

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

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## **Abstract**

Based on the results of an extensive research carried out in the last decade, the paper analyses the role played by Italian economists in post-unification parliaments and cabinets from the vantage point of the debate on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unification of Italy. It examines the participation of economists in political activities, focusing on their role in debates and in law making, on their contribution to policy making, and on the role that political economy had in parliamentary debates.

In the post-unification political background, many economists were attracted by the prospect of playing an active part 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. The analysis reveals the importance of the economists' political commitment and the place it occupied in their active life. The intense political experience of many Italian economists was a consequence of a tradition of thought that emphasized the role of social and political institutions in economic life. Conversely, the attention paid to the lessons of economics in parliamentary debates and political decisions was variable. In many instances economic arguments were endorsed by the political class while in many other circumstances they were largely ignored.