration triggered by the First World War, the entire «population» of the country took on strategic value and, as such, began to require a new form of attention beyond managing the labour market. Never before had the totality of inhabitants become so powerful. Its integrity as well as its productive and reproductive capacity had to be protected from the impact of other nations at a time when the trenches were still a recent memory. Moreover, in view of the «total» character of the war, it was expected that the retreating tides of conflict would leave in their wake a multitude of handicapped soldiers, widows, orphans and elderly citizens without children to take care for them. In this historical transition, it was not only the bodies of soldiers and civilians that were destroyed but also the entire regime of insurances which, albeit lagging behind those of most European countries, had until then seemed acceptable if not wholly desirable.

In this context, therefore, the «crack» represented by the social question had become a chasm threatening to swallow the entire state apparatus: the conditions were such that it had to be addressed.⁸

In June 1916, Prime Minister Boselli outlined for the Parliament the features of a committee that would be tasked with preparing for the transition from war to peace in terms of planning – albeit without ever using the concept of planning itself, as it had yet to appear in the politi-

⁶ Kantorowicz, 1957.

⁷ Schiavone 1990.

⁸ Procacci, 2013; Pavan, 2016.

cal lexicon.⁹ Despite the fact that Italy was the last to adopt such measures, it took a stand alongside other great European powers in this respect. In the end, however, this initiative was blocked with the fall of the government in October 1917. It was not until the following Prime Minister, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, that this project was launched once again.

On 21 March 1918, a «governmental» committee was established, headed by Orlando himself and divided into two broad subcommittees, one in charge of legal, administrative and social matters, and the other of economic matters (industry, commerce, agriculture).¹⁰ At the beginning of April, presidents were appointed to head the two subcommittees: Vittorio Scialoja for the first one and Eduardo Pantano for the second. At the end of June, twenty-seven thematic sections were created.¹¹ Vittorio Scialoja described the connections between war and the committee in a range of public talks. The Army – he argued – «it's just a section of the struggling people, a section of its military power as a consequence of the new warfares». ¹² The war thus had «completely shaken» not only the army, but also «the whole social structure of the nation and it had repercussions on every branch of activity». Against this background, he considered social reforms as the most important topic to plan the post-war and to prevent «periods of tumults and disorders». ¹³

For these reasons, the first subcommittee included the Section *Social legislation and provision* (Section X). Labelled in the following years the «Rava Committee» after its President Luigi Rava, this Section completed its task in less than five months.¹⁴

⁹ Letter of Finance Minister Filippo Meda to the President of the Government Paolo Boselli 19-9-1917, Central Archive of the State (henceforth ACS), Fondo Boselli, busta (from now on b.) 1, fascicolo (from now on f.) 11.

¹⁰ Decreto Luogotenenziale 21 marzo 1918 n. 361.

¹¹ Decreto Luogotenenziale 30 giugno 1918. The list of all presidents and sections in: Melis, Tosatti 1994, pp. 20-21. The amount of materials produced by the Committee is stunning and no one has investigated it in its entirety. Some information in Isap, 1969, pp. 29-40. On industry: Falchero, 1991.

¹² Scialoja 1918(a), p. 27.

¹³ Scialoja 1918(b), pp. 2-7, 303. On the relationship between war and social reform see also Rava, 1916, 1917.

¹⁴ Rava's letter to the Mariotti senator (President of the XVI section), 5/12/1918, ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (from now on PCM), Grande guerra 1915-1918, b. 269 bis, f. 3 Sezione X, sf. 3 Trasmissioni di voti e ordini del giorno.

The «Rava Committee» handed the government the most ambitious and organic plan of social reform in Italian history, comparable only to the D'Aragona Committee following the Second World War. Its resolutions allowed Italy to bridge the gap with Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark and France up to the Great War, at least in terms of expanding social protection provisions. The work of this Committee thus constitutes an extremely effective entry point for studying the history of social reform in the context of the long-term, polysemic process of state building. Nevertheless, this history is just as frequently mentioned as it is unexplored.¹⁵ How might we approach such an investigation?

Although the final acts of the Committee are available for consultation, having been published in 1920,¹⁶ the files of preparatory materials and meetings minutes held at the Central State Archives are quite scant if compared to those of the other Sections.¹⁷ The minutes of the sub-groups it comprises are lacking altogether, minutes that would shed light on the discussions of the various themes and the backgrounds of Committee members. Also within the personal archive of President Luigi Rava, which his family donated to the Classense Library in Ravenna, there are feeble traces of these minutes. In terms of research, this lack of sources prevents us from reconstructing the positions taken by each actor and the overall dynamics of interaction in an attempt to capture the Committee in action, that is, before the members crystallized their final resolutions on every single matter.

However, the «Rava Committee» is too important as an object of research to give up on or investigate it by merely describing its acts which are constantly referenced, in a ritualistic and superficial manner, in the existing bibliography. I have thus opted for a biographical approach, placing the «actors» at the centre of my analysis. Like any other methodological option, this is neither good nor bad in and of itself; rather, this approach must be evaluated in relation to its ductility and effectiveness in making available sources speak. To this end, I put together a database of relevant information about Committee members using a prosopographical method to uncover certain general characteristics of the Section that would be invisible by focusing only on the

¹⁵ Conti, Silei, 2013, p. 76.

¹⁶ Commissione Reale per il dopoguerra, 1920.

¹⁷ The Committee sources are in ACS, PCM, Grande guerra 1915-1918.

texts of the proposals or individual figures, however central they may have been.¹⁸

The first list of members contains twenty-four names. One of these, the socialist Claudio Treves, resigned for political reasons together with all the members of the Socialist Party, and Giuseppe Toniolo died on 7 October 1918, failing to attend even the first session due to health problems.¹⁹ The Section was subsequently reformed and ended up comprising twenty-eight names. During the first meeting, the members decided to divide into four subgroups that would work separately and then discuss their proposals in the plenary meetings: social legislation, social insurances, provision, the middle class and the conditions of the woman.²⁰ This articulation and the very name of the Section show the lexicon used around War World One to describe and classify a topic increasingly strategic for the State. If the labels *Social State* and *Welfare State* never appear in the Committee Acts, *Social Legislation* instead works as general frame. In fact, it encompasses the «life conditions of industrial, agricultural, commercial workers and the public employees just like the private». Furthermore, it regards the balance of the «relationships between the industrial-commercial class and the working class and, finally, the raising of the conditions of the woman in the social life». Following this definition, the constitution of the subgroup *Middle Class and Conditions of the Woman* is rather straightforward, while the formation of the two subgroups of *Social Insurances* and *Provision* remains less clear. The Committee Acts establish indeed a general correspondence between the former and all kinds of social provisions; while they associate more specifically the latter with the «industrial Provision» deemed to be «imperfect» and «fragmented».²¹

In this perspective, Committee members were distributed as shown in Table 1.

