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Governing the Enterprise: The Transition from Welfare Capitalism to Human Relations in Post-World War Two Italian Business

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Abstract

Although company welfare has been discussed at great length in international historiography, only in recent years have works been published that analyze its persistence over time. Detailed research has concentrated on the decades following World War Two, which saw the radical modernization of European business culture under the influence of studies made in the USA. In Italy in particular, Human Relations had an impact on the concept of the company and became the subject of a broad debate, whose many participants included members of the government, trade unions, industrialists, and even the country's leading companies. I examine how Human Relations was perceived and what it actually signified to the different participants in the debate. This is the first step towards evaluating its real impact on company welfare; it reveals the persistence and further expansion of company welfare, which nevertheless came into conflict with state welfare in the decades following the economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s. The singularity of the Italian situation on the persistence and development of company welfare requires a broad comparison with the international situation, which, in turn, requires study of important Italian cases.

Keywords: Company Welfare; Human Relations; Italy; Welfare Capitalism.

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Introduction

The importance of welfare and social security measures during the twentieth century has become the subject of extensive historical research.¹ Some of the most recent studies have looked at both public and private sectors.² In particular, the scope of investigation has broadened out from a focus mostly directed at state intervention to a more detailed historical re-examination of the actions of private institutions, including the important role played by companies.³ This article focuses on the welfare and social security measures that Italian companies implemented for their workers, whose essential content can reveal the participatory and community character of these companies.

With this aim, this study concentrates on the crucial period after World War Two, when the resources provided by the US Marshall Plan encouraged modernization and drove Italy's big businesses to adopt methods and organizational practices similar to those of their US counterparts.⁴ In particular, influential members of the government, the principal trade unions (CGIL and CISL),⁵ businesses through the *Confederazione generale dell'industria Italiana* (hereafter Confindustria),⁶ and some of Italy's major companies focused a great deal of attention on Human Relations (HR).⁷

This study intends to examine the extent to which the community approach (Charles Hecksher and Paul Adler 2006), based on recognition of employers' and workers' mutual interests in company management, and its consolidation over time, prevailed during the post-war period of maximum growth. The arrival of HR in Italy as a set of ideas introduced from the US makes it possible to examine the extent to which its impact on the management methods of some of Italy's biggest and most representative firms influenced their relations with their employees, and—more generally—affected companies' social responsibility.⁸ To understand the influence of HR on company behavior, the article focuses on the significance attributed to HR by the many social actors, ranging from the government to the representatives of workers and of company owners.⁹

This article is based on publications that deal expressly with this subject supplemented by further research using the in-house journals of the most influential businesses (Bart Dredge 2013) and unpublished archival material. The remainder of the article is structured as follows.

¹ For a general summary: G. Francis Castles, Stephan Leibfried, Jane Lewis, Herbert Obinger, Christopher Pierson (2010).

² For a brief account, see Patrizia Battilani and Corrado Benassi (2013).

³ See the recent summary of Keetie Sluyterman (2012); Aldo Carera (2009); and Luigi Trezzi and Valerio Varini (2012).

⁴ There was a marked expansion of company welfare after World War Two in the USA (Elisabeth Fones-Wolf 1986).

⁵ Carlo Vallauri (2008).

⁶ '... the main association representing manufacturing and services companies in Italy ...'
<https://www.confindustria.it/en/about-us>.

⁷ In general, although not claimed as statistically representative, the companies considered here are selected because of their size and presence in the most developed area of Italy. They played a leading role in the modernization occurring after World War Two, in addition to their direct interventions in the issue of relations between HR and company welfare examined in this study. For an overview of Italian industrial companies in the period examined see: Franco Amatori (1999); Andrea Colli and Michelangelo Vasta (2011); and Vera Zamagni (1993). For more detailed observations on the post-war boom, see Gianni Toniolo (2013); while for a more extended contextualization in a long period see Paolo Di Martino and Michelangelo Vasta (2015).

⁸ On corporate social responsibility generally, see Carroll B. Archie, Kenneth J. Lipartito, James E. Post, Patricia H. Werhane, and Kenneth E. Goodpaster (2012).

⁹ The focus is on the first post-war decades and on the discussion among those who were directly involved in studying HR. No adequate study has yet been made of agreements between the major employers' organizations and trade unions regarding the relations between HR, company welfare and state intervention.

Firstly, there is a brief analysis of the historical importance of company welfare and the extent to which it has become the focus of increasing interest. This is followed by a brief review of the origins of HR and its arrival in Italy after World War Two. The account of HR's direct impact on companies includes the study of some examples, and leads to a brief analysis of the social workers' role in the management of company welfare.

Company Social Intervention: Paternalism and Company Welfare. A Historical Debate

Since the nineteenth century, historical research has concentrated on corporate social and welfare activities, and the mostly personal and family corporate management has meant that these measures have been classified within the broad category of paternalism, a term which has sparked a considerable debate about its nature and objectives. It is useful to recall that Britain's early industrialization involved a wide range of paternalistic interventions that have been studied extensively, leading to a heated debate in the 1980s about interpretation. This debate centered on the original motives for these interventions and on the relations between the service providers, in their dual role as the company and its owners, and their beneficiaries, the workers.¹⁰

Some authoritative researchers see the decisive turning point that marked the transformation of "paternalism" into company welfare (CW) as occurring after companies' organizational structures increased in size, which led to changes in management methods.¹¹ This development process was especially evident in the United States, where CW measures in the first half of the twentieth century became so widespread and so intense that they exercised a long-term influence on social interventions by public authorities. This helped to weaken the personal relationship between the company owner and the beneficiary of social care, which was replaced by administrative management of welfare, known as welfare capitalism, CW, etc. This approach differed from traditional paternalism in that the organizational functions of the company now included the management of services provided to the community revolving around it, accompanied by a corresponding reduction in the owner's power of decision about these services.

The economic problems of the Great Depression led to a considerable reduction in CW in the United States from its peak in the 1920s, and this was followed by a difficult recovery during the New Deal, hampered by legislation on industrial relations and union representation.¹² This decline in CW has been interpreted in different ways. Some have seen it as the prelude to the end of "welfarism", intended as the principal means used to curb union membership, while other researchers have underlined its persistence—albeit in a different form—even after World War Two. Very recently, there has been a renewed interest in companies' social action, accentuated by reduced public intervention in these areas.

The breadth of historical research at the international level and the renewed interest of Italian historians, have led to a focus on the period following World War Two.¹³ This was the period when a combination of different factors, such as the successful construction of a pervasive welfare state and the increased impact of labor relations, led to a profound

¹⁰ For a summary of the debate, see Patrick Joyce (1984a; 1984b) and Richard Price (1982; 1984). For the origins of paternalism, see Michael Huberman (1987).

¹¹ For a useful comparison with the situation in Britain, see Joseph Melling (1980; 1991).

¹² The most significant studies on the general situation in the USA, with significant divergences regarding the nature and objectives of company social intervention: David Brody (2009).

