

THE ROLE OF ECONOMISTS IN PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT AFTER THE UNIFICATION OF ITALY (1861-1922)

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Introduction

The present paper is based on the results of an extensive research on ‘The Economists in the Italian parliament, 1861-1922’ we have promoted, coordinated and carried out in the last decade. This research has examined both the activities of the most eminent economists who became members of parliament until the rise of fascism (Augello and Guidi 2003a), and the main economic debates within the two chambers, mirroring the dramatic problems that arose in the transition from an agriculturally-based economy to an industrial society (Augello and Guidi 2002). We have also attempted a quantitative analysis of the profiles and activities of the thirty academic economists who became MPs during this period (Augello and Guidi 2005b), while a more qualitative analysis has been provided by Augello and Guidi (2003b). Furthermore, we have promoted a comparative research on the role of economists in parliament in the main European countries, in America and Japan, and this research gave us the opportunity to understand the specificities of the Italian case in an international perspective (Augello and Guidi 2005a; 2005c; 2005d; 2005e). A widening of the perspective to the post WW2 period has been attempted in Augello and Guidi (2006). The present paper aims to reconsider these studies from the vantage point offered by the historiographical debate on the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy. It examines the participation of a broadly defined group of economists in parliamentary and government activities, focusing on their role in debates and in law making, their contribution to policy making, and the role that political economy had in parliamentary debates.

Most of the liberal revolutions of 1848-1849 ended in tragedy for those who hoped for unification and liberalization. Both in the regions of northern Italy under the rule of the Austrian crown and in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the restoration of official authority was accompanied by a repression that obliged the majority of liberal intellectuals, among whom there were many economists, to fly to Piedmont, the only area in which a liberal constitution was preserved. Some economists participated in the short-lived parliaments and governments created in 1848 and 1849: Francesco Ferrara was a member of the Sicilian parliament and a component of the unfortunate deputation that was sent to Turin to ask King Carlo Alberto to allow his son Amedeo to accept the crown of Sicily (Fauci 1995: 66-74); Pellegrino Rossi was prime minister of the Roman Republic, where he was murdered in troubled circumstances at the opening of the Chamber of Deputies on 15 November 1849 (Ledermann 1929); Pietro Torrigiani participated in the provisional government of the Duchy of Parma, offering the local troops to Carlo Alberto during the siege of the Austrian fortress of Peschiera (Augello 2003: 82); finally, some Neapolitan economists, like Antonio Ciccone and Antonio Scialoja, took part in the liberal revolution of 1848, becoming members of parliament. After escaping to Turin, the latter was vice-minister in the Sardinian government in 1859-60 (Gioli 2003: 2).

An important fact is that after the unification of Italy the process of academic institutionalization of political economy was radically accelerated, fostering the spread of economic

studies and the professionalization of economists. This in turn had an important feedback in the prestige economists enjoyed in political life.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section outlines the political situation of Italy in the so called 'liberal age' and reviews the general state of economic studies in this period; the second section discusses the definition of 'economist' and examines the social and professional characteristics of economists in Parliament; a third section studies the nature of the economists' contribution to parliamentary and government activities, the intellectual and political role they played, and the relationship between their scientific activities and their political commitments; finally, the last section discusses the contribution that political economy gave to parliamentary debates and policy orientations, and *vice versa* the stimuli that the economists' political activities gave to the evolution of economics in Italy in the liberal period.

1. The 'liberal age' and the growth of economic studies

Historians usually refer to the period of Italian history between 1861 and 1922 as the 'liberal age'. After the military conquest of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1860 by a semi-official army led by Giuseppe Garibaldi, the new Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861. An institutional setting based on constitutional monarchy and on a parliament elected under limited suffrage was extended to the whole country, on the basis of the liberal constitution conceded by Carlo Alberto of Savoy, which the Kingdom of Sardinia had enjoyed since 1848. To mark the continuity with the past and the leading role of the House of Savoy in unification of the country, the first King of Italy retained the epithet of 'the second' instead of adopting the more obvious title of Vittorio Emanuele I. The parliaments elected after the unification also conserved the numbering dating from the 'Albertine' constitution, and after a short transitory term in 1860 (seventh parliament), the first national assembly elected in 1861 was called 'eighth parliament'. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister who had been the craftsman of the unification, Camillo Benso, count of Cavour, died immediately after proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy. Two regions were still excluded from the newly created Italian Kingdom: the Venetian area, dominated by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until 1866 (Trento and Trieste were annexed only after WW1), and Rome, which was conquered only on 20 September 1870 and soon thereafter became the capital of Italy.¹

The Italian parliament was divided into two houses: the Chamber of Deputies, which was elected for five years, and the Senate, whose members were appointed for life by the Crown, following a complicated system of representation that mirrored the composition of the national *élite*. Until the reform of 1882, the franchise was limited to those who were literate and paid a tax of 40 liras per annum, featuring less than eight per cent of the male adult population.² But in 1882 the suffrage was radically extended, the requirement now being limited to completion of the first two years of primary school or payment of a tax of 19.80 liras. The electorate rose as a consequence to 25% of the male adult population and a great number of middlemen entered parliament. Universal male suffrage was introduced in 1911, while women had to wait until 1946 to have access to a polling station.

Immediately after unification, the cabinets appointed by the Crown, with the help of parliament, engaged first in a strategy of 'state building' and then in a huge effort of 'nation

¹ For a synthesis in English on this period see the recently updated Mack Smith (1997). A recent outlook, in Italian, is Sabbatucci and Vidotto (1995, 1999).

² Some professional groups had the suffrage independently of their income. These included university professors, civil servants and graduates. See Mastropaolo (2002).

building', which aimed at the unification of cultural and legal traditions and at the economic and social modernization of the country. From an economic point of view, in 1861 Italy was an agricultural country³. In Lombardy, Piedmont and in the Venetian area a developed agriculture based on silk production, rice and farming profited from integration with rural manufactures and a network of rich commercial towns, whereas in central and southern Italy, but also in various areas of the North, the persistence of outdated systems of tenancy was one of the main causes of the immobilism and poverty that prevailed there. In order to promote the development of the country, the right wing ministries in power between 1861 and 1876 focused on normative and administrative unification, infrastructures, schooling and free trade, whereas the left wing cabinets that succeeded them after the so-called 'Parliamentary Revolution' of 1876 adopted a more interventionist strategy – especially after the adoption of the protectionist 'general tariff' of 1887 – in order to promote the industrialization of the country. By the end of the nineteenth century the typical contradictions of modernization had already exploded. The northern part of Italy was rapidly industrialized, whereas the ancient kingdom of Naples sank into an aggravated state of backwardness. Trade unionism and socialist ideas spread among the working classes, and a socialist party was created in 1892. Although the Vatican *non-expedit* of January 1868 obliged Catholics not to engage in politics, a Catholic movement rapidly developed in civil society. The cabinets headed or manoeuvred by Giovanni Giolitti tried to solve the contradictions of the country with a strategy of 'government by administration' and conciliation with the socialist party and the labour movement (Pombeni 2002). However, during the first decade of the twentieth century the newly created organizations of landowners and manufacturers embraced a more and more intransigent attitude toward the working class. After WW1, these tensions exploded and culminated in the *coup d'état* orchestrated by Benito Mussolini in October 1922, which marked the rise of the fascist regime.

The period under review was also decisive for the institutionalization of political economy. After the Restoration, the reactionary governments of the Italian regional states had seriously restricted the teaching of economics at university, considering it a vehicle of liberal and democratic ideas. But following the unification of Italy in 1861 chairs of political economy were introduced in the majority of law faculties (Augello and Giva 1988). In 1876, the new university regulations added the teaching of statistics, while public finance was established as a compulsory course in the academic year 1885-86, following a period in which it already existed as an optional course. In the generality of cases, both these specialities were taught by economists. Likewise in the eighties, the teaching of economic disciplines was introduced in the two Higher Schools of Commerce that were created in Genoa and Bari, similar to the first institution of this kind which had been founded in Venice in 1868.⁴ This expansion multiplied the opportunities for economists to obtain a university position. The number of academic economists rose from 8 in 1860 to 26 in 1880, and to 41 in 1890, a figure that remained approximately stable for the rest of the liberal period (Augello and Guidi 2004). The academic recruitment, based on the instrument of 'free lectureship' of which we will speak later, functioned as a mechanism of co-optation into the scientific community of economists, while the

³ For a synthesis on the economic condition of Italy in the liberal age see Castronovo (1995), chapters 1-3, and Zamagni (1993), part 1.