¹⁸ Charle, 2001, pp. 12236-41; 2013, pp. 94-108; Rollet, Nabonnand, 2012.

¹⁹ Toniolo's letter to Rava 26/7/1918 in ACS, PCM, Guerra europea 1915-1918, b. 269 bis, f. 3: Sezione X, sf. 1.

²⁰ The original name of this subgroup explicitly referred to women in the singular form.

²¹ Commissione Reale per il dopoguerra, 1920, p. 446.

Table 1
Members of the four subgroups in the “Rava Committee”

Social Legislation	Social Insurances	Provision	Middle class and conditions of woman
M. Abbiate	M. Abbiate	M. Abbiate	L. Albertini
L. Borri	F. Bargoni	L. Albertini	A. Beneduce
P. Colaianni	A. Beneduce	A. Beneduce	E. Conti
P. Di Fratta	L. Borri	E. Conti	P. Di Fratta
G. Falciani	P. Colaianni	T. Labriola	A. Finocchiaro-Aprile
C. Ferrero di Cambiano	G. Falciani	V. Magaldi	T. Labriola
A. Finocchiaro Aprile	C. Ferrero di Cambiano	O. Paretti	A. Loria
R. Gobbi	R. Gobbi	F. Rainaldi	L. Marozzi
A. Loria	A. Loria	G. Toja	G. Morelli-Gualtierotti
V. Mangano	V. Mangano		U. Scalori
G. Morelli-Gualtierotti	O. Paretti		G. Toja
E. Raimondi	L. Pontiggia		F. Virgillii
U. Scalori	G. Toja		
M. Vaccaro	M. Vaccaro		
F. Virgillii	C. Zucchini		

At first glance, the subgroups appear to have an uneven number of members. Based on a purely quantitative criterion, it could be concluded that the social legislation and social insurances groups were considered to be strategic or, at least, to require more expertise, as they have the highest number of participants (15). Moreover, while most members contributed directly to one or two subgroups, Ugo Toja, Mario Abbiate, Alberto Beneduce and Achille Loria took part in three out of four. Finally, only one woman — Teresa Labriola — was co-opted to focus on social security and the middle classes as well as on the condition of women. This, together with the exclusion from the voting right until 1946, makes evident the marginality of women within the Italian institutions of the period.

Unfortunately, in the absence of session minutes, whose number remains unknown, it is impossible to trace the explicit reasons for this distribution and the actual contribution each member made to his or her respective subgroup(s). However, starting from available data we can un-

cover some features of the subgroups about members' expertise in social reform, their professions and political cultures.

1. Regulations, forms of knowledge and sciences

The chart on age range (Chart 1) – identifying eight cohorts, each comprising a five-year span consistently with the model of public statistics – shows that the majority of Committee members was between fifty-three and sixty-two years old at the time they were convened, with the other cohorts making up relatively insignificant proportions. Members born between 1856 and 1865 therefore represented the overwhelming majority. No matter where we might opt to set the threshold of youth in that specific historical context, the Committee unquestionably lacked younger generations' input on the issue of social reform, excluding as it did anyone aged less than thirty-eight years. Against this reconstruction, we can examine members' academic degrees and backgrounds in a more substantial manner.

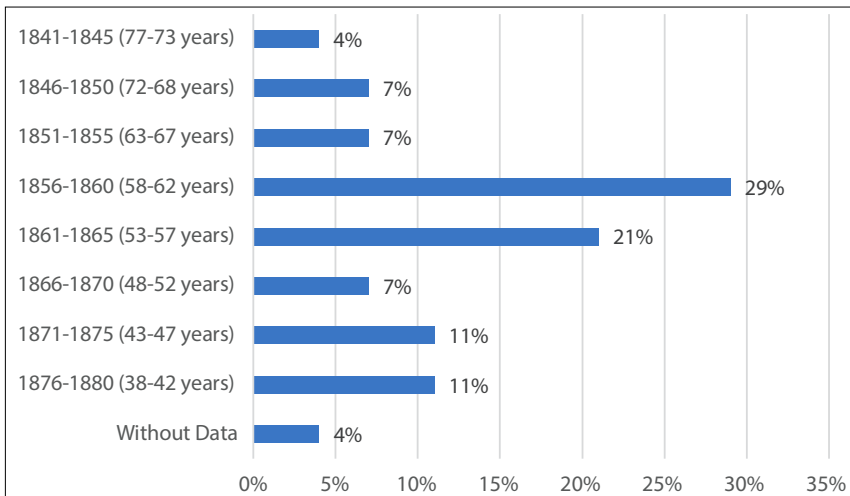


Chart 1

Age range of the Committee members

The chart regarding educational background (Chart 2) shows that only 8% of members did not hold a university degree. Almost all of them had managed to earn a higher education degree in a country where only 2.620 people graduated out of 14.357 enrolled in 1885-1886, and a few years before the war in 1909 this ratio fell to 1.521 out of 22.817.²² A degree was, therefore, a rare commodity that unequivocally identifies the members of the Committee as the cultural elite of the country. The most evident feature, however, is the predominance of law degrees, which can be interpreted on the one hand as marker of a higher status in the landscape of academic departments and, on the other, as the confirmation of the prestige that legal education continued to enjoy among elites in the years of the Great War.²³

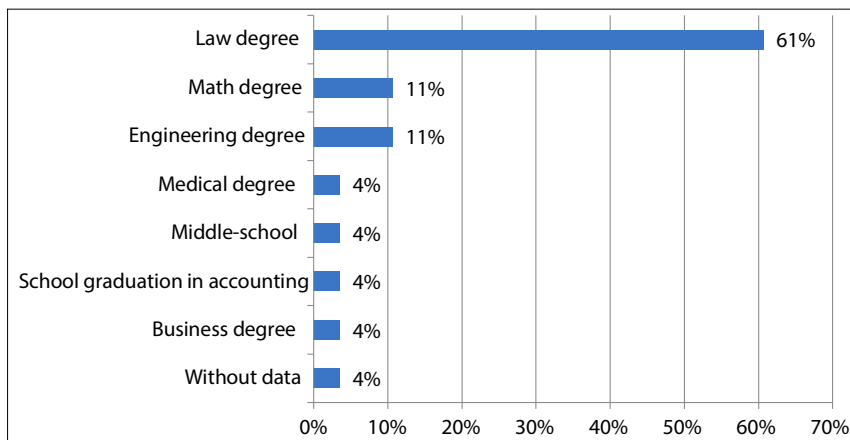


Chart 2

Educational background of the Committee members

If we cross-check the results displayed in the two charts above, we can see that approximately 70% of the Committee members reached graduation age between 1876 and 1900, that is, between the regulations for the Faculty of Law put in place by the Minister of Education Ruggiero

²² Cammelli, Di Francia, 1996, pp. 7-77.

