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THE «NEW ITALIAN TRADE UNION»: THE CISL BETWEEN  
MODERNITY, IDEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

A contribution to the historiographical debate

For some time now, the historiography of the Italian trade unions after World War II has been considered unsatisfactory. What is asked for is a greater in-depth analysis of the trade unions and a better identification of the connections that inscribe them within a wider and more general historiography. This is not the place to review the existing historiography; a useful overview can be found in papers that offer a general and quick panoramic on some of the existing studies.<sup>1</sup> Actually, the contributions so far produced are many and distributed in a considerable number of researches. The aim of this paper is not that of examining the various interpretations formulated, but to indicate some particularly significant points in order to introduce the addressed subject: the role of the democratically

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *La storia del movimento sindacale nella società italiana: vent'anni di dibattiti e di storiografia*, G. Pellegrini e A. Ciampani (eds), Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2005. An article that is inevitably not up to date but which offers a starting point on Marxist tradition – the only one taken into account – is the following: O. Bianchi, 'Temi e problemi nella storiografia del movimento operaio e sindacale dal dopoguerra a oggi' in *Storiografia contemporanea e storiografia sindacale: rassegna critica*, O. Bianchi, M. Comei, A. Vitacolonna (eds), Cacucci Editore, Bari, 1980, pp. 51-110. Regarding the historiography of the Cisl see the volume by various authors *Per una storia della Cisl. Indirizzi storiografici e prospettive di ricerca*, Quaderni della Fondazione Giulio Pastore, n. 2, 2004 (within this last volume a panoramic of the most recent studies conducted outside of Italy is found in the article by G. Bianchi, 'Il sindacato come soggetto storico: recenti orientamenti della storiografia sindacale negli altri paesi' pp. 65-86). For a synthetic description of some of the more significant contributions see the brief review 'La Cisl come problema storiografico: punti per una bibliografia' G. Bianchi (ed), in *La Cisl negli anni Sessanta e Settanta. Materiali per un ripensamento*, Quaderni della Fondazione Giulio Pastore, n. 4, 2005, pp. 105-114.

and Christian inspired trade union in the modernization of the Italian trade union system.

A first, central issue is the strongly politicized notion of the trade union in the Italian tradition and, as far as our subject is concerned, in Italy after World War II. The fascist totalitarian regime had placed the trade union within a corporative notion that subordinated the workers' organization to the needs of the political agenda. The fall of fascism meant the end of the corporative experience, but it did not call into question the politicization of the trade union, which had deep roots in national history. Bianca Beccalli summarizes the condition of the post-fascist Italian trade union as follows:

“At the end of World War II the Italian trade union is reborn strongly politicized. The organization is politicized: the high and middle ranking members of the union come directly from the political parties; the decisions taken within the union depend on the parties' decisions. And the militancy, the base is politicized: that is, joining a trade union, even for simple union members, is not conceived as a tool to defend specific and immediate interests, but rather as a political act supporting a new social order which is about to come true.”<sup>2</sup>

From this point of view, Beccalli seems implicitly to underline how such a political notion isn't born solely from theorizing the trade union as a “Vee belt” – a theory founded on the claim of the party's exclusivity in representing the interests and ideals of the working class – but also from a spontaneity of the masses dictated by a radical politicization of every aspect of life, by a totalizing vision of politics, which is one of the signs of that modernity that has characterized twentieth century European history. This notion is at the basis of the separation of the various political and trade union cultures (Marxist, Catholic, republican) that had come together as a single entity with the Pact of Rome – which, in 1944, gave birth to the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* – the Cgil (the *Italian*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. Beccalli, ‘La ricostruzione del sindacalismo italiano, 1943-1950’ in *Italia, 1943-1950. La ricostruzione*, J.S. Wolf (ed), Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1974, p. 351.

*General Confederation of Labour*). An experience that Piero Craveri has defined – referring to the Catholics – as “atypical” and substantially dictated – at least for most of them – by tactical reasons.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1948 these differences appeared irreconcilable and led to the separation of the Christian wing (but also of the secular non-communist and non-socialist one) that gave birth first to the *Libera Cgil* (*Free Cgil*) and later, in May 1950, to the *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori* (Cisl) (*Italian Confederation of Workers’ Trade Unions*).

Although it has been done, it would be reductive to interpret the fracture of the trade union’s front as “nothing more than the political-ideological reflection of the class struggle occurring in society”<sup>4</sup> or as the prevailing of a “Vatican scheme.”<sup>5</sup> These far too partial interpretations can be misleading. The very role of the Cold War, in the various phases of its development, must be considered in all of its complexity, without assuming its influence to be purely mechanical. Along this line of thought, Guido Formigoni underlines that, even within the quickly deteriorating internal relations of the unitary Cgil, “there was no relationship of dependence between the political split over the Marshall Plan and the breakup of the union in July-August 1948.”<sup>6</sup> The process which led to the birth of the Cisl was less predictable and linear. As Aldo Carrera claims, a process directed from without “would not have

<sup>3</sup> P. Craveri, *Sindacato e istituzioni nel dopoguerra*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1978, pp. 35-37.