⁴ The Higher Schools of Commerce (Scuole Superiori di Commercio) were of a university level. Other institutions of this kind were created in Milan (Commercial Luigi Bocconi University, a private institution founded in 1902), Rome (1905), Turin (1911) and Trieste (1918). They were subsequently transformed into Faculties of Economics. Another similar institution was the Higher School of Social Sciences (Scuola Superiore di Scienze Sociali) of Florence, established in 1875, and later transformed into a Faculty of Political Sciences. This picture can be completed with the establishment of the first Higher Schools of Agriculture in Milan (1870) and Portici, near Naples (1872), followed by Perugia in 1895, where the teaching of political economy was introduced for limited periods. See Augello and Guidi (1988).

birth of the first Institutes of Economics at the universities of Pisa, Siena and Turin⁵ and the institution of grants and prizes, coupled with increasing opportunities to go abroad for post-graduate studies in economics, favoured a more specialist training of the younger generation.

These phenomena corresponded to the spread of economic studies in Italy. A large number of economic textbooks were published, and a host of journals specialized in economic and social sciences emerged out of an already lively production of learned and scientific periodicals, promoting the debate on political economy and the spread of economic ideas within public opinion (Augello and Guidi 1996). Political economy was also popularized through dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The Genoan economist Gerolamo Boccardo published a *Dizionario della economia politica e del commercio* (1857-61; 2nd edition: 1875-77; 3rd revised edition: 1881-82) and was the editor of an important universal encyclopaedia (Guidi 1994; Augello and Guidi 2001c). Finally, the institution of economic associations, often of a practical and political orientation, stimulated the debate on economic theory between opposed schools of thought and fostered the institutionalization of political economy in the university system (Augello and Guidi 2001b). A consequence of this intense activity was the rapid assimilation of the international economic debate: the empirical methodology of the historical school was largely accepted from the mid-1860s onwards, while marginalism penetrated at the end of the eighties and became the orthodox approach by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century (Buchanan 1960; Barucci 1972; 2003).

The Italian economists in the liberal age: social and intellectual characteristics

Before undertaking a detailed analysis of the role that the economists exerted in the Italian parliament, it may be useful to discuss the definition of 'economist' which seems to be the best suited to the context of mid nineteenth-century Italy. This task is far from being easy, since the social and intellectual features of the economists dramatically evolved during the period under review.

A further complication is represented by the fact that, as shown by the papers contained in Augello and Guidi (2002), references to political economy and its principles were very frequent in parliamentary debates, although sometimes they were only instrumental. One of the most widely represented groups in parliament was that of jurists and lawyers. Among them, those who had graduated in law after 1861 had attended regular courses in political economy, while the next generation had been trained in statistics and public finance as well. The learned journals they read and the juridical encyclopaedias they consulted were rich in articles on economic topics. But even those of the earlier Risorgimento generation who entered parliament after the unification of Italy had received some economic training. For example, the group of Neapolitan jurists of which Pasquale Stanislao Mancini was an eminent representative had studied political economy in the private schools of law that were set up in Naples in the 1830s and 1840s for the training of young candidates to legal professions (Di Battista 1983: 94-8), and political economy had also been present in the curriculum of legal studies at the Turin University since the 1840s.

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A Historical and Legal Seminar was established at the University of Pisa in 1876, and a Legal Circle was created at the University of Siena in 1880. Both had an economic section. The Institute for Practical Exercises in Political and Legal Sciences of Turin University was founded in 1881. Its 'class' of economics was transformed in 1893 into an autonomous Workshop of Political Economy. These institutes had been the creation of some of the most representative economists of the second half of the nineteenth century, who saw in them a centre for the training of the younger generation of economists: Giuseppe Toniolo in Pisa, Achille Loria and later Augusto Graziani in Siena, Salvatore Cognetti de Martiis in Turin.

A similar familiarity with political economy was also widespread among those protagonists of unification and of the political life of the liberal age, who strictly speaking cannot be considered economists. Noteworthy names include Camillo Benso count of Cavour (Romeo 1984: 279-97), Marco Minghetti (Gherardi 2003), Quintino Sella (Are 1974), and Sidney Sonnino (Haywood 1999; Carlucci 2002), all of them prime ministers, and Stefano Jacini, who was the president of the parliamentary committee for the agricultural inquiry (1877-1881) (Caracciolo 1958; Guidi 2002). Political economy was part of the private education these descendants of noble and wealthy families had received in their youth. Moreover, the network created by economic associations, academies, journals, newspapers, and publishing houses generated an ongoing debate concerning the economic problems of the country, in which the arguments of political economy were clearly echoed.

The case of the representatives of agricultural, industrial and banking interests who were present in parliament was similar. The examples of Alessandro Rossi (Are 1974) and Giuseppe Colombo (Lacaita 1985), who represented the industrial interest in the Senate from 1886 to the first decade of the twentieth century, were the most significant. Unlike the majority of politicians, whose background was based on law and humanities, these members of the northern bourgeoisie had received a technical and scientific training associated with economic instruction. This peculiarity was responsible for the early attention these figures paid to the currents of industrialist and protectionist economics that emerged in the central decades of the nineteenth century.

Therefore, political economy was present in parliamentary debates even independently of the presence of a specialized group of experts. But one might ask whether such a specialized figure truly existed in post-1861 Italy and was present in parliament.

There are two kinds of criteria that can be employed to answer these questions. We might classify them as 'objective' and 'subjective' respectively. The most important objective criteria are those of *authorship* and *profession*. The former was certainly the most obvious for contemporary observers, especially at the beginnings of the liberal age, since publishing books and articles on economic topics with sufficient continuity was considered to signal a vocation for this subject. However, it would be difficult to make a sharp distinction between economists and non-economists on the basis of a rigorous criterion of authorship. On the one hand, a large number of politicians, industrialists and agriculturists involved in policy making published economic pamphlets and articles, often hosted by learned and economic journals. The question is whether these works should be considered as evidence of scientific proficiency in political economy, or occasional tracts of a political and practical nature. On the other hand, many scholarly economic authors never dealt with theoretical matters, preferring to focus on applied issues which were, nevertheless, considered part of the science of political economy – education, poor laws, population, colonies, and emigration. Moreover, in some cases their 'scientific' activity was concentrated in a single period of their life, either before or after their political career.

The criterion of authorship is therefore ambiguous when employed in isolation. However, it may prove useful in association with other criteria, often of a more subjective nature. For example, a single book published by Marco Minghetti (1859) earned him an undisputed *reputation* of being an economist. Minghetti (1818-1886) was one of the political leaders of the Right party, which held the majority in the Chamber of Deputies from 1860 to 1876. He was the minister of internal affairs in the first national cabinet headed by Cavour in 1860, and was elected to parliament in the same year. He was later minister of finances and of agriculture, industry and trade, and was twice appointed Prime Minister (1863-1864 and 1873-1876). A similar case was that of Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927), who became professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Padua in 1863 and was elected to the House of Deputies in 1870,

where he remained until 1921, after which he was appointed to a seat in the Senate. He was repeatedly minister of 'agriculture, industry and trade', of the treasury, of finances, and of 'mail and telegraph'. Finally he was Prime Minister from 1910 to 1911. Luzzatti's works on various topics of political economy, and his militancy in the cooperative movement and in the development of technical and commercial education, were the basis for his reputation as an economist, which was sanctioned in 1895 when he was awarded a lectureship in political economy at the university of Perugia for some years, while continuing to teach Constitutional Law at the University of Rome (Petrovich 2003).

A second objective criterion is that of *profession*. In mid nineteenth-century Italy, the fact of regularly lecturing in economics in some university, with or without tenure, was already a distinctive mark of the economist's identity. However, this criterion may be also confusing, at a time in which the demand for economists was at times higher than the supply due to the rapid academic institutionalization of economics, as demonstrated by the number of courses of political economy, public finance and statistics that were entrusted to professors of law and (to a lesser extent) philosophy, sometimes for long periods. On the one hand, however, the major authors of contributions to economics sooner or later became professors of economics. On the other hand, the fact of being tenured in economics produced many disciplinary conversions, when this was not the outcome of spontaneous evolution. Lastly, the development of economic teaching and research at university level undoubtedly made the new generations of economists recruited in the 1880s and after more professional from the point of view of training (Petrovich 2003), 'specialization' and 'persistence' (Stigler 1965).