²³ Tacchi, 2002, pp. 107-37.

Bonghi (11 October 1875) and the regulations established by Minister Nunzio Nasi (13 March 1902). Bonghi put an end to the hegemony of private law by introducing a group of subjects drawn from eighteenth-century police science:²⁴ political economy and statistics, merged together, became one of the fundamental areas; the science of administration and public hygiene, the encyclopaedia of political sciences, the science of finance were included among optional subjects.²⁵

The subsequent regulations introduced by Minister Coppino in 1885 (22 October), together with some modifications introduced in 1876, strengthened the position occupied by these forms of knowledge, thus including the science of finance and the science of administration among core subjects even though the first was combined with financial law and the second with administrative law. The regulations also divided statistics and political economy into two separate courses as the domains they covered were broad and important.²⁶

Finally, while the regulations introduced by Minister Nasi did not rearrange the subjects, they did contain the first harbingers of a change that was already underway, introducing a new phase in which public law took shape as a school around Vittorio Emanuele Orlando. This school was constructed through a number of strategies amongst which distinguishing law from the social sciences and defending the positions of jurists in the University as well as in the political arena. In short, it was a matter of safeguarding their power to define and steer the state.²⁷

Regulations provide only an initial indication. A deeper understanding would require tracing in detail the relations of power within each individual field of knowledge and between these fields and the state that, ultimately, established their boundaries. Nevertheless, regulations do point to a very important aspect. Like a litmus test, they record the crisis that law was undergoing under the pressure of three very strong centripetal forces. First, industrialization, urbanization and internal migration brought to the surface a constellation of problems concerning the population as a whole. What should be done, and how, to address disease, poverty, poor living

²⁴ Napoli, 2003.

²⁵ «Regolamento della Facoltà di Giurisprudenza», *Bollettino Ufficiale. Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, January, 1876, pp. 23-5.

²⁶ «Modificazioni ai Regolamenti universitari. Relazione a sua maestà», *Bollettino Ufficiale. Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, December, 1885, p. 1081.

²⁷ Cianferotti, 1980.

conditions and the education of children, the lack of urban housing as well as problems with the organization of cities as well as air and water quality?

Second, the making of the working class as a political actor raised a whole series of questions about labour relations. For instance, associations, humanitarian societies and trade unions mobilized throughout Europe and succeeded in destigmatizing the issue of unemployment, freeing it from the idea of poverty as immoral.²⁸ The idea of contract represented another area of change: the idea of the wage relationship as a contract between two free, independent and equal parties, like private law maintained, was cast into ever-increasing doubt by harsh social inequalities.

Finally, the last force stemmed from the upper tiers of state-building, understood in this case as the creation of immaterial structures including a range of knowledge forms that allowed elites to govern the population and establish a balance with organized collective subjects.

In the decades following national unification, the Italian law proved incapable of staking out a strong position at these three distinct levels. This was true of both the period prior to Sedan, when France exercised a strong influence on Italian legal culture, and later, when Roman law made its way back to Italy from Germany, Europe's new hegemonic centre of power.²⁹

The 61% of graduates in Law (Chart 2), therefore, were educated at a time when a number of disciplines with porous and mobile borders, including in particular statistics and the science of administration, were undermining the primacy of law from within legal departments themselves.³⁰ This group was integrated by the 11% of members with a degree in mathematics who had worked as statisticians in ministerial offices or as professors of statistics at the University – such as Filippo Virgilio, Orazio Paretti and Alberto Beneduce³¹ – and by an additional 11% of engineers, including Guido Toja, professor of financial mathematics at Bocconi University and general manager of *Fondaria Assicurazioni* and the *Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni* (INA).

The statistics they learned and practiced were, of course, a social – if not directly a political – science, understood as a form of knowledge to be used in administration. The concept of administration did not indicate only the bureaucratic apparatus of the state: just as in many other parts of

²⁸ Alberti, 2013.

²⁹ Grossi, 2000.

³⁰ Schiera, 1986, pp. 226-7; Cianferotti, 2001, pp. 17-75.

³¹ Marucco, 1996; 1999.

Europe,³² it was understood to overlap with the concept of government, that is, the practice of politically intervening in daily life through techniques of quantification and measurement.³³ Given this overlap, according to the model proposed by Lorenz von Stein in Germany³⁴ and Angelo Messedaglia in Italy, the boundary between statistics and the science of administration was blurry. This ambiguity can be seen, for example, in the writings and biography of Carlo Francesco Ferraris, who taught both subjects at the university level and advocated for their hybridization.³⁵

Both fields of knowledge were associated with two figures who guided the circulation and reproduction of the two disciplines, especially that brought in from Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century, and went on to have strategic roles within the Committee: Luigi Cossa and Angelo Messedaglia. Their crucial importance leans on the fact that they held multiple positions in the management of universities (in Pavia and Rome) and in the system of competitive state exams through which positions were distributed. They were also involved in the cultural institutes and scientific journals that ordained young scholars, in the Higher Council of Public Education that authored the regulations for establishing forms of knowledge as sciences and, finally, inside the Parliament, the site where the laws and budgets of the Ministry of Education were approved.³⁶

Ultimately, beyond the prevalence of law degrees, the main form of knowledge underlying the proposals of the Rava Committee was a version of statistics closely associated with the science of administration. To avoid misunderstandings, both fields must be contextualized in time and place, that is, without anachronistically distorting them through reference to the ways their boundaries and content developed in the following decades.

In addition to these forms of knowledge, a prosopographic approach also reveals the link between engagement in social reform, the professions and the political cultures found in the country at that time. While it is impossible to identify the criteria used to form the Committee, it is nevertheless possible to examine what they produced.

³² Moullier, 2010, pp. 39-50; Sordi, 2010, pp. 119-149.