¹³ Examples of historical research on CW include: Hubert Bonin and Paul Thomes (2013); Michael Hillard (2004); *International Labour and Working-Class History* (1988); Sanford Jacoby (1997); Margaret McCallum (1990); Nikki Mandell (2002); Andrea Tone (1997); Varini (2016); and Gerald Zahavi (1988). For a recent reinterpretation, see Susanna Fellman (2019).

transformation in CW.¹⁴ Other important reasons for this include the “Americanization”¹⁵ of the European economy during the first decades after World War Two.

Considering only management practices and their transformation during the crucial years of the economic boom,¹⁶ the adoption of HR had an important influence in Italy. In addition to sparking a broad debate, it also impacted on the services that companies had already provided for some time, and in many ways it enabled clearer understanding of the nature of their actions. HR must also be understood within the broader process of the formation and consolidation of post-war “corporate cultures”, marked by the cross-flow of ideas between the USA and Europe.¹⁷

Human Relations: From Experiment to the Italian Debate

HR originated in the USA with experiments carried out in 1924 at the Western Electric Company in Hawthorne (Illinois) to measure the productivity of some of its manufacturing departments.¹⁸ The results were quite contrasting, indicating that productivity was influenced by a factor—the human factor—not envisaged by the dominant Taylorist approach of the time. As a result, Harvard academic Elton Mayo was appointed to do more detailed research in order to identify the factors affecting productivity. His work led to the development of HR theory, interest in which became so widespread during the 1940s and 1950s that the issue was also broadly debated in Italy after World War Two. Although subsequent tests did not actually confirm the impact of the human factor, the HR approach found a “cognitive consonance” that made it particularly suited to the post-war economic climate. In particular, HR ideology contrasted with the Taylorist idea of work as a mere productive factor; HR placed more emphasis on the connections between the person, as a worker, and the company, with the consequent need to create a socially pleasant and harmonious working environment. Moreover, according to Mayo, HR would counteract the dangers of a lawless industrial society by recreating a sense of belonging in company communities. Lastly, HR gave importance to the informal and collaborative relations permeating companies, which Taylorism tended to deny.¹⁹

Here it is useful to briefly examine Mayo’s studies in order to understand better the original relationship between HR and CW. According to Mayo (1946), HR belonged to the wider general issue of “Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization”, revolving around aspects related to working in modern factory organization systems. Mayo’s observations on “fatigue” as a distinguishing aspect of work are illuminating. The background to his observations was British studies conducted during World War One, when the war effort spurred an intensification of industrial production. However, the results were so disappointing that a government body, the Industrial Fatigue Research Board, was appointed to carry out specific studies to identify the reasons for the poor performance of the nation’s industry. Its research focused mainly on understanding the factors affecting productivity, with a particular focus on the “nature of fatigue” (*ibid*, 2). The large number of studies conducted in the 1920s essentially involved the

¹⁴ For the singular but significant case of Pirelli, see Varini (2013).

¹⁵ Harm Schröter (2005); Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel (2000).

¹⁶ The dissemination of HR also met responses and significant “religious” analogies in contemporary experiences in the USA; see Elisabeth Fones-Wolf and Ken Fones-Wolf (2012).

¹⁷ Giulio Sapelli’s examination of “production organisers” indicated HR as the means of “Italianizing American sciences”, used as the vehicle to consolidate a “general [familistic] model for all companies”, which he saw as extensively consolidated during the crucial decades immediately after World War Two (Giulio Sapelli 1994, 278-279).

¹⁸ On the Hawthorne case study see a critical approach: Jeffrey Muldoon (2012).

¹⁹ For the origins, timing and reasons for the dissemination of HR, see Giuseppe Bonazzi (1990, 54-70).

performance of work,²⁰ but Mayo's opinion was that research to find a "single discovery, the simple remedy, the one best way, had failed to materialize".²¹ This dissatisfaction led to his research at the Western Electric Company, the results of which helped to make him famous. The well-known "Hawthorne Experiment" at the basis of the original HR core took place in a context that the author himself recognized as being extremely "high in a list of industrial institutions if the order in such list were determined by consideration of the worker and a real concern for his welfare".²²

In the case studied, besides salaries that Mayo considered high, the workers also benefitted from many other services, including a "restaurant"²³ and a "hospital" with specialized personnel;²⁴ both were managed by a "personnel division" that had been capable of reacting to every "symptom of discontent" in the twenty years before Mayo's experiments.

This led him to state that the validity of his own evaluations regarding HR could be found in "a company definitely committed to justice and humanity in its dealing with workers", able to raise "the general morale high", and not equally verifiable in situations judged as having "low morale".²⁵ Starting from Mayo's original formulations, HR practices were valid and could be adopted by companies operating CW, whose presence was—as Mayo clearly reiterated—judged to be essential for adequate worker satisfaction and a pre-requisite to achieve an efficiently functioning production organization.

Despite the lack of substantial feedback about the basis of the relations between "morale"²⁶ and productivity, as HR wished, these practices proved particularly suited to the changes in production implemented after World War Two with the spread of more highly integrated and automated production processes. The production process became more rigid,²⁷ and was dictated by machinery timing rather than by the time taken by manual tasks, while tasks done by individual workers were replaced with collective production by a team or a department. This meant that HR had a technological importance and was not just an ideological preference. It was necessary to counterbalance the depersonalization of production processes with the personalization of relations in the production hierarchy, focusing on training for team leaders, who were called on to become the main interlocutors of the workers. Given that these interventions did not radically transform working performances, some viewed them as a "lubricant" Taylorist method (Bonazzi 1990, 70).

British and US research on fatigue and productivity was also paralleled by similar studies in other important economic contexts, for example Germany, during the years leading up to World War Two. At Siemens, the pursuit of "technical and organizational rationalizations" led to the adoption of management policies aiming at "work motivation, training, integration, and commitment to the company", and these included intensive implementation of CW.²⁸

²⁰ "Hours of Work, Rest Pauses, Industrial Accidents, Atmospheric Conditions, Vision and Lighting, Vocational Guidance and Selection, Time and Moviment Study, Posture and Physique" (ibid, 6).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 95.

²³ "In which good food is obtainable at moderate prices" (ibid).

²⁴ "Adequately equipped, and staffed by medical officers of high qualifications" (ibid).

²⁵ "In an industry of low morale and uncertain of its intentions, the inquiry would not have been possible" (ibid, 96).

²⁶ The meaning of "Morale" as used by Mayo appears to be the equivalent of wellbeing, although the author defines it only "in any accepted meaning of that term" (ibid, 95).

²⁷ For automation processes in Italy, see Duccio Bigazzi (1999, 986-988).

²⁸ "Expenditure for this 'social programme' was considerable ... and it was an element of the company's social engineering policy" (Heindrun Homburg 1983, 148-155).

