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Italian Catholics and the Social Question

The Emergence of a Social Consciousness and Social Action Amongst Conservative Catholics in late 19th Century Italy

by

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Abstract

The Opera dei Congressi e dei comitati cattolici in Italia was established in 1874 by conservative Catholics, known as the intransigenti, as a means of drawing together the numerous Catholic societies and individual Catholics into a united Catholic movement to oppose the anticlerical actions of the new Italian State and push back the increasing secularisation of Italian society. The organisation was to exist for 30 years during which time it held 19 national congresses, the proceedings of which form the basis of this study. Through their efforts to reassert the influence of Catholicism in Italian society, these Catholics were increasingly brought to confront the severe contemporary social problems: the evident suffering and exploitation of many workers and peasants, and their growing resistance and political agitation which were arising from the development of capitalism combined with the continuing impact of semi-feudal residues and pressures from an increasing population and the policies adopted by the governments of the late 1800s. These problems were generally referred to as the social question. The intransigenti attempted to deal with the social question at both a theoretical and practical level, trying to define their understanding of what composed a truly Catholic society and what was therefore unacceptable about contemporary Italian society, and involving themselves with the establishment of a network of institutions and associations through which they thought Catholic principles could be restored to what they believed to be their rightful place and the causes of social conflict and suffering removed or at least ameliorated. Major divisions were to emerge within the Opera dei Congressi over the most effective response, from a Catholic viewpoint, to the social question, and the degree of importance socio-economic issues should have within the organisation. These divisions, together with changing papal policies, were ultimately to lead to the dissolution of the organisation. The history of the Opera dei Congressi, however, reveals the emergence on the part of a growing number of devout Catholics, of a social consciousness, of an awareness that Catholics, both lay and clerical, had a moral, spiritual and practical responsibility to grapple with the social question in a way that had effective results and, based on that social consciousness, the development of a small but significant network of institutions to implement Catholic social thinking. These Catholics saw that individual acts of charity were no longer sufficient but rather that questions of social justice were involved. Through their work, although it was often flawed and contradictory, they laid the basis for a Catholic social movement and new approaches to the problem of the Church's relationship to modern society.
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Abbreviations

A.C.S. Archivio Centrale dello Stato

BASMCI Bollettino dell'Archivio per la storia del movimento sociale cattolico in Italia

Federterra La Federazione nazionale dei lavoratori della terra

Sem Semestre

The congresses are cited in the footnotes according to their number
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Introduction

The role of the Church and Catholicism in Italy was undercut and threatened in a fundamental manner by the unification of Italy, with its takeover of the Papal States and invasion of Rome, and the anticlerical policies of the new Italian State. The response from Catholics, both lay and clerical, was mixed. Some Catholics, including members of the hierarchy, described as liberal Catholics, supported the political transformation. These Catholics were ultimately caught between the defensive position adopted by the papacy and the anticlerical stance of the early governments of united Italy. Conservative Catholics close to the Church reacted in a defensive yet active fashion. Through their actions these conservative Catholics, known as the intransigenti, were to create a militant movement to defend the centrality of the papacy, the Church and Christian values in Italian society.

Initial moves were made by the intransigenti during the 1860s to form a national organisation to implement these goals. Their attempts were unsuccessful due to Government laws and their fears that the Government would act against them. They tried again a few years later with the consequent establishment in 1874 of the Opera dei Congressi e dei Comitati Cattolici in Italia. It was to exist for 30 years, during which time its level of activity varied considerably while its effectiveness in achieving its goals was frequently undermined by internal conflict. It was dissolved in 1904 by Pius X because of irreconcilable divisions between different factions of intransigenti and the implications of the organisation's situation for papal politics. Nevertheless, during its existence, the Opera dei Congressi came to comprise the main organisational forum of Catholicism, outside the Church itself, apart from the more directly charitable organisations such as the Conferences of St Vincent de Paul and the various pious associations. Although the intransigenti always denied it, the Opera dei Congressi did play a political role, unifying Catholic opposition to the liberal-controlled State and providing a means of expressing that opposition outside the formal structures of the Church itself.

This thesis is concerned only peripherally with the political role of the Opera dei Congressi. Its central concern is with the social consciousness and action of the intransigenti. The organisation which embodied the ideas and aims of the intransigenti existed during a period of, not only considerable political change, but also of far-reaching social and economic transformations as the already harsh conditions of many

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1 For convenience the Catholic Church is referred to in this thesis as the Church.
2 Hereafter referred to as the Opera dei Congressi.
of the urban workers and peasants were adversely affected by the increasing dominance of a capitalist mode of production in Italy and its acceleration by the new State. Amongst a number of the *intransigenti* there gradually emerged an awareness of the extent of the social problems developing in Italian society. Their understanding and approach to these problems was to have a major impact on the history of the *Opera dei Congressi*.

The *Opera dei Congressi* was a hierarchically organised body reflecting the hierarchical structure of the Church and of contemporary Italian society. Although excluded from national political power by the unification of Italy and the response of the Church, the *intransigenti* were predominantly members of the dominant class, being either members of the aristocracy or from professional ranks. This did change to a degree in later years when the direction of the *Opera dei Congressi* was under challenge from a younger generation of militant Catholics with more democratic ideas. The older *intransigenti* believed, however, that social and religious hierarchies were both natural and divinely inspired. The relationship of the *Opera dei Congressi* to the clergy was envisaged as one of lay subordination, in particular, of total obedience to the pope. Membership was not restricted to the laity as a substantial proportion of members were clerics. Members were chosen on a selective basis. They were either prominent Catholics or representatives of Catholic associations. Despite the emphasis on hierarchical principles and organisation the *intransigenti* regarded the *Opera dei Congressi* as a populist organisation, as a means by which the masses could be influenced and the secularisation of Italian society opposed.

The *Opera dei Congressi e dei Comitati Cattolici* had a dual focus as was reflected in its name: the national congresses held at varying intervals over its 30 year existence and a four-tiered committee structure following the structure of the Church and headed by a president. The national congresses brought together eminent Catholics and representatives of Catholic associations, providing an opportunity for mutual support and reinforcement of the *intransigenti*’s opposition to the liberal State and for the public display of Catholic fervour in the face of widespread anticlericalism. They were also the occasion on which proposals were made of practical means to implement the aims of the organisation. The material dealt with at the congresses was divided into five sections as they were called. The sections gradually assumed a permanent existence separate from the congresses with particular *intransigenti* responsible for the examination and study of issues belonging to their section and the presentation of reports and proposals for action to the congresses. Socio-economic material was the responsibility of the II Section. For some time this section was also responsible for
issues relating to charitable institutions and impulses, reflecting the traditional Catholic response to social problems, but this approach was gradually modified.

The *Opera dei Congressi* was directed by the *Comitato Generale Permanente* under which there were regional, diocesan and parish committees. The various committees were meant to represent the *Opera dei Congressi* throughout Italy, to draw ordinary Catholics into the organisation, to marshal support from them and to establish a well-disciplined grass roots structure through which Catholic values could be defended at a local level. The committee structure never matched the goal of the *intransigenti* of representation in every diocese and parish of Italy nor were all the committees active in any sense, but at its strongest, in the mid to late 1890s, the *Opera dei Congressi* was reasonably widespread and particularly active in parts of Northern Italy. Regional, diocesan and parish congresses were held by the appropriate committees but these were far more infrequent and sporadic than the national congresses. As with the Northern concentration of the committee structure, the more regular regional and diocesan congresses took place in the North. Initially members were encouraged to work to establish lay Catholic associations with specific aims such as workers' mutual aid societies, youth groups, women's associations and societies to promote Catholic education. Gradually the more hardline *intransigenti* moved to exercise control over autonomous lay Catholic associations and many of these organisations did pass into the orbit of the *Opera dei Congressi* although not without dissension.