<sup>4</sup> A. Pepe, ‘Il sindacato nel compromesso nazionale: repubblica, costituzione, sviluppo’ in *Storia del sindacato in Italia nel ‘900*, vol. III *La Cgil e la costruzione della democrazia*, A. Pepe, P. Iuso, S. Misiani (eds), Ediesse, Roma, 2001, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Turone, *Storia del sindacato in Italia, 1943-1969*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1973, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> G. Formigoni, *La scelta occidentale della Cisl: Giulio Pastore e l’azione sindacale tra guerra fredda e ricostruzione (1947-1951)*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1991, p. 57.

withstood ‘having everybody in opposition’.<sup>7</sup> It is probable that without a strong sharing, based on autonomous reasons, other choices would have been made, and the influence of the (the party of the Catholics), of the Acli (the *Associazione Cristiana dei Lavoratori* – the *Christian Association of Italian Workers*) and, more in general, of the Catholic world, as well as the weighty tradition of the “white syndicalism” with a Catholic matrix, would have led to different results.

The search for this specificity must certainly be understood within a more general political dimension. The triggers were many, and the rejection of an exclusive link of causality is the result of this preliminary recognition. Just by refusing an overly unilateral explanation as a starting point, Luigi Musella identifies the reasons of the division within the contrast originating in how the world, society and humankind were viewed: “it must not be believed that the division, especially between socialist and communist workers on one side and Catholic ones on the other, answered solely to issues originating in the political parties. The main political events and the top executive decisions were important, but they also ended up responding to a reality which pre-existed in the behaviour and the perception of the workers.”<sup>8</sup> Further on Musella specifies: “the conflict was also about the role and the activity of the trade union, but in general it had to do with *two different visions of the world and of society* [...] the contrast, therefore, was cultural, political and idealistic, but also, more specifically, social.”<sup>9</sup>

The different notion of what the trade union had to be originated, in the first place, from a different notion of politics, of the human being, of society and of the historical process. The

<sup>7</sup> A. Carera, ‘Sindacato libero e economia mista: la scelta della Cisl’ in *Le scissioni sindacali in Italia e Europa*, M. Antonioli, M. Bergamaschi, F. Romero, A. Ciampani (ed), BFS, Pisa, 1999, p. 146.

<sup>8</sup> L. Musella, ‘I sindacati nel sistema politico’ in *Storia dell’Italia repubblicana, vol. I, La costruzione della democrazia: dalla caduta del fascismo agli anni Cinquanta*, Einaudi, Torino, 1994, p. 874.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 375-376. Emphasis added.

reasons of the conflict between the Catholic world and the communist one, between the *Democrazia Cristiana* and the *Partito Comunista* (the *Communist Party*), which were culturally and ideologically founded on different world views, had natural repercussions also at the trade union level. The Cold War added another contrast – illustrated in the binomial “East/West” – which did not superimpose itself perfectly on the pre-existing ones, but which greatly contributed at widening the gap between the two realities. In this sense, the model of international relations typical of the Cold War showed all its pervasiveness, not limiting itself to simply hardening the opposing standpoints. Formigoni underlines with accuracy its capacity of influencing and changing the very dynamics of discussion claiming that “the cultural conflict arising from the different world views also entailed a relevant change in the open processes within those worlds.”<sup>10</sup> Such a pervasiveness showed itself also on an analytical level, as it influenced the definition and elaboration of the epistemological system through which the new post-war political reality can be interpreted. Along this reasoning, Federico Romero underlines how this general element inevitably reflected itself at the trade union level:

“the values and rules of the Cold War, those ideological options that justify the taking of sides, provide also a useful cognitive filter. In fact, on several occasions the trade unionists of the Cisl and of the Uil [the social democratic and republican trade union] – or in an opposite but, after all, similar manner those of the Cgil – resort, in the absence of better analytical tools, to typical categories of the bipolar division to understand some quick and surprising international transformation, to evaluate choices which suddenly have to be made, to make sense of events which otherwise they would not know how to face.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> G. Formigoni, ‘Lavoro sindacato e capitalismo nelle riflessioni del cattolicesimo italiano’ in *Le scissioni sindacali in Italia e Europa*, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> F. Romero, ‘Guerra fredda e scissioni sindacali: stato e prospettive della storiografia’ in *Le scissioni sindacali in Italia e Europa*, op. cit., p. 12.

