

ECONOMIC SCIENCE AND CORPORATISM:  
THE SCHOOL OF CORPORATIST SCIENCES OF PISA

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the analysis of the institutional architecture of the first School of Corporative Sciences among those created by the fascist regime, established at the University of Pisa in 1928, the contribution, in the first part, examines some aspects of the scientific proposal of the institution, especially on the side of the economic disciplines taught there. In addition to the goal of training personnel who were to work in corporate structures, until 1935 the school contributed to the development of a “science of corporatism” that went beyond the postulates of “pure” economics. In the second half of the 1930s, following the transition of the leadership from Giuseppe Bottai to Widar Cesarini Sforza, a long phase of crisis began for the school, punctually recorded by the conspicuous decline in membership. In the second part political economy teachings are examined as symbols of the failure of corporatism from a theoretical point of view. Guido Sensini and Ugo Spirito were imparting teachings that could not have been more different. The former based on marginalist postulates and the acceptance of corporations as a lesser evil. The second on the rejection of homo oeconomicus and the exaltation of corporatism as overcoming liberalism and communism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of a “science of corporatism” constituted the cornerstone of the attempt made by fascism to present itself as a “third way” alternative to capitalism and socialism. In ideological-cultural terms, the corporatist solution involved the articulation of a reflection – as broad as it was contradictory – on superseding the liberal state and market economy. In political-institutional terms, on the other hand, it gave rise to complex lines of debate for the radical reinterpretation of the status of economics, law and legislative regulation concerning labor relations, and the ways of regulating the economy. As has been noted by numerous scholars, corporatism relates directly to the central problem of modern politics, namely how to reconcile the plurality of interests present in society with the construction of the unity of direction of the contemporary state. It was precisely this question that gave absolute centrality to the need to set up institutions aimed at creating a new ruling class and training the personnel who would work in the state and in corporative institutions. As early as the mid-1920s, fascism had attempted to provide an answer to the long-standing question of the training of civil servants with the creation of faculties of political science, but it was only through the initiative of Giuseppe Bottai that attention shifted specifically to the creation of academic institutions aimed at training the “technicians” of the “corporate state”. It is well known that the articulation of Bottai’s plan found an initial concretization with the creation of the first “corporative school” in Italy: the “School of Corporative Sciences” founded at the University of Pisa in 1928, which, moreover, was the first component of a more complex institution – the “Pisan Corporative School” – which took on a completed physiognomy in the early 1930’s. In this context, it should be emphasized how the school increased the importance of economics courses over the instruction offered at the Faculty of Law, thanks in part to the opportunity given to students of the latter and of the Political-Corporative Science course to take the school’s exams.

The paper then examines in the first part the school’s path from the development phase to the stagnation and crisis phase. The second part analyzes the school’s economics courses taught by Ugo Spirito – the only ones published in written form – with the lectures taught by Guido Sensini in the Faculty of Law, an example of the contradictions that the corporatist theory was never able to solve.

## 1. AN ECONOMIC LABORATORY FOR CORPORATISM: INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

Recently Guido Melis has pointed out how “the experience of the ‘corporative’ state remains even now the least substantially researched and most problematic point in the whole universe of the fascist institutions” (Melis 2018: 413). After laying the foundation of the corporative system – with the introduction of the new legislative discipline regarding collective contracts of 3 April 1926, which sanctioned the legal recognition of workers’ associations – the introduction of the Carta del Lavoro (Labour Charter) of 1927 and the reform of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Corporazioni (National Council of Corporations) in March 1930 constituted the necessary preconditions for the promulgation, in February 1934, of the institutive law of the corporations. This complex process was accompanied by an awareness, mainly within the Ministry of Corporations, of the need to proceed swiftly with the training of the personnel that were to be employed in the corporative system being constituted. The solution devised by Giuseppe Bottai, in his capacity as undersecretary of this ministry, coincided with the creation of specific schools of specialization in corporative sciences aggregated to various universities in the kingdom. In the years following the opening of the first school in the Faculty of Jurisprudence in Pisa in 1928,<sup>1</sup> and up to the collapse of the regime, eight other schools were founded at the universities of Bari, Bologna, Florence, Ferrara, Milan, Rome, Trieste and Padua. It is worth pointing out that these institutions developed in very different ways. Although there has so far been no in-depth study of the individual cases, it is plausible that these experiences did not produce the hoped-for results and, for reasons that include institutional ones (chronic difficulty in obtaining adequate additional funding, the remoteness of the academic venues to which they were aggregated, etc.), were very far from achieving the objectives for which they had been created, both with regard to the training of the new corps of officials in the corporative state, and to a concrete contribution to the development of corporative economic-juridical theories. Proof of this is that in 1937 a process of reorganisation of these schools was initiated, which reached its conclusion only in 1940.<sup>2</sup> A partial exception, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Initially the school had a duration of one year (later lengthened to two years), during which time the graduate students were supposed to sit some obligatory examinations and prepare a final paper. Those who were eligible were graduates in Jurisprudence, Political Sciences, Social Sciences and Economics, although in the following years the possibility of enrolling was also granted to graduates with qualifications other than those mentioned above (on the organization of the school and its teaching systems cf. AMORE BIANCO 2012).