Human Relations in Italy: A Debate with Many Participants

Following World War Two, helped also by Marshall Plan resources, Italy experienced a period of profound economic and social change.²⁹ The country's Golden Age of the 1950s was the result of macroeconomic changes, as industry superseded agriculture, and microeconomic changes, as big companies, both public and private, achieved success in international markets.³⁰ Companies mainly present in Italy's northern regions, especially Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria, with very small branches in other areas of Italy, grew in terms of employee numbers and in the complexity of their production processes.³¹ The marginal industrialization of southern Italy derived from the investments of public companies, such as ENI in the energy sector, and from the persistence of traditional textile production.³²

In this context, the aim of improving working conditions and involving workers in company life had a direct impact on CW practices that were widespread in Italian companies; HR gave critical emphasis to their "paternalistic" nature, which had already been the object of a profound revision due to trade unions' ongoing attempts to have CW included in negotiations with management.³³

The spread of HR in Italy in the post-war climate of "Americanization"³⁴ favored by the Marshall Plan also involved the work of specialized training schools teaching management theories. These included the IPSOA, established in Turin (1952) to meet the training objectives of companies such as Olivetti and FIAT,³⁵ and the Industrial Training Institute in Milan, promoted by Pirelli, Edison, Montecatini and Falck.

These initiatives were foreshadowed in the early twentieth century, when influential researchers like Agostino Gemelli began to investigate the "human factor", while research in "industrial psychology" was being carried out in the USA. Gemelli's work led to the establishment in Milan of the Experimental Psychology Laboratory (1921), while there were also some company initiatives that were clearly influenced by developments in the USA. For example, Mario Giani, manager of the Italian division of Westinghouse, implemented recreational organizations responsible for an important share of CW (Victoria De Grazia 1981). Although these initiatives were conditioned and subordinated to the directives of the Fascist regime during the 1930s, they helped maintain knowledge of US corporate culture in the following years.³⁶ It was also equally important that Italian technicians never stopped visits to

²⁹ On the importance of the Marshall Plan for Italy's post-World War Two recovery, see the contributions on this in Alberto Cova (2008).

³⁰ "The annual average growth rate of Italy's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita during the period 1950–1973 was 5.0 percent versus the 3.8 percent average of the twelve Western European countries At the microeconomic level, there is no doubt that the golden age was a successful period for Italian businesses' growth, capacity to innovate—at least in less technologically intensive sectors—and expansion into international markets (Di Martino and Vasta 2018).

³¹ For the dynamics of the industrial system during the period examined and throughout the nineteenth century, see Colli and Vasta (2011); and Giovanni Federico (2003).

³² For some isolated cases in southern Italy, see Ezio Ritrovato (2012), and for Italy as a whole, also in merely quantitative, terms, see "Corporate welfare ... was found more in the North of Italy than in the Centre and the South" (Paolo Raspadori 2021, 290). More generally, on the differential development between northern and southern Italy, and a wider international comparison, see Emanuele Felice and Giovanni Vecchi (2015).

³³ For a general overview of the Italian situation, see Elisabetta Benenati (1998).

³⁴ On the impact of Americanism, especially in relation to the productivistic objectives of the input from the USA, see Jacqueline McGlade (1996).

³⁵ For the origins and aims of IPSOA, see Giuliana Gemelli (1997).

³⁶ For a summary, see the rich anthology of studies published in 1940 with a long introduction by Filippo Bottazzi and Agostino Gemelli (1940).

their American counterparts, and thus were able to compare Italian conditions with US best practices throughout the Fascist period.³⁷

The experience accumulated in the past, together with the new post-war opportunities, favored the economic centrality of Milan. Milan's business world began to assess HR, and opposing evaluations emerged; some of the most important economic associations such as the UCID and ACLI, the Catholic employers' association and the Catholic workers' association respectively, played important roles in the issues discussed here. While the UCID supported HR, the ACLI denounced its "scandalous effects ... on the state of human relations in Lombardy's factories".³⁸ Here, it is useful to recall the acute observations made by Mario Romani, one of the founders in 1950 of the Catholic trade union CISL (Guido Baglioni 2011; Sergio Zaninelli 1988) and an influential authority on issues concerning worker participation in company management, about "re-ordering company organization", where the aim was to achieve "satisfaction of the worker's needs ... [thus] reducing or eliminating ... any position that contrasted with the dignity of the person". The aim was to foster "employees' sense of belonging to the company", implementing the consequent "management responsibility" via representative "bodies", and providing an opportunity for direct involvement of the "trade union organizations".³⁹

More generally, these observations contributed to the debate on "productivity", which raised serious questions for all stakeholders involved, starting with the workers' representatives, about their involvement in company management. This debate also included questions about the very nature of the company and the responsibilities of all the actors involved, and about how the benefits arising from improvements obtained by introducing innovations should be shared.⁴⁰

These issues influenced decisions by economic and social organizations, mostly inspired by religious ideals, which conditioned the policies of the governments in the first post-war decades, led by exponents of the Christian Democratic Party (Democrazia Cristiana). This majority party was strongly influenced by certain figures, such as Amintore Fanfani,⁴¹ whose roots lay in Milanese Catholicism, and CISL founder Romani.

The delicate question of renewed industrial relations was a central theme of the pastoral activity of Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, who made Milan one of the centers of thought at the national level (Francesco Ferrari 2017), with wide-ranging effects also on other production areas, such as Turin, the headquarters of Italy's most renowned car manufacturing company, FIAT (Marta Margotti 2012).

Considering only HR, these approaches were criticized even by those who were responsible for putting them into practice in companies. In the early 1950s an executive of OSRAM's Italian division complained of a business culture pervaded by the belief that the workers were merely "means of production and nothing more" (Caotorta A. Marzotto 2006,

³⁷ See, for example: Archivio Storico Pirelli, pr. 1684, Relazione viaggio negli Stati Uniti – Aprile – Giugno 1931; Varini (2013).

³⁸ For the reception of HR and an evaluation of its impact on the behavior of employers and workers in companies, see Ada Ferrari (1984, 105-106).

³⁹ Romani (1988, 69-71); for a general account of the debate in the CISL on the "active participation of all employees in management responsibilities" in the hope of "new company organization criteria", capable of fully comprehending the tendencies towards "humanization" and against "depersonalization" of the worker, see Vincenzo Saba (2000, 74-76).

⁴⁰ On questions regarding business, innovation and the debate surrounding the establishment of the National Productivity Committee (*Comitato Nazionale Produttività*), see Carera (1993); for a European overview of the "US Technical Assistance and Productivity Mission", see Schröter (2005, 50-53).

⁴¹ Fanfani was a leader of the Christian Democrats in the period 1958-1987. He held many ministerial positions, served five terms as prime minister, and also chaired the General Assembly of the United Nations (1965-1966).

48). The adoption of HR caused opposing reactions among trade union members, with the Catholic CISL favoring collaboration in management and the socialist-communist trade union CGIL (Fabrizio Loreto 2017) expressing decisive opposition.⁴² There was also plenty of opposition within Confindustria, sparked by employers' fears of limits to their decision-making power.⁴³

Stefano Musso's (2009) analysis of the situation at Olivetti, considered the most advanced company in terms of trade union participation in company management, shows that the attitude of CGIL members was prevalently instrumental, soon becoming openly conflictual, when the growth of "public welfare" became a preferred alternative to the services provided by the company (Musso 2009). Similar situations arose in other businesses that were icons of Italian industry, such as the Terni steelworks,⁴⁴ the prestigious car manufacturer Alfa Romeo,⁴⁵ and Marzotto, which in 1968 was at the center of a bitter dispute triggered by the reduction of "social benefits".⁴⁶ The president of Confindustria, Angelo Costa, was also particularly critical of company social measures; he considered them outside the sphere of good company management, entrusted entirely to the independent decisions of single companies, escaping all attempts to impose legal regulation, or—even worse—to become a matter for negotiation with the unions (Confederazione generale dell'industria Italiana 1953).