³³ Desrosieres, 2014.

³⁴ Lindenfeld, 1997.

³⁵ Ferraris, 1880. About Ferraris: Malandrino, 2007.

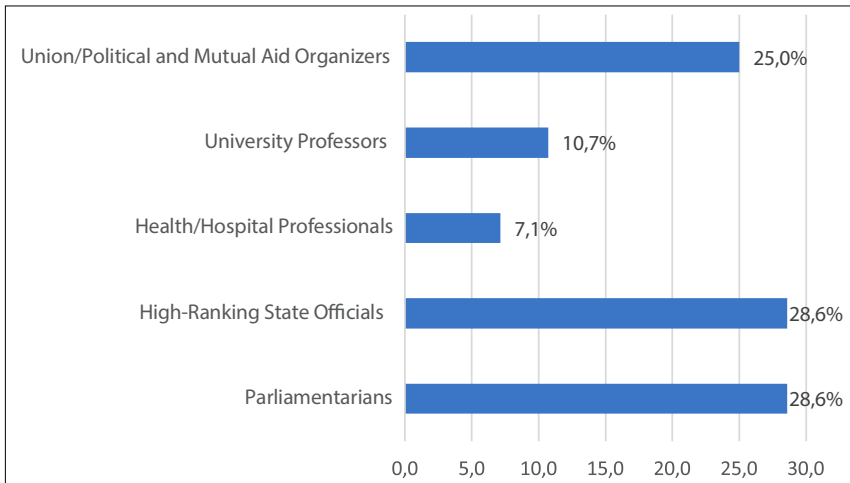
³⁶ About Cossa: Faucci, 1984 and Cardini, 1993, pp. 38-9. About Messedaglia: Favero, 2000, pp. 151-176. See also: Messedaglia, 1851; 1869, pp. 576-593.

2. The reformers

Chart 3 illustrates the professions of the Committee members in 1918. The two most relevant groups in terms of numbers are the *High Ranking State Officials* and the *Parliamentarians*. The former is composed almost entirely by professionals operating in the field of social provisions and insurances. As in the cases of Alberto Beneduce, the managing director of the *Istituto Nazionale di Assicurazioni* (INA), and Guido Toja, president of the same institute, some of these professionals were also University Professors. The group of *Parliamentarians* is made up by Deputies and Senators who dedicated their political activity to the «social question». The third group, that of *Union/Political and Mutual Aid Organizers*, is rather heterogeneous. Indeed, it includes political organizers, like Teresa Labriola, but also trade unionists, like Emanuele Raimondi and Pompeo Colajanni, as well as Mario Abbiate, the President of the *Federazione delle Società di Mutuo Soccorso* (Federation of Mutual Aid Organizations), who would become the first Labour Minister of Italy in 1920. A fourth group gathers University Professors teaching statistics and political economy (Ulisse Gobbi, Achille Loria, Filippo Virgili). Finally, the last group includes two professionals working in the health and hospital sector.

If professions are an indicator of social status, results displayed in Chart 3 suggest that the Committee was formed mainly by members of the elite of the country as well as by members of that portion of society that, precisely in that period, was consolidating and becoming publicly visible under the label «middle class».

My effort to identify the political positioning of the Committee members is hampered by the typical problems of classification characteristic of social history. In this specific case, the difficulty is exacerbated by the particular historical moment and by the heterogeneous social composition of the Committee itself. In relation to the first obstacle, scholars have demonstrated that the World War was such an intense experience as to cause sudden changes in political affiliation. A clear example of this is Benito Mussolini's shift from socialism to fascism with an intermediate stopover in interventionism. We must, therefore, seek to pinpoint Committee members' positioning at the very moment of discussing proposed reforms, paying attention to skip the traps of anachronism such as attributing them positions dating to before or after the crisis of the First World War.

**Chart 3**

The professions of the Committee members

Regarding the second obstacle, the fact that different professional groups (parliamentarians, high-ranking officials and members of a ministerial higher council, political and trade union organisers as well as university professors) coexisted in the same arena makes it impossible to use a single classification criterion. While it is possible to position Deputies and Senators according to their seats in the political geography of the Parliament, it is impossible to do the same for high-ranking state officials. It is, therefore, necessary to look for traces of their political orientation in the positions they took – including public speeches or memoirs – knowing, however, that there is a marked lack of such sources due to the political discretion characterizing this social group.

To reduce the risk of error and avoid creating a distorted view, I have opted to present a large number of «responses» lacking specific information. In other cases, no effective criteria could resolve doubts and, therefore, I examined the type of activities carried out by members, the contexts in which these activities occurred and their networks of relationships. Chart 4 outlines some early results for Parliamentarians.

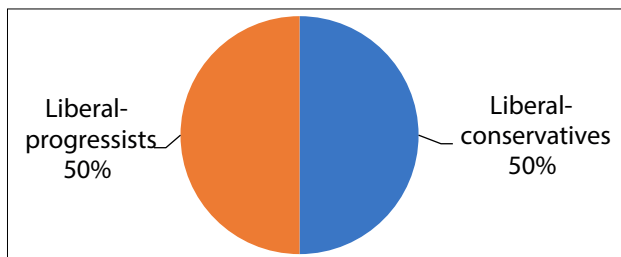


Chart 4

The political positions of Parliamentarians

As it shows in Chart 4, there were equal numbers of «radicals», «liberal-democrats», «constitutional democrats» - which I included in the category of Liberal-progressivists (Finocchiaro Aprile, Rava, Scalori, Vaccaro) – and figures belonging to the conservative and anti-Giolitti component of the parliamentary line-up (Albertini, Conti, Ferrero di Cambiano, Morelli Gualtierotti), which I classified as Liberal-conservatives.³⁷ These are sub-divisions of the larger Liberal field since the Socialist party did not allow its Parliamentarians nor its trade unionists to take part in the Committee. Finally, this portrait clearly expresses the shape liberalism took at the time: a field of struggle which, although comprising distinct groups³⁸ and characterized by internal conflicts over the very definition of liberalism, generally agreed on the broader issue of social reform, with some of its factions even mobilizing around this issue. These factions can be labelled «reformers» to distinguish them both from socialist reformism as well as from the other factions of liberalism that were opposed or even hostile to the idea of social reform, opting instead to stubbornly defend property and the Ancien Régime. While this fact might be expected in the case of the different components of progressive liberalism that had long pressed the newly-formed Italian state to address the «social question», it is much less obvious for the conservative factions. Driven by the long-term objective of preserving social order, curbing «the seeds of individualism and anarchy» – to quote Salandra, who, tellingly enough, was a professor of administrative science in Rome – they came together in the

³⁷ An useful tool: Corbetta, Piretti, 2009

³⁸ H. Ullrich, pp. 403-50; 1990, pp. 107-73.

attempt to alleviate the discontents of society through reforms, therefore playing out their game on a stage that might be defined as reformist.³⁹

Widening the scope of my analysis to all the members of the Committee, the resulting picture is more nuanced. Although the high percentage of non-classifiable positions affects the internal distribution of political subcultures, what stands out in Chart 5 is their variety.