As a matter of fact, the evolution of the institutionalization of economics during the liberal age produced an increasing professionalization of academic economists. Augello, analysing the 50 scholars who taught with continuity political economy from 1861 to 1900, identifies some generational differences following two criteria (Augello 1992). The first is the period of training, which allows identification of three 'generations':

1. those who graduated before 1861, most of them in law;⁶ only a minority of these economists attended a regular course in political economy during their university studies;
2. those who graduated between 1861 and 1876, all of them in law; these economists had more opportunities to learn some rudiments of economics during their training, since political economy was compulsory in law faculties;
3. those who graduated after 1876; among these, the majority graduated in law faculties, where they could attend lectures in political economy, statistics and, especially after 1886, public finance, while others graduated in the Higher Schools of Commerce, where they also attended courses of economic history, business administration, banking and finance. In addition, some went abroad for post-graduate studies in economics.

A second criterion is provided by the period of recruitment; this criterion identifies two generations:

1. those who obtained a professorship before 1876; these economists worked in an academic environment in which political economy was considered an appendix to law studies;
2. those who became professors after 1876; these economists benefited from an organization of law studies in which economics had a wider scope, along with administrative and political studies, while some of them pioneered economic teaching in the Higher Schools of Commerce created in this period.

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Exceptions are Francesco Ferrara and Vittorio Ellena, who had no graduation.

Following the first of these criteria, we can observe that the first generation had less intensive training and specialization in economics than the two others. Post-graduate studies were a rarity, and periods abroad for specialization were unknown. The traditional channel of specialization was the so-called ‘free lectureship’. In order to be granted the title of ‘free lecturer’, young scholars were required to write a memoir on some scientific topic under the supervision of a titular professor. They then submitted their work to a jury of a university. This title allowed them to give a series of non-compulsory lectures within the main university courses, and gradually became a prerequisite for access to tenure. However, this channel of specialization concerned only a minority of economists. Moreover, almost one half of them started their academic career by teaching non-economic subjects, and continued lecturing on such topics even after they were tenured in political economy. The average age at which tenure in economics was obtained was over forty. Moreover, none of these economists started their active life as a lecturer or professor of economics. Some were employed in the civil service, others were politicians, and others were lawyers, physicians and journalists. For only a minority did their active working life begin with a lectureship or professorship, albeit in legal topics. Finally, some economists of this first generation abandoned their academic position to undertake other activities, especially in the political field.

Turning to the two generations that graduated after 1861, the professional character of their academic profile became more evident, especially for the third generation. The proportion of those graduated in law grew in the second generation, while the third generation was divided into those who graduated in law and those with a diploma from a Higher School of Commerce. The data concerning postgraduate studies are also significant. The new university regulations issued after the unification of Italy progressively transformed the title of ‘free lecturer’ into a necessary prerequisite for annual lectureships and tenures. This novelty explains why a majority of economists obtained this title. The somewhat infrequent cases of economists who had the opportunity to acquire specialized training abroad are also situated in these cohorts. Moreover, those who started their academic career with non-economic lectureships sank to zero in the third generation, and additional non-economic lectureships became a rarity. The average age upon obtaining the first lectureship or tenure decreased to thirty for the second generation and to an even younger age for the third generation. As to pre- and post-academic activities, the second generation was still largely characterized by a professional non-academic start and by some cases of abandonment, while one half of the third generation started as a lecturer or professor of economics, and none of this generation abandoned his tenure before retiring. In conclusion, it seems clear that the professionalization of economics received a strong impulse from the institutionalization of political economy in post-unification Italy, and by the end of the nineteenth century a figure of professional academic economist had definitively emerged.

Overall, the criterion of profession allowed us to identify no less than thirty academic economists who obtained a seat in parliament between 1860 and 1922.⁷ Cross-examination of the literature published by these authors confirms that all of them had sufficient expertise in economic science (Augello 1989; 1994).

This conclusion does not imply that the academic position was the only feature that distinguished an economist from a non-economist. The vantage point of parliamentary activities reveals the existence of another important road leading to specialized and ‘professional’ economics, that of the civil service, especially in the economic departments of the administration. Many talented young men, often with low levels of education, were recruited to the legislative and statistical services, where they received massive ‘on the spot’ training in economics and

statistics. This was partially a necessity for the young structures of the Italian State. But it was also the result of the enlightened vision of some influential figures, like Luigi Luzzatti, who was the most powerful politician in the ministry of agriculture, industry and trade, and Cesare Correnti and Luigi Bodio, who organized the department of statistics as a ‘brain trust’ at the ministers’ service.⁸ Some economists who entered Parliament originated from these departments of the administration, for example Vittorio Ellena, Carlo Francesco Ferraris, Agostino Magliani, and Luigi Bodio. It is interesting to observe that Antonio Scialoja – one of the more important economists of the Risorgimento generation who had published a treatise (Scialoja 1840) based on Jean-Baptiste Say’s doctrines, translated into French in 1844 – abandoned his chair of political economy at the university of Turin in 1849 to devote himself to political activities, and was active in post-unification economic departments of the civil service. Scialoja and Luzzatti were appointed in the 1870s to the head of the governmental committee for the ‘industrial inquiry’, which prepared the ground for the protectionist and industrialist turn of 1878 and 1887 (Are 1965; Prodi 1966).

Other brilliant economists – like Rodolfo Benini, Augusto Bosco, Enrico Raseri, Bonaldo Stringher, and Carlo Schanzer – were totally or partially trained in the statistical services of the department of agriculture, industry and trade. Although they did not enter Parliament, they played a major role in the special committees and councils which were created in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Many of them also became professors of economics in universities, while others, like Ellena (a future member of parliament), taught political economy in the special technical schools of agriculture created by the ministry of agriculture, industry and trade. The education they received determined a special vocation of these economists both as scholars and as politicians. As scientists, they made important contributions to empirical and statistical studies, while as members of parliament, ministers and members of governmental committees, they conceived of their political activity as a strictly technical service, inspired by values of loyalty and objectivity, and oriented to functions of expert information and backstage influence.

Finally, there were some protagonists of the scientific and political debate who, beyond authorship of important contributions to political economy, could boast of other entitlements to the qualification of economist. For example, Fedele Lampertico, although he never became professor, held a regular public course on political economy at the Accademia Olimpica of Vicenza from 1863 to 1866. The preparatory materials for these lectures were later gathered together and published in a bulky treatise entitled *L’economia dei popoli e degli stati* (1874-1884), which Francesco Ferrara (1874, p. 1009) – the main representative of *laissez-faire* classical political economy – ironically defined ‘the Gospel of Lombard-Venetian economists, and Fedele Lampertico their Messiah’ (Ferrara 1874: 1009). In fact, Lampertico played a major role in the launching of the new ‘school’ of economic thought based in the universities of Pavia (Lombardy) and Padua (Venetian region), which imported into Italy the modern quantitative approach to statistics and the empirical methodology of the German Historical School. He was the signatory – with Antonio Scialoja, Luigi Cossa and Luigi Luzzatti – of the ‘Circular of Padua’ (11 September 1874), which announced that a conference would be held in Milan and summoned all economists who subscribed to these methodological guidelines and were favourable to State intervention in social affairs and to the protection of national industry. The Milan conference created the *Associazione per il Progresso degli Studi Economici*, which actively promoted these policy objectives for more than a decade. But Lampertico was also a key figure in the academic institutionalization of economics. As a lifelong and very influential member of the Higher Council of Public Education, he was frequently present on the

⁸ See Marucco (1996), pp. 39-72; Melis (1996), pp. 108-13, 160-6, 203-16; Soresina (2001).

boards of examiners for the recruitment of university professors of economics. One of the reasons why he never became a professor himself was probably that he reputed his condition of 'perpetual examiner' incompatible with the role of applicant.

Another uncommon personage was Count Giovanni Arrivabene, who was a senator from 1860 to 1881. He came from a career as a journalist and writer on various subjects of political economy. For his liberal ideas, he became an exile and settled in Brussels, where he founded in 1855 – with Gustave de Molinari and Charles le Hardy de Beaulieu – the Société Belge d'Economie Politique of which he was elected president. Five years later, when the Società di Economia Politica was created in Turin, Arrivabene was elected its president (Erreygers 2001; Augello and Guidi 2001b).

As this short review shows, there were many entitlements that can legitimately be invoked for the definition of an economist. But textual analysis reveals that an ongoing effort of definition (and self-definition) regarding the nature and role of economists was an essential element of the discourse on political economy in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Therefore, another manner of identifying economists in the liberal age might consist in appealing to some 'subjective' or 'discursive' criteria emerging from textual sources such as biographies, memoirs, obituaries, correspondences, and parliamentary reports.