While the committee structure and involvement of the *intransigenti* with associated groups formed a significant part of the history of the *Opera dei Congressi* this thesis is concerned primarily with the social and economic concerns of the *intransigenti* as they emerge in the proceedings of the national congresses, specifically the proceedings of the general assemblies of the congresses. Associated material such as proceedings from the meetings of the *Comitato Generale Permanente*, private sessions of the congresses, letters between prominent *intransigenti* and published articles written by *intransigenti* have been used to some extent but the focus is on the proceedings of the general assemblies. The selection of primary source material was partly due to the availability of source material and the need to restrict research to manageable levels. It was also shaped by the belief that the proceedings of the general assemblies of the congresses by themselves illuminate the emergence amongst the most conservative part of the Italian Catholic world of a more widespread social consciousness as Catholics faced the social problems then rampant in Italian society. Although the public nature of

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3 Later in its history there was a *consiglio diretivo* which stood above the *Comitato Generale Permanente*. 

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the occasion influenced the approach taken to the material brought before congress members, nevertheless, the proceedings reveal clearly the work accomplished by the II Section in regard to socio-economic issues as well as giving an indication of the diverging paths being taken by various of the intransigenti in relation to these issues. The work done by the various committees and associations adhering to the Opera dei Congressi in regard to social problems is also reflected in the often extensive reports given to the congresses on regional and diocesan activity.

What then were the intransigenti dealing with in their statements and reports on social and economic issues? They were responding to what was loosely termed the social question which basically encompassed a constellation of social problems deriving from a pre-capitalist mode of production still prevalent in agriculture combined with limited industrial development and the increasing dominance of a capitalist mode of production both in agriculture and industry, as well as political action and opposition by workers and peasants to the worsening conditions they were experiencing as a result of this economic situation. Other factors exacerbating the conditions of urban workers and peasants included Government action to create an internal market and to open up the Italian economy to international competition, high taxation, and a severe shortage of employment opportunities both in agriculture and industry for the increasing population. Combined with these factors was the severe economic crisis which lasted from the late 1870s well into the 1890s. The intransigenti found themselves amidst a society experiencing appalling poverty, malnutrition, widespread unemployment and suffering, the answer to which many workers and peasants found in either temporary or permanent emigration. Others turned to the socialist movement which grew quickly in the late 1800s, threatening the existing social order. This concrete situation is outlined in some detail to compare and contrast the statements and actions of the intransigenti.

The intransigenti were far from comprising a united group, particularly when it came to social issues. While they held many positions in common they were deeply divided over the approaches that they should take to the changes occurring in Italy during the late 1800s and early 1900s and the purpose of the work of the Opera dei Congressi. The divisions deepened in later years as a younger generation began to agitate for a new approach. The diverging approaches split roughly into three groups: the hardline intransigenti, the cristiano sociali and later the Christian democrats. These groups were not totally clear-cut in the positions they adopted nor were they always in conflict with each other, but they were sufficiently so as to distinguish coherent trends and distinct approaches.
The hardline *intransigenti*, who controlled the direction of the *Opera dei Congressi* for most of its existence, always gave precedence to its role as defender of the Church and the papacy with its socio-economic activity in a subordinate role. The most prominent amongst these *intransigenti* was Paganuzzi, a conservative Venetian lawyer who dominated the *Opera dei Congressi* for much of its existence and held the presidency from 1889 to 1902. The *cristiano sociali*, on the other hand, believed that socio-economic issues needed to be given far greater prominence because of the seriousness of the problems. These *intransigenti* were clustered around the II Section. Few in number in the early years, the *cristiano sociali* increased, although not greatly, in the 1890s when the socio-economic issues became overwhelmingly important. It was also the work of these *intransigenti* which influenced the direction taken by the younger generation of militant Catholics. The latter can be grouped together under the label Christian democrats although the differences between them were often great. They saw the need to build up a mass movement which was both social and political and they did not shy away from the political implications of their activities. They played a pivotal role in the disbanding of the *Opera dei Congressi*, causing deep divisions within the organisation and fighting for its reform along democratic lines. Their action was broadly based on democratic values. Hints of these lines and ideas, of grass roots activity and of the Catholics going to the masses can be found in the work of the II Section although the *cristiano sociali* always followed an essentially paternalistic line. The Christian democrats do not emerge all that often in the proceedings of the general assemblies of the congresses because attempts were made to avoid open conflict but the pressure on the *cristiano sociali* is obvious and even on some hardline *intransigenti* who paid lip service at least to the social question.

Discussion of social and economic issues came to occupy a significant proportion of time at the general assemblies of the congresses. Frequent reports were given on rural and urban conditions and there were a number of speeches touching on characteristics of the capitalist mode of production. These reports and speeches were generally of a condemnatory character and often gave strongly ideological explanations of social problems tracing them back to liberal and materialist theories, the French Revolution and beyond to the Reformation. The reports made by members of the II Section from an early date began to reflect an attempt to examine the social question in a more critical and detailed fashion than the ideological expositions although they often retreated into ideological explanations. The *cristiano sociali* regarded theoretical studies as crucial to understanding the scope of the problems involved in the social question. This view brought them into conflict with hardline *intransigenti* who wanted them to abandon this work in favour of organisational work around social issues. Hardline *intransigenti*
such as Paganuzzi failed to fully comprehend the issues with which the **cristiano sociali**, and later the Christian democrats, were grappling, instead taking an extremely narrow-minded view of the direction and purpose of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The **cristiano sociali** and Christian democrats, on the other hand, were responding to the social needs they saw around them and in the case of the Christian democrats, to the political implications of those needs. Nevertheless it was the hardline position which predominated during the 1890s causing some frustration amongst the more socially oriented *intransigenti*. The condemnations of capitalism and of the conditions of workers and peasants emanating from the congresses at times sounded as if they were being made by socialists, reflecting the existence of some common ground between Catholics and socialists although the challenge of socialism to the Church’s influence over the masses was such that this common ground could hardly be acknowledged.

The studies of the II Section were also intended to form the basis for practical action focussed on a range of charitable, and later more distinctly socio-economic institutions which the *intransigenti* took up. This organisational work had the support of the hardline *intransigenti* although they saw its value more in terms of building an extensive and united Catholic movement in defence of the papacy and opposing the growth of the socialist movement than in terms of socio-economic assistance for and of itself. These *intransigenti* were suspicious of the tendency of these organisations to follow a relatively independent line and they were opposed to the development of Catholic peasant and worker groups which recognised class divisions and the inevitability of class conflict in disputes about working conditions. Opposition to socialism was also a strong motivation behind the organising activities of all the factions who were aware of the attraction to workers and peasants of socialist associations stressing as they did the interests of workers and peasants against those of the *padroni*. The **cristiano sociali** and the hardline *intransigenti*, however, worked from the premise that it was possible and necessary to re-establish close links of co-operation between the classes through Catholic socio-economic organisations composed of both *padroni* and workers. Their ideal was the medieval corporation although altered somewhat to suit the contemporary situation. The **cristiano sociali** gradually conceded that class-based organisations were more appealing to workers and peasants but they continued to maintain that inter-class organisations were the ideal institutions to resolve social problems. The Christian democrats, taking a more realistic position, slowly began to establish organisations to defend the rights of workers and peasants and it was from these activities that Catholic unions emerged. These developments were a challenge to the hierarchical and paternalistic views of the hardline *intransigenti* and, to some extent, the more moderate but still paternalist, views of the **cristiano sociali**. As to the strength of the Catholic
socio-economic movement, the major part of which was linked to the *Opera dei Congressi*, although it never corresponded to the strength of the socialist movement, a strong network was established in parts of Northern Italy and to a lesser extent elsewhere.