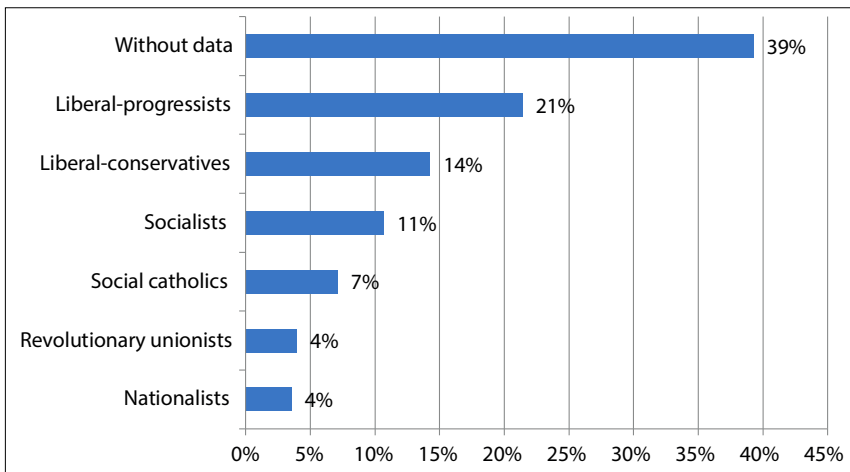


Chart 5

Political positions: the Committee

Besides the above-mentioned divisions running through the liberal field that were reproduced on a larger scale, it is also interesting to delve into the other political cultures. The socialist group included well-known figures such as Achille Loria (1857-1943) who developed an affinity with socialism after having befriended Turati and Bissolati while attending university in Bologna but never officially joined the party. His scientific career confirms my earlier point that forms of knowledge could not be reduced to legal culture alone and that certain personalities played central

³⁹ A. Salandra, *Atti parlamentari. Legislatura XXIV, I.^a Sessione. Discussioni. Tornata del 10 dicembre 1913*, cit. in Gentile, 1999, p. 73. Lucarini, 2012.

roles. Having graduated in law from Bologna, he continued his studies at the University of Pavia under the direction of Luigi Cossa who, together with Angelo Messedaglia, launched him on the path of studying population and political economy. Loria held a chair at the University of Turin and, while the Committee was active, he was one of the most well-known and frequently-translated Italian economists in Europe.⁴⁰

Vittorio Mangano and Carlo Zucchini were representative of the Catholic component. Mangano came from the Sturzio faction of social democrats in Sicily while Zucchini's background lay with the *Opera dei Congressi* and the Economic-Social Union,⁴¹ and both of them were closely related to Giuseppe Toniolo.⁴² Toniolo, likewise initially recruited into the Committee, was a student of Angelo Messedaglia and came to focus his studies on the German current of social reform at the University of Padua under Messedaglia's guidance before embarking on a university career and obtaining a chair in Political Economy in Pisa in 1879. Toniolo is well-known for being the national point of reference for social Catholicism, and indeed this current of thought was developed, consolidated and disseminated through his journal «*Rivista internazionale di scienze sociali e discipline ausiliarie*» (founded in 1893).⁴³ It is worth recalling that, in addition to calling for the state to contribute to balancing and harmonizing relations between classes, he also distinguished himself by taking a position in support of corporations as intermediate bodies capable of healing the fractures of society.⁴⁴

The nationalist member of the Committee, Teresa Labriola, was also its only female participant. Daughter of the famous Marxist philosopher Antonio Labriola, in 1894 she was the first woman to graduate from the Faculty of Law in Rome. While she did achieve a professorship in Philosophy of Law in 1900, she failed to secure a permanent university career for herself despite repeated attempts, most likely because of the anti-female prejudice of the time. In 1906, she delivered the official report for Italy at the congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Copenhagen and became a member of the governing council

⁴⁰ D'Orsi, 2000.

⁴¹ The statute of the 24 March 1906 establishes that the goal of the Union is «to promote associations and institutes for implementing the socio-economic and christian program».

⁴² De Rosa, 1962, pp. 2-5; Vian, Zucchini, 1954, p. 1828.

⁴³ Tacchi, 2015, pp. 272-301.

⁴⁴ Menozzi, 2014.

of the National Committee for female suffrage (CNPSF). As the conflict drew closer, Labriola turned toward nationalism and, moving away from the entire world of feminist pacifism or neutralism, took a stand in favour of interventionism. In 1917 she founded the Women's Patriotic Association, which was associated with the Italian Nationalistic Association, and in the following years she established herself as one of the most authoritative figures in the Italian women's movement. In the stew of nationalist culture, her support for the emancipation of women took on an almost mystical-religious hue brimming with eugenic undertones, which explains why she was included in the Committee.⁴⁵

Finally, the political mechanism dedicated to reform also included a revolutionary unionist, Emanuele Raimondi. The confidential reports by the prefecture of Palermo drafted for the Ministry of the Interior had been monitoring Emanuele Raimondi's political activity in Sicily since 1900, when he was considered «dangerous both for his propaganda and, when relevant, for his actions, since not only does he not hesitate to publicly expound his antisocial ideas, he is also capable of stirring up the masses». In 1911 he was still listed as «dangerous».⁴⁶ This changed in 1915 as the organization he directed, the Palermo Agency of Labour, joined the «reformists» at the Chamber of Labour to give rise to a single structure called the Union of Labour, which the «revolutionaries» found to be derisive. In this occasion, Raimondi was accused of «opportunism» and «shabby corporative consistency».⁴⁷ During the work of the Committee, therefore, he was moving towards the more reformist currents of Italian socialism, and he remained faithful to those positions even after the Fascist regime grew its roots and began monitoring him as «subversive».

3. The committee's proposals

Delving into the members' backgrounds allows situating the Committee proposals – of which I will examine in depth only those most disruptive to the pre-existing structure of the Italian welfare state⁴⁸ – within a flow of medium/long-term tensions and transformations revolving around

⁴⁵ Tesoro, 2004; Taricone, 1994.