The conflict and the competition between trade unions, both at a national and at an international level, led to a continuous and insistent use of the themes of the Cold War and, consequently, to a perpetuation of its “relevance.”<sup>12</sup>

The “Western choice” of the Cisl, which was by no means a foregone conclusion considering the numerous resistances within the Catholic world to joining the “American model,”<sup>13</sup> had strengthened the significance of the international reference points. In fact, such a choice was not limited to matters of foreign policy and to the general political-ideological frame of reference, but it had a direct influence on the reformulation of the nature, the characteristics, the functions and the role of the trade union within a democratic and pluralistic modern society. From this standpoint, it must be underlined how the positions of the future leadership of the Cisl and of its very leader, Giulio Pastore,<sup>14</sup> changed significantly from 1947 onwards. These positions went from the initial support of the Marshall Plan by the Cgil’s Christian wing, with the consequent criticisms of the communists’ reservations on the Plan itself,<sup>15</sup> to pointing at the American syndicalism as the reference model for a radical modernization of the Italian trade union. Formigoni summarises the overall course of the “new trade union” as follows:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Formigoni, *La Democrazia cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale (1943-1953)*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the trade union career of Giulio Pastore cf. V. Saba, *Giulio Pastore sindacalista: dalle leghe bianche alla formazione della Cisl (1918-1958)*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> “Since the reunion of the Cgil’s collective on 30 December 1947, the Christian syndicalist wing criticised the reticence of Di Vittorio in the analysis of the American proposal, putting forward a clearly favourable opinion towards an initiative that – it was claimed – would have allowed the Italian economy to integrate itself into a vast international and developed economic area, and at the same time to use the aids to build its own autonomy, which would be a guarantee of political and economic independence.”; G. Formigoni, *La scelta occidentale della Cisl*, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

“the Western choice of the Cisl developed in reality as something less than a transplant of an organic ideological reference subordinated to what happened overseas, but at the same time it was much more than a mere reflection of events. It proved to be a determined phenomenon: a historical process during which the complex itinerary of the years 1947-51 led the group of Catholic trade unionists to reconsider and modify their convictions, their own trade union culture and their strategic orientations, borrowing a series of decisive references, almost through osmosis, from the Western world led by the United States, and weaving them with their own historical and idealistic heritage.”<sup>16</sup>

This reference point became so central as to be considered the real transformational element that has given to the Cisl a rather different trade union profile from that of the “Christian wing” of the unitary Cgil. A reference point that, it must be underlined again, did not give to the “Western choice” an extensive value indicating a relationship of mechanical derivation or subjection to the American administration.

This was true also for contradictions that were difficult to resolve. From this standpoint, Romero underlines how the various needs of the political stabilization and of the economic modernization led to strategies that were difficult to reconcile.<sup>17</sup> The “productivism”, which was at the basis of the Marshall Plan and around which converged the positions of the American and of most European trade unions, became the privileged instrument to begin a process of economic, social and political modernization. In this sense, “the concept of productivity,” continues Romero “has acquired – in reference to the political objectives of the Marshall Plan – meanings far greater than the simple technical notion of intensity and effectiveness of the productive process. It is used in the largest sense as a social philosophy and a political-economic strategy, which were the cornerstones of the American planners’

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. F. Romero, ‘Gli Stati Uniti e la «modernizzazione» del sindacalismo italiano’ in *Italia contemporanea*, n. 170, March 1988, pp. 71-96.

scheme for the growth and stabilization of Europe.”<sup>18</sup> Just on such a “social philosophy” the Cisl tried to find its own “positive identity.”<sup>19</sup> This effort was not devoid of difficulties and tensions, and inevitably it had uneven results.

Some scholars have underlined the limits of the influence of the “*Anglo-Saxon trade union*” on the Cisl, not only emphasizing correctly the impossibility of a “simple extension in Italy of the Anglo-Saxon model and its trade union, cultural and financial forces,”<sup>20</sup> but also judging the Cisl’s adherence to such a model as “an image which is stereotyped and not always realistic.”<sup>21</sup> After all, the *American trade union*, the *CIO*, which was a reference point for the Italian “new trade union,” had disputed on various occasions with the Cisl, manifesting its open reserves on the excesses of moderation used “in the name of the stability of anti-communist politics.”<sup>22</sup> A critique, however, that in Romero’s judgement explicates an irresolvable impasse exclusively internal to American politics:

“the economic aid, the propaganda and cultural appeal could not replace the autonomous contractual function of the trade union: an aggressive reclaiming action by it was as necessary, to face and counter the communist trade union representations, as it was concretely banned in the name of political stability. [...] This was the impasse of American politics: the difficult dilemma between the needs of stabilization and those, in many ways conflicting, of modernization.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 84. For an analysis not exclusively centred on Italy, but on the overall relations between Europe and the United States cf. F. Romero, *Gli Stati Uniti e il sindacalismo europeo, 1944-1951*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> F. Romero, ‘Gli Stati Uniti e la «modernizzazione» del sindacalismo italiano’ op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> A. Pepe, ‘Il sindacato nel compromesso nazionale’ op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> S. Sciarra, ‘L’influenza del sindacalismo americano sulla Cisl’ in *Analisi della Cisl*, vol. I, G. Baglioni (ed), Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1980, p. 306.