The main criteria emerging from the economic debate are those of self-awareness or self-definition, behaviour, and recognition or reputation. To begin with, those who consciously adopted a scientific and scholarly approach to economic policy defined themselves as 'economists' and emphasized their competence in the field of economics while presenting their opinions in parliament and in the press. Such an attitude was closely connected with a particular approach to political activities, based on careful examination of facts and statistical evidence, complex deductive reasoning relying on the laws of political economy, and supposed *super partes* attitude in controversial debates. Sometimes these highly competent figures could not conceal their contempt for less learned colleagues who ignored the complex chains of causation and interdependence that bind together economic variables. Finally, public recognition of the economist's status was sometimes bestowed on these experts. At times the economists in parliament were praised for their doctrinal erudition, and were listened to with attention, as the colleagues of Gerolamo Boccardo and Vittorio Ellena report in their obituaries. On other occasions they were defined as '*sui generis* politicians', as Ghino Valenti wrote in the obituary of Lampertico (Valenti 1907: 59). However there were also occasions when they encountered the impatience of their parliamentary colleagues, who had little patience with the dogmatism, intransigence and self-conceit the economists revealed in their speeches, the boring details they mentioned, and the lack of flexibility and political wisdom they sometimes demonstrated.

These 'subjective' criteria confirm that the increasing specialization and academic professionalization of economists produced a recognisable, albeit variegated, body of experts, whose proficiency and competence was acknowledged by public opinion. Their special attitudes could be distinguished even in their political activities. Although the science of political economy was a more widespread ingredient of political discourse, it was clear to contemporaries that the life of the Italian parliament was characterized *inter alia* by the presence of a distinct group of 'economists', largely identifiable with the academic profession.

Representation and policy-making: the role of economists in parliament

During the liberal age, the presence of economists in parliament was continuous although variable in its extent. In a House of Deputies composed of 625 members and in a Senate the

size of which changed according to the rhythm of appointments, consisting on average of 250 members,⁹ they were a trifling minority ranging from no more than ten to fifteen (see fig. 8.1). However, their weight appears more significant compared to that of other academic groups represented in parliament, and likewise in comparison to the total of academic economists outside parliament.

As to the first term of comparison, the evidence collected by Cammarano and Piretti (1996: 589, tab. 7) shows that the presence of academics with law degrees ranged from 54 in the period between 1861 and 1882 (i.e. before the first reform act) to 34 in the period between 1900 and 1919. As explained above, almost all academic economists had a degree in law, and a rough comparison with the data concerning their presence in parliament shows that the economists represented 30 to 40 per cent of parliamentary academics with law degrees. These figures were also constantly higher than those of academics with degrees in medicine (2 and 3 respectively) and engineering (8 and 4 respectively).¹⁰

Turning to the weight of parliamentary economists in the scientific community, in Augello and Guidi (2005) we showed that the average percentage of parliamentary economists out of their academic colleagues was as high as 20 per cent, a figure that reveals the profound political commitment of this category of scholars.

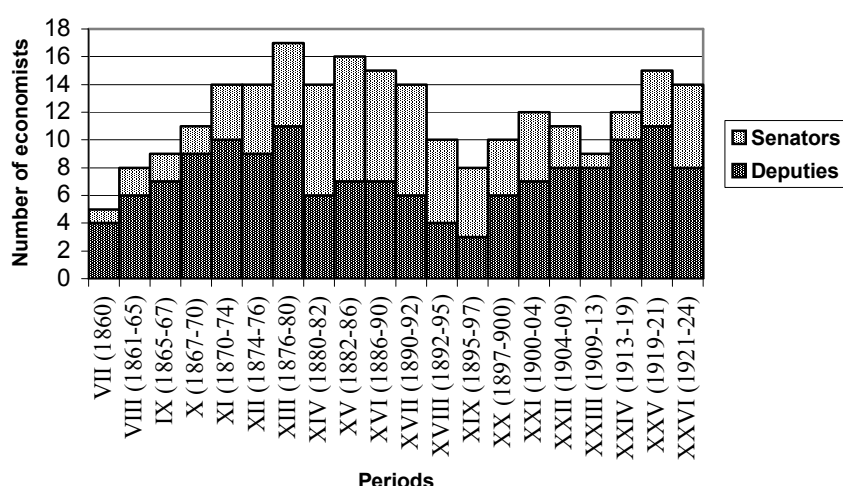


Figure 8.1 Number of economists in Parliament per period in which both Houses were in office (1860-1924)

Despite a negative trend between 1892 and 1900, the presence of economists in parliament was not significantly affected by changes in the extension of suffrage. Prior to 1882 university professors were eligible to be elected to the House of Deputies independently of the income qualification that was otherwise indispensable. As a consequence they were largely over-represented in parliament, and this partially explains the rapid growth in the number of parliamentary economists between 1860 and 1882. After that date, the fall in number of deputies was compensated by new appointments to the Senate, in conformity with a never accomplished constitutional design which aimed at transforming the Upper House into a ‘chamber of experts’. An analysis of parliamentary transactions reveals that the economists – with the

⁹ Members of the House of Deputies were elected every five years or at shorter intervals when parliament was dissolved by the crown. Senators were nominated by the crown ‘without limitation’ and were lifelong. As a consequence, the size of the Senate was variable.

¹⁰ See Augello and Guidi (2003), pp. xxxi-xxxviii, and Augello and Guidi (2005) for a more detailed quantitative account.

occasional exception, as in the case of Ferrara who probably never attended the Senate sessions – took this role very seriously, engaging in an intense activity of bill-drafting and participation in debates.

The 1880s and 1890s were also the eventful years of the Lombard-Venetian group of interventionist economists. Nominations of their members to the Senate were a consequence of the high reputation enjoyed by the leaders of this school of thought both in the academic field and in politics. The protectionist turn fostered by the governments of the Left wing in office after 1776 was inspired by these economists, although they generally sat on the right benches of parliament. Among the authors of the ‘Circular of Padua’, Antonio Scialoja and Fedele Lampertico were nominated in 1862 and 1873 respectively. Luigi Luzzatti succeeded in retaining his seat in the House of Deputies until 1921, when he was appointed senator, and only Luigi Cossa never entered parliament, although he was a lifelong member of the Higher Council of Public Education. Another economist who was sympathetic to this group was Angelo Messedaglia, who became professor of political economy at the University of Padua in 1858, moving to the University of Rome after his election to the House of Deputies in 1866. In Rome, he played a major role in the development of statistical studies, establishing a close connection between the university and the department of statistics of the civil service directed by Luigi Bodio (Parisi (2003), who had himself been a professor of political economy at the Venice Higher School of Commerce (directed by Francesco Ferrara) from 1868 to 1872 and became a senator at the end of the century. Messedaglia was appointed senator in 1883, after his defeat in the general election of 1882.

However, senatorial appointments were ecumenically granted to several outstanding spokesmen of the *laissez-faire* approach as well. One example is Ferrara, who sat in the House of Deputies between 1867 and 1880, was the minister of finances in the cabinet headed by Urbano Rattazzi in 1867, and was nominated senator in 1881. Ferrara was the most outstanding Italian economist of the mid-nineteenth century. He was the editor of the first two series of the *Biblioteca dell’economista*, a collection of classical textbooks in 26 volumes (1850-1868), and expounded an original ‘cost of reproduction’ theory of value, which is generally considered an antecedent of marginalist theory (Minelli, Guidi and Guccione 2004). Gerolamo Boccardo, who was favourable to the classical free-trade approach and continued Ferrara’s work as editor of the *Biblioteca dell’economista* (third series, 15 vols, 1876-1900), was also admitted to the Senate in 1877, without previous experience in the House of Deputies.

After 1900 the number of new nominations to the Senate diminished. However, this phenomenon was compensated by a further increase in the number of deputies. The general election of 1900 roughly coincided with the appointment of Giuseppe Zanardelli and Giovanni Giolitti as prime ministers (1901-1903 and 1903-1905 respectively), an event which inaugurated the so-called ‘Giolittian age’ (1901-1915). The cabinets headed or influenced by this statesman attempted to introduce the so-called ‘government by administration’. Many consultative councils were instituted in technical and economic areas of government, and a host of experts – among whom many economists – became their members. As a consequence, the role of the Senate as a ‘chamber of experts’ was partially set aside. But, on the other hand, a new generation of pugnacious economists had access to parliament as representatives of new and more modern parties, such as radicals, socialists, and (only at the end of the period) Catholics.