⁴⁶ ACS, Casellario Politico Centrale, b. 4206, f. Emanuele Raimondi ragioniere.

⁴⁷ Marino, 1976, pp. 24, 33, 37.

⁴⁸ The resolutions are twelve in total.

the relationship between constructing the state and governing the crowd of individuals and groups that move through society. A few years earlier, even a student of Orlando's – Santi Romano – had addressed this relationship in a famous lecture. Going beyond a perfunctory tribute, Santi Romano dismantled the entire foundation of his teacher's juridical culture, so stubbornly attached to preserving an abstract and formal definition of the state but was still dominant within the university sphere and among political elites.⁴⁹ The work of the Committee was actually strikingly rapid but it did not express any sudden conversions or cobble together emergency measures. Rather, these proposals reflected the far-reaching scope of the forms of knowledge and discourses that had proliferated since the 1880s and were keeping in with the multiple deliberations of the *Consiglio Superiore del Lavoro*⁵⁰ (High Council of Labour) and of the *Consiglio della Previdenza* (Provision Council), as indeed approximately half of Committee members had previously taken part in these governing bodies.⁵¹ This membership shift demonstrates the crucial significance of these two councils for the history of social reform in Italy. Unfortunately – as mentioned in the introduction – the sources do not allow us to determine the contribution of each members of the «Rava Committee» to the deliberation and the final version of the proposals. However, it is possible to examine more closely the areas it dealt with.

Quite understandably, «the first and most important topic that drew the attention of the Section» was the *Legislative regulation of employment contracts* to establish a unified contract – which did not yet exist at the time – for all of the «broad categories of workers» both public and private. Explicit reference is made to one of these categories – i.e., «domestic work», «contemplating» the need to introduce «a minimum wage» in order to combat the exploitation of women. Responding to critiques of the civil code and existing legislation in this area, the development of an employment contract was perceived as an «inevitable» consequence of the birth of «class organizations» that extended «and transformed disputes from individual to collective».⁵² These organizations, at least in the industrial field, had to be given the power to express themselves and represent

⁴⁹ Romano, 1967; Mangoni, 1982; Ferrajoli, 1999 p. 22.

⁵⁰ Vecchio, 1988.

⁵¹ 59 percent of the members took part in one advisory committee of the State (at least), 33 percent did not belong to any committee, on 8 percent no data are available.

⁵² Romagnoli, 2009.

the «aspirations and interests of workers» through «effective mediating bodies» enjoying institutionally-granted legitimacy in the workplace. This reform paved the way for *factory workers' internal committees*, some of which (hatters, metallurgists, mechanics) had struggled so hard at the beginning of the century to achieve even minimal space for manoeuvring and were subsequently targeted for frontal attacks by employers' associations from the 1910s on.⁵³

Once the legitimacy, autonomy and even desirability of internal committees had been established, the following step was the *juridical recognition of trade associations* by applying the same regulations in force for cooperatives. Referencing the 1884 French law on professional trade unions that had yet to be adopted in Italy, the resolution was interpreted simultaneously as an enhancement of «rights» and as a measure of «pacification» and stabilization. It was seen as having positive effects not only in terms of the «participation of workers», by meeting «criteria of justice and fair social evaluation», but also in terms of «supervising and managing companies».

Perhaps the most ambitious proposal advanced by the Committee involved social insurance measures, which were surrounded by high expectations in light of the discrepancies between Italy and other countries as well as of the fragility of the Italian system. The Committee first discussed «free social insurance, funded exclusively by the state», thereby demonstrating that it was fully aware of what was occurring in the rest of Europe, and finally opted for the German model. This entailed a number of innovations. While in the past the prevailing logic had been voluntary, this reform introduced mandatory rules. A single or «global» form of insurance was introduced, replacing the previous spotty and inconsistent approach to workplace risks and to cover illness (examining «the issue of hospitals and calling for their construction»), disability, old age, involuntary unemployment, accidents and maternity. Moreover, the segmentation and incompleteness characterizing the old system was discarded in favour of including all «salaried or independent workers (workers, farmers, employees, craftsmen, etc.)». Finally, the Committee put an end to the proliferation of multiple management institutes by creating a Central Institute to administer all areas except for unemployment, which was instead dealt with by using funds from professional trade unions according to their requests.⁵⁴

⁵³ Loreto, 2015.

⁵⁴ A very similar form of insurance will be introduced in United Kingdom by Sir. William Beveridge in 1942.

Although across-the-board guarantees already included some figures belonging to the «middle class» – employees and craftsmen – as well as women, who were granted maternity leave, the Committee dedicated special care and additional investments to both these categories through two specific resolutions (i.e., Protection of the middle class; Assistance to maternity and childcare) developed by an entire subgroup dedicated to this area in particular (i.e., the *Middle Class and Conditions of the Woman* group). The words *protection* and *assistance* conceptually evoke a type of state intervention enacted through different channels and qualitatively distinct from the mechanism of social insurance. In relation to the middle class, what was needed was «aid» in the credit sector as well as subsidies for relaunching the businesses of the «liberal professions», «small property owners» and «artisans», «tax deductions» on income destined «for the education of children» and the «creation of the means necessary for beginning their productive activity». Besides actual measures, what deserves most attention is the fact that a discourse emerged in the wake of Fascism aimed at presenting the middle classes as the «connective fabric of the economic and social life of the nation». Viewed from this standpoint, the resolution clearly reveals the process of inventing this social aggregate, simultaneously legitimating and accelerating this process by granting it an institutional seal of approval. Indeed, the process started at the beginning of the twentieth century on a national and international scale⁵⁵ through the proliferation of statements concerning the middle classes that shifted from negative representations full of undesirable qualities⁵⁶ to representations with positive, favourable connotations.⁵⁷

In the second case, that of women, the Committee resolution was influenced deeply by the personal biography of Teresa Labriola and the nationalistic bent towards the «female question» that had taken on beginning in the war period. In this heated climate she both supported and contributed to create, Labriola placed motherhood at the political service of the state: «the means for carrying out the holocaust of individual caducous life» to pass instead «to the immortal life of the nation».⁵⁸ This context helps explaining the dual aspect of the resolution. On the one hand, it

⁵⁵ Rapini, 2018, pp. 27-47

⁵⁶ Banti, 1996, pp. 235-36.