The major divisions over social issues that arose gradually within the militant lay Catholic movement as represented by the *Opera dei Congressi* emerged partly because questions about social justice could not be dealt with without addressing their political implications. The responses of the *intransigenti* were made more acute by the seriousness of the contemporary situation - the severe challenge both the capitalist processes of transformation and the widespread appeal of socialist and democratic ideas were posing to the established order. The *intransigenti* split along lines of a conservative, defensive position towards the existing power distribution, a more moderate position invoking ameliorative action but which was still largely conservative and a more radical position which involved a reassessment of the social, economic and political order in terms of a Christian perspective of social justice. The divisions also emerged from a different understanding of the implications of their Catholic faith, although the implications were both political and social. For both the *cristiano sociali* and most but not all the Christian democrats, the more primary concern came to be the reconciliation of their Catholic faith with the obvious injustices around them, and for them that reconciliation could only come through social action and studies.

The questions with which the various factions of the *intransigenti* were grappling have continued to trouble and divide the Catholic clergy and laity up to the present and the history of the *Opera dei Congressi* reflects the continuing, unresolved conflicts over issues of social justice and the responses that Catholics think should come from the Church itself. The activities and efforts of the *cristiano sociali* and the Christian democrats, in the end result, were directed at making the Church more relevant to the masses and more responsive to their needs. The *Opera dei Congressi* is an example of these tendencies emerging in an organisation closely tied to the Church and submissive to the directions of the Church hierarchy with clergy as well as laity as members. While the social doctrine of the Church strongly determined the direction taken by the II Section in particular, the *Opera dei Congressi* gives evidence of lay thought which was developing independently of the line laid down by the Church. In the late 19th century these processes were more advanced in other European countries than Italy but the work done by the *cristiano sociali* and the Christian democrats indicated that Italian Catholics were capable of developing along similar lines.
The social doctrine of the Church has only been considered here in regard to the major papal encyclicals and their influence on the social consciousness and action of the intransigenti. This is because it is such a huge and complex field of inquiry in itself but also because this thesis is concerned primarily with the emergence of social action and thought within an organisation closely linked to the Church but to some extent independent of its control. The fate of the Opera dei Congressi, its disbandment by the pope, indicated the authoritarian role the papacy believed should be exercised over lay action, particularly because such action carried strong political implications. The II Section was permitted to continue to operate independently but its action was to be closely controlled by the hierarchy.

The significance of the militant Catholic movement lies not only in the emergence of Catholic social thought and action in Italy but also in the fact that it is the background from which political Catholicism sprang. The emergence of the Christian Democratic Party in Italy can be traced back to the ferment of these years and to the Opera dei Congressi and the emergence of a lay party operating between the Church and society. Furthermore the same contradictions of conservatism and more radical concerns which were contained within the Opera dei Congressi, divided the modern Christian Democratic Party whether in its former shape of the Partito Popolare or of that of the existing Christian Democratic Party. There was conflict between the more conservative approach operating from the top down and a more democratic approach of reconquest of the masses through action amongst and with the masses.

The militant Catholic movement of the late 19th century has been examined in some detail by Italian historians but very little of this material is available in English. The period of existence of the Opera dei Congressi was, however, a crucial transitional one in the history of Italy, politically, economically and socially. The responses of the intransigenti, both intellectual and practical, to the impact of capitalist processes of transformation, offer an important perspective of those processes in a country in which Catholicism had and continues to play an important part. Moreover, the role the intransigenti played in relation to the social question and the forces they represented were not insignificant even if the strength of the Opera dei Congressi varied considerably throughout the country.

The approaches take by historians to the Opera dei Congressi have varied. In general, different historians have emphasised different aspects of the organisation depending on their particular interest, persuasion, or purpose. Furthermore Italian historians, more so than those of English-speaking origin, more clearly reflect in their work their
political persuasions. The often conflicting views taken of the Opera dei Congressi derive partly from this different approach. However, that the Opera dei Congressi provides such a rich resource for historians also derives from the complexity of the organisation and its relationship to institutions such as the Church, to the State and the ways in which its members reflected and interacted with social, economic and political processes.

Prior to the late 1940s and more particularly the early 1950s the studies of the Catholic movement in Italy were limited both in terms of quantity and profundity of approach. Historians had generally approached the area from a liberal perspective, concentrating on the political role of the Catholic movement and of the Opera dei Congressi and treating a heterogeneous movement as if there were no divisions. In addition there were some studies by Catholic apologists. From the early 1950s there was a shift in approach which broadly began to re-evaluate the significance of the various currents of the Catholic world through the 19th and 20th centuries. In regard to the Opera dei Congressi research began to appear which reassessed the significance of the intransigenti and the relationship of the Catholic movement to Italian society in a more complex fashion than had occurred before. The shift was determined largely by the new political situation but also by factors such as changes in historiographical approaches as the old ones stressing political concerns were shown to be inadequate, and the increased availability of archival material.

Notable were the approaches taken in the studies that appeared from historians such as Fonzi, De Rosa, Gambasin, Scoppola and Candeloro, their positions ranging from Catholic apologist to Marxist. In the following decades there have been controversies and discussions over the studies of the 1950s and further research has appeared which has deepened the knowledge of the area. There has been continued discussion over the relative weight of the political and ideological, as opposed to the economic and social significance of the intransigenti and of the other currents of Catholics. More recently

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Rossi has reassessed the intransigent’s links with the development of capitalism. I have used this material to inform my approach particularly where I believe the historian in question has contributed to the knowledge of the area either in terms of information or in historiographical terms. Brezzi and Gambasin have both been useful in this context because of their extensive use of archival material to which access is difficult. Their areas of concern may seem to overlap with mine but the approaches differ. I have disagreements with parts of Gambasin’s analyses primarily because he is writing from within the Church and this colours his approach. He tends to downplay the conflict over the social question and he also skims over areas I have looked at in greater detail. In regard to Brezzi, his study has a more detailed focus on the leading cristiano sociali while mine is more general. In addition his valuable study ends with the issuing of the papal encyclical on the conditions of the working class, Rerum Novarum, in 1891 leaving 13 years of the existence of the Opera dei Congressi largely unexamined. My intention is not to conduct, however, a historiographical survey but rather to use the material of these historians where it has elucidated the proceedings from the general assemblies of the Opera dei Congressi.

This study takes the approach of a general survey of the social thought and action of the Opera dei Congressi set against the economic and social transformations of the late 1800s and their effects on workers and peasants. It attempts to show the evolution of a social movement within an organisation closely bound to the Church and the contradictions and conflicts which arose when its members either willingly or forcibly confronted the profound problems of the mass of the Italian population. One of the goals of the Opera dei Congressi was to return the masses to the Church, however, in attempting to do this the intransigenti had to face the problems endured by the masses. This study looks at how the intransigenti dealt with the social question, and how they reconciled their Catholic beliefs, their attachment to the Church, their own social and economic interests and questions of social justice, all of which are still of significance to the Church today.

M.G.Rossi, Movimento cattolico e capitale finanziario: appunti sulla genesi del blocco clerico-moderati, Studi storici, 13 (1972), N.2, pp.249-88; M.G.Rossi, Le origini del partito cattolico, Roma, 1977.
The Opera dei Congressi

The first attempt to form a national Catholic organisation to defend the Church and promote Catholic interests in the face of the unification of Italy under a liberal government was made in the mid-1860s. The Associazione cattolica italiana per la difesa della libertà della Chiesa in Italia was established in December 1865 and received papal approval in the following April. The organisation was directed from Bologna by conservative Catholics, who were later closely involved in the Opera dei Congressi, and was represented in various other cities, primarily in the North. It was dissolved by its founders in May 1866 in response to anticlerical actions by the government.\(^1\)

Another, more successful attempt was made in the following year when the Società della Gioventù Cattolica Italiana was established.\(^2\) Similar to the earlier organisation the governing body of Gioventù Cattolica was located in Bologna.\(^3\) The aims of Gioventù Cattolica were somewhat limited in that the organisation, as the name indicates, was directed at young men.\(^4\)