The radical group was an odd assemblage of different factions. Among the economists, it included the Sicilian statistician Napoleone Colajanni (Macchioro 2001; Bianchi 2003), who wavered between protectionism and free-trade and was favourable to State intervention in social policies. Another deputy elected as part of the radical grouping was Francesco Saverio

Nitti, who taught public finance at the University of Naples from 1899 and was the editor of the economic journal *La Riforma sociale* (Magnani 2003; Realfonzo, Forges Davanzati and Patalano 2003). Elected for the first time in 1904, he became minister of agriculture, industry and trade, subsequently, as Prime Minister in 1919-1920, he promoted a massive plan of intervention for development of the metropolitan area of Naples, based on low-cost electric energy supplied by State-owned companies, public housing and fiscal incentives to the industrial plants located in that area. Nitti also sponsored the nationalization of social insurance with the creation, in 1911, of a monopolistic State-owned company, the INA (National Institute of Insurances).

A very different group of radical economists was that composed by Antonio De Viti de Marco and Maffeo Pantaleoni (with Vilfredo Pareto supporting them from outside parliament). These economists were the protagonists of the marginalist revolution in Italy, whose main contributions to pure economics, public finance and sociology were translated into English and enjoyed some international reputation (Asso 2001; Fausto and De Bonis 2003). During parliamentary debates De Viti and Pantaleoni reported on the policy guidelines discussed within the Association for Economic Liberty (Michellini 2000), of radical *laissez-faire* tendency, and provided extensive coverage of these themes in the *Giornale degli economisti*, the most influential economic journal of which they were the proprietors and editors, using it as a weapon to spread their liberal ideas (Magnani 2003).

Among the socialists, the main representatives were Antonio Graziadei, who was elected in 1910 and was one of the founders of the Communist party in 1921, Arturo Labriola, elected in 1913, and Achille Loria, who was appointed to the Senate in 1919. The only Catholic elected to the House of Deputies for the Popular party, of Catholic tendencies, in 1919 was Vincenzo Tangorra, who taught public finance at the university of Pisa.

It therefore seems evident that among experts of an academic and/or scientific level, economists were one of the most widely represented categories in parliament. Their role was even more considerable within the group of 'technicians' with a natural political vocation, such as those with a training in law. Lastly, their presence in parliament was considerable even in the Giolittian age, and this may be considered as a sign of the significance they attributed to the legislative power and to parliamentary debates as an arena for the spread of political economy, and as a stepping stone for their engagement in government and in other administrative functions.

Another typical feature of the economists' parliamentary activity in the liberal age was the duration of their presence in parliament. It is known that before the formation of mass parties a Weberian figure of the professional politician had not yet appeared (Weber 1919; Mosca 1884). However, those MPs who sat in parliament for prolonged periods have been seen as something similar to 'proto-professional' members of the ruling class (Mastropaolo 1986: 44-5). These representatives devoted their whole life to political activities and lost contact with the social and professional milieu from which they originated. The case of economists in Parliament is interesting from this viewpoint (see fig. 8.2). Two well-known figures, Luzzatti and Paolo Boselli (the latter taught public finance at the University of Rome in the 1870s and 1880s and repeatedly held ministerial office, becoming Prime Minister between 1915 and 1917) sat in parliament for more than fifty years, six others for more than thirty years, and 19, i.e. one half of the total, for more than twenty years. It should also be remembered that the dramatic upheaval marked by the rise of fascism abruptly interrupted the political career of many liberal and socialist economists, who were obliged to resign and in many cases to flee abroad, while the presence of others, especially in the Senate, was only formal.

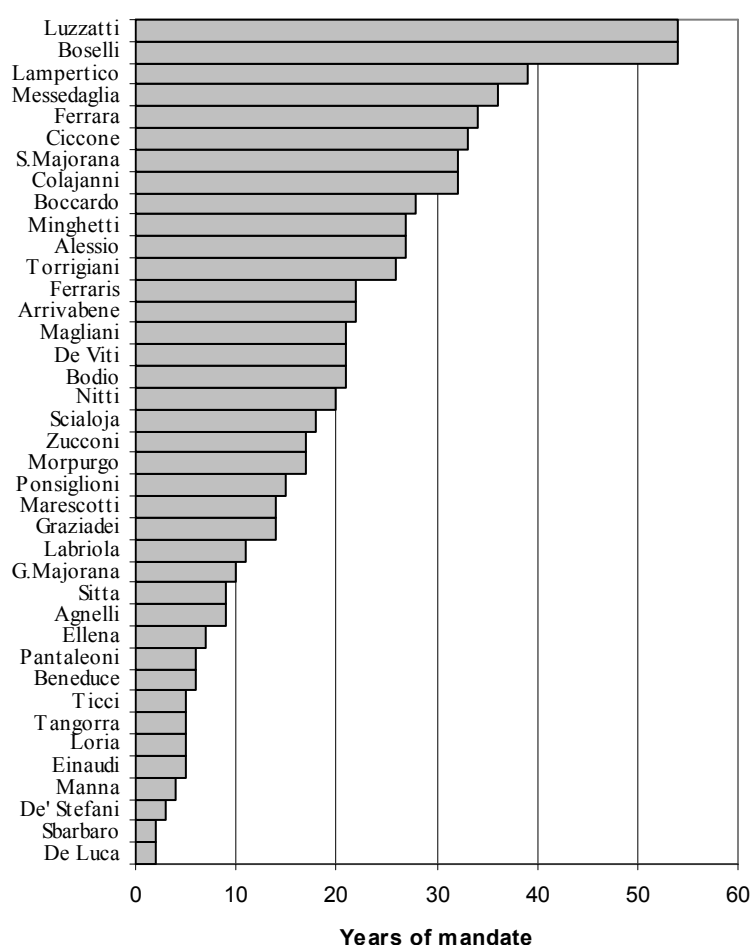


Figure 8.2 Number of years in which economists were members of parliament (1860-1923)

Observing the intense commitment of the economists, it would be tempting to conclude that, for many of them, the access to parliament represented a radical turn in their intellectual career. The question is whether or not they abandoned their scientific interests when they became ‘proto-professional’ statesmen. An answer may come from a typology specifically propounded by some political scientists for this period (Martinelli and Zucchini 2001: 817-19), including three models of representation: *political*, *locally-based* and *interest-based*. The positioning of the economists among these alternatives was not straightforward. On the one hand, a genuine political vocation was the natural outcome of their legal and economic training. During their studies, they had developed an awareness of the universal character of the law, of the *super partes* function of the State, and of the role the legislator was called upon to play in reforming existing institutions in conformity with the ‘natural’ economic laws that regulated ‘the physiology of civil society’.¹¹

On the other hand, however, the economists’ consciousness of representing the interests of their electors was less evident. Significant differences can be noted between the generations of the 1860s and 1870s elected by a handful of aristocrats and wealthy people, and the younger generations of radical and socialist economists elected by enlarged or universal suffrage. Yet many economists preferred to regard themselves as ‘expert’ legislators and policy

¹¹ The phrase comes from the ‘Introduction’ to Say (1828-29).

makers rather than as representatives. Very often, the ground on which they assessed their policy orientations was their belief in the principles of political economy rather than the ultimate will of the people. They participated in parliamentary debates more to persuade their colleagues of the truth of their deductive reasoning, than to reach a reasonable compromise between different interpretations of the interest of the nation. They preferred to draft bills on economic matters and take part in special committees, rather than negotiate with their colleagues. Moreover, their willingness to accept office as ministers or members of administrative boards reflected a view closer to that of the benevolent despot than to the model of the shrewd politician of the liberal age.

As for the other types of representation that were typical of the liberal age, it is interesting to explore the extent to which economists were involved in the representation of local, group or class interests and accepted the typical rules of conduct of nineteenth-century 'leading citizens' (in French: *notables*), developing an extensive network of patronage in their constituencies, or alternatively preferred to become the spokesmen of powerful economic lobbies.

According to Max Weber (1919), the two distinctive features of the nineteenth-century *notable* were *gratuitous work* and *prestige*. The former depended on enjoyment of a private income and leisure and was typical of landed gentry and of professionals like lawyers, who could schedule their professional activities in a manner that allowed them time to devote to politics. Economists, as university professors and sometimes as members of wealthy families, potentially benefited from similar conditions. Moreover, their social prestige was high, despite the young lineage of the science of political economy. It is also worth noting that the economists' behaviour sometimes followed the patterns typical of a *notable*: for instance, the correspondence of Fedele Lampertico (1996-1998) and Francesco Ferrara (2002) is rich in examples of patronage. The case of Luigi Luzzatti was partially different, because his permanent engagement in government and the civil service prevented him from directly engaging in local systems of patronage. However he acted as a 'mediator' between government and a local network of supporters who in turn possessed their set of patronage connections. Economists also frequently intervened in favour of the interests of their constituency. A typical example was that of the recurring debates on the construction of railways, tunnels and other public works; the debates on tariffs and trade agreements likewise displayed an array of similar examples.