<sup>2</sup> BIENTINESI and CINI (2019: 110-114).

is constituted by the Scuola di Scienze Corporative (School of Corporative Sciences) in Pisa (and, in part, also by the one in Ferrara).<sup>3</sup> There are multiple reasons for this exception. The most important of these was the design conceived by Bottai in the construction of an extremely complex institutional and scientific structure, in which he was assisted by Giovanni Gentile, Director of the Scuola Normale Superiore, and by Armando Carlini, Chancellor of the University of Pisa. The School of Specialization in Corporative Sciences was, in fact, supported by a Collegio di Studi Corporativi (College of Corporative Studies, later Collegio Mussolini), administered by the Scuola Normale, which channelled carefully selected and motivated students into corporative studies.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the initial period, the real structuring of the school came with Bottai's administration, from 1929 to 1935. The first five years of the 1930s saw the arrival at the school of teachers who profoundly influenced a discussion, in that period neither unanimous nor shared, on corporatism.<sup>5</sup> Bottai's efforts to bring teachers of economic disciplines to Pisa were particularly significant. With regard to the subject of law, numerous teachers at the school came directly from the local Jurisprudence Faculty. Economics was a different matter. The only teacher of political economics in the faculty was Guido Sensini, an economist whose thinking was not at all in line with corporatism. But, as Ugo Spirito observed, political economics was exactly that science that had, more than any other, felt the influence of the fascist revolution, so much so as to change its name to 'corporative economics' (or 'political and corporative economics'). However, Spirito went on, "the rapidity of the transformation, the relative rigidity of the old ways of thinking, the lack of scientific preparedness of the young people tending towards reform, have spread within this field of study so many contradictions and misconceptions as to make the route ever more rugged and difficult" (Spirito 1934a: 121-131). In effect, it was exactly the "rigidity of the old ways of thinking" denounced by the philosopher from Arezzo, that had emerged clearly in the debate that accompanied the first phase of the discussions on corporatism, but it had also become plainly apparent in the multiplication, tangible but substantially chaotic, in the number of economics courses in the first years of the regime thanks to the creation of the faculties and degree courses in Political Sciences – in total five faculties

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<sup>3</sup> On corporatism at the school in Ferrara cf. PELLEGRINI (1995: 549-571).

<sup>4</sup> On the Collegio cf. MARIUZZO (2010).

<sup>5</sup> On the subject there is now an extensive historiographic literature. Regarding the subjects dealt with in the present article see at least: MANCINI *et al.* (1982); CAVALIERI (1994: 7-49); SANTOMASSIMO (2006); FUSCO (2007: 49-92); CERASI (2019: 100-133).

and nine degree courses – designed for the training of personnel who would work in the offices of the state, government agencies and diplomacy.<sup>6</sup>

Awareness of the general context that was taking shape prompted Bottai to select a group of teachers who fully complied with the completely original conception of corporatism developed by the hierarch himself. The choice fell upon two academics who were already ‘established’, though not yet firmly introduced into the university system – Filippo Carli<sup>7</sup> and Ugo Spirito – and on three young academics, chosen by Bottai for the efforts they had made in their studies in the area of corporative economics: Federico Maria Paces, Celestino Arena<sup>8</sup> and Giuseppe Bruguier Pacini.

Thus, in the early-1930s in the Pisan ‘laboratory’, alongside the juridical sciences, the economic disciplines quickly acquired unprecedented importance, which reflected the much greater question of the new epistemological approaches of fascism to the social sciences and, in particular, to economics.<sup>9</sup>

If Bottai’s efforts in the first part of his directorship were focused on the search for an uneasy equilibrium between the realization of a solid and innovative scientific facility to grant to the school – and therefore to the selection of a corps of teachers who were qualified in corporative matters – and the need to defeat the hidden cultural resistances of the Faculty of Jurisprudence, on which the school depended, the teachers recruited focused instead on the problem of the education of a new intake of young students and future ‘technicians’ of the corporative state, and on the identification of new theoretical principles on which to construct a model of corporative economics that legitimized the attempt to proceed to a new regulation of production.

With regard to the first point, the graduate students enrolled from the academic year 1928-1929 to the academic year 1942-1943 totalled 867, an extremely significant number for the university standards of the day. Of these, 185 concluded the course, obtaining post-graduate diplomas. However, it was only until 1935 that the enrolments maintained an appreciable upward trend: in the first two years there were 281; from 1930-1931 to 1934-1935 there were 337, while after the change of directorship of the school from Bottai to

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<sup>6</sup> BIENTINESI and CINI (2019: 89-110).

<sup>7</sup> Some observations on Carli’s background and ideas on economics are contained in BARUCCI (2008: x-xx).

<sup>8</sup> Letter sent by the Chancellor Carlini to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 9 December 1933, Archivio Generale dell’Università di Pisa [General Archive of the University of Pisa], personal file of C. Arena.

<sup>9</sup> See, in this regard, the discussions contained in the volume BARUCCI *et al.* (2015), and in AUGELLO *et al.* (2019: 1-32).

Widar Cesarini Sforza enrolments dropped dramatically (from 1935-1936 to 1938-1939 there were 162 enrolments; in the following years, until the school closed in 1944, there were 87).<sup>10</sup> The graduates showed considerable interest in economics-related subjects: about a fifth of the dissertations discussed to obtain the diploma concerned topics of an economics and business character: from the fascist monetary policy, to the organization of the banking and finance systems, from company organization to the economic fluctuations in the corporative regime, from the theory of imperfect markets to the subject of economic crisis and instability.

Regarding the second aspect mentioned above, it is possible to identify at least two tendencies at work in the school. The first, until 1935, was focused on the dispute with the enthusiasts of pure political economics and on the definition of a new scientific mechanism whose double objective was the dismantling of neo-classical economics and the scientific paradigms on which it was based or which were attributable to it. The three main teachers who worked on these lines were Ugo Spirito, Filippo Carli and Federico Maria Paces. The second tendency, however, fostered by Celestino Arena and some of the school's jurists, seemed more focused on an investigation into 'concrete' issues connected with the construction of corporative assets, including the theory and policy of wages – the subject of 'corporative wages' is the one that comes up most often in the course curricula and the titles of the graduate theses –, collective labour contracts and professional associations, The Charter of Labour and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Corporazioni (National Council of Corporations), the trade unions, mandatory consortia, etc. These subjects, moreover, recur constantly in the course curricula, in the titles of graduate theses, and in the reviews and critical papers published by graduates in the *Archivio di Studi Corporativi*, the school's journal.