<sup>22</sup> F. Romero, ‘Gli Stati Uniti e la «modernizzazione» del sindacalismo italiano’ op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 76-77.

By virtue of this intrinsic limit, according to Romero, the “American model” could not but head towards its gradual failure.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the ambivalence of the American economic and syndicalist politics, it is however certain that the attention that the Cisl had for the American trade union and its forms, represented an important novelty on the Italian trade union scene,<sup>25</sup> and it certainly contributed decisively to review what has been defined as the traditional “neo-corporative creed” of the Catholic trade unionism.<sup>26</sup> This attention constituted a downright watershed within the Italian trade union and the new condition to envisage the nation’s modernization. The matter of initiating a process of modernization was at the basis of the Western choice of the Cisl’s leadership and, especially, of Giulio Pastore. Formigoni has specified how

“the peculiarities of Pastore’s Western choice [were] in fact connected to the specific channels that mediated his encounter with the American world. An American trade union which was decisively anti-communism both internally and internationally, but which was also transparent in respect to an internal model of a strong dialectic answer to the challenges of advanced capitalism. A governmental interlocutor that involved the trade union in the mechanisms of the Cold War, but which tended to export – just through the construction of the “Western block” – a more general modernization design, following the scheme of the “politics of productivity” that looked for interlocutors in European societies. A new international organization of trade unions, unified by an ideological reference point and at the same time reaching out for the circulation of the canons of moderate trade unionism.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96. Romero comes to the conclusion that certainly “the United States could give to the political-economic élites of the other nations the support of their power and decisive financial aids. But they didn’t have the capacity to translate their supremacy in an influence capable of modelling the political and social systems of the allied nations according to the canons of their vision.”

<sup>25</sup> On the attention of the Cisl towards “the reformist drive of the American industrial syndicalism” cf. S. Misiani, “La cultura” in *La Cgil e la costruzione della democrazia*, op. cit., p. 318.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. P. Craveri, *Sindacato e istituzioni nel dopoguerra*, op. cit., p. 299.

Finally, an American Catholic-social world that surely identified itself in the reasons of the economic development and in the growth of the capitalist system, but that also chose a dynamic relationship with the social environment, because of the possibility of promoting the progress of the workers' movement and therefore an overall civil maturation, inspired by classical doctrinal references."<sup>27</sup>

Naturally, the true novelty wasn't in the acceptance of the foundations of the capitalist economy. On this point, the evolution of the Catholic world was noteworthy, to the extent that it presented in sizable sectors an out-and-out conforming "to practically liberal ideas." The leadership of the Cisl had rather searched for and reached "a new balance," weaving "the adherence to the needs of the economic growth with giving value to the possibility and the fecundity of the conflict, albeit a conflict with well-defined rules and downplayed to a simple instrument useful to continually adapt the economic structures."<sup>28</sup>

A fundamental role in this search for a new and more fruitful equilibrium was certainly performed by the economist Mario Romani. His trade union theoresis comprised all the American experience as well as the overcoming of the perspective of that "third way" that had also strongly characterized the Catholic world.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, the receiving of the Keynesian doctrines performed a fundamental function, especially the spreading within the Catholic world of a modern economic culture which was not disconnected from ethically grounded reasons. Along these lines, within the Italian Catholic party (the *Democrazia Cristiana*) the group bound to Giuseppe Dossetti, which represented the strongest alternative to the majority led by Alcide de Gasperi, was particularly active, and it also directly influenced the Cisl's circles.<sup>30</sup> It is not

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<sup>27</sup> G. Formigoni, *La scelta occidentale della Cisl*, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. G. Acocella, *Storia della Cisl*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1988, pp. 55-56. The relationship between the leadership of the Cisl and Dossetti's

a matter of verifying here how much these positions can be traced back to a sort of Keynesian orthodoxy. What is of interest is rather to underline how much they represent for a part of the Catholic world a tool to resolve traditional antinomies and to renew one's view of the capitalistic development. Naturally, such a new approach interacted with a deep-seated tradition, meaning that the acquisition was not devoid of relevant problems. Ada Ferrari has summed up this problematic point:

“certainly the advent of Keynesian theory had led to the fall of the a priori incompatibility between trade union action and capitalistic accumulation and opened up the possibility of studying the two terms in a non-antinomic way. But the loyalty to Keynes' ideas seems at times simply overlapping or only partially made up of an underlying humoral texture that with difficulty renounces to traditional, instinctive dualisms between “evil” capital and “good” labour and, on the other hand, inter-class irenicisms that are more indebted to the traditional Catholic solidarity than to an evaluation [...] of the advantages of social peace and of a utilitarian indulgence of corporate interests.”<sup>31</sup>