Within this framework, representation of interests took place in two distinct ways. On the one hand, some economists were engaged in projects concerning credit, co-operation or industrialization, and their parliamentary activity reveals strong support for these interests. The examples of Luzzatti's interventions in favour of co-operative credit, and of the actions undertaken by Boccardo and Boselli to defend the interest of the mercantile marine, can be mentioned here. But on the other hand, economists were also active in fostering the institutionalization of economics in universities, both at the informal level of under-the-table agreements and recommendations – of which their published and unpublished correspondence furnishes eloquent testimony – and at the official level of legislative initiatives on schooling, university and scientific research. To consider just a few significant instances, in 1872 Antonio Scialoja promoted an official inquiry on secondary and technical education; Lampertico, Luzzatti, with Salvatore Majorana and Emilio Morpurgo, engaged in a series of initiatives in favour of technical education. Moreover, Boccardo, Ferrara, Ferraris, Luzzatti, Majorana, Messedaglia and Nitti were for long periods members of the Higher Council of Public Education, where they had numerous opportunities to defend their interests as academics in general, and as professors of economics in particular. In 1876 Salvatore Majorana, who taught political economy at the University of Catania, introduced a bill that extended the teaching of political economy to all sections of technical secondary schools. Between 1869 and 1870 Angelo Messedaglia pre-

sented a proposal for the creation of an independent curriculum in political and administrative studies within the faculties of law, where economics played a major role. Antonio Ciccone, a Neapolitan economist, participated in 1872 in the foundation of the Higher School of Agriculture in Portici (Naples), and Luzzatti contributed in 1871 to the foundation of the High Institute for Forest Studies in Vallombrosa (Florence). The latter, with Lampertico and Ferrara, was also involved in the founding of the Venice Higher School of Commerce, inaugurated in 1868. We have already mentioned the role played by Correnti, Messedaglia and Bodio in the development of statistical research.

Finally, in their capacity as members of parliament and delegates of government, some economists were instrumental in the foundation of international institutions in which economic research was present, although their efforts were often hindered by frustrating diplomatic negotiations and by discussions on very practical governance problems. The International Institute of Statistics was founded in London in 1885 with the participation of Bodio (as secretary), Boccardo, Ellena, Ferraris, Lampertico, Luzzatti, Magliani, and Messedaglia. The International Institute of Agriculture (later FAO) was founded in Rome in 1905 thanks to the preparatory work of Pantaleoni and Luzzatti, and to the intense activity of Bodio and De Viti de Marco, and with the participation of other non-parliamentary economists including Umberto Ricci, Pasquale Jannaccone and Giovanni Lorenzoni. Bodio also played an active role in the foundation of the Society of Nations in Geneva after WW1.

This variegated activity differed in many ways from organized lobbying. However, parliamentary economists were certainly decisive for the institutionalization of economics in the university framework and for the development of economic studies.

In the light of the perspectives outlined above, the question raised earlier as to whether the economists' political activity marked a break in their scientific identity or broadened and enriched their intellectual vocation still awaits an answer.

It cannot be denied that many economists in Parliament were involved in discussions and decisions that bore little relation even to the very broad view of the scope of political economy that was typical of their age. Moreover some elected economists significantly reduced their scientific and publishing activity upon their entry into Parliament. Such was the case, for instance, of Pietro Torrigiani, who was professor of political economy at the university of Parma and Pisa, Antonio Ponsiglioni, who taught at the universities of Siena and Genoa, and the above mentioned Salvatore Majorana (Catania) (Augello and Travagliante 2004).

However, in the central debates on tariffs, trade agreements, the State budget, taxation and public debt, in discussions on the organization of the banking system, education, or public works, and in debates and inquiries on the condition of agriculture and industry, the voice of economists and the 'economists' approach' always manifested itself. The economists were eager to explain the principles of political economy to those who apparently had no knowledge of the constraints these principles imposed on the action of legislators, and they endeavoured to indicate the incentives and disincentives created by different political arrangements and the re-distributive effects of taxes and tariffs. Some economists specialized in the collection and interpretation of statistical data, using the resulting information to warn their colleagues against measures that ran counter to 'actual facts'. Finally, they made a point of suggesting economic policies that were consistent with the principles of political economy. In all these cases, the economists acted, or claimed to act, as spokesmen of economic science. Was this empty rhetoric, or an elegant way of concealing partisan views? In many cases this was certainly the case, especially when the economists found themselves on both sides of a controversy. However, these attitudes revealed some awareness of the specificities of the economists' intellectual profession, and the extension of their field of action to parliament and government objectively strengthened their 'partial monopoly' as experts on economic questions.

This does not mean that the economists' activity in parliament always corresponded to this high profile. Once involved in parliamentary life, many of them were constrained to accept approaches to political decisions that contrasted with the principles they had theorized in their university lectures and in the books and articles they had published. Furthermore, it was not infrequent for their approach to depend on the position they occupied in parliamentary dialectic. It was far easier to vindicate the rigorous principles of political economy from the benches of opposition than from those of the majority. This was the case for *laissez-faire* economists like Ferrara, Torrigiani, Manna and Ciccone, who had inspired the economic policy of the Right from 1861 to 1876, whenever the revision of tariffs was debated. The case of De Viti de Marco and Pantaleoni at the beginning of the twentieth century was also interesting. On the one hand, although firmly opposing the 'statelist' and protectionist approach of the majority, they could not refrain from making transactions and compromises with some sectors of parliament they considered as potential allies, including the socialists. On the other hand, their exasperated belief in the explanatory and predicting capacity of economics induced them to adopt a rigid and even openly contemptuous attitude *vis-à-vis* the political class. This attitude gradually became the foundation of their political vision, in which a shortcut was created between 'pure' economics and a liberal, anti-interventionist and anti-socialist approach.

However, the economists who were part of the majority and were involved in important legislative and political decisions were likewise often obliged to accept the mechanisms of compromise and mediation between opposed interests that were typical of parliamentary dialectic. Some of them accepted to participate in decisions that conflicted with arguments they had presented in their publications. Others – like Antonio Ciccone – considered these decisions as a tragic betrayal of their inner beliefs. Yet others pragmatically accepted the distance that existed between science and art, while only a few seized the opportunity provided by innovative political decisions to undertake the revision of those principles of political economy that seemed to contradict them. This was the case, for example, of the Lombard-Venetian economists, and of some economists of the younger generation like Francesco Saverio Nitti and Giulio Alessio, who found in legislative activity a stimulus for a deeper analysis of the reasons that justified State intervention in social policies and in the encouragement of national industry. It should also be recalled, as shown above, the economists often accepted the rules of patronage and mediation of local and economic interests, and defended their interests as academics and scholars.

Despite these difficulties, such ambiguities were probably both a necessity and a mechanism that contributed to strengthening the social identity of economists, who apparently felt a strong need to take an active part in political decisions, and to contribute to the building of the new Italian State and nation. For these figures, the activities of educator, legislator, policy maker and preacher were all essential parts of their scientific mission as economists.

Political economy in parliament

The unification of Italy and the establishment of a liberal constitution created an arena in which economists could voice the characteristic of political economy as a 'science of the statesman or legislator', establishing the aims and limits of politics and enlightening public opinion and the ruling classes with the systematic insights this science affords into the nature of economic relationships.

Significantly, the new science of political economy inspired by Adam Smith and Jean-Baptiste Say was imported into Italy in a period – that of the Restoration and Risorgimento (1815-1860) – in which the unstable alliance between 'philosophers' and 'legislators' that was

typical of the Enlightenment period had been dissolved. While in the United Kingdom David Ricardo sat in parliament, in Italy the spread of political economy was looked upon with suspicion, since its contents were identified with liberal ideas in politics. Those who cultivated political economy ceased to publicize their ideas on economic policy and confined themselves to learned or technical discussions in scientific academies and 'agrarian' or 'economic' societies. However, as soon as some restrictions on civil liberties began to be lifted, the public dimension of political economy re-emerged with the creation of new debating societies and new journals.