The economics courses that best characterized the school were (with various changes of name): Corporative Politics and Economics, whose most representative teacher was Ugo Spirito (from 1932 to 1935), later substituted by Giuseppe Bruguier Pacini; Business Techniques (later Business Administration), assigned to Federico Maria Paces from 1932 to 1938), and then to Egidio Giannesi from 1940 to 1944 (with the brief intermission of Antonio Argnani in 1939-1940); lastly, History of Economic Doctrines, assigned to Carlo Costamagna in 1929-1930, and then, for a long period to Filippo Carli (from 1931 to 1938).<sup>11</sup> Equally significant was the

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<sup>10</sup> CINI (2021: 13-41).

<sup>11</sup> After Carli's death in 1938, the professorship was assigned to Guido Sensini (1939); Alberto Breglia (1940-1941); Giuseppe Bruguier Pacini (1942-1943).

discipline assigned to Celestino Arena from 1928 to 1938 (Comparative Legislation of the Economy and Labour and, in the Jurisprudence degree course, Financial Science).<sup>12</sup>

A recent collective work has examined the courses held by these teachers and the manuals produced, composing a sufficiently detailed picture of the scientific orientations that coexisted in the school. The picture that has emerged from this research has highlighted a lack of homogeneity in the approach to corporatism of the teachers of economic disciplines.<sup>13</sup>

Arena, in his courses, wholeheartedly advocated the need for a new theory of finance to be developed within the corporative system, based on a complete integration of the individual in society and of society with the state, but he was unable to clearly formulate the foundations of this new corporative theory of finance, and on multiple occasions resorted to the traditional marginalist theory to explain phenomena connected with the public finances. Even regarding the teaching of History of Economic Doctrines – for which Carli was responsible for a long time – it cannot be said that this discipline deviated much from the institutional course models developed in the other universities in the kingdom, and the most original contributions of a corporative character must instead be identified in the articles published in the school journal, which did not, however, have explicit points of contact with the subject taught. Considerations in the opposite direction can, however, be made for the courses of Spirito and Paces. It is to the lessons of the philosopher from Arezzo – and to the aporias that characterized him – that the second paragraph of this article is dedicated. However, to better understand the scientific dynamics that were being articulated in the school it is necessary to look at some aspects of the contribution given by Spirito in the years in which he was a professor at Pisa, not only because he was a foremost protagonist in the economics debate on the corporatism of those years – a circumstance that allowed him to engage, and more often to argue, with orthodox or corporative economists – but also because he was the professor around whom the scientific and cultural interests of the students coalesced to the greatest extent.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, and this was the main factor that justified a discussion on the contribution of the philosopher from Arezzo,

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<sup>12</sup> The professorship of Financial Science went to Attilio Garino Canina (1928-1929 and 1930-1931); Guido Sensini (1929-1930); Celestino Arena (from 1931-1932 to 1937-1938); Giuseppe Bruguier Pacini (1938-1939); Alberto Breglia (1939-1940 and 1940-1941).

<sup>13</sup> CINI (2022: 39-86); see, in particular, the articles of Alberto Pench – for Celestino Arena and Alberto Breglia – and Massimo M. Augello and Daniela Giaconi – for Filippo Carli.

<sup>14</sup> On the interest shown by the student community for Spirito's theses see STAMPACCHIA (2008: 218-230), and DURANTI (2010).

it was during his time at the school that he formulated the most original paradigm of his reflection on corporatism. In the years when he taught at Pisa, Spirito confronted a multiplicity of issues, including the definition of the limits of compatibility of the corporations with respect to the market economy. This reflection had its first formulation in the celebrated report presented, just a few months after his arrival at Pisa, to the Second Congress of Trade Union and Corporative Studies in Ferrara in May 1932, at which he raised a crucial question: once the corporations were instituted, the problem would arise in the running of companies of the coexistence of private and public principles. The solution put forward, as noted, was that of the “proprietary corporation”, i.e. the fusion of capital and labour in the corporation that had become the owner of the companies of which it was composed.<sup>15</sup> The reactions to this proposal are known and it is not necessary to dwell on them. It is important, however, to observe how in this intervention Spirito had insisted on the existing separation – theoretically inadmissible – between corporation and company, by stressing that “the *productive fact* does not concern corporatism, and does not therefore concern, through the corporative system, the activity of the state, which remains extraneous to the company and intervenes in it only in other ways and often *late*”.<sup>16</sup> In this passage Spirito lay the basis for a discussion on the “business corporation” to be understood as a productive-territorial structure and not a bureaucratic-hierarchical one.<sup>17</sup>

The business corporation, in Spirito’s analysis, would destructure the state’s control over society, concentrating in the company the resolution of the multiple complexities arising daily from social and economic dynamics. What characterizes, in an innovative sense, this paradigm is ‘technology’ with respect to the old categories of ‘capital’ and ‘labour’, and the importance attributed to it in the modernization of the productive processes, and therefore of the company. As has been observed, in formulating the notion of the ‘business corporation’ Spirito was inspired by the studies of Paces, assuming two aspects of his reflection: “the importance of the company within the framework of the economic system and the interpretation of corporatism as an essential moment for the rationalization of the productive process” (Parlato 1990: 97-98).<sup>18</sup> Paces

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<sup>15</sup> PERFETTI (1988: 202-243), and SANTOMASSIMO (2006: 141-166).

<sup>16</sup> MINISTERO DELLE CORPORAZIONI (1932: vol. I, 188).

<sup>17</sup> Spirito developed this paradigm in the articles SPIRITO (1934b: 117-120; 1934c: 119-120).