It is therefore possible to trace a pathway on which the different actors engaged in a debate about the meaning of CW, with many discrepancies between the general statements and the decisions taken by single companies. The leaders of Confindustria feared an excessive burden on companies and limits to their freedom of decision, while the principal workers' representatives were divided between collaboration (CISL) and direct management (CGIL) of social services, and these differences gave rise to the open conflict of the 1970s. The present analysis addresses this pathway during the 1950s and 1960s.

It was inevitable that the aim of improving working conditions and increasing workers' involvement in company life would impact on the social services that companies had already been providing for a considerable time, and discordant reactions began with the first implementation of HR. Reactions were also discordant in comparison with the USA, where HR was closely correlated to a revival in CW interventions.⁴⁷

Italy's first important public occasion involving consideration of HR occurred in Milan in April 1954, at the national convention on "Human Relations in Industry" sponsored by the

⁴² For the CGIL position on HR as the expression of an "ideological program", see Silvio Leonardo (1956, 46), and as "weakening the resistance" of workers, see Bruno Trentin (1956, 290); for general CGIL positions on issues related to work and business, see Trentin (1992), while for a more complete account of CGIL positions on the issues examined, see Pietro Ichino (2013). In addition, according to the CGIL, collaboration with the company would foster a feeling of company loyalty, to the detriment of a more conflictual identification with the "working class" (Lorenzo Bertucelli 1997a; 2005).

⁴³ For critical Confindustria attitudes towards worker "participation" in company management, in particular Angelo Costa's dissent regarding the direct involvement of workers' representatives, see Francesca Fauri and Vera Zamagni (2007) and Vincenzo Saba (2000, 17).

⁴⁴ At Terni "during the Fifties and Sixties, before the progress of the national welfare state and the reorganized workers' movement, the total factory ... was gradually disappearing, leaving in its place a series of measures, negotiated with the workforce, delivered thanks to the assistance of subjects outside the company" (Raspadori 2012, 203).

⁴⁵ At Alfa Romeo, "1946-1961 appears as a period of evident collaboration" between the workforce and company management, followed by the prevalence of marked conflict with ups and downs, which led to a drastic reduction in the company's provision of social and welfare services (Nicola Martinelli 2012).

⁴⁶ This reduction was justified with the "creation ... of a modern social state [which] rendered such a pervasive company presence in workers' daily lives superfluous" (David Celetti 2012, 23).

⁴⁷ "Ford Motor Company began its management-financed recreation program in 1945 ... as representing a new and vigorous phase of the 'human relations' that we hear so much about these days" (Fones-Wolf 1986, 254).

Istituto di Studi sul Lavoro (Institute of Labor Studies). Its board of honor included various well-known heirs of industrial dynasties, like Giovanni Falck and Alberto Pirelli, with the Minister of Trade and Industry (Bruno Villabruna), the Minister of Finance (Roberto Tremelloni), the Minister of Labor (Ezio Vigorelli), Angelo Costa (president of Confindustria), and many other members of the government and the business community. The following year saw two further meetings, in April in Milan and in September in Stresa. All three meetings were organized by the Istituto di Studi sul Lavoro, “which has inherited from the glorious old ENIOS the task ... of operating for the technical and scientific progress of labor organization” (Achille Marazza 1954, 30). In previous decades, ENIOS had played a decisive role in Italian industry’s adoption of Taylorist theories and practices.⁴⁸

In addition to the records of these meetings, there are also useful articles in three periodicals dedicated to HR: “*Fattore Umano. Rivista mensile di direzione ed organizzazione aziendale per il periodo 1955-1961*” (The human factor. A monthly magazine of company management and organization for 1955-1961), the “*Bollettino d’informazione per la direzione aziendale. Rapporto mensile a cura dell’Istituto per gli studi economici ed organizzativi (1962-1966)*” (Company management information bulletin. Monthly report by the Institute for Economic and Organizational studies), and “*L’assistenza sociale nell’industria italiana. Rivista bimestrale della Confederazione generale dell’industria italiana (1964 - 1968)*” (Social Work in Italian industry. Bimonthly magazine of the General Confederation of Italian Industry).

The crucial period when HR attracted most attention was from 1954 to 1960, the year when criticism and reconsideration began about HR’s capacity to achieve the desired aims, so that the *Bollettino* shifted its attention from HR to organizational and management aspects of company governance.⁴⁹ It is thus possible to identify the developmental stages in attitudes towards HR. When HR was introduced, the periodicals referred to above indicate that business and economic leaders and the CISL were positive about the prospect of overcoming conflict via collaboration. But there then followed a more pessimistic realism regarding the possibility of achieving profound changes in industrial relations.⁵⁰

The CGIL criticized CW measures because they could be used in a “paternalistic” way that accentuated the workers’ subordination to the company. This was obviously against HR’s founding principles, and the documents of the first 1954 conference often state that a company owner with a paternalistic attitude to company relations will “never create a climate of real human relations”, so that the worker “will tolerate this state of affairs with a kind of ignorance that remains an infantile form of dependency. Or he will feel the sharp bite of humiliating paternalistic benefits provided as charity” (J. Seriex 1955, 120). On the contrary, paternalism had to be set aside in order to achieve the solid and lasting collaboration desired. The aim was therefore to effect “a revival in the concept and application of human relations, especially by those involved in management” (V. Pons de Wartensee 1954, 18).

The trade unions had the same ideas, seeing paternalism as the “behavior of the company owner who provides his workers with collective welfare they have not requested, conceived at the level of charity and aimed at soothing the workers’ minds ... so that they will relinquish their own demands” (Pasquale Valsecchi 1955, 420).

Here was an essential reason why companies continued to provide social and welfare services, which became the object of a general conflict, since they were seen as a means of reiterating the subordination of the workers and preventing complete realization of the worker’s identity. However, it was a matter of translating these considerations into concrete measures

⁴⁸ On the work of ENIOS, see Bigazzi (1999, 942-943) and Giulio Sapelli (1978, 49-52).

⁴⁹ For CW during World War Two in Italy, see Battilani, Silvia A. Conca Messina, and Varini (2017).

⁵⁰ On this pessimistic view, see Aris Accornero (1976); a similar approach is taken in Gianfranco Petrillo (1992, 144-150).

where the wide range of CW measures were consolidated company activities. At the same time, the trade union representatives were insistent that welfare should be included in negotiations with management, and no longer provided solely at the company's discretion.⁵¹

Terms like "consensus", "collaboration" and "participation" were increasingly contrasted with "dictatorship" and "minority", which were seen as attributes of "paternalism". Proposals were made for organizations that would pursue collaboration via "communication and training", with communication intended as two-way interaction between hierarchies, and a growing role for intermediaries. Communication was perceived as a prerequisite for participation, and was the reason for "suggestion boxes"⁵² and "company newspapers".⁵³ On the other hand, the central idea of training, that "training managers and workers is a permanent function of Senior Management" (L. Colloredo 1955, 6) was translated in Italy as *Training within Industry* (TWI), meaning the "capacity to command ... the manager's ability to obtain his employees' collaboration" (Umberto Baldini 1956, 70).