But the national State in 1861 represented a break with the past. A new space – the legislative power – had opened up for expressing both the normative deductions of political economy and its pedagogical and controversial dimension. The 'paper wars' on free trade vs. protectionism, *laissez-faire* vs. interventionism, growth vs. re-distribution, which had characterized economic discourse in the first half of the nineteenth-century in Italy and elsewhere, now entered parliament and became part of the deliberation process that led to political decisions of strategic importance in the development of the country. For the first time, economists found themselves faced with the task of persuading not only other scholars, but also the ruling class and the representatives of local and economic interests. Significantly, many economists in Parliament systematically published their parliamentary speeches and their opinions on the issues at stake in learned and scientific journals, newspapers, pamphlets and collections. Parliamentary debates thereby became a stepping stone to the enlightenment of public opinion at large. Lastly, parliamentary economists were active in the committees for inquiries on agriculture, industry, tariffs, money circulation, education, and on the conditions of labourers and peasants. The results of these inquiries were frequently disappointing from a methodological viewpoint and also reflected the compromises that had to be established between the requirements of science and those of political wisdom. Nevertheless the role of economists was often significant.

On the whole, the contribution of political economy to important political decisions was significant. Starting with trade regulation, the discussion in May 1861 which eventually led to a reduction of custom tariffs was introduced by Cavour himself, who was the Prime Minister in office. Cavour had a strong economic background, basing his actions on the typical Smithian arguments in favour of free trade (Bini and Parisi 2002: 11-12). The shift toward protectionism initiated by the general tariff voted in 1878 was the result of the preparatory work of Luzzatti, Scialoja, Lampertico and Ellena, and was presented in parliament by Agostino Magliani, a statesman with a strong economic background (Magliulo 2002; Guidi 2003; Petrovich 2003; Rancan 2003). These economists, with the addition of Angelo Marescotti and Paolo Boselli, followed the evolution of tariffs and trade legislation and agreements until the new general protectionist tariff was approved in 1887. At the end of the liberal age, Giulio Alessio was the inspirer of the 1921 tariff revision (Michelini 2003). These economists favoured a more industrialist orientation of Italian political economy. Although they did not deny in principle the validity of classical political economy statements on free trade, they developed a series of interesting historical and empirical arguments in favour of protection of infant industries, development of strategic sectors, creation of 'poles' of intensive development, and improvement of social welfare.

In the field of public works, in 1885 Boselli presented a package of interventions in parliament in favour of the mercantile marine and shipbuilding industry, which represented the first example of industrial policy in the Italian State and paved the way to other interventions in favour of the iron and steel and engineering industry (Asso 2003). In contrast, the law that nationalized the railway service, promulgated in 1905, was the result of political compromises unrelated to scientific considerations. However, its author, Carlo Francesco Ferraris, was an

economist, and other economists like Giulio Alessio defended it on economic grounds, highlighting the adjustment effects that it could produce on the disequilibria between different areas of the country (Giocoli 2002; Michelini 2003; Tusset 2003). Lastly, at the beginning of the twentieth century Francesco Saverio Nitti defended the nationalization of electric energy as a weapon for the growth of less-developed areas (Patalano 2002; Realfonzo, Forges Davanzati and Patalano 2003).

Another area of debate was that of public finance. Many important tax reforms were fostered by economists like Ferrara, Minghetti, and Messedaglia, who essentially shared the same orthodox view on budget balance. The same authors were also the protagonists of the measures taken in 1886 for the unification of the land tax and for the institution of a national land register (Parisi 2003). Moreover, Minghetti, Scialoja, Magliani, Luzzatti and Alberto De' Stefani promoted a series of successive reforms of State accountancy and the public budget (Fauci 2002). The interesting feature of these debates was the interaction between economic and legal arguments that had been a distinctive characteristic of Italian economic and legal discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The same association of themes could be perceived in parliamentary debates on the problems of administrative and financial unification of the country (Pastorini and Pizzanelli 2002), the regulation of joint-stock companies (Teti 2002), intellectual property rights (Grembi 2002) and the military budget (Gentilucci 2002).

But perhaps the area in which the 'institutionalist' approach that Italian economists active in the second half of the nineteenth century had inherited from the Italian Enlightenment through the works of Giandomenico Romagnosi and Carlo Cattaneo was that of agriculture. Immediately after unification, the approach to modernization of the Italian primary sector recommended by liberal economists, and endorsed by the cabinets of the Right was based on a mixture of free competition and institutional arrangements which favoured the circulation of landed property through the subdivision and privatization of large estates belonging to the Church and the State, and encouraged investment (long leases, rules of accountancy, irrigation etc.) (Lepore 2002; Raffaelli 1997; Piccioni and Raffaelli 2002). A typical representative of this orientation was Stefano Jacini, the president of the committee for the agricultural inquiry whose conclusions were published when the new protectionist policy promoted by the Left was already producing its devastating effects on Southern agriculture. The grievances presented at the end of the century by the marginalist economists both in the press and in parliament were still grounded on defence of the advantages produced by the classical blend of competition, rules and infrastructures (Guidi 2002).

With regard to monetary policy, although the Right-wing majority of the first fifteen years after unification adhered to the classical orthodox view on convertibility, the war against Austria and an international financial crisis obliged the government to decree the forced circulation of paper money in 1866. It was an economist, Antonio Scialoja, who as minister of finances promoted this measure and defended it in parliament, not without some embarrassment (Gioli 2003: 17-18). Other economists of the liberal camp, like Salvatore Majorana and Gerolamo Boccardo, led the attempts to restore convertibility that were undertaken in 1877 and subsequently. In 1880 Magliani, as the minister of finances in office, introduced the bill for the repeal of forced circulation (Gioli 2003; La Bruna 2003; Pavanelli 2003; Rancan 2003).

Another important event was the debate on the negotiations for the Latin Monetary Union (1865-1894), in which Luzzatti and Ellena were the major architects (Masini 2002). The participation of economists in parliamentary debates and special committees was accompanied in this case, as in others, by a wealth of discussions in the specialized press. Almost all economists paid formal homage to monometallist orthodoxy, although they were ready to discuss

both political and economic arguments in favour of the gold-silver standard that France had imposed within the Union.

The laws concerning the re-organization of the issuing and banking system, which culminated in the foundation of the Bank of Italy in 1893, were likewise the result of efforts by economists such as Scialoja, Luzzatti, Minghetti and Boccardo. Nevertheless, the most lively economic debate was aired in the specialized press, where an approach in favour of a plurality of issuing banks – an approach dominated by Ferrara – stood in opposition to the views of the majority of economists, who argued for a central bank on the model of the Bank of England (Realfonzo and Ricci 1995). The debate in parliament, on the other hand, was dominated by the scandal of the Banca Romana denounced in 1892 by two economists, Colajanni (who was a member of parliament) and Pantaleoni (who was to enter Parliament some years later). The Banca Romana was one of the six issuing banks inherited from the pre-unification period, whose board of directors was accused of having issued two series of banknotes with the same serial numbers. The scandal sprang from the charges brought against the Cabinet led by Giolitti, accused of concealing the truth with legal and illegal means. As a consequence, the debate in parliament was dominated by moral and political questions and the creation of the Bank of Italy was seen more as a solution to the corruption of the ruling class than as an efficient economic solution to monetary regulation (Giacconi 2002).

A further problem that attracted the attention of parliament after unification was that of education. Although it was clear that there was a connection between mass literacy, schooling and the expansion of scientific and technical training, on the one hand, and modernization (or ‘civilization’, in Romagnosi’s terminology), on the other hand, and although many Italian economists had a clear notion of ‘human (or immaterial) capital’, the debates on these problems focused more on the cultural and linguistic unification of the country than on economic arguments. The economists who took an active part in them, among whom A. Scialoja, L. Luzzatti, N. Colajanni, and C.F. Ferraris, were no exception to this rule (Gallifante 2002; Spalletti 2002).¹²

Many economists were also seriously engaged in the issuing of laws on social insurance and welfare. The outstanding figure in this area was Luigi Luzzatti, who sponsored laws on social insurance (1898), on the labour of women and children (1902, 1907, 1910), and on public housing (1903) (Petrovich 2003). From 1890 onwards Ferraris, acting as ministerial advisor and later as member of parliament, presented a series of bills on compulsory insurance for workers (Tusset 2003). Nitti and Alessio sponsored the nationalization of social insurance in 1911. Giulio Alessio promoted a law on compulsory arbitration in controversies between trade unions and factory owners, although he did not succeed in obtaining its approval in parliament (Michelini 2003; Realfonzo, Forges Davanzati and Patalano 2003). This series of efforts represented the logical application of the ideas the ‘Lombard-Venetian’ group had inherited both from the ideas of Giandomenico Romagnosi and from German ‘chair socialism’ on the subject of State intervention in favour of the working class and the poor. It was an approach that was regarded as an instrument for preventing class conflict or the rise of revolutionary socialism, and as a way of securing a harmonious and smooth process of industrialization. The dramatic issue of emigration was also at the forefront of concern during this era, with Luigi Bodio becoming the key figure of the Giolittian period. In 1901 Bodio sponsored the creation of the General Board on Emigration and remained at its head until 1904. He then headed the parliamentary committee that controlled the action of this board (Sunna 2002; Soresina 2003). But even a radical *laissez-faire* economist like Pantaleoni promoted the legal

¹² On the notion of ‘immaterial capital’ in the Italian economic thought of the early nineteenth century see Guidi (2004).

recognition of trade unions, in 1901, as well as the legalization of strikes, endorsing the action of the cabinet led by Zanardelli in this circumstance. According to Pantaleoni, the action of trade unions was pro-market, and should not be mistaken for a type of monopolistic intervention (Bini 2003).