<sup>18</sup> It is worth remembering that Paces thought Spirito’s thesis on “proprietary corporations” was scientifically unfeasible. The company, Paces maintained, being composed of three elements – the organization (or “enterprise” in companies with economic aims), labour and capital – in order to conserve its own identity, even in the corporative regime had



had been the first to observe that the corporative economy would be impossible to apply in fascist Italy due to the structure and organizational model of the Italian company;<sup>19</sup> consequently, he oriented his scientific efforts towards adapting the Tayloristic theories from across the Atlantic to the specific configuration of the national business system, by proposing a new model for the rationalization of production that allowed the basic unity of the productive system not to lose efficiency in a context that could be disconnected from the dynamics of private capitalism (and also from those conditioned by state intervention, judged to be inefficient).<sup>20</sup>

It is worth remembering that Paces had founded in 1929 the Istituto Aziendale Italiano (Italian Business Institute), created for the training of a corporative managerial class, by privileging, on the model of U.S. schools, correspondence courses. In these years he dedicated himself to spreading the scientific study of the company operating in the corporative regime in all its aspects and potential, with the aim of promoting management not as a 'private subject', but as a constituent component of the corporative state. It was the originality of his approach to business studies that had prompted Bottai to assign the Business Techniques course to him – the first teaching post to be introduced into the Italian university system with this name – at the school in Pisa, a post he filled until 1937-1938. In his Pisan period he had the chance to systematize his conception of the "Aziendaria", defined as "the ensemble of scientific and technical disciplines, having as their object the study of the conditions of the life and development of the company organism, within the framework and according to the laws of the politico-economic organization of the state; as well as the study of the economic administration of the company and the means of promoting it, maintaining it and controlling it" (Paces 1934a: 8). The development of the new discipline – clearly influenced by the scientific management and theories of John R. Commons and Thorstein Veblen – was progressively articulated in the lessons taught at the school – brought together in the course handouts collected under the title of *Principi di aziendologia* – and completely systematized in one of Paces' major works, *Introduzione agli studi di Aziendaria*. By clearly distinguishing the "company" from the "enterprise", he constructed his theory on the corporative programming of company business in evident contrast to the contemporary reflection

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to let these three factors interact and amalgamate without any of them coinciding with the corporation (PACES 1934a: 209).

<sup>19</sup> PACES (1933: 119).

<sup>20</sup> Observations on Paces' scientific activity are in ROZZANIN (1997: 107-143), and in CINQUINI (2007: 209-240).

of Gino Zappa on the primacy assigned to Bookkeeping compared with the multiple disciplines called on to deal with the internal dynamics of the company, acknowledging for this discipline the exclusive use of the field of quantitative analysis, while to *Aziendaria* the task of analysing the multiple phases of the administration of enterprises on the basis of a divisional vision of company processes was delegated.<sup>21</sup>

The direction given to the school by Bottai coincides with the school's most fruitful period, in scientific terms, as is also documented by the intense activity of the Economic Observatory annexed to Collegio Mussolini and coordinated by Bruguier Pacini, whose research often constituted the basis of the editorial series published by the school: between 1933 and 1935 thirteen of the eighteen volumes published by Sansoni were released, to which must be added the school's journal, the *Archivio di Studi Corporativi*. However, the most significant reform was the activation, in 1932, of the degree course in Politico-Corporative Sciences in the Faculty of Jurisprudence. The institution of this course was directly linked to the need to give a more organic structure to the complex of corporative studies activated some years previously with the institution of the school. One could perceive, in fact, the substantial disconnect that existed between the curriculum that led to the Jurisprudence degree and the following stage represented by post-graduate corporative studies. Hence, in October 1932 the new degree course named Politico-Corporative Sciences was approved, with a length of four years, designed to "correspond to the requirements of those who aspire to corporative positions in the state and the trade unions" and to "open the way to a superior career in the corporative system whether in the political field, the administration or the scientific field".<sup>22</sup> The courses included all those taught at the School of Specialization, a particularly significant circumstance as it was clearly intended to reinforce the intimate cohesion between the new degree course and the school. Moreover, this continuity also emerges from the topics assigned by the teaching staff to the students for the preparation of their degree theses, which were modelled on the same corporative subjects discussed by the post-graduate students.<sup>23</sup>

The structure given the school by Bottai experienced a crisis in 1935, following his naming as Governor of Rome and Carlini's resignation from the chancellorship. In the same year Spirito was transferred from the ministry to the Faculty of Education in Messina, and the professorship

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<sup>21</sup> Paccès further developed this reflection in an article published in the school journal in 1934 (PACCES 1934b).

<sup>22</sup> General Archive of the University of Pisa, Faculty of Jurisprudence, Assemblies 1925-1935, session of 12 October 1932. See also AMORE BIANCO (2012: 168-169).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the students' archive edited by RONCO (2021: 209-234).

in Corporative Politics and Economics was assigned, by appointment, to Bruguier Pacini. The school was entrusted to the directorship of Widar Cesarini Sforza, the interpreter of a conception of corporatism that was decidedly distant from Spirito's 'integral' one.<sup>24</sup> The change of direction brought about a reorganization of the school: Cesarini Sforza's approach brought about a reduction in economics courses and a reinforcement of juridical and labour law ones, consistent with a comprehensive design that intended to go beyond the scientific-theoretical approach of the school in the first phase of its life, by privileging instead a more applied and professional orientation. These changes prompted some teachers to abandon the school: in 1938 Arnaldo Volpicelli and Celestino Arena moved to the University of Naples and Paces to that of Turin. At this point, of Bottai's 'old' school there remained not a single prominent professor – Carli had passed away in May 1938 – and the characteristic courses of that period were split into two or more disciplines or eliminated.<sup>25</sup>

The reforms introduced or attempted by Cesarini Sforza, however, did not produce the desired effects, if it is true that during this second phase of the school's life there was a conspicuous hemorrhaging of enrolments. The events of the two-year period 1937-1938 can be read as a tangible sign of the difficulties faced by the Pisan project, by now a long way away from the scientific and cultural directions of its origins and incapable of defining a new setup consistent with corporatism. Furthermore, they show the criticality of the institutional formula adopted, i.e. the 'school of specialization', and of this problem even the National Ministry of Education was fully aware, and in 1937 it constituted a Special Committee for the graduate and specialization schools appointed to formulate an organic plan of the reform of post-graduate education. The work of the ministry was completed only in 1940, when the debate on corporatism had by now left space for other topics connected with autarchic policies and the war in progress. The schools of specialization in corporative sciences were confirmed but in the national context that had emerged they led an ever more marginal and scientifically insignificant existence within the university framework: the school in Pisa was no exception, and even the attempts to relaunch it by its last director, Carlo Alberto Biggini, produced no tangible effects.