Moves to form a broader, national organisation were made again in 1871. The initial step was a proposal for the holding of a national congress of prominent and active Catholics who were opposed to the attacks being made on the Church. The proposal came from the Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica although it appears that Paganuzzi played an important part in initiating the project.\(^5\) The Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica set itself up as the Comitato Promotore for the new organisation. It compiled a statute for the proposed organisation, borrowing from similar organisations in Germany and Belgium, and formulated clear ideas about its structure.\(^6\) Paganuzzi had hoped that a national congress could be held in 1871 but this proved impossible. The project had the support of conservative Catholics in Bologna and the

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2. Hereafter referred to as Gioventù Cattolica.
5. I. pp.269-74; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.19-31, 281; Scoppola, *Dal neoguelfismo*, op. cit., p.34. For Paganuzzi's role in the Opera dei Congressi, see the references given in Chapter 5, footnote.3.
Veneto but it seems that strong lobbying was necessary to gain wider support and even then the actions of these Catholics were regarded with suspicion by many lay and clerical Catholics.7

Plans were then made to hold the I Congress in 1873 but it was delayed by government bans on congresses and assemblies on the pretext, as the president of the Comitato Promotore Cavalier Acquaderni put it, of abnormal conditions of public health.8 It appears that the delay was also due to continuing uncertainty amongst Catholics as to the benefits of such an organisation as was envisaged, and a cholera epidemic which was raging in Venice where the first congress was to be held.9 The congress was then planned for mid-1874.10 Despite the delays and obstacles a number of Catholic societies and clergy lent their support to the establishment of this new organisation. Acquaderni listed Catholic societies in Rome, Florence and Venice as preparing the work for the different sections. The project was given the apostolic blessing by the pope and there was also vital support from other members of the Church hierarchy.11 The work of the Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica and of Acquaderni himself was acknowledged by the Patriarch of Venice and Honorary President of the I Congress, Cardinal Trevisanato, to have been crucial to the formation of this national body.12

The Opera dei Congressi was to be formally established at the first congress. The constitution of the central governing body of the organisation was announced at the I Congress held in June 187413 and it was intended that the Comitato Promotore hand over to this committee at that Congress.14 It appears, however, that the formal constitution of the Opera dei Congressi did not happen immediately and that the Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica continued to bear responsibility for the new organisation which indicated a very tenuous beginning.15 It seems that the Opera dei

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7 Cavaliere Acquaderni of Bologna, acting as president of the Comitato Promotore, sent letters to the Italian bishops, the pope and Catholic associations at the beginning of 1872. Cardinal Trevisanato, Patriarch of Venice, also wrote to the pope asking for his blessing. I. pp.274-9; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.146-7; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.63; De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., p.68; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.23-9.
8 I. pp.281-3.
9 De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., p.68.
10 I. pp.281-3.
11 I. pp.34-5, 37-40, 276-8; Poggi, op. cit., p.15.
12 I. p.36.
13 I. pp.40-1.
15 Acquaderni stated at the II Congress held in September 1875 that the Congress had been prepared by the Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica with the assistance of other Catholic associations. Also at the II Congress the office and function of the Comitato Generale Permanente for future congresses were entrusted to the Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica. II. pp.47, 187.
Congressi did not emerge as a distinct organisation from Gioventù Cattolica for several years and certainly was very dependent on the assistance it gave.\textsuperscript{16}

Under the Statute put together in November 1871 and signed by Acquaderni as President, Cavalier Rubbiani as Secretary, and approved by Cardinal Trevisanato, members of the Opera dei Congressi were to be delegates of Italian Catholic associations, active members of Catholic associations adhering to the Statute, Catholics known for their religious zeal and learning who were nominated as soci adherenti and who accepted the Statute, clergy with special commendatory letters from their bishops and finally men invited to join by the Comitato Promotore.\textsuperscript{17} Women could participate as observers and Catholic women's associations could be represented by their male spiritual director or ecclesiastical assistant.\textsuperscript{18} The associations and individuals were required to make a financial contribution to the Opera dei Congressi.\textsuperscript{19} A substantial proportion of members appear to have been clergy.\textsuperscript{20} Members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy had a more direct, advisory role.\textsuperscript{21} Thus the Comitato Promotore had Cardinal Trevisanato as its honorary president. Each congress was to have as honorary president the senior member of the Catholic hierarchy of the town in which it was held.

In the early years of the Opera dei Congressi, activity focussed on the national congresses. Later on, the organisation of regional, diocesan and parish structures took on more importance but at the beginning it could be said that the national congresses were to a large extent, all that existed of the Opera dei Congressi. This crossover was reflected in the copies of the Statute included in the proceedings of the I and II Congresses. The first copy referred to the purpose of the 'congress' whereas the second copy set out identical aims as being those of the Opera dei Congressi, that is of the organisation.\textsuperscript{22} According to De Rosa the Opera dei Congressi was seen by some

\begin{itemize}
\item Article III, Statute, I. pp.13-4.
\item II, Vol.II, Documenti, p.95.
\item Articles IV-VI, Statute, I. pp.13-4; Article IV, Statute, II, Vol.II, Documenti, p.95.
\item Candeloro notes that clergy outnumbered laity at the I Congress. Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.67; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.154. Another example of the role of the clergy is the significant proportion of clerics responsible for the work of the various sections. See X. pp.16-9; XI. p.10; XII. pp.27-31; XIII. pp.15-9; XIV. pp.23-7; XV. pp.22-6; XVI. pp.15-6; XVII. pp.17-22; XVIII. pp.19-23.
\item Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.33-4.
\item Article II, Statute, I. pp.13-7; Article I, Statute, II, Vol.II, Documenti, p.94. The crossover was also indicated by the name, the Opera dei Congressi e dei Comitati Cattolici in Italia. The Comitato Generale Permanente was also transferred from a committee responsible for realising the deliberations of the congresses to one responsible for regulating all the activities of the organisation. De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.98-9.
\end{itemize}
intransigenti as an instrument, as a series of public occasions to promote Catholic activities rather than a concrete, structured organisation. However, as there had been a number of attempts to establish such an organisation it is not surprising that the *Opera dei Congressi* emerged in the form of a structured organisation.

The purpose of the congresses was to draw Catholics together in a national congress to gain strength and inspiration and to propose and formulate programs for action to promote the Catholic cause. The Statute of the *Opera dei Congressi* stated that:

*Scopo del Congresso è di riunire in generali adunanze i Delegati e i Membri delle Società cattoliche italiane, e tutti i Cattolici conosciuti per la loro devozione alla causa della Religione, affine:*

1. di informarsi dello stato delle Opere già esistenti in Italia;
2. di provvedere alla loro maggiore diffusione;
3. di procurare la fondazione di nuove Opere;
4. e di concertarsi sui modi coi quali Associazioni ed individui possano più efficacemente concorrere alla difesa dei diritti di Santa Chiesa, e rinvigorire nei popoli lo spirito religioso.24

Cardinal Trevisanato described the congresses in the following terms:

...non è un Concilio, ma una eletta riunione di dottissime e nobili persone cristiane e veramente cattoliche, qua raccoltesi per difendere le ragioni della Chiesa e di quel Pontefice Santo che la Chiesa governa.25

The congresses were a time of personal renewal for the participants and of testimony to Italian society of their Catholicism and devotion to the pope. They were also the occasion on which decisions were made regarding the structure of the organisation and during which members were urged to show greater dedication to organising support from Catholics.27

There was also emphasis, although primarily at a later date, on the role of the *Opera dei Congressi* as a means of organising the masses. At the VIII Congress Paganuzzi, by then president of the organisation, stated that the importance of the Congress derived

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23 Ibid., pp.97-8.
25 I. p.218.
26 VI. pp.85-7.
27 II. pp.47-8; IV. *Documenti*, pp.347-51; VI. pp.87-8.
not just from its themes which were the fate of the poor classes and the future of the
growing generation, but also from the union of i popoli cattolici in the name of their
faith, their religious interests and in the name of the Church and the Pontiff. Conte
Commendatore Viancino di Viancino spoke of the spirit of the Opera dei Congressi in a
similar tone at the XIII Congress in 1895:

...l’Opera dei Congressi non è puramente un’opera di pietà, o di carità... La sua
azione è un’azione sociale da opporsi alla congiura contro la fede del popolo
Italiano, contro la guerra che si fa alla Chiesa ed al Papato.29

The understanding of this role by most but not all intransigenti was a paternalistic one
aimed at drawing i popoli italiani under the hierarchical control of ruling class Catholics
to add force to their opposition to the Italian State.