From Theory to Practice: Comparing Companies

Some practical examples of CW's application in companies help to clarify not only its meaning but also its connection with their social interventions. The companies chosen for this purpose were some of the leaders of Italian industrialization, whose size put them at the head of their respective sectors; they played an exemplary role in the reflection on HR and carried out wide-ranging CW interventions.

At OM of Brescia⁵⁴, the training "courses" devoted to "labor relations" were mostly for team leaders and mainly reiterated the need to obtain the "collaboration" of the workforce.⁵⁵ Team leaders were identified as those with "delegated authority" to manage "production" workers; their task of control was based on the authority delegated by higher management and on the effective participation of their own subordinates.⁵⁶ This imposed an "interest in their living and working conditions",⁵⁷ recalling the welfare implemented over time, always based on the priority objective of "production".⁵⁸ This was followed by announcement of the "method for dealing with the problems", which consisted of stages of intervention by the team leader to resolve the daily functions related to his own role.⁵⁹ Although this was not formally explicit, and was represented only schematically, there was a link with CW, whose very existence implied its use in managing HR. When a team leader acted in his role as a manager of "men", he also

⁵¹ On the emblematic "participatory" experience in Olivetti: Musso (2009, 124-126); for a general summary on union negotiations, see Giuseppe Berta (1999).

⁵² A. Tomasi (1959, 544-550); the example refers to Ansaldo where 10,621 suggestions were recorded in 1954-1959, with 2,836 awarded prizes amounting to a total of 7,375,650 lire.

⁵³ For lights and shadows of company newspapers: *Bollettino d'informazione per la direzione aziendale*, 3 December 1962; for an overview of house publications after World War Two, see Giorgio Bigatti and Carlo Vinti (2010).

⁵⁴ For some information on this company's origins and development, see OM, *una storia nella storia* (1991); after FIAT acquired control of the company in 1930, OM became Italy's leading manufacturer of commercial vehicles.

⁵⁵ "Man's labor can be bought; but his enthusiasm, his initiative, his loyalty, and his collaboration are things that must be earned, and day after day" (OM. *Guida per i capi* 1955).

⁵⁶ "a team leader knows how to command well when he is capable of obtaining his subordinates that they voluntarily provide the work desired within the time required and in the way it must be done ... a team leader does not obtain results without the help of other men" (*ibid*, 5); on the "sense" of authority and voluntary participation in "relations between persons", see Richard Sennet (2008).

⁵⁷ OM. *Guida per i capi* (1955, 11).

⁵⁸ "The fundamental objective that must always be kept absolutely clear is that of production" (*ibid*, 17).

⁵⁹ These stages represented training: "gathering the facts ... judging and deciding ... taking action ... checking the results" (*ibid*, 17-20).

acted as a mediator and had to use the “health and welfare service”; in other words, CW played a crucial function in the delicate matter of workforce management (see Figure 1).

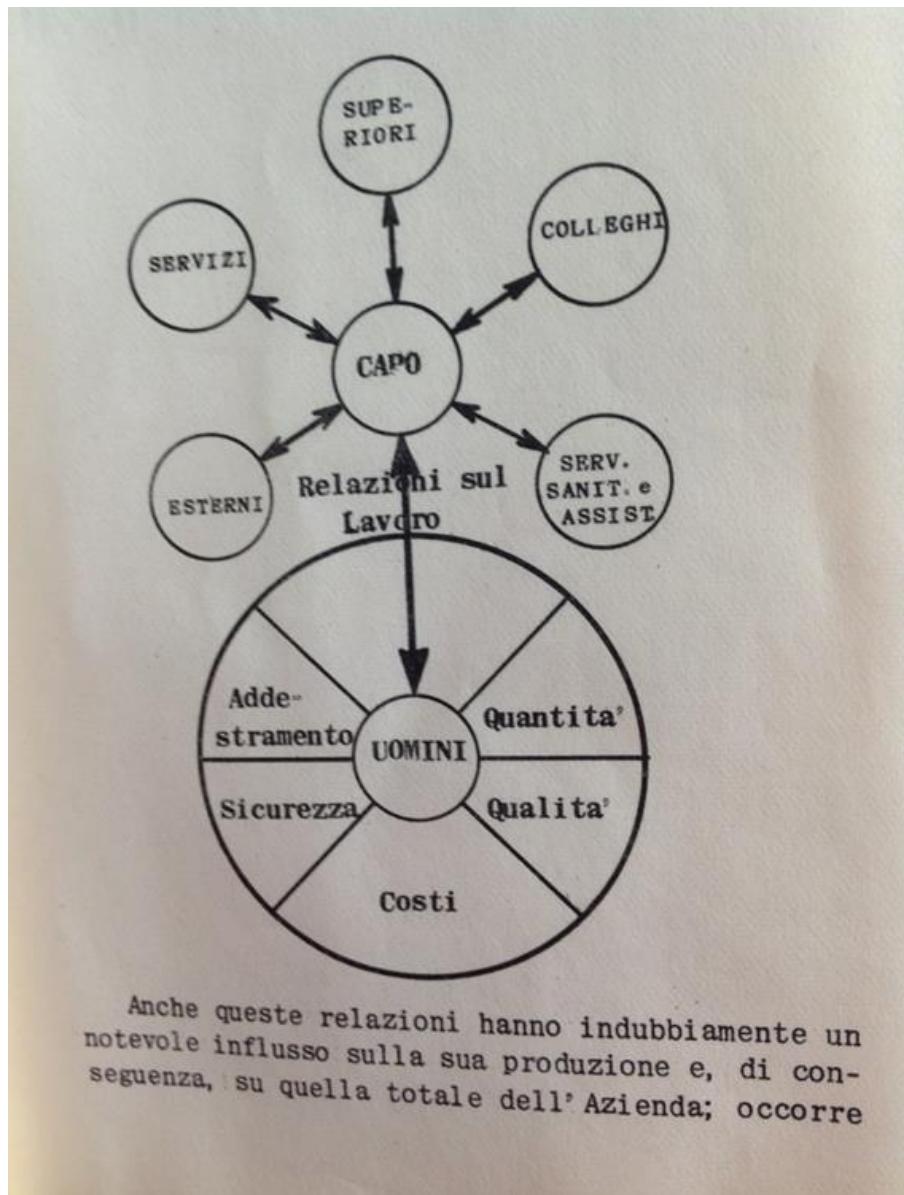


Figure 1
The “team leaders” in the company

Source: *OM. Guida per i capi. Quaderno N. 1. Compendio del corso per le relazioni del lavoro* (1955, 23).

Notes: Superiori = Higher management; Capo = Team leader; Servizi = Services; Colleghi = co-workers; Esterni = outside the company; Servizi sanit. E assist. = Company welfare; Addestramento = Training; Uomini = Workers; Sicurezza = Safety; Quantità = Quantity; Qualità = Quality; Costi = Costs. “It is certain that these relations also have a great impact on its production, and so affect the Company’s total production” (*ibid*, 23).