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<sup>24</sup> AMORE BIANCO (2012: 21-22).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (2012: 276-277), and MARIUZZO (2010: 178-186).

## 2. THE CONFLICTING WAYS IN WHICH CORPORATIVE ECONOMICS WAS TAUGHT AT THE SCHOOL

What might be considered good reasons for a study of the ways political economics was taught at the School of Corporative Sciences in Pisa? One possible reason is the contribution that might emerge from a delineation of the difficulties and contradictions in the genesis of Corporatism and, consequently, its failure as a theoretical and practical alternative to capitalist and collectivist economics. This failure was very clear to Giuseppe Bruguier Pacini who, in 1937, wrote:

For the reconstruction of economic science to occur with the unity and systematicity of logical scientific procedure, first of all an ‘economic principle’ needed to be defined that would provide a foundation for the theory, a principle that was, like the hedonistic principle of the least means or the postulate of homo oeconomicus, so general as to be valid in all areas of economic science, but which was also, unlike those principles, not merely abstract and formal, but concrete, so as to express those national goals which we have seen at the core of the Charter of Labour and corporative legislation. A problem was thus presented that economists had already encountered in their work, albeit in another form: the problem of the definition of the objective utility or the heteronomous choice, the problem of an autonomous principle of political economics, just like the problem of corporative economics, are nothing more than different formulations of a substantially identical problem. To which had been given, on the admission of economists, a negative solution, with the claiming of the unknowability of the tastes, and therefore of the choices, of others (the so-called *no bridge*) and with the exclusion of the field of economics, to entrust it to political science or ethics, the determination of the aims which the state or the community pursues through the so-called ‘economic policy’. But with this rough and lazy distinction, between political economics and ethics, which in its rigidity is no longer capable of finding the unity of the parts, the problem ends up even being denied, limiting the role of economic policy to the forecasting of probable consequences of the possible types of economic conduct; just as, with the tracing back of the economic act to the ‘choice from limited means’, a formal criterion is established but with such a generality as to be applicable to all individual acts, thus losing sight of the concrete economic interest, and on which alone economic judgement can be founded. Not having confronted this problem with full awareness, the corporatist economists mentioned above did not manage to give us a satisfactory economic theory.<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted that Bruguier Pacini, one of the teachers at the school, stated explicitly in the school’s own journal, total dissatisfaction with the

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<sup>26</sup> BRUGUIER PACINI (1937: 76-77). On Bruguier Pacini cf. MAGGIORE (1964).

results of ‘corporative science’. But on what basis should this science have been founded? A comparison of the courses taught by two teachers might suggest the weakness – or, better, the impossibility – of this basis. The two teachers are Guido Sensini and Ugo Spirito.<sup>27</sup> The former was not an official teacher at the school, although he conducted seminars there. However, he taught the political economics course at the faculty of Jurisprudence at Pisa University, and because of this many of the students at the school had been taught by him. Sensini, one of Vilfredo Pareto’s students, had become, against his will, one of the protagonists of the “Paretaio” – the group of slavish imitators of Pareto – described by Pasquale Jannaccone<sup>28</sup> in the homonymous article. In particular, Jannaccone had taken aim at Sensini’s volume on the theory of economic rent,<sup>29</sup> dedicating a vitriolic portrait to him.<sup>30</sup> The devotion of the student still permeated the course twenty years later. Thus in the introductory part of the course handouts one could read: “the phenomena which we call economic and that consist precisely in this: winning, i.e. overcoming the obstacles to the satisfaction of those needs. Pareto made this idea the basis of the whole of his *Manuale di Economia Politica* published in Milan in 1906 by the Libreria Publishing House. *For this author, who is undoubtedly the best economist to appear so far, the whole of economics can be divided into two parts: 1st) the theory of tastes – 2nd) the theory of obstacles*” (Sensini 1932: 24, our italics).

Therefore, if the course was based on Pareto’s teaching, it could not avoid starting from the foundation of marginalist theory: the assumption of a rational and maximising economic agent, *homo oeconomicus*. Sensini did not deny the abstraction of this hypothesis,<sup>31</sup> but he reiterated its

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<sup>27</sup> On Sensini cf. POMINI (2017; 2020). On Spirito cf. MACCABELLI (1998); PERRI and PESCIARELLI (1990); BRESCHI (2018); ROGGI (2018b).

<sup>28</sup> “The worst calamity that can befall a man of true and great brilliance is befalling Vilfredo Pareto: he is becoming fashionable. And becoming fashionable, for a scientist, a philosopher or an intellectual [...] means that that work, great because it is personal, one and multifaceted, is stripped of all these attributes by the throng of little imitators, who break it up and divide it into excerpts; they reduce it to a skeleton with their repetitions devoid of new vital content; they dilute it and distort it, substituting a conventional language and some conceptual schemes to a practical work” (JANNACCONI 1912: 337).

<sup>29</sup> SENSINI (1912).

<sup>30</sup> A portrait that began like this: “Prof. Sensini has written a book on Economic Rent Theory (Rome, Loescher, 1912) with which he has undisputedly taken first place in the ‘Paretaio’. It is worth examining it meticulously, because it is a work that is destined to be *epochemachend*, as the Germans say. Since the day of its publication, no other economist, past or present, exists but Sensini; there should also be Pareto, but as all of Pareto has been decanted into Sensini, no-one else remains but Sensini” (*ibid.*: 343). Pareto, however, wrote a very favourable review of Sensini’s volume cf. Pareto 1912.