The congresses of the Opera dei Congressi were held annually from 1874 to 1877 but
more infrequently in the 1880s when the organisation was in crisis. They met again at
close intervals through the 1890s and up till 1903. Effectively the Opera dei Congressi
operated for 30 years, holding 19 congresses in that time span.30 Proposals were put to
the II Congress by Paganuzzi, then one of the vice presidents of the Congress, to
ensure that congresses be held at regular intervals.31 At the VIII Congress in 1890, after
a decade of relative inactivity, Paganuzzi proposed that congresses be held annually as
occurred in Germany, Belgium, France and Switzerland.32 Regional congresses were
also held by local committees of the organisation although few were held in the early
years. The national congresses were held in towns and cities, predominantly in
Northern Italy where the Opera dei Congressi was always strongest. Only two were
ever held in the South.33 The congresses normally lasted for four to five days and
several hundred people attended each congress which was generally held in a church.34

28 VIII, p.6.
29 XIII, p.134.
30 Gambasin includes in his list of congresses a XX Congress held in 1910 in Modena. This
Congress has not been considered here because it occurred six years after the dissolution of the
Opera dei Congressi and had little continuity with the other 19 congresses. See Gambasin, Il
movimento sociale, op. cit., Table 5, p.622. For a list of the congresses see Appendix 2.
31 II, pp.116-7.
32 VIII, p.8.
33 The VI Congress was held in Naples and the XVIII in Taranto.
34 Statute, I, pp.13-7. Over 500 attended the II Congress and women were present in the side chapels
of the Church. II, p.43. A description of the scene of the II Congress is given in the proceedings
of the Congress. Reference was made to the banks of seats of bishops and of the presidency. The
latter was richly decorated:
Il postergale della Presidenza, elegantemente lavorato ad intagli lumeaggiati in oro sullo stile del
cinquecento, raffigurava una loggetta a cortine di raso rosso, e sull’arco di mezzo fra intagli pure
The frequency with which the congresses were held was partly due to external factors. On a number of occasions congresses were banned by the local prefect. The III Congress, held in Bologna in 1876, was cut short when the prefect banned it after the first day in response to death threats and demonstrations against those in attendance.\(^3\) A congress was to be held in 1878 but was banned by the Government for political reasons.\(^3\) In 1886 it was planned to hold the VII Congress in Lucca but it was prohibited at the last minute by the prefect on the grounds of general conditions of public health. In a circular sent out to various committees of the Opera dei Congressi, the Comitato Generale Permanente described the reasons given by the Prefect as a pretext for political motives. Brezzi notes, however, that there had been a serious cholera epidemic and that Paganuzzi himself had expressed doubts about holding the congress. The decision may have also been influenced by various contemporary ant clerical moves.\(^3\) Prefects' reports from a range of provinces in the 1880s make it clear that they were monitoring the extent of Catholic influence as well as that of other groups which they regarded as subversive, such as the socialists and extreme republicans.\(^3\)

External influences likewise affected the timing of later congresses. The XI Congress which was planned to be held in Naples in 1893 was deferred to early 1894 for health reasons.\(^3\) Then, in 1898 the Opera dei Congressi was affected by the government's repression of groups regarded as subversive. Nevertheless a national congress was held in Rome. XI. Parte II, Documenti, p. 15.

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\(^3\) Several regional congresses were held in 1878 to compensate for the lack of a national congress. These local congresses were supported by Pope Leo XIII in a breve he sent to the Opera dei Congressi in September 1878. IV. Documenti, p.428; Brezzi, Cristiano sociali e intransigenti. L'opera di Medolago Albani fino alla Rerum Novarum, Roma, 1971, pp.8-9.

\(^3\) Ibid., pp.256-6; VII. pp.19-20.


\(^3\) It was held in Rome. XI. Parte II, Documenti, p.15.
held in April 1899 despite fears that it would be prohibited and despite the disarray that the organisation was in.\(^{40}\)

The frequency of the national congresses was also affected by the internal situation of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} and it gives some indication of the strength of the organisation given that the national congresses constituted such an integral part of the organisation. On the other hand, the frequent holding of congresses was not necessarily positive and productive because it did not allow sufficient time for the development of new material and the implementation of decisions.\(^{41}\)

The lack of regular congresses from the mid 1880s was partly the result of a crisis within the organisation which revolved around the appointment of \textit{Dottor} Venturoli as president to whose appointment much opposition had been expressed.\(^{42}\) In the view of Brezzi the period of Venturoli's presidency, from 1884 to 1889, was characterised by a sense of uncertainty.\(^{43}\) It appears, however, that Venturoli was blamed for problems which stemmed not only from his indecisive leadership. \textit{Conte} Medolago Albani, a leading \textit{intransigente}, believed that inferior intellectual resources and the overly bureaucratic character of the \textit{Comitato Generale Permanente} also contributed to the lack of decisive leadership and action.\(^{44}\)

Throughout the 1880s the organisation also suffered from internal disputes between various factions of \textit{intransigenti} which threatened the existence of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}. The crisis continued until 1890, soon after Paganuzzi was elected president.\(^{45}\) During his presidency, which lasted until 1902, congresses were held nearly every year. Another factor influencing the situation of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}, which was external to the organisation but internal to the Catholic world in its effects, was the line taken by the pope in relation to the Roman question. It has been argued that the period of greatest disarray within the organisation was that during which Leo XIII favoured conciliation, that is from 1879 until 1887 but after 1887 the more rigidly intransigent line taken by Leo XIII favoured the expansion of the militant Catholic movement.\(^{46}\)

\(^{43}\) Ibid., pp.97-8.
The work of the national congresses was divided into five sections:

Section I  
Opere Religiose ed Associazioni

Section II  
Opere di Carità

Section III  
Istruzione ed Educazione

Section IV  
Stampa

Section V  
Arte Cristiana

Each member attending the congress could participate in the studies of a section which were held separately from the general assemblies. At these private sessions of the sections members examined and studied material assigned to the section and then reported to the general assemblies, putting forward proposals for action to be ratified by the congress as a whole.47

These sections changed to some degree over the existence of the Opera dei Congressi. Extra areas of interest were added to sections and the titles of the I and II Sections were altered, reflecting changes in approach and subject matter while the other sections experienced far fewer changes.49 Initially the I Section covered religious organisations with the organisation of the committee structure of the Opera dei Congressi as one of its many concerns. By the V Congress in 1879 the organisation of the Opera dei Congressi was a much more prominent concern and the I Section was then titled, Catholic Action.50 Religious organisations and specifically religious concerns continued to fall under this Section but other more varied areas such as organising the Catholic vote for local and provincial elections, il riposo festivo, the organisation of Catholic...
university students and Catholic women’s societies were added over the years.\(^{31}\)

The II Section, arguably the most important section of the Opera dei Congressi and the one with which this thesis is most concerned, underwent the most significant changes which reflected the increasingly different ideological and practical positions taken by different groups within the organisation. Known as the Opere di Carità for the first four congresses, it was entitled Opere di Carità ed Economia cattolica at the fifth, Economia Cristiana at the sixth and finally Economia Sociale Cristiana from the seventh congress in 1887. The last change was made by Conte Medolago Albani, president of the Section from 1885 until the dissolution of the Opera dei Congressi, because he believed it more accurately reflected the concerns of the Section. Economia Cristiana had been the choice of the Comitato Generale Permanente.\(^{32}\) The title Economia Sociale Cristiana reflected a shift away from traditional Catholic responses to social problems in terms of the provision of spiritual and charitable assistance, to attempts at more detailed assessments of the economic changes that were occurring and of their social effects, and the implementation of practical projects to ameliorate social problems.\(^{53}\)