Falck is another important case,⁶⁰ and the company's wide-ranging social measures have been studied extensively. The entire range of social and welfare services were provided at its various production sites in Arcore, Dongo, Sesto San Giovanni and Vestone, not only for Falck workers themselves, but also for the entire community around its factories.⁶¹

In 1954, the company started "special training courses on human relations in industry". These reiterated the same aspects already mentioned, i.e. the involvement of those "entrusted with command" and specific attention dedicated to "working methods" aimed at improving production (*La Ferriera* 1954a, 2).⁶² Participation levels were good: in the first year alone, over 800 employees took part out of a total workforce of around 15,000 (Varini 2007, 190). The same terms were recurrent at Falck as at OM, with "cordiality and cooperation" seen as the ingredients needed to achieve the objectives of the company's production plan.⁶³ What became even more of a metaphor of the company was the relationship between "the team leader and his employees", which was based on the "mutual trust that leads to the active cooperation of all the personnel".⁶⁴ This was followed by instructions on how to behave in order to improve management skills, without any contrast involving Falck's CW, whose organizational structure was expanded after World War Two with the adoption of a "welfare service". This was entrusted to a "body of 10 assistants" trained at the Milan "social services school", whose founders included Enrico Falck.⁶⁵ Although limited to the narrow context of HR, this became less important in the following years, at least according to articles in the company newspapers. On the other hand, these still contained references to the "responsibility for the lives of all the families that stand alongside these men [workers]", reiterating the social character of the company, which was based on meeting the needs of the entire community in which it operated.⁶⁶

Although communication and training were the two proposed ways of promoting HR, a critical appraisal of the link between HR and social measures led to a significant change in its concrete application in the company context, reflecting the shift in CW during the period examined. As already recalled, the prevalent attitude to CW was at first sceptical, viewing CW as paternalistic and criticizing welfare as indicative of workers' subordination. The question

⁶⁰ From its establishment in 1906 until closure in the mid-1990s, Acciaierie e Ferriere Lombarde Falck, usually known simply as "Falck", was Italy's leading private iron and steel producer, and was characterized by its use of electricity to produce steel. In the 1950s, it had a total workforce numbering around 15,000, of whom 9,000 were employed at its Sesto San Giovanni plant in Milan.

⁶¹ For an overview of Falck's welfare and social security measures, and its large-scale recreational intervention, see Trezzi (2005, 93-106); for a summary of Falck's social measures and those of its neighbouring companies in the Sesto San Giovanni industrial center, see Varini (2012, 179-181).

⁶² See also *La Ferriera* (1954b; 1954c). There was also the similar definition of the "good team leader ... knowledge of work ... knowledge of responsibilities ... capacity to command... capacity to instruct ... capacity to improve working methods" (*La Ferriera* 1954a, 2). For a brief account of HR at Falck and for useful observations on the ideas of company directors Enrico and Giovanni Falck, see Andrea Umberto Gritti (2021, 313).

⁶³ *La Ferriera* (1954b, 6); the similar behavior of Falck and OM regarding the questions discussed here originates with both companies entrusting the management of their social services to the UCID's "Company Social Services", and also to the direct participation of their managers as speakers on the "Corsi di Tecnica aziendale per imprenditori e dirigenti e Corsi di Tecnica aziendale per capi intermedi" 1954 – 1969, given by various prestigious speakers, including Guido Carli, future governor of the Bank of Italy, Armando Frumento and Achille Gattuso (Falck managers), and Mario Calvi (OM manager) (Silvia Milanese 2017-2018).

⁶⁴ *La Ferriera* (1954d, 8); for the relations between "reciprocity" and "dependency", see Sennet (2003).

⁶⁵ *La Ferriera* (1960, 14).

⁶⁶ "the company is a complex that is delineated as a human community ... for which all take on responsibilities, precisely because this community has a purpose that transcends that of the company" (*ibid*, 11).

was expressed in a rather simplistic way: welfare provided unilaterally by companies should stop because it was contrary to the spirit of HR. Only when CW had been stripped of all references to paternalism were there correct relations with workers. It therefore became vitally important to remove this obstacle to the maintenance of welfare services and eliminate their supposedly paternalistic component.

Two contrasting accounts summarize the contrasting opinions about the importance of HR: one in favor of ending CW, and the other more favorable to the spread of welfare services provided by Italian industry. According to the CEO of Edison,⁶⁷ Carlo Bobbio, “a human relations policy is difficult to reconcile with the extensive recourse to activities aimed at stimulating the worker’s sense of responsibility and initiative, which prove to be counter-productive ... it would be better to avoid imposing on workers a pre-established way of meeting certain needs” (Bobbio 1954, 61). As an alternative to CW, he suggested that a policy “of good salaries is the best condition for the development of a policy of good human relations ... [and] the company is spared excessive involvement in welfare activities” (*ibid.*). This position was welcomed by trade unionists, who advocated ending CW because it unified the company community and led workers to identify themselves with their company. Both positions agreed on the abandonment of welfare measures by delegating them to organizations outside the company and underlining that the principal and single objective of the company was production.

Over time, these radical attitudes became those of a minority, and a more conciliatory approach developed. In the words of Alberto Boyer, a manager of Ansaldo⁶⁸ of Genoa, “We have tried to remove paternalism from the welfare service ... it has a negative impact on the welfare service ... provided by the company, which may offend the workers”. Instead, he summed up the situation effectively and proposed the distinction that “doing it without them is paternalism”, while “doing it with them means healthy human relations and collaboration”.⁶⁹ CW became the precious foundation of HR.

This shift is further confirmed by the second national HR convention, where it was indicated that HR was based on a shared “identity”⁷⁰ that gave a precise role to personnel management: “the professional, moral and psychological education of the workers ... organization of social, welfare and recreational services”.⁷¹ This was a more markedly “democratic approach” to the adoption of HR and its problematic relations with the Scientific Management of Taylorism, showing that there was a “management community who sought to enable workers to become active participants in the management of the labour process” (Kyle Bruce 2006, 193).

The issue remained of how to eliminate the paternalist use of welfare for company ends. A partial solution was found by using social workers, professional figures who engaged in a dialogue with the workers to understand their problems in relation to “well-being” in the company, even dealing with difficult family relations when these impacted on a worker’s peace of mind.

⁶⁷ Edison pioneered the production and distribution of electricity and had an extremely important role in the Italian economy until nationalization of the sector in 1962 (Bruno Bezza 1986).

⁶⁸ Ansaldo and the companies it controlled in the post-World War One period constituted Italy’s principal industrial group, and when it came under state ownership following World War Two, it remained one of the country’s leading shipbuilders; *Storia dell’Ansaldo* (1994-2002), in particular Giorgio Mori (2000).

⁶⁹ *Le relazioni umane nell’industria. Atti del 1° convegno nazionale. Milano 27 aprile 1954* (1954, 27).

⁷⁰ “A policy of human relations of the kind we suggest is that there is an area of identity, a point of convergence between the basic interests of the employer and those of the worker” by Umberto Balsini, head of personnel in Montecatini, in *La direzione del personale. Atti del secondo convegno nazionale per le relazioni umane nell’industria* (1955, 40).

⁷¹ Mario Fasciano, director of personnel at Innocenti (*ibid.*, 47).