<sup>31</sup> “Pure economics does not remotely deny that the real man is different from the ‘homo oeconomicus’ studied by it; in fact it admits it unreservedly. However, it knows very well that

absolute necessity as the basis of a true economic science: “To return to homo oeconomicus which is of interest only to us (not to Sociology), we shall say that it is an abstraction precisely in the way that in Mechanics the point without dimensions (material point) is, just as inelastic bodies, etc., are in that science. But it is only with these abstractions that one is able to write on one hand the equations of pure economics, and on the other the equations of mechanics” (Sensini 1934: 157).

This approach, obviously, had precise consequences for excellent economic policies, in fact for the only combination of policies possible from the point of view of economic rationality: minimal state, gold standard and free trade. A reality that classical economic theory had intuited but which, not having available the marginalist theoretical arsenal, it could not demonstrate unequivocally.<sup>32</sup>

The problem that Sensini faced at this point was not at all simple. It was a matter of managing to conciliate these theoretical suppositions with the practice of the economic policy of the fascist regime, moreover in a moment in which the ‘liberal’ phase of the inception could be said to be definitively concluded.<sup>33</sup> The solution, as has been mentioned above, was constituted by recourse to the sociologist Pareto.<sup>34</sup> If the pure theory impeded the comparability of personal utility, sociology allowed the overcoming of this *impasse* and the judgement of the impact of economic policy choices on the whole of the national community:

The ophelimities of different individuals cannot be compared with each other, cannot be added together, etc.; they are heterogeneous quantities. Thus in pure economics a maximum of ophelimities of the community makes no sense. However, in Sociology, the heterogeneity of individual utilities disappears, insofar as it is no longer the individual who is the judge of them, but rather the government, and it is in this way that these utilities, through actions for which Pareto provided the mathematical theory, can help achieve, through the legislative

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man has certain feelings that cannot be considered in the field of mathematical economics. These feelings are dealt with by sociology; so all that is needed is a simple reference in which it is said that to study the actions of the real man, see essay on sociology, such and such a page” (SENSINI 1932: 92).

<sup>32</sup> “The whole of nineteenth century classical economics has done no more than shout in favour of economic liberalism, i.e. no customs duties, no economic laws on the part of governments; everything must be left to private initiative. Classical economics reasoned in this way because it had glimpsed without being able to demonstrate that theorem that Walras demonstrated first mathematically, i.e. that free competition allows the human community to enjoy the maximum number of ophelimities” (SENSINI 1932: 170).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. BINI (2021).

<sup>34</sup> Pareto’s bibliography is very large. Here we limit ourselves to referring to the analyses and bibliography contained in MALANDRINO and MARCHIONATTI (2000); MORNATI (2015).

provisions emanating from it, a maximum of utilities for the community for which it is accountable, or a maximum of utilities for the community (if, for example, it sacrifices one or more classes for the general wellbeing, it is only this second maximum that will be possible to achieve) (Sensini 1934: 368).

Furthermore, the sociological approach allowed the evaluation of economic policy choices within every specific national context. In this way, decisions pregnant with grave consequences in one country and with a given political, social and economic conformation, could turn out to be positive in other countries and/or other contexts. Sensini wrote in this regard (the choice of the railways policy does not seem coincidental):

The solution to the problems regarding the economic socialism of the state, cannot be given only by economics, and still less by pure economics. In fact, economic phenomena interfere, in this case, so strongly with sociological phenomena in general, and especially with political phenomena, that the simply economic solution of the problem becomes necessarily erroneous. *Just consider the management of the railways*, which though economically disastrous for a country with one government, can become excellent with another. After all, today, the intervention, direct or indirect, of the state in both industrial and agricultural production, is in most countries in the world extremely intense and on the increase. We therefore feel that it is unnecessary to discuss the subject further (Sensini 1934: 439, our italics).

Sensini, by continuing with his sociological analysis, brought into focus with clarity – but perhaps unconsciously? – the real purposes of the politics of fascism: the drastic reduction of the bargaining power of the working classes. In fact he wrote:

After all, as in every human phenomenon (and analogously in what happens in the phenomena dealt with by the biological sciences, especially in the treatment of illnesses) one has, in our case too, a problem of degree, i.e. a quantitative problem. Within certain limits, not very wide in terms of extension and intensity, the advantages of state constraints may considerably outweigh the disadvantages, especially if we consider (as we must) not only the economic field, but the whole sociological field. *Suffice it to mention, as an example of this, the possibility for a government to have, through corporatism (in periods, like ours, in which workers' trade unions are unavoidable), workers' associations, which would otherwise be hostile to it, dependent on it.* Liberals claim exemption from considering facts like these which are fundamental in the economic-political life of a community (Sensini 1934: 402, our italics).

Pareto's student was anyway careful to define the precise limits of public intervention, beyond which the costs would outweigh the benefits: in fact

he concluded that “beyond those limits, the consequences are inverted, and the damage done outweighs the advantages” (*ibid.*). Sensini declared that he was extremely doubtful about the possibility of reducing the peaks of the economic cycle through the corporative structure.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, he was worried about the possibility of a bureaucratic drift by the corporations.<sup>36</sup>

Put simply, Sensini’s course reiterated the validity and the necessity of an economic theory based on the marginalist hypothesis, partially justifying some economic policy choices with sociological assumptions.

The positions expressed by Ugo Spirito in his courses were in total contrast to this. The starting point was constituted precisely by criticism of *homo œconomicus* “atomistic, fragmentary, agnostic, anarchic” (Roggi 2018a: 89).<sup>37</sup> To this isolated entity, not just a-social but pre-social, whose only relationships were based on trade,<sup>38</sup> Spirito countered with *homo corporativus*, i.e. that individual “who had come to recognize the reality of the state as his own” and realizing “a concept of freedom that is the same as that of corporatism” (Roggi 2018a: 37).