The sections took on an existence separate from the congresses in the 1880s as permanent sections were gradually established by the Comitato Generale Permanente. The permanent sections were to meet regularly to study material relevant to their areas of concern and prepare proposals and programmes to go both to the Comitato Generale Permanente and the congresses.\(^{54}\) Based in Bergamo in Lombardy, the II Section was officially constituted as a permanent section in January 1885 and it was initially composed of three intransigenti who lived there, Medolago Albani, Professor Caironi and Professor Rezzara.\(^{55}\) It was slowly to gather other interested intransigenti around it although the group most involved was always small.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{31}\) VI. pp.7-9; XIV. pp.23-7; XVII. pp.17-22. It was proposed at the XVII Congress that a general women’s section be added to the I Section to promote the involvement of women in the militant Catholic movement. XVII. pp.172-5. The issue was raised again at the XVIII and XIX Congresses. XVIII. pp.146-50; XIX. pp.25-30. The organisation of Catholic university students was prominent at the later congresses not only because of its function in organising students but also because of the role played by circles of university students in working with operai. XIV. pp.23-7, 104-5, 151; XV. pp.22-6, 295-8; XVI. pp.247-58; XVIII. pp.200-7; Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.39-41.

\(^{32}\) Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.192; Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., p.99.

\(^{33}\) De Rosa regards the title Opere di Carità ed Economia cattolica as indicating confusion over this area because he does not regard the intransigenti as having a clear distinction in approaches. De Rosa, L’azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.146-7.

\(^{34}\) The Comitato Generale Permanente reserved the right to approve proposals made by the permanent sections. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.85-6, 89-90. The proposal to form the permanent sections was made in late 1884 by Medolago Albani. Ibid., p.191.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., pp.190-2; Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., p.98.

\(^{56}\) Candeloro, Storia dell’Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.407. The most notable addition was Toniolo who
From the beginning there were problems over the degree of autonomy the II Section was to be allowed. Attempts by the II Section to establish direct links with the committees of the Opera dei Congressi and other Catholic associations, with the aim of widening the Opera dei Congressi’s involvement in socio-economic issues, were undermined by members of the Comitato Generale Permanente resident in Bologna who then controlled that committee. The committees were not officially informed of the existence of the II Section until November 1885 because the members in Bologna had maintained that the committees did not need to know of this development as the II Section was officially part of the Comitato Generale Permanente. Despite continuing obstacles put up by the Comitato Generale Permanente, Medolago Albani was not deflected from his attempts to gain more independence for the II Section.

Members of the II Section were to find that their work always provoked opposition of varying degrees from the intransigenti controlling the Comitato Generale Permanente largely because their focus on social problems appeared to hardline intransigenti, such as Paganuzzi, to conflict with the role of the Opera dei Congressi as the primary defender of the Church and Catholic values in Italian society.

Apart from the national congresses and the structure of the sections which emerged from them, the other integral part of the Opera dei Congressi was the committee structure based on the hierarchical structure of the Church. It was headed by the Comitato Generale Permanente, under which there was to be a network of regional, diocesan and parish committees. This committee structure was intended to ensure the spread of the organisation throughout Italy but in practice it was often unwieldy, imposing limitations on local action rather than assisting it. Furthermore many of the committees were moribund, reflecting the problems arising from an insistence on the establishment of such a structure.

contributed greatly to the work of the Section. Agócs describes Toniolo as the major Italian Catholic sociologist of the period. He was professor of political economy at Pisa University from 1882. He was in correspondence with Medolago Albani from 1885 and became more active in the Catholic movement from 1888. S. Agócs, The Troubled Origins of the Italian Catholic Labor Movement, 1878-1914, Detroit, 1988, p.35; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.237; Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.112-4

57 Ibid., p.99.
58 Ibid., pp.107-12,148-9.
59 Ibid., pp.125-6, 266, 295-300, 465-8; IX. pp.150-1.
61 The Comitato Generale Permanente was known as the Comitato Permanente until the VI Congress in 1883.
The Comitato Generale Permanente was established in Bologna from 1875. Initially it was formed by members of the Consiglio Superiore of Gioventù Cattolica but gradually other intransigenti were added. The president of the Opera dei Congressi was elected by members of the Comitato Generale Permanente and his power within the organisation was unlimited. Gradually a smaller group called the consiglio direttivo was formed from the larger committee to assist the president in the daily running of the organisation and the implementation of decisions taken by the Comitato Generale Permanente which met far less frequently. These committees were based in Bologna until Paganuzzi's election to the presidency when they were moved to Venice. In general the Comitato Generale Permanente assisted the president in directing the Opera dei Congressi, made decisions about administrative matters and organised activities relating to the congresses. Members were also to maintain good relations with the bishops and to obtain the active support of other Catholic societies.

The regional, diocesan and parish committees were meant to implement the decisions of the national congresses and to generally promote action in support of Catholic interests. Each of these committees was to be under the guidance of an ecclesiastical assistant. Regional committees were to be composed of at least five people who were to be nominated by the Comitato Generale Permanente and diocesan and parish committees were to have at least three members. Apart from implementing congress proposals, the regional committees were intended to assist the Comitato Generale Permanente in establishing diocesan committees, to work with those committees, to promote the holding of regional assemblies and to carry out administrative tasks such as the collection of financial dues.

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63 Ibid., pp.292-3, 353-4; XI. pp.58-77; XII. pp.95-6; XIV. Documenti, pp.57-8; XV. pp.166-9, 260-2. In the early years the Comitato Generale Permanente was composed of from 13 to 20 members. By the VI Congress it had 35 members and by the VIII Congress in 1890 the number of intransigenti actively and nominally involved in the committee had increased to 50. Its membership remained above that number for the rest of the existence of the organisation. II. p.11; III. pp.5-6; IV. p.5; V. p.5; VI. p.5; VIII. pp.v-vi; IX. pp.5-6; X. pp.5-6; XII. Documenti, Parte II, pp.83-5; XIV. Documenti, pp.137-9. As the committee became larger and the activities of the Opera dei Congressi increased it was resolved to hold a meeting of the entire committee once a year so that direction was given by the entire committee and not just members resident in the city in which it was based. VII. p.36.
64 The consiglio direttivo was then composed almost entirely of Venetians, the majority of whom were priests. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.48-9, 102-5, 271.
65 See the Article of the Statute given in the Documents of the II Congress referring to the duties of the Comitato Generale Permanente. Quoted in Appendix 1.
66 Proposals regarding the establishment of these committees were put to the II Congress in 1875. II. p.216, Vol. II, Documenti, pp.94-102.
67 Another reference states the parish committees were to be composed of at least five members. II. p.216.
The diocesan committees had an extensive list of duties. They were to put together lists of zealous clergy and lay Catholics, to encourage them to become involved in the work of the Opera dei Congressi, to promote Catholic organisations and associations recommended by the congresses, to collect statistics on these associations, to establish parish committees in each parish, to assist with their work by holding regular meetings with them, to collect financial dues and distribute proceedings of the congresses. Members of the diocesan committees were to be nominated by the Comitato Generale Permanente. Parish committees were to work with the local priest to oppose secular influences and promote the Catholic faith. They were seen as centres around which Catholics could gather. These committees were also to hold regional, diocesan and parish congresses to help achieve their aims. Where committees could not be constituted the Opera dei Congressi could be represented by a person described as a corrispondent.