With reference to such a dualism, Ferrari underlines “the permanent conditioning force” of the cultural and mental background of the Catholic trade unionists.<sup>32</sup> But the adherence to the American trade union model, the Western choice conceived as a choice of specific values, although with all its peculiarities and possible contradictions, had led to a profound change. Regarding principles and values, the Cisl searched for its foundation not in the Church's teachings but in the experience of the modern parliamentary democracies.<sup>33</sup> The new industrial culture of the Cisl's trade unionists led to a full belief in the development of a capitalistic system, to an

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political wing has suggested the existence of a sort of “Christian Labourism,” cf. V. Saba, *Quella specie di laburismo cristiano. Dossetti, Pastore, Romani e l'alternativa a De Gasperi, 1946-1951*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> A. Ferrari, *La civiltà industriale: colpa e redenzione. Aspetti della cultura sociale in età degasperiana*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1984, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

active and propulsive role of the democratic institutions and, naturally, to a refusal of the legitimacy of subversive actions. The road to modernizing post-fascist Italian society required the adoption of a productivist philosophy that recognized the democratic trade unions as having a fundamental role not only in defending the legitimate interests of the workers, but also in being directly involved in choosing the economic policies on a national level. Giuseppe Acocella claims that “for the Cisl the action of the trade union was aimed at aiding development and the increase in productivity, but in order to transfer large shares of the profits to the salaries.” Only in this way, according to Acocella, “precise needs of modernization” could be met, reconciling “the original Christian-social inspiration with the new ‘industrial culture’ that the Cisl was elaborating.”<sup>34</sup>

Naturally, the lesser conflict of the Cisl in comparison with its ideal American model came from the need to defend and sustain the democratic and liberal structures of the Italian republican state. This was an element that significantly conditioned the action of the “new trade union” and that, as mentioned, had also created some friction with the CIO. This perennial taking responsibility for the “effects on the political context”<sup>35</sup> of every action increased the responsibility of the Cisl and the degree of politicization of its activity.

The efforts to carve out a precise area, to identify a specificity of the trade union’s action which would differ from the political and the religious ones, didn’t lead to an apolitical configuration of the trade union. The modernization of the trade union’s conception demanded to clearly reject the subordination of its activity to an external subject, be it even a

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<sup>34</sup> G. Acocella, *Storia della Cisl*, op. cit., p. 52. Vincenzo Saba has also underlined how much this structuring characterised “the culture of the Cisl from the very moment it came into being”; V. Saba, ‘Verso un nuovo sindacato (luglio 1948-1955)’ in *Il sindacato nuovo: politica e organizzazioni del movimento sindacale in Italia 1943-1955*, S. Zaninelli (ed), Franco Angeli, Milano, 1981, p. 417.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. G. Baglioni, *Il sindacato dell’autonomia*, De Donato, Bari, 1975, p. 221.

political party or a denominational organization, but not because of a denial of its political value. The centrality of the concept of autonomy invested several levels. It wasn't simply a refusal to be steered from outside by virtue of the past experience within the unitary Cgil. It was rather the result of an analysis on the complexity of a twentieth century modern society, on the importance of recognizing plurality in the decision-making centres, on the need to defend the principles and values at the basis of a parliamentary democracy.

From this viewpoint, "modernity" meant full integration of the workers in the state structures and the raising of their standard of living; reconciliation between trade union demands and economic development; "trade union secularism"; participation of the trade union in the decision-making processes and the elaboration of the national economic policy.

Such an idea of modernity fitted into the tumultuous context of the reconstruction in post-war Italy, in which the very concept of modernity was conceived in many different ways. It is misleading to interpret the roles of the *Democrazia Cristiana*, of the Italian industrialists, of the United States and of the Vatican as substantially univocal, like the expression of a monolithic block.<sup>36</sup> Rather, it is true that just the accusation of immaturity and backwardness addressed to the Italian entrepreneurial world contained the reasons for the non-contingent

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<sup>36</sup> An example of this monolithic interpretation during the national reconstruction can be found in A. Pepe, 'Il sindacato nel compromesso nazionale' op. cit., p. 24.

contrasts of the Cisl.<sup>37</sup> and of some circles of the American administration.<sup>38</sup>

The attention towards creating and coordinating connections “between the productive organization and the trade union organization” was a central aspect “in the programmatic horizon of Catholicism at the time of De Gasperi, and it was at the centre of a vast modernizing effort.”<sup>39</sup> But the modalities of constructing such connections and relations, and the perspectives and fundamental objectives were different within the trade union world, the world of the *Democrazia Cristiana* or, even more generally, the Catholic world. This plurality of standpoints cannot be trivialized or considered marginal. Even the simple overlapping of the industrial culture of Costa (the president of the Confederation of Italian Industrialists) and the political culture of De Gasperi – read as a “duopoly between industry and State” that, continuing along a path inaugurated in the nineteen-thirties by fascism, reduced the trade union to the pure management of the workforce “in a derivative and subordinate position”<sup>40</sup> – represents a schematic