The Social Worker: The Welfare Mediator

In this sense, the Confindustria “believes that social workers can be very useful in different areas of company activity, collaborating directly with executives and middle managers to seek solutions that help improve human relations and safeguard the personality of the workers”.⁷² Social workers were asked to encourage workers to trust and appreciate company management; their mediation was intended to overcome practices that the industrialists’ representatives saw as causing “workers constant mortification or humiliation with every concession over and above the relations defined in their contracts”, and the job of the social workers was to enhance “the worker’s personality”.⁷³

The debate subsequently included concrete examples of the service rendered by the social workers in two famous companies: one was a branch of Unilever, the other Pirelli.⁷⁴ Unilever established its social service in 1961. Managed by a qualified social worker with a “diploma”, the service was independent of the other management structures in order to facilitate contact with the workers. The social worker’s job consisted of collecting the workers’ requests for intervention in order to enable “the individual to integrate into the working community”, and their task also extended to the workers’ families. Their intervention consisted of organizing face-to-face meetings, communicating problems to the “head” of the personnel function, and even contacting the health service.⁷⁵

With regard to Pirelli, the magazine *“L’Assistenza sociale nell’industria italiana”* (“Social Work in Italian Industry”) published an article on the annual report of the Pirelli group social services managers. The service was involved in three distinct areas. The first area concerned the psychological and social problems of individual employees in relation to their place in the company community and their family relationships.⁷⁶ The second area of activity involved enabling new employees to adapt to the company by familiarizing them with the company’s characteristics, and the social service was presented as their intermediary for all problems involving their daily work.⁷⁷ The third area concerned company structures, so that the social service facilitated communication between middle management, executives and workers.⁷⁸ A summary of the work by Pirelli’s social services was provided with a concrete example of intervention in one of the group’s Italian factories at Arco Felice in the province of Naples.⁷⁹

⁷² “I Sindacati e la Confindustria di fronte al servizio sociale di fabbrica”; see also Marconcini in *// servizio sociale di fabbrica* (1969, 25-27).

⁷³ *L’assistenza sociale nell’industria italiana* (1967a, 28-30).

⁷⁴ Pirelli was founded in 1872 by Giovan Battista, and was from the start one of the major producers of natural rubber; in the twentieth century it became an international leader in tyre manufacturing; see Bezza (1987) and Fabio Lavista (2015).

⁷⁵ *L’assistenza sociale nell’industria italiana* 1967a.

⁷⁶ “Workers usually contact the social workers because of psychological and social problems, and the most frequently recurring situations concern dissatisfaction or maladjustment in the family or at work, or else regard the upbringing of subnormal children or bad behavior” (*L’assistenza sociale nell’industria italiana* 1967b, 69).

⁷⁷ “The purpose of the social worker is: to present company resources (educational assistance, school-type courses, retirement home, cultural activities, sporting activities, various types of paperwork, consultancy regarding accidents outside the workplace, suggestions box ... the Piero Pirelli professional institute” (*ibid*, 72).

⁷⁸ “direct ... activity so that that the social service is increasingly recognized, perceived and used as a staff service, and to communicate the opinions and needs of the base in order to adapt the company social services to them” (*ibid*).

⁷⁹ To illustrate the extent of Pirelli’s welfare activity, in 1951 its “healthcare” sector alone had the following: 685 affiliated doctors, including 616 general practitioners and 69 specialists (6 of whom were in the Bicocca medical center); 12 home care assistants; 73 affiliated hospitals; 20 clinics for specialist treatments, 680 pharmacies (*Fatti e notizie. Periodico interno della Pirelli S.p.A di Milano*. 1951).

Another important example was the *Società Idroelettrica Piemontese* (Piedmontese Hydroelectric Company; SIP).⁸⁰ Its vast array of social measures⁸¹ were managed by its social services and extended to the company's entire network of production units scattered across a broad territory.⁸²

Another suggestion from Confindustria led to social workers managing recreational activities, organized via the company's social club (*dopolavoro*), with the explicit aim of strengthening the feeling of belonging to the company community.⁸³ In addition, social workers were given the task of overcoming "the mistrust of workers who accuse employers of having ulterior political motives ... [while] there was a need for a neutral party to seek a psychological balance between employer and employee",⁸⁴ and CW measures were indicated as the best way "to eliminate shortages or needs, and especially of to raise the cultural tone". This approach, with the social worker as a mediator, meant that CW no longer appeared as the paternalism that had been so heavily criticized. According to Confindustria, welfare was "the tissue connecting all company social initiatives and services for employees: holiday camps, education grants, cultural and recreational activities",⁸⁵ and the report by the Milanese *Istituto per il Servizio Sociale di Fabbrica* (Industrial Social Service Institute) emphasized that "the social workers' collaboration has proven to be very useful for the functioning of company social measures".⁸⁶

Research in the late 1960s (see Table 1 below) shows that a rapid increase in the number of social workers was then followed by a significant reduction in the very years preceding the rapid insurgence of conflict in the "hot autumn" of 1969 (Rita Cutini 2018).⁸⁷ Many social workers were directly employed by companies, and their numbers rose markedly over a three-year period (a 73 percent increase 1962-1964) before levelling, although the majority of social workers were employed by "specialized organizations" like those mentioned above, which were generally promoted by the companies themselves.

⁸⁰ SIP competed for many years with Edison for the leadership of Italy's electricity industry until the sector's nationalization in 1962 (Adriana Castagnoli 1993).

⁸¹ "A Montessori nursery school, holiday camps, scholarships, advanced professional training courses, legal and tax advice, the most modern healthcare facilities, individual grants, etc." (*La direzione del personale: Atti del secondo convegno nazionale per le Relazioni umane nell'Industria*. 1955, 148).

⁸² "SIP employees are located in the most diverse places because of the nature of their work: external sites, power stations, mountain dams and reservoirs. The work of our Social Service reaches everywhere, and it has been asked to intervene in around 400 specific cases in the last year: granting loans, housing problems, sanatorium and hospital treatment, children's admissions to boarding schools, paperwork in external offices and bodies, care for accident victims and their families" (*ibid*).

⁸³ For the origin and spread of company social clubs, see De Grazia (1981).

⁸⁴ "Today this appears as an instrument of company solidarity and education that tends to improve not only the moral conditions of individual workers but also human relations in the workplace" (R. Paoloni 1964, 27).

⁸⁵ *L'assistenza sociale nell'industria italiana* (1967c, 78).

⁸⁶ *Il servizio sociale di fabbrica* (1969, 36).

⁸⁷ In Italy, as in many other European countries, 1969 was marked by profound social conflict, and the onset of lasting tension in industrial relations also had an important impact on CW, although this aspect has not been sufficiently explored by historical research. The literature on this issue is extensive, and sufficiently well-known not to require specific treatment; for a general overview, see Guido Crainz (2015).

Table 1
Factory social workers, 1961-1968

	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Company employees	158	170	271	297	295	276	273	270
Employees from industrial associations	81	81	72	74	68	63	62	61
Employees of specialized organizations	319	450	587	585	599	556	557	563
Freelance professionals	24	46	67	68	68	25	25	25
Total factory social workers	582	747	997	1024	1030	920	917	919

Source: *Il servizio sociale di fabbrica* (1969, 59).