Although the early constitution of a network of committees was advocated and hoped for by the intransigenti, such a network was always far from complete as it depended on the strength of the local Catholic movement and its attitudes to the Opera dei Congressi and its intransigent policies. Frequent exhortations were made throughout the history of the organisation on the need for active involvement of intransigent Catholics in the establishment of committees because of the local representation they gave to it. The success of the intransigenti in founding committees tended to be concentrated in the North although there were some areas of strength in Central and Southern Italy. The statistics reported to the congresses on the committees have been used here to give a general idea of the distribution and extent of the Opera dei Congressi and the level of activity at a local level. The figures for the committees are only indicatory as it is not possible to give accurate figures, in particular for the diocesan and parish committees, because information given in the congress proceedings was never complete as many committees failed to provide information on a regular basis. Other sources such as the extensive tables in Gambasin’s study, Il movimento sociale, have some internal discrepancies as well as conflicting at some points with the congress figures.

69 Ibid.
71 IV. pp.279-94; V. pp.357-9; VII. pp.162-4; VIII. pp.18-25; XI. pp.17-21; XIV. pp.98-100; XVII. pp.149-51; XVIII. pp.265-6.
72 In Central Italy it was relatively strong in Emilia-Romagna and around Naples and later in Sicily in the South.
73 Gambasin’s extensive tables chart the existence of many committees although the absence of figures for any one or number of years does not necessarily indicate that all pre-existing ones had ceased to exist. Rather it often means that no information was available. See Gambasin, Il
Some regional committees were not formed until over 20 years after the establishment of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The first regional committee was formed in 1876 in the Veneto, followed by Lombardy74 and Piedmont in 1877, Liguria in 1878, and Rome, Emilia, the Marches, Tuscany, Campania, Abruzzi, Sicily75 and Romagna in 1879.76 Regional committees were not established in Umbria until 1886, Calabria in 1894, Apulia in 1896 and Sardinia in 1902.77 The fact that a regional committee had been set up did not mean that it was active nor that it continued to exist. A number of these committees were reconstituted after their establishment and some more than once.78 Gambasin states that the number of inactive or practically inactive regional committees always outnumbered the active ones. Paganuzzi, during his presidency, largely by-passed these committees and communicated directly with the diocesan committees which reflected the difficulty of working with the regional committees.79

Diocesan and parish committees had also begun to function by the III Congress held in October 1876.80 By the V Congress in October 1879 there were 11 regional committees, 66 diocesan committees out of a total of 309 dioceses, and an unknown

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74 Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., Table 18, p.649. A report to the V Congress suggests it was 1879. V. pp.164-5.
75 A report to the IX Congress suggests it was not formed until 1886. IX. *Vol. II, Documenti*, p.126.
76 Regarding the Romagna, Gambasin gives 1879 as the date and it was listed as existing at the V Congress. V.p.35. At the VII Congress it was dated to 1885. VII. pp.78-9. It may have been re-established. See also Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., p.337.
77 Also in 1902 two areas formerly included under Campania, around Salerno and Benevento, were designated as regions and regional committees set up. V. p.169; VI. pp.114, 152, 173, 234-5; VIII. pp.71-4; XIII. pp.173-4; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., Table 18, p.649.
78 The *Comitato regionale romana*, set up in 1879, was reported at the IX Congress in 1891 as having just been reconstituted. IX. p.136. It was again reconstituted just before the XI Congress in early 1894. XI. p.74. The *Comitato regionale napoletano* (Campania) stated in its report to the VII Congress in 1887 that its achievements had been affected by problems with the presidency of the committee. VII. p.81. The same committee was reconstituted in 1892, again just before the XI Congress and then again in 1895. X. pp.110-1; XI. pp.74-5; XIII. p.89. It appears that the regional committee in Sicilia was also having problems at the time. XI. pp.76-7. In April 1894 the regional committee in Liguria was also reconstituted and that in Tuscany was also re-established in 1894. XII. pp.103-5, 137. Piedmont was also re-established in 1894 after problems in the early 1890s. XII. *Parte II, Documenti*, pp.53-5.
80 III. pp.42-5. Reference to the existence of various committees was also made in Pius IX's breve to the III Congress. III. pp.27-8.
number of parish committees. 52 of the diocesan committees had been formed since the IV Congress in October 1877. By 1879 regional assemblies had also been held in the Veneto, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Tuscany and the Abruzzi. 27 of the 66 diocesan committees were in Northern Italy, 32 in Central Italy and only six in the South. The region with the largest number of parish committees by 1879 was the Veneto where they had been established in 501 out of the 1663 parishes. In Lombardy the formation of parish committees was considerably slower but some of the dioceses such as Bergamo and Brescia were beginning to stand out as centres of Catholic activity. In the other regions referred to at the V Congress progress was considerably slower.

Through the 1880s advances were made mainly in Northern provinces such as Lombardy and the Veneto and there were pockets of activity in other provinces. However, it seems that while the committees expanded during the early years, in the late 1880s they decreased, reflecting the disarray within the movement during the presidency of Venturoli. All regions which sent reports to the General Secretary of the Comitato Generale Permanente, and not all existing committees managed to do so, seemed to have been experiencing problems in establishing parish committees. This is hardly surprising given the problems inherent in trying to assemble such a network.

By the VIII Congress in 1890 however, the number of diocesan committees had dropped from around 112 to 88. As occurred frequently, few of the diocesan

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81 It was expected that a further 12 diocesan committees would be established soon after the V Congress. V. pp.36-7.
82 V. pp.36-7.
83 Gambasin gives 30 and 38 respectively for the diocesan committees in Northern and Central Italy but six for the South. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., Tables 21-24, pp.654-67; V. pp.36-7.
84 V. pp.162-3.
85 V. pp.164-8.
86 V. pp.168-80.
87 By the VI Congress in 1883 there were 12 regional committees, 114 diocesan and around 3000 parish committees. There were some successes in Central Italy and Piedmont in addition to the Veneto and Lombardy. VI. pp.35, 113-4, 151-9, 173-83, 214-26, 234-43, 246-9. By the VII Congress in 1887 there were 13 regional committees, 112 diocesan and 36 diocesan correspondents. No figure was given for parish committees but it was stated that they were increasing. VII. pp.34, 37-8, 51-3, 58, 61-8, 78-80, 81, 87, 89-90, 109-10, 117, 159; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.326-7.
88 Reports to the VI Congress came from Campania, Rome, Emilia, Piedmont, the Veneto and Liguria. To the VII Congress reports came from Tuscany, Lombardy, Piedmont, Romagna, Campania, the Veneto, Liguria and the Marches. Casoni, the General Secretary, also gave information to the VII Congress on Umbria and Sicily. VII. pp.37-8.
89 Although the number of people acting as diocesan correspondents had increased from 36 to 68. VIII. p.19.
committees had provided information on parish committees to the General Secretary of the Comitato Generale Permanente so complete figures were not available.90 Regional reports from Central Italy indicated some activity in provinces such as Umbria, the Marches and Tuscany91 while in the North, committees were reasonably active in Lombardy, Liguria and the Veneto. The only report from the South came from Campania where parish committees were being reconstituted.92 On the whole, though, apart from the diocese of Brescia in Lombardy, the committees appeared to be fairly stagnant.

By the IX Congress held in the following year, the situation had improved somewhat. Reports from committees were more numerous, particularly from the South.93 There were reports from all regions of Central Italy indicating that there were active committees in some dioceses but on the whole there was not much success in founding committees.94 In the North the situation seemed to be more hopeful and certainly there appeared to be more activity centred primarily around the committees in Lombardy and the Veneto, although the focus of much of the work seemed to be on establishing workers' societies.95

By 1896-897 the committee network was far more extensive. Even from 1896 to 1897 the increase was considerable although the intransigenti were still far from achieving committees in each diocese and parish. Furthermore, given the uncertain existence many committees had, the effectiveness of those existing was open to question. Nevertheless the network represented a significant movement even given its geographical concentration in particular areas.