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<sup>37</sup> According to Acocella, “the Italian industrial world did not show any real interest towards the modern conception of the trade union and industrial relations”; G. Acocella, *Storia della Cisl*, op. cit., p. 53. A few years earlier, Acocella himself underlined how, during the mid-fifties, the progressive taking shape of the “essential characteristics” of the new trade union did not correspond to the establishment “of a new model of industrial relations that would have constituted the reference frame for the development of proper trade union relations.” An entrepreneurial stance that proved “particularly harmful for the Cisl that had counted on this new kind of relations for its syndicalist model”; cf. Id., ‘Il sindacalismo cristiano nel secondo dopoguerra’ in *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia*, vol. V, F. Malgeri (ed), Il Poligono, Roma, 1981, p. 353.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. for example, the reconstruction of Mario Del Pero on the contrast between sectors of the American administration and the Italian government on the method of use of the ERP funds; cf. M. Del Pero, *L’alleanza scomoda: gli Usa e la Dc negli anni del centrismo, 1948-1955*, Carocci, Roma, 2001, pp. 55-64.

<sup>39</sup> A. Ferrari, *La civiltà industriale*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> A. Pepe, ‘*Il sindacato nel compromesso nazionale*’ op. cit., pp. 60-61.

forcing that does not take into account the complexity and the plurality of the elements at stake.

The idea of modernity and the elaboration of the distinctive traits of the process of Italy's modernization are profoundly different even within the same political group or the same cultural area. The very communist trade union notion that sees the trade union as a subject that is perfectly congruent with the party representing the interests of the working class, answers to an absolutely modern idea of politics in the history of the twentieth century. Such politics are perceived as comprising every human action and capable of providing answers to all matters and expectations expressed by a modern mass society.

Along these lines, it must also be specified how to read the penetrating reflections of the major theoretician of the Cisl, Mario Romani, on the history of the trade unions in Italy.<sup>41</sup> He hits several fundamental points when he criticises the Italian political leadership for having a nineteenth century conception of the trade union, both for the overall lateness of the Italian economic and social system and for the theoretical formulation.<sup>42</sup> But the accusation of expressing a substantially anti-modern idea of the trade union was born exactly from a different conception of politics. Romani sets up against a "totalizing" vision of politics one that saw human activity as plural, constituted by different levels that are independent one from the other and not defined by a unitary, organic and perfectly harmonic design.<sup>43</sup> This was a different idea of

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. especially M. Romani, *Il risorgimento sindacale in Italia: scritti e discorsi, 1951-1975*, S. Zaninelli (ed), Franco Angeli, Milano, 1988.

<sup>42</sup> Cf., by way of an example, the essay from 1966 'La posizione della Cisl di fronte ai problemi dell'unità sindacale' in M. Romani, *Il risorgimento sindacale*, op. cit., pp. 244-268.

<sup>43</sup> With regard to this, Silvio Costantini has ascribed to the principle of trade union autonomy a founding value and also a different vision of politics: "the autonomy, which is not corporative closure, nor pan-syndicalism, is instead a condition that gives real power to an independent trade union, making it take root in society as an instrument of self-management of labour in those advanced industrialized nations that, instead, tend to centralize decision-making and reduce all social issues into political ones";

modernity that marked the peculiarity of the leadership of the Cisl, setting it apart even from the greater part of the Catholic world and the world of the *Democrazia Cristiana*.

One of the most evoked differences was the refusal of an explicitly ideological conception. On the trade union level, the reference to an ideology was judged critically, as the residue of an era which was being overcome and that persisted because of the backwardness of Italian society. Guido Baglioni has so summarized the Cisl's viewpoint:

“for the Cisl of the early days the term ideological means deformation of reality, non-scientific, non-objective consideration of things, sectarianism and cultural backwardness. Communism, for example, is ideological and as such it fogs reality and supports itself on an obsolete, nineteenth century point of view. Consequently, the democratic trade union is presented as non-ideological, foreign to the fixed patterns for interpreting the past and the present, inserted without prejudices in the flux of modernity, of economic development, of a pluralistic society.”<sup>44</sup>

Essentially, this was the “discourse on modernization” inaugurated by the Cisl<sup>45</sup> According to Baglioni, considering oneself unrelated to ideological “assumptions” constituted one of the limits of the conception of the new trade union.<sup>46</sup> This insistence has been interpreted by some as a “neutral