Besides the quantitative data, their guidance was extremely important in cases that are emblematic of Italian industry. Social workers trained by UCID operated in some of the most important Italian companies, like Bassetti, where they met both advantages and disadvantages.⁸⁸ The social service was implemented at different production branches between 1956 and 1957. Its main tasks concerned the integration of new employees, relations between workers and company management, and company cultural and welfare activities. The greatest difficulties it had concerned relations with company management, little inclined to understand and share management of employees with the social workers, while the workers themselves found it difficult to accept "psychoanalytical" methodologies used to evaluate their attitudes to work. Another critical issue concerned decisions about career progression; this generated bitter conflict between the social workers and the "team leaders", who did not always agree on evaluations of single workers.⁸⁹ The major difficulties arose from the mistrust of the "team leaders", who were unwilling to accept mediation by social workers, especially in matters they considered to be in their own sphere of competence, such as decisions about promotion or training. Another delicate question was that of interventions regarding technological improvements; this impacted on the team leaders' area of competence, and they were unwilling to involve the social workers in managing these complex organization processes.⁹⁰ Lastly, the relations with trade union representatives were extremely conflictual; their scepticism about collaborating with the social workers stemmed from fear of losing the backing of the workforce. However, the delicate terrain of personal cases related to problems in workers' private lives was an area in which social workers achieved considerable success.⁹¹

⁸⁸ The textile company Bassetti had several production sites in the 1950s, mostly in Lombardy, with a total of 3,800 workers (<https://www.zucchettibassetti.com.it>). Other examples in the production sector include: Barilla (agrifood); Borletti (engineering; sewing machines); OM (vehicles); OSRAM (electrical equipment); Tecnomasio Brown Boveri (electromechanics); and Edisonvolta for the energy sector and Rinascente for mass distribution. In the period 1958-1966, the number of companies with social workers trained by the UCID Secretariat rose from 31 to 61, with a clear prevalence of large industrial and services firms concentrated in northern Italy (Milanese 2017-2018, 264-272).

⁸⁹ In the first year, 1957, interventions by the Social Service provided by the UCID at Bassetti dealt with 49 cases, and 105 in the following year; of a total head office workforce of 195, mostly consisting office staff, 80 turned to the Social Service (Milanese 2017-2018, 289).

⁹⁰ As confirmation of the crucial importance of this relationship, of the Service's 201 interventions in 1959, a total of 58 concerned problems at work and 54 concerned tensions with "team leaders" (*ibid*, 300).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the Italian situation shows that CW took hold from the very outset when the industrialization process started, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first large enterprises were born, and continued to be an essential component of the practices used to build and consolidate the company as a community, based on mutual recognition of interests and aims that both employers and workers shared. The development of HR from its beginnings to full deployment in company management shows that it was initially viewed as a means of denying the usefulness of CW and justifying its suppression, but that a shift took place over time so that HR was integrated into the most systematic and consolidated welfare services of the companies examined.

The discussion launched with the first national conventions in 1954 indicates that Italian companies were receptive to the ideas originating from HR experiments in the USA, but that they adapted these ideas to their own company practices. The “team leader”, who played a vital role in human resources management, also found his work helped by company provision of social and welfare services. Relations between worker and company were such a delicate matter that it was necessary to involve a professional figure, the social worker, who could ensure the control and benefits deriving from a more efficient and personalized selection of the services provided.

HR definitely helped to increase the amount of attention paid to workers’ social problems, even outside the workplace, suggesting the need to involve professionals who could gain the workers’ trust and directly manage the social and welfare problems of individual workers. The aim was to establish relations extending beyond the working hours and the workplace, in order to maintain solid links with the company during workers’ free-time activities, and with the services provided to their families. This was an extremely delicate role, because it contrasted with the activity of the trade union representatives, who aimed to negotiate and manage CW directly.⁹²

The need to update business practices, especially in the delicate field of HR, led Italy’s major companies, such as Falck, FIAT and Olivetti, to promote associations that trained these professional figures so that they could also work in smaller companies. Here was a true commitment to private training that could modify the management policy of these companies, which were influenced by the USA but also careful not to dissipate the specific characteristics of their own social care traditions.

Our knowledge about the effective operation of the professional social workers is still insufficiently detailed. Their work ran the risk of removing the original sense of CW by weakening identification with the company providing benefits, and there was also the risk of competition and conflict with the unions, who aimed to regulate CW by contract and to entrust its management to their own representatives.⁹³ This requires further study of factory experience, in order to examine the concrete impact of social workers and its persistence over time.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, this study indicates the extent to which CW developed from the original paternalism of the 1800s to become a component of company organization and is a

⁹² For the exclusion of trade union representation from the “company family”, see Bertucelli (1997b, 205-207; 2005).

⁹³ For an example of tension in negotiations regarding welfare and the conflicts created by its regulation via agreements with the trade unions, see Musso (2009).

⁹⁴ Particular attention was dedicated to the professional training of the social workers, especially in the most-studied case of the Social Secretariat of the UCID, where the courses multiplied. But both entrepreneurs and unions distrusted such social workers for a long time, a distrust sharpened even further during the early 1970s by the bitter conflicts between employers and the unions, leading to the introduction of the Workers’ Statute, which gave a much more important role to the trade unions in companies (Milanese 2017-2018, 273).

constituent element of companies that allows them to function concretely with reciprocal relations between their “human resources”.

Ultimately, like other international experiences, post-war modernization proves that “the private model with its company-level services and insurance-based social security was still a ‘first-order’ preference of the employers” and “an important tool for generating trust at the company level” (Fellman 2019, 682). While CW was reduced only as a consequence of the consolidation of the welfare state with its financial impact on workers and companies and of the turbulent industrial relations pervaded by ideologies of social conflict, it did not come to an end.⁹⁵ There are two notable areas where CW had played an important role, although in the final decades of the twentieth century it was to a large extent replaced by the intervention of the state. The first was healthcare: up until the 1960s, company mutual funds were largely autonomous, but in the 1970s the growing cost of sustaining them and the obligation to adhere to state legislation meant that healthcare became public (Nicola Martinelli 2017, 116-118). A similar situation is found for housing, where diverse workers’ villages indicated the broad scope of company intervention (Augusto Ciuffetti 2004; Gian Luigi Fontana 2014); following implementation of the INA-Casa Plan of the 1950s, these were increasingly replaced by wide-ranging interventions of public authorities.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ “Further Research, is, however, needed to establish whether corporate welfare’s role in personnel management was mainly aimed at limiting wage claims, neutralizing industrial unrest, increasing the employees’ loyalty and productivity or a mix of all these reasons” (Raspadori 2021, 292).

⁹⁶ *Fanfani e la casa. Gli anni Cinquanta e il modello italiano di welfare state, Il piano INA – Casa* (2002); purely as an example, excluding education, the welfare state’s share of Italy’s GDP rose from less than 10 percent to over 20 percent in the period 1960-1980, (Battilani and Benassi 2013, 9); for an analytic account of the Italian welfare state with special attention to the items relating to work, see Maurizio Ferrera, Valeria Fargion, and Matteo Jessuola (2012).

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