To this criticism of a more general scope, Spirito added many more, regarding more specific aspects. The ordinal conception of the utility – and therefore the ‘no bridge’ invoked by Bruguier Pacini – prevented the “liberal” economic theory from becoming a true science.<sup>39</sup> From this came a particularly negative analysis on the real mechanisms of trade, seen as a zero-sum game, as an arena in which every agent tries to overpower the other:

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<sup>35</sup> “Believing that, through trade unions controlled by the government, through corporations, etc. it is possible to avoid crises of overproduction, is erroneous. No government [...] could oppose with alacrity what enterprises produce, obliging them in this way to reduce their workforce, not to hire workers, to close factories, not to build them, etc.” (SENSINI 1934: 406).

<sup>36</sup> “Not infrequently, especially if corporatism is very widespread and intense, this has as a consequence the existence of a vast bureaucracy that represents a simple increase in the cost of the production of goods, or a burden on state finances” (*ibid.*: 401).

<sup>37</sup> In 2018, Piero Roggi edited Spirito’s lectures at the school.

<sup>38</sup> The social structure based on a market economy in Spirito’s interpretation appears to be very close to that which Isaiah Berlin attributes to Joseph De Maistre: “Society is not a bank, a limited-liability company formed by individuals who look on one another with suspicious eyes – fearful of being taken in, duped, exploited. All individual resistance in the name of imaginary rights or needs will atomise the social and the metaphysical tissue, which alone has the power of life” (BERLIN 2013<sup>2</sup>: 129). Not for nothing does Berlin identify the origins of fascist thought in De Maistre’s positions.

<sup>39</sup> “Another objection, much more serious, presents itself if we go on to consider the relationship between the harmony of the goods in a certain individual and the harmony of the goods in another certain individual: in which relationship do we find the marginal utilities of the former and those of the latter? If the marginal economy is capable of determining this relationship it is also capable of founding a science; otherwise it fails in its purpose” (ROGGI 2018a: 48).



For example, for the buyer a necktie has a value in financial terms of 25 lire, while for the seller it represents a cost of 5 lire. The two participants in the exchange then agree on a price of 10 lire. Now the different values represented by the utility and the cost of the necktie subsist insofar as they are subjective values that are determined in the two participants in given moments. Now on entering the market and agreeing on the price of 10 lire, to which subjective value of the two participants does this price correspond? Evidently this price does not represent a value for either of the two subjects, or, therefore, the value of the goods which is always a subjective value. The value of the goods in itself would be another concept of value, not expressed, either by the utility of the buyer, or by the cost of the seller, but would be a third thing. It can be called a value, but naturally outside the subjective sense of the word. So as not to confuse it with the notion of value, we shall call this third objective element “price”. How much must the price amount to for you to carry out the exchange? It is clear that if the seller is prepared to yield a commodity for 5 lire and the buyer to acquire it for 25 lire, the price can be determined between 5 and 25 lire. There is therefore the possibility of fixing this price at between five and twenty-five lire. If the price is determined above 25 lire or below 5, the exchange would not take place. But assuming that the exchange does take place, it involves seeing whether any amount at which the price is fixed, on a scale from 25 to 5, corresponds to any intrinsic requirement of the exchange. Let us assume for the sake of simplicity that the price is fixed half-way. But for this to be possible it is necessary that the buyer and the seller are aware of the value that both of them attribute to the goods. However, they are each unaware of the subjective value that the other gives to the goods. It is therefore not possible for them to decide on half-price, because what would be the whole price to be divided by two? *So as the price, logically determined, cannot be fixed half-way or at any point on the scale, it is determined by the ability of the negotiators, who would begin to haggle and the more savvy of the two will manage to determine the price by trying to intuit the needs of the other and concealing his own. The price moves in this way, without a reason that is intrinsic to the exchange, in favour of the more able of the negotiators.* In general the merchant is the stronger and more able, as he has less need of the necktie and is less subject to the unique qualities of the necktie that attract the customer, who instead, not having any other choice, is thus forced to accept the seller’s price (*ibid.*: 170, our italics).

As one can see, Spirito’s criticism concerned both the positive and legislative aspects. Not only was there criticism of the ‘unequal exchange’ that characterized trade in the real economy, but the corporative economy – marked by “identity of the individual with the state” (*ibid.*: 66)<sup>40</sup> – was

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<sup>40</sup> “Corporatism says: there are no conflicting class interests, but only a single national interest, that of maximum production. Therefore, the subordination of the classes is necessary to this one end. In the law of 3 April 1926 the trade unions of the workers and the entrepreneurs are recognized equally, capital and labour are placed on the same plane” (*ibid.*: 96).

presented as the solution for eliminating this inequality, by surpassing the limits of liberalism and socialism:

So what is this corporatism? If we retrace the road we have taken we shall see that this corporatism is something new, it asserts an original principle. It is liberalism insofar as it defends the freedom of the individual in the state. It is socialism insofar as it asserts the freedom of the individual in the face of capitalism. It is nationalism insofar as it asserts the concept of nation, but considered as fruitful cooperation with all nations. It is state socialism insofar as it asserts state intervention in the economy. Thus corporatism combines within itself all the political and economic requirements established from the eighteenth century onwards (*ibid.*: 67).

Spirito was then prudent enough to postpone the accomplishment of this objective to an unspecified later date.<sup>41</sup> But even in so doing, two important problems remained to be defined: the role of the individual in the organizational structure and the rationale behind economic liberalism flaunted by fascism from the start. For the latter, Spirito saw in the liberal phase of fascism the instrument that was necessary for surpassing the grovelling socialism of the immediate post-war period.<sup>42</sup> The former problem, however, was more complex. The obvious risk was that the individual identifying with the state would become a sort of individual-cell in a state-organism. In this way, it would have been difficult to find real differences with the bureaucratization in the Soviet experience. The paradoxical solution proposed by Spirito claimed total bureaucratization as a positive element:

But if we bureaucratize the whole nation, i.e. we make all the citizens officials of the nation, this incongruity will no longer occur. The work of the individual will be in accordance with the national interest: and this without leading to any estrangement, any detachment between man and land and buildings, because the

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<sup>41</sup> “It is therefore not to be wondered at if it is said that Fascism, at least for now, cannot resolve this problem. It cannot resolve it because the elements for the resolution are missing, and there is no scientific organization that can provide them. The immediate complete arrangement of the economic organism, so vast and complex, of a nation, presupposes scientific and statistical knowledge that we do not have and cannot have for now. So the first thing that is required by the current state of things is to begin to build that science that is still missing, because only on the soundest of scientific principles will it be possible to found the new economic system” (*ibid.*: 97).