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S. Costantini, ‘La formazione del gruppo dirigente della Cisl (1950-1968)’ in *Analisi della Cisl*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>44</sup> G. Baglioni, *Il sindacato dell'autonomia*, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. Baglioni reconstructs the Cisl's political line as follows: “the discourse on modernization acquires several forms in the culture and in the lexicon of the Cisl. Mainly, it expresses itself as a growing pre-occupation that the trade union is not foreign to, let alone adverse to the economic, scientific and cultural transformations that make the industrial and democratic society grow. To reach this level of maturity, the trade union must first of all abandon every ideological lure. Ideology – for the Cisl of the nineteen-fifties – means an incapacity to understand progress and transformation, a distorted and schematic vision of reality, economic “illiteracy” and cultural backwardness.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

syndicalism”<sup>47</sup> that promoted a trade union policy destined, in the context of the nineteen-fifties, to fail “when confronted with the reality of the class struggle.”<sup>48</sup> Others have expressed the belief that such a conception, not only non-ideological but simply apolitical, was “one of the many national manifestations of the Cold War.”<sup>49</sup>

The main misunderstanding that might arise from such interpretations is to judge the new trade union and the culture at its base as being the expression of a purely technical vision. Aware of such a danger, Guido Formigoni specifies that choosing to be autonomous “did not mean, at any rate, to reduce the trade union to a strictly technical-economic context, so as to self-confine itself to the pursuit of sectorial interests.”<sup>50</sup> Sergio Zaninelli wants to underline the same idea quoting the words of one of the most significant collaborators of Mario Romani, Benedetto De Cesaris, who claims that “the trade union cannot be “agnostic” [...] it must operate a fundamental choice regarding the organization of civil society: it must have, therefore, a “political ideology” broadly speaking.”<sup>51</sup>

This is one of the most delicate matters in the birth of the new trade union. The structuring of a modern and new trade union, compared to those within both the socialist and Catholic Italian tradition, was forced to refuse a denominational and, as mentioned, ideological connotation. But the leadership of the Cisl felt that what had to be ensured was the disengagement from a political and religious dependence that questioned the legitimacy of the trade union’s autonomy. The evoking of an

<sup>47</sup> It is so, for example, in P. Craveri, *Sindacato ed istituzioni nel dopoguerra*, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 296.

<sup>49</sup> B. Beccalli, ‘*La ricostruzione del sindacalismo italiano*’ op. cit., p. 382, footnote 64.

<sup>50</sup> G. Formigoni, *La scelta occidentale della Cisl*, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>51</sup> S. Zaninelli, ‘Alle origini della cultura sindacale della Cisl: la rivista «Realtà sociale d’oggi» di Mario Romani (1947-1954)’ in *Analisi della Cisl*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 165. The quote of B. De Cesaris is taken from the article *Prospettive e problemi di una politica sindacale*, in «*Realtà sociale d’oggi*», VIII, n. 4, 1952.

non-ideological approach arose from a concrete preoccupation bound to the specificity of the historical context. Therefore, what was rejected was the dependence from the *Democrazia Cristiana* – so as to mark a difference from the Marxist Cgil – and the explicit Catholic connotation, which marked, instead, the distance from the tradition of white syndicalism. There was a desire to find the values and ideologies of reference outside of the Catholic-communist political dualism and inserted within the context of the Western democracies. It was to be an ampler context where other political cultures could find their place, a “democratic ideology” towards which had to converge men of various classes and origins and which should have forged a new ruling class.<sup>52</sup>

Andrea Ciampani notices how the statutory statements of 1951 that shaped the Cisl “didn’t constitute nor did they identify an ‘ideology’.”<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, the history of the Cisl can be read as a “long journey, in stages, of emancipation from ideology.”<sup>54</sup> A peculiar relationship between theory and practice is, after all, one of the distinctive traits of the idea of the “new trade union.” Romani himself claims that “theories come after the protection of interests, but the theories are indispensable if they don’t lead to abstractions but become an associative identity and give meaning to one’s commitment.”<sup>55</sup> The emphasis placed on the pragmatic protection of the workers’ interests represented one of the fundamental traits of the “new syndicalist method,”<sup>56</sup> but this did not lead to marginalizing the contribution of theory. Even more specifically, the pragmatism – which moreover, as already stated, is never

<sup>52</sup> On the “democratic ideology” as a reference point for the building of a new trade union executive cfr. S. Costantini, *La formazione del gruppo dirigente della Cisl*, cit., pag. 130.

<sup>53</sup> A. Ciampani, *Lo statuto del sindacato nuovo (1944-1951)*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1991, p. 92.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in A. Carera, ‘Oltre gli artifici e i miti: ipotesi per qualche studio organizzato di storia della Cisl’ in *Per una storia della Cisl*, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

devoid of specific principles<sup>57</sup>— did not prevent finding ideological stances that formed the identity outline of the Cisl.