Debates and law-making on the so-called 'southern question' – i.e. the question of the backwardness and poverty of the regions formerly belonging to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies – were another example of controversy between the interventionist approach of the 'Lombard-Venetian' economists and the *laissez-faire* approach of marginalist economists. On the one hand, Giuseppe Majorana and Giulio Alessio favoured the introduction of 'special laws' for the development of southern areas suited to specific economic activities, and Nitti – whose industrialist strategy of development dominated parliamentary debate and action in the first decade of the twentieth century – sponsored the law of 8 July 1904 on the metropolitan area of Naples (Patalano 2002). But, on the other hand, the question of the development of southern Italy was also kept alive by the lively controversy between these economists and Pantaleoni and De Viti de Marco, who saw in the protectionist tariff on corn and manufactured goods of 1887 – which had provoked retaliations by France and other countries – the main cause underlying the crisis of wine and oil export-led productions in the South (Tortorella Esposito 2002; Zagari 2002; and Cardini 2003). Despite his political and personal affinity with the latter figures, it was Napoleone Colajanni who defended the 1887 tariff, arguing that the main causes of the backwardness of the Mezzogiorno lay in the *latifundium* (badly managed large estates) and the corrupted connexions between Mafia and the State (Realfonzo 2002).

These intense activities by economists in parliament reveal that the majority of them shared a strong propensity to endorse State intervention for the development of the country and for a solution of the 'social question' and the 'southern question'. This orientation is confirmed by the fact that many economists of the Risorgimento generation (for example Boselli, Ciccone, Marescotti, and Scialoja), who had been educated to the free-trade ideals of classical economics shifted their allegiance towards interventionist ideas in the late 1870s, in some cases becoming members of the Associazione per il Progresso degli Studi Economici. As argued by Antonio Magliulo (2002) and by Piero Bini and Daniela Parisi (2003), there was a strange paradox in the fact that all these economists, no less than the leaders of the Lombard-Venetian school (Lampertico, and to a lesser extent Luzzatti) never repudiated the classical approach and its *laissez-faire* deductions. On the contrary, they explicitly continued to defend it as the true – albeit abstract – view on economic relationships and economic policy. As a consequence, although they actively sponsored protectionism and the policies in favour of industrialization, they presented them with tactical and empirical arguments and never formulated a coherent industrialist and interventionist economic theory. As far as social policies were concerned, they were able to claim that the classics of Italian economic thought had largely anticipated the paternalist and redistributive arguments of *Kathedersozialismus*. Only a few economists of the younger generations (like Ellena, Nitti and Alessio) developed interesting arguments in favour of industrialization and argued for an active role of the State in the economy.

Conversely, among the authors of the opposite field who adhered to *laissez-faire* views, very few, perhaps only Ferrara among those of the classical generation, and Pantaleoni and De Viti de Marco in the marginalist generation, displayed an intransigent attitude vis-à-vis government interference in the economic field. Many others, from Minghetti, Boccardo and Magliani to Bodio, actively supported the action of parliament and government. But the contributions of ideas and stimuli that both Ferrara and the marginalist economists furnished to parliamentary debates and legislation from the benches of opposition was also essential for

enhancing the theoretical level of discussions and warning against adoption of dangerous and hasty measures.

This does not mean that the voice of political economy was always heeded, or awarded the same attention at all times. In the period dominated by right-wing cabinets (1861-1876) the main policy orientations were consistent with, and based on, the teachings of classical political economy. Not only free-trade, but also the huge investments in education and infrastructures could be justified with classical arguments. Authors like Giandomenico Romagnosi, and later Scialoja and Carlo Cattaneo (who refused an offer of election to the Italian parliament) had stressed in their work the function of accumulation of knowledge in economic development, and regarded a modern transportation network as a condition for inclusion of the Italian economy in the international division of labour.

In contrast, in the period between 1876 and 1900 dominated by the Left, economic arguments were rarely at the core of debates and decisions on important issues such as tariff regulations, credit, and railways. Even the economists who participated in these debates and sponsored important decisions preferred to avoid technical arguments and addressed their colleagues with moral and political arguments. There are two ways of explaining this change. First, as argued above, the economic arguments in favour of State intervention were generally of an empirical kind, justified as exceptions to the principles of political economy. And second, the enlargement of suffrage after 1882 introduced into parliament a host of representatives of the middle classes, whose intellectual background was often less qualified than that of their learned colleagues in the elitist parliaments of the 1860s, and whose propensity to represent specific economic and social interests was stronger.

However, a further change took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, in a manner more favourable to political economy. The new policy orientations which aimed to foster the development of southern Italy and the implementation of a modern system of social welfare as well as encouraging a new direction in industrial relations were openly based on sound economic arguments that delved into the notion of effective demand, supply policies, poles of development, etc. On the other side of the political spectrum, the *laissez-faire* opposition rooted its position in the arguments developed by marginalist economists concerning the optimality of free competition. But even in this period, many decisions were taken without considering the arguments of political economy.

Conclusions

In the political background that prevailed in Italy after the unification of the country in 1861, many economists were attracted by the prospect of playing an active role in parliament and in government. Thirty academic economists and various other experts of political economy were either elected to the House of Deputies or appointed senators. Many of them became ministers both in economic and in non-economic departments, and four were appointed prime ministers. Their political activity was therefore intense and contributed to placing them at the core of the ruling elite.

The analysis attempted in this paper reveals the importance of the economists' political commitment and the place it occupied in their active life. Many elected economists sat in parliament for more than twenty years. In both houses of parliament, they often played a technical role, focussing on the discussion of economic issues and seizing any opportunity for spreading the principles of political economy and illustrating the limits of a purely political logic. But they did not refrain from meddling with questions of a more political nature, and on occasion did not hesitate to act as *notables*, establishing a network of patronage in their con-

stituencies, or sponsoring powerful economic interests, as well as their 'professional' interest in the institutionalization of economics. Overall, their interest in politics was intense and can be considered a fundamental ingredient of the intellectual mission they aimed to fulfil in the Italian society.

Finally, this analysis of the attention paid to the teachings of economics in parliamentary debates and political decisions highlights not only a number of cases in which economic arguments were endorsed by the political class, but also some – perhaps many other – circumstances in which they were largely ignored. Conversely, the intense political experience of many Italian economists was probably a consequence of a tradition of thought that emphasized the role of social and political institutions in economic life.

Still to be addressed is the question as to whether the economic debates in parliament contributed to orienting the evolution of Italian economics in some specific directions. The answer can be only conjectural, although it appears plausible that some features of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Italian economic thought may have been influenced by the stimuli economists received from their institutional experiences. To begin with, consider one of the distinctive features of the Italian school of 'scienza delle finanze', its emphasis on the twofold nature, economic and political, of public finance. Such an awareness of the role of government in determining the distribution of taxation and the weight of public debt may have profited from the daily experience of political mechanisms that many economists acquired in parliament and in governmental agencies. Second, the interest taken by some Italian economists (Pantaleoni, Pareto, Del Vecchio, etc.) in dynamic analysis as an application of a mixed methodology which combines economics, sociology and political science could be considered as a consequence of their knowledge of political machinery and of its interference in economic phenomena. Third, the shortcuts between pure economic analysis and free-trade policies, typical of the Italian marginalist school, were also a partial result of economists' political engagement and their opposition to the inefficiencies of the Italian State. Finally the high level of statistical studies in Italy between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century is also a result of the efforts made by those economists who shared important political responsibilities.

It may be concluded that the ancient propensity of Italian economists to study the interaction between political and social institutions, laws and economic phenomena, which was probably responsible for their desire to play an active role in politics, was in turn strengthened by their political experience.

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