<sup>42</sup> “Once the war ended, it is true that the state continued with a disciplined and regulatory economy, but the individual forces constrained for so long by the aims of the war wanted to reconquer all freedoms at once; therefore, on one hand there was statism, and on the other individualism; there was the rebirth of a socialism, which, however, retained of socialism only its revolutionary character, and it was individualistic, anarchic, Bolshevik. From 1919 to 1922 there was in Italian political and economic life the emergence of conflicting motives: socialism, liberalism, statism” (*ibid.*: 65).

most humble peasant in the most remote part of Italy, for example, will continue to live off the land and for the land, while still being an official of the nation; he will continue to feel and love his work as a living and functioning reality, as a uniquely personal activity even though it is rationally classified in the complex game of the national economy. We will have given in this way, to this man, all the positive qualities of the bureaucrat and removed those that are merely negative. Only by arriving at this concept of the bureaucracy will we be able to get rid of it, if by bureaucracy we mean the characteristic combination of its defects. The word 'bureaucrat' will no longer have any reason to exist, not even an etymological one. Instead, a much simpler and more human word will have a reason to exist: the word 'citizen' (*ibid.*: 93).

The corporative society would then have been organized through a precise hierarchy based on competence. In his words:

Obviously, if hierarchical freedom is seen as a relationship of above and below, he who finds himself below will always try to claim for himself a greater freedom. Put in these terms, the relationship assumes the appearance of pure force. One needs instead to consider this relationship not extrinsically but substantially, i.e. ask oneself in what sense individuals are on a lower or higher rung. Obviously because the inferior is unable to do, to carry out the work that the superior performs. I.e. it is necessary to spiritualize the hierarchical relationship and substitute for the terminology of superior and inferior that of more technical and less technical, of more complex and less complex. Only if the substantial relationship changes in this way will the hierarchy acquire a spiritual significance and guarantee the freedom of all; otherwise it is founded on force and always implies a liberal reaction (*ibid.*: 219).

It is difficult to say whether Spirito had a technocratic society in mind. As always in his lessons, the arguments are sufficiently vague as to lend themselves to different interpretations. What was certain was the absolute dominion of the individual who was at the top of the hierarchy:

The freedom of the individual is that of being able to ascend hierarchically and in so doing realize in an ever greater manner his own personality in the life of the nation; and when this individual has arrived at the supreme position of command he can order the whole of national life, he is one with the state and can therefore shape it according to his abilities (*ibid.*: 39).

Sensini and Spirito: in their lessons, two opposite conceptions of economics. It is not difficult to imagine the bewilderment of the students. On one hand an analysis completely based on the postulates of the marginalist theory, in which corporatism was justified on the sociological plane and accepted as *faute de mieux*. On the other an individual completely absorbed into the state and subjected to a rigid hierarchy. In this sense, the

two precepts become an example of the cacophony that would accompany the attempt to give a theoretical foundation to corporatism.

## CONCLUSIONS

The school's activities officially ceased in December 1944, after two years of slow starvation due to wartime events involving the Peninsula. In fact, since 1939 the organization of courses had undergone numerous and continuous changes, due to the school's inability to secure stable faculty with an established scientific profile. However, the real break with the first phase of the school's life – the one in which the scientific and teaching activity of the faculty exhibited an undoubted liveliness – had already manifested itself in 1935, following Bottai's departure from Pisa and Cesarini Sforza's assumption of the directorship. Two main elements impacted this change, which coincided with a slowdown in the theoretical debate on corporatism, which in turn occurred – paradoxically – at the very time when corporations were established and was accentuated by the shift in attention to autarkic issues. On the one hand, a decisive role was played by the University's embryonic resistance – particularly in the Faculty of Law – to a scientific and didactic project that was never really accepted, and which hindered the hiring of new faculty members specifically identified for their inclination for the corporative disciplines, both in their economic and legal forms. A resistance that became evident in the second half of the decade, when with the plans for reform of the school's regulations advanced by Cesarini Sforza, there was a return to prefiguring a structuring of studies that, in addition to diminishing the corporative aspect, seemed to call into question the entire process of the renewal of political-social studies initiated by fascism since the creation of the Faculties of Political Science, reaffirming the primacy and centrality of traditional legal training for graduates destined to assume administrative and government positions in the various structures of the state and civil service. On the other, there was the undoubted failure of the attempt to give a solid theoretical foundation to corporatism, evident in Pisa in the glaring contradictions between the lectures of Ugo Spirito – centered on the rejection of maximizing hypotheses – and those of Guido Sensini, in perfect continuity with the Paretian approach and accepting corporatist structures as a *faute de mieux*.

Notwithstanding these considerations, it nevertheless seems to us appropriate to point out some of the achievements of the Mussolini School and College in terms of the training of the fascist managerial class. Just by checking the parliamentary positions attained by the students of the Pisan School, we can see that during the 30<sup>th</sup> legislature six members of

the school and one enrolled in the degree course in Political-Corporative Sciences were appointed National Councilors of the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations. These are proportionately higher numbers than the historiography highlights for the entire body of graduates in Political Sciences of the Kingdom who had access to the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations. Equally worthy of attention appears to be the number of students at the school who took part in the various peripheral corporate institutions (Ronco 2021: *passim*); on the potential implications related to the latter point, however, judgment must inevitably be shaded, due to the difficulties that inevitably arise in a balanced assessment of this kind.

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