⁵⁷ For example: V. Magaldi, 1908, pp. 95, 109; Scarselli, 1911. It should be noted that Vincenzo Magaldi is a member of the «Rava Commettee».

⁵⁸ Labriola, 1915, p. 444.

marked an advancement in the social recognition of motherhood in Italy after the creation of the Maternity Fund in 1910, a provision which soon proved to be completely insufficient. Indeed, this reform marked an historical shift from providing assistance solely to female workers to universal maternity coverage under the responsibility of the state, at least theoretically.⁵⁹ On the other hand, however, this recognition was fatally flawed. To be sure, assistance was offered in the name of the «fundamental interest of the nation» to grow «a strong population» that could «reach the period of productivity fully efficient». In other words, it had its roots in eugenic ideas which, while not the *ex novo* product of the war, were certainly reinforced and unleashed by the conflict in the direction of social biologization.⁶⁰ In this context, the move to valorize mothers protected their reproductive function more than their role as citizens in the fullest sense.⁶¹ In fact, the resolution was concerned with returning «conjugated workers» promptly to their family lives «after the war mobilization», which made «women less suited to the fulfilment of their social mission».⁶²

Conclusion

In this article, I highlighted certain properties of the «Rava Committee» as it was drafting proposals for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, adopting a prosopographic approach to analyse in greater depth the professions, the forms of knowledge, and political cultures embodied by its members.

The range of professions carried out by members suggests that the Committee was composed predominantly by individuals coming from the elite of the country or, at least, from those sectors of the Italian society that were beginning to self-represent and self-organize under the label «middle class». This, in turn, helps clarifying the choice of the Committee to define a social legislation that was inclusive of these sectors and envisaged specific benefits for them.

⁵⁹ The Maternity Fund concerned only the industry and it was financed by the workers and the entrepreneurs without the support of the State: Bravo, 1997, p. 149.

⁶⁰ Mantovani, 2004, p. 190.

⁶¹ Rossi Doria, 1995, pp. 171-77; Scattigno, 1997, pp. 273-99.

⁶² All quote of the Acts come from the *Commissione Reale per il dopoguerra, Studi e proposte della prima sottocommissione presieduta dal sen. Vittorio Scialoja*, cit., pp. 447, 448, 452-454, 468-469.

The Committee hosted representatives of all the political cultures interested in addressing the social question, made pressing by the total war, through the active intervention of government institutions.⁶³ It goes without saying that the «progressive liberals», «conservative liberals», «reformist socialists», «social Catholics» and «nationalists» comprised in it found common ground on the issue of social reform for reasons that diverged, and sometimes even clashed, especially with regard to their ultimate political objectives. They converged in the short term to avoid fracturing society. Undoubtedly, the stew of shared corporate culture acted as a glue: the Catholic members or certain liberal-progressives such as Mario Abbiate, who was in favour of a Chamber of Corporations, expressed this aim more openly while other members were less explicit. A corollary of this fact was that all members, although with varying nuances, shared a conception of the state that was neither the night watchman nor merely despotic. In their conception, therefore, the state should take care of managing the population and equip itself with the instruments to do so. In this respect, the line adopted by the Committee resembles what has been later called a “third way”, although this is a terminology that appeared in the 1930s in conjunction with Fascism – a connection that should not be extended to this specific context.⁶⁴

Beneath the panoply of political cultures, it was not law that provided the main toolbox but rather a version of statistics intimately linked to the science of administration. These, therefore, were presented as the forms of knowledge of social reform *par excellence*. Forms of knowledge that were «non» or «pre»-disciplinary to the extent that the borders of academic disciplines, as currently understood, were still extremely porous and labile at that time. While the role of statistics is not so surprising, that of the other form of knowledge is less evident insofar as traces of its memory have almost completely disappeared and did not leave any successors – at least in the University sphere – after being transformed, during the 20th century, into the science of studying state bureaucracy.⁶⁵ Thus, this finding calls for a more in-depth study of this subject in the future.

⁶³ The Committee composition is not representative of all the political organizations in the Parliament because it was appointed by the government.

⁶⁴ Santomassimo, 2006.

⁶⁵ Some references in Sandulli, 2009 and Cassese, 2010.

Ultimately, the political heterogeneity of the Committee reflected in its proposals, inevitably involving diverse inclinations that cannot be reduced to a single current of thought. There was a purely emancipatory bent in favour of social actors who had been excluded from citizenship, as in the case, for example, of the *Legal recognition of trade associations* or the *Compulsory insurance for all worksite risks*, so-called «global insurance». At the same time, there were also normalizing impulses that applied standards, techniques and regulations in an effort to direct and control conduct or define life itself under the banner of the nation, as with the *Maternity and childcare assistance* reform with its eugenic undertones.⁶⁶ Finally, the resolution for *Protection of the middle classes* had a performative quality: by formalizing the existence of a homogeneous subject through this name, a subject bearing particular features that had been altered by the war, the Committee granted this subject visibility while also reinforcing belief in its social concreteness, consolidating it and, ultimately, activating it even before the advent of Fascism. In light of the symbolic and political weight that «the middle classes» acquired a few years later through the network of powers of the totalitarian state, this seems to me another finding worthy of note.⁶⁷

Furthermore, by moving backward genealogically, the prosopographic approach adopted here sheds light also on certain figures, relationships and institutions that in turn help to explain – albeit partially – how the Committee developed the specific properties it did or, in other words, how its foundation was possible in the medium term. To summarize the clues collected here, Messedaglia and Cossa represent nodal figures; the universities of Pavia, Padua and Rome emerge as epicentres in the topography of the space of reforming forms of knowledge, at least in the 1870s and 1880s, and Giuseppe Toniolo's *Rivista internazionale di scienze sociali e discipline ausiliarie* constitutes a site for aggregating corporatism and implementing the social doctrine of the Church. I also found that the Higher Council of Public Education held a crucial position in institutionalizing knowledge about society and population and creating new scientific containers. Similarly, I would list the High Council of Labour and Social Security Council as two institutions for

⁶⁶ There are some affinities between these eugenic undertones and Fascism: De Grazia, 1993, pp. 50-62.

⁶⁷ Salvati, 1992 and 1995, pp. 446-474; Socrate, 1996, pp.155-166.

collecting data and materials as well as for formulating legislative proposals that were explicitly taken up by the Section headed by Rava. All in all, this heterogeneous constellation constituted a space – or at least a part of a larger space, which here I have only sketched in the background – in which ideas about social reform developed transversally between the 1880s and the Great War. A space that specialized studies have trouble reading as such, focusing as they tend to do on separate analyses of institutions, political parties, universities or culture in the liberal era.