Baglioni insists repeatedly on the existence of an ideological dimension of the Cisl, and he singles out its principal characteristics in anticommunism<sup>58</sup> and in a sort of neo-positivist vision of capitalistic development.<sup>59</sup> According to him, this latter aspect represented “the limitation at the basis of the Cisl’s doctrine, that is to say considering the economy as an objective, neutral, single track process” that is rationally defined.<sup>60</sup> Baglioni considers the faith of the “new trade union ‘s’” leadership in the forms of mature capitalism a limit for a real understanding of reality, which instead had strongly conflictual connotations and didn’t seem to lead to an orderly and rational economic and social development. However, on a practical level, the strong pragmatism of the Cisl led to paying much attention to the existing imbalances and to refusing a rigidly institutional structuring of the conflict based on the “stable composition between capital and labour.”<sup>61</sup> This was a solution that always had a strong ascendancy in the Christian trade union culture.

This is another crucial point of the new trade union experience. The peculiarity of the post-war Italian historical context forced the Cisl to act within a set framework, having as a political interlocutor the interclass party of the *Democrazia Cristiana*. In reference to this situation, Piero Craveri speaks of a “new institutionalism” for that “Catholic syndicalism that aspired to follow new paths – and for this it drew inspiration from the experiences of Anglo-Saxon trade unionism” – and for which “it was vital to express a real bargaining power, not only on salaries and working conditions with the employers, but also on a political level, being assertive in the processes

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. M. Freedden, *Ideologie e teoria politica*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. G. Baglioni, *Il sindacato dell'autonomia*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

of social mediation in the democratic state. In effect, this is the political-syndicalist philosophy expressed by the Cisl, the ideological manifesto with which it declared its desire to operate within the institutions and in the scope of capitalistic development.”<sup>62</sup> According to Craveri, the Cisl’s “peculiarity” resided in “the way in which, in the concrete historical-political framework, it combined its classless ideology and its syndicalism inspired by Anglo-Saxon trade unionism with the normal, interclass practice of the *Democrazia Cristiana*’s governments.”<sup>63</sup>

However, at the same time, if this conception is to be indicated as the “new institutionalism,” one must underline its distance from the traditional corporative doctrines and from the thesis of the trade union as a subject of public canon. This might seem obvious, but it defines the limits of the relationship between the trade union and the institutions, on which the leadership of the Cisl will concentrate much effort, especially within the *Democrazia Cristiana*.

The “ideological question” in the culture of the Cisl has to be, therefore, inserted in this precise context, which has led to positions which are not always devoid of ambiguities. The various historiographical interpretations arise also from different emphases of elements that coexisted in the elaboration of the “new trade union.” Furthermore, open contradictions manifested themselves in the assimilation of the new postulates by the militancy, by the middle management and also by the leadership. Talking of the formation of the ruling class, Costantini recognizes that “it would be empty triumphalism to claim that the leadership of the Cisl was homogeneous” around the new conception of the trade union.<sup>64</sup> Far more decidedly others have underlined a considerable resistance that has made them, in effect, foreign to the new culture:

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<sup>62</sup> P. Craveri, *Sindacato e istituzioni nel dopoguerra*, op. cit., pp. 302-303. Emphasis added.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>64</sup> S. Costantini, *La formazione del gruppo dirigente della Cisl*, op. cit., p. 140.

“not only the base, but also the great majority of the middle management and of the operators, remain totally foreign to this perspective: ultimately, they don’t even understand it. The inter-nalization of the old Catholic culture and the perception of the Catholic world as a compact entity that includes, with full rights, also the Cisl, continue to dominate the Cisl past the ideas of its official ideologues.”<sup>65</sup>

According to this thesis, this resistance would have surfaced fully in the following period, and it would end up by showing all the anti-capitalistic load of the Catholic tradition.<sup>66</sup> Regardless of sharing similar or other opinions, it is evident that the novelties brought by the syndicalist notion at the basis of the birth of the Cisl required starting anew a process of formation and assimilation of new postulates that could neither be brief nor devoid of incongruities and ambiguities. After all, they were radical novelties that broke with a large part of the pre-existing tradition, and they entered a context that still had characteristics with which it was hard to reconcile. Just the strong polarization of the political conflict implicated a sort of under-representation of the internal differences of the two alignments. The same reasons that had led to the political unity of the Catholics were used by the trade union to call for a clear expression of affiliation. This affiliation, which was also ideological, applied to the Cisl as well, but it did not manifest itself on a party or denominational level, but on a more generically, yet always political, Western democratic one. The founding values of the parliamentary democracies, the productivism and the faith in the process of development of modern capitalism, the anticommunism, as well as a certain echo of the personalist doctrines made up the ideological profile of the Cisl and the political vision that served as the reference horizon for its concrete trade union action.

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<sup>65</sup> P. Kemeny – E. Ranci Ortigosa, ‘La Cisl dei primi anni e l’ideologia del mondo cattolico’ in *Analisi della Cisl*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