The proposals elaborated by the Committee collected dust on the desks of the Prime Minister's office without being either applied or discussed by the Parliament as they deserved. Called on to govern the transition from war to peace and, internally, the unaddressed decalogue of social illnesses facing the country in the long term, the Nitti and then Giolitti administrations adopted only a few partial and sectoral measures⁶⁸ while avoiding the core of the matter: an overarching redefinition of the relationship between the state and society. After the macroscopic effects of the World War, only an intervention of such magnitude could have hoped to repair the crack I identified at the outset of this article. Michelangelo Vaccaro's 1893 words ring prophetic when, thinking on the basis of the state and unaware of his future involvement in the Committee, he asked himself:

The bourgeoisie believes that it has cleared its conscience by doing some charity (...). It also believes that it is able to sleep peacefully when there are agents and judges watching out for it, and when prison bars are safe. But this is a real illusion. (...) Will there be the means then to stem the violent outbreak of the storm?⁶⁹

Indeed, the storm swept in only four years after the documents had been delivered to the Prime Minister's office. Furthermore, it was not only a matter of «bars» and «prisons»: once the equilibrium of the first phase following the march on Rome had been broken,⁷⁰ what emerged was an all-encompassing, ambitious plan to construct the material and

⁶⁸ The only resolutions approved are: the compulsory insurance for disability and old age of salaried workers; the ministry of Labour; the central employment and unemployment agency.

⁶⁹ Vaccaro, 1893.

⁷⁰ Bertini, 2001.

symbolic scaffolding of the state and government of the masses that re-framed the individual items identified by Section X when not directly implemented them as in the case of «global» insurance.⁷¹ In this sense, the Fascist state broke with the previous epoch, which had instead been characterized, as I tried to show, by a deficit of administration. In this case, framing the concept of administration in its historically specific context, it also entailed steering and managing the population. In other words, not only did Mussolini take the social question seriously in the aftermath of the war by supporting the formation of a labour party. The entire totalitarian state went on engaging with the same terrain that had swallowed up the liberal state.

Would the implementation of the vast reform programme envisaged by the «Rava Committee» as it teetered on the edge of the precipice have been able to contain the explosive tensions unleashed by Fascism? It is beyond the capacity of the historian to answer. Nonetheless, if we are to pursue an open and anti-deterministic conception of history, such a question is not misplaced and it may, at the very least, facilitate the interpretation of certain developments.

Not counting Committee members who died before 1925, when Mussolini created the Faculty of Political Science with the aim of attacking the remains of the liberal-age legal culture that still persisted in the Faculty of Law⁷² and creating the cadres of the fascist administration, 43% of the members joined the regime (supporters), 9% cooperated (collaborators) and 22% refused to do both. None of them took part in active anti-fascism.⁷³

Of course, there were many roads leading elites into the arms of Mussolini and we should not trust in single-cause explanations: factors included the cult of the nation, fears of social disorder, personal ambitions and the career opportunities offered by the regime, anti-parliamentarism, the illusion of using Fascism only temporarily or, in some cases, the op-

⁷¹ I'm referring to the totalitarian State: Aquarone, 2003; Cassese, 2010.

⁷² Gentile, 2003; Mangoni 1994, pp. 381-398.

⁷³ I labelled as supporters people who claim publically to share the ideology or the policy of Fascism (Colaianni, Ferrero di Cambiano, Finocchiaro Aprile, Gobbi, Labriola, Magaldi, Morelli-Gualtierotti, Rava, Scalori, Toja); as collaborators people who get head in the public administration or in the university (Beneduce, Virgili); as non-supporters people who take publically a stance against Fascism or who retire from public life (Abbate, Albertini, Loria, Mangano, Zucchini). No information is available on 26 percent of members.

posite, that is, perfect adherence to Mussolini's propaganda. Sometimes these roads overlapped and converged. Many of the jurists who were trained at Orlandi's «School of Public Law» – including Rocco, for example – perceived the idea of the totalitarian state as fully consistent with the theory of the «legal character of the state», which formed the basis of their teacher's entire system and thus their training, in that both approaches rejected popular sovereignty.⁷⁴

Vice versa, most of the jurists in the Committee adhered to a non-Orlandian, if not anti-Orlandian, conception of legal science insofar as they were connected to the teachings of Angelo Messedaglia. Messedaglia's approach represented an alternative to Orlando's within the University, not only in terms of its stance on hybridization between law and the sciences for administering society, but also in terms of the more overtly political node of state/society. It was certainly no coincidence that Orlando did not come to dominate Rome's Faculty of Law until 1905, four years after the death of Messedaglia, who had founded the Economic-administrative School there in 1875. While Messedaglia argued that the science of administration and statistics were crucial for guiding state interventions to alleviate the problems of the population in dialogue with law,⁷⁵ the future Prime minister relegated the study of «social interference by the state» to a completely marginal position with respect to the aims of the state itself and the primacy of legal science.⁷⁶

Although the factors that contributed to determine certain choices were undoubtedly complex, we may assume that these Committee members encountered Fascism as a break with the liberal state, at least to the extent that they expected the new regime to provide something the previous one – and themselves as part of it – had proved incapable of delivering. Rava's story is paradigmatic in this respect. He asked the Fascist administration for the same reforms that had been obstinately outlined both before and during the Committee's term. In voting for the Mussolini government in the autumn of 1922, Rava compared the head of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party) to Napoleon and the Fascist revolution to the French one: if 1789 created the conditions allowing Bonaparte to implement the Civil Code - he argued - 1922

⁷⁴ Rocco, 1927, pp. 18-19; Colao, p. 302. For more on the relationships between jurists and Fascism: Birocchi, Loschiavo, 2015.

⁷⁵ Messedaglia, 1851 and 1869.

⁷⁶ Orlando, 1887.

could similarly open the doors «not simply to a new provision of law or an adaptation of articles, but to a reform aimed directly at forming the Labour Code». ⁷⁷ The same Labour Code that the liberal elite had been unable to achieve.

Such outcomes were constructed at the molecular level in the unfolding of a non-predetermined history. There is no ground to think that the coming of Fascism was already written in some ahistorical organicism or in the points of affinity that existed between the stew of corporate culture many members of the «Rava Committee» shared and the corporatist mystic espoused by the regime.

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⁷⁷ Rava, 1922, p. 22. About Rava: Rapini, 2012.

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