90 VIII. pp.19-20.
91 VIII. pp.71-4; Documenti, pp.45-9, 55.
92 VIII. Documenti, pp.35-45, 49-64.
93 Southern regions that sent reports were the Abruzzi, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily and Campania. It was the first time that so many reports had come from the South. Most of the reports were from clergy indicating that they had had little success in establishing committees in most regions. IX, Vol.II, Documenti, pp.113-32.
95 Ibid., pp.27-77. In Brescia approximately one third of the parish committees had been transformed into, or united with, Catholic workers' societies. Ibid., pp.49-50.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Number of Dioceses</th>
<th>Diocesan Committees</th>
<th>Number of Parishes</th>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>1075</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Calabria</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>886</td>
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96 The figures given for the parish committees at the two Congresses conflict. At the XV Congress the number of parish committees for 1896 was given as 26 whereas the statistical report made to the XIV Congress gives 121. The latter figure has been used here. An increase of 65 over the two years brings the total to 186. XIV. pp.143-4; XV. pp.156-7, 159.

97 The parish committee figures again conflict. A figure of 184 was given at the XV Congress for 1896 but the figure in the statistical report was 266. An increase of 286 brings the total to 550. XIV. pp.142-3; XV. p.157.

98 There is disagreement again between the figures for the parish committees. The figure given for 1896 at the XV Congress was 104 but the statistical report gives 154. An increase of 35 brings the total to 189. XIV. pp.142-3; XV. p.157.
<table>
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<th>Regions</th>
<th>Number of Dioceses</th>
<th>Diocesan Committees</th>
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<td></td>
<td>1896</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>1897</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardinia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Italy</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>309</strong></td>
<td><strong>172</strong></td>
<td><strong>196</strong></td>
<td><strong>20191</strong></td>
</tr>
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The expanded organisation was not to last long. The network that had been painstakingly built up over 24 years was severely reduced when the Government dissolved two thirds of the committees and associated organisations during the upheavals of 1898 on the grounds that they were a threat to public order. The rapid growth of the *Opera dei Congressi* during the 1890s, it appears, had begun to worry the liberals.100 The *intransigenti* were never able to rebuild the network to its strength of 1897.101 Letters from the *Opera dei Congressi* to the Minister for Internal Affairs in June 1898 and January 1899,102 and a report to the XVII Congress (1900) giving advice on

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99 The figures are drawn from the reports given to the XIV and XV Congresses by Monsignor Scotton. He noted to the XIV Congress that many diocesan committees had failed to respond to requests for information in which case they had been left out. XIV, pp.137-45; XV, pp.153-9. It could be argued that if they failed to respond, their level of activity could be questioned. These figures differ frequently with those given by Gambasin in *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.654-81, but they have been used in preference to those of Gambasin which have internal discrepancies.

100 XVI, pp.66-72, 79-85; Scoppola, *Dal neoguelfismo*, op. cit., p.63; De Rosa argues that the Government action was motivated by a range of reasons. Firstly to defend the State from attack from the two mass oppositions, the Catholics and the socialist movement, but also to force the militant Catholics to draw back from their intransigence and help defend the State. De Rosa, *L'azione cattolica*, Vol.1, op. cit., p.187. The diocesan committee in Milan was dissolved first followed by four regional committees, 70 diocesan committees, around 2600 parish committees, 600 youth sections and 400 other associations linked to the *Opera dei Congressi*. The Comitato Generale Permanente was not dissolved. Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.262-4. The *intransigenti* stressed at the XVI Congress in 1899 that they supported social peace and opposed socialism. XVI, pp.66-72, 79-85, 144-9. The dissolutions occurred primarily in Lombardy, the Veneto, Tuscany and the Romagna. Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.261-4. F. Fonzi, *I cattolici e la società italiana dopo l'unità*, Nuova Universale Studium, Roma, 1977, pp.91-102.

101 Candeloro states that the committees revived quickly but this conflicts with references in the congress reports. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol.7, op. cit., p.182; XVI, pp.101-5, 278-83; *Parte II, Documenti*, pp.54-7; XVII, pp.149-51. There was only one reference to general organisation at the XVII Congress and no general regional reports were given at the previous Congress. Nor was there a report to the XVIII Congress. A report to the XIX Congress outlined the difficulties they had encountered. XIX, pp.5-8.

102 XVI,* Parte II, Documenti*, pp.54-7.
the reconstitution of committees, indicate that they were initially impeded by Government opposition to the re-establishment of the committees. Their attempts were also undermined by conflicts within the Opera dei Congressi over the growing Christian democratic movement which was challenging the control of the older intransigenti over Catholic action and by a general change in environment. It was acknowledged at the XIX Congress that they were operating in a different environment which worked against the re-establishment of the committees as younger intransigenti were drawn towards groups based on principles of Christian democracy. The report on general organisation to the same Congress added that the death of Leo XIII and the election of a new pope had also created uncertainty about the direction the Opera dei Congressi should take.

The reasons for the geographical concentration of the Opera dei Congressi go beyond the concerns of this thesis but a few comments are appropriate to give some understanding of the complexity of the situation at a local level. The various reports from areas where the intransigenti found it difficult or impossible to establish committees referred to a lack of interest or even opposition from local Catholics. Gambasin attributes the apathy primarily to the administrative centre of the Opera dei Congressi being in the North. He also gives a more detailed survey of the geographical incidence of the committees, noting some of the local reasons for the varying support. De Rosa explains the relative absence of committees in the South as being the result of different attitudes of the clergy and peasants to such an organisation and to the Italian State. Sicily stands out as an exception although this was a later development and was closely linked to Catholic socio-economic action taken in response to increasing socialist activities. The extremely inflexible stance of some leading intransigenti, in particular of Paganuzzi who always played a dominant role in the organisation, was another major factor which hindered the expansion of the

103 XVII. pp.149-51.
104 XVII. pp.63-4, 149-51; XIX. pp.5-8; Scoppola, Dal neoguelfismo, op. cit., pp.70-1.
105 XIX. pp.5-8, 21-3. The few statistics which were available indicate that 104 diocesan committees had forwarded information indicating that there were 1965 parish committees out of approximately 20191 parishes. There were 155 Christian democratic groups. XIX. pp.5-8.
108 Ibid., pp.325-55.
109 To support his argument he refers to the lack of support in the South for the non expedit in comparison to areas of Catholic strength in the North. De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1., op. cit., pp.155-6. Tramontin reaches similar conclusions in his article on Catholic action in the South. See S. Tramontin, Movimento cattolico e azione sociale in Italia meridionale all'epoca della presidenza Paganuzzi (1891), BASMCI, X, 1975, pp.85-127.
committees. Furthermore it appears that it was often difficult to keep such committees going, perhaps because of the generality of their purpose. This may have been a reason for the close connection between Catholic workers' societies and these committees in areas such as Liguria and Lombardy, in particular in the diocese of Brescia. The pattern of stagnancy and expansion of the committees was also related to some extent to the internal problems of the *Opera dei Congressi* as was the case with the frequency with which the congresses were held.

The activities of the committees were as varied as the lists of their duties. Some of the committees, primarily in the North, were involved in activities dealing with social and economic problems. The first report from the regional committee of Lombardy stressed the importance of such activity in the range of action it had undertaken. The Ligurian committee also noted socio-economic work in its report. The reports from Lombardy continued to emphasise these socio-economic issues and a number of other regions gradually included such references. It was later proposed that where the need was felt regional and diocesan committees should establish permanent commissions to deal with the work of the separate sections, a proposal which was repeated at the XIX Congress with emphasis on groups to look at socio-economic issues. Some committees had already set up sections to deal with specific concerns. At the VII Congress in 1887 it was noted that the diocesan committee of Bergamo in Lombardy had three sections, one for matters of organisation, another for elections and the third for workers' societies.

The role played by the *Opera dei Congressi* as an organisation, its scope for manoeuvre and achievement, were strongly determined by the extent of papal and clerical influence over it, the direction of papal policies and its relationship to other lay Catholic organisations. The *Opera dei Congressi* stood between the world and the Church as a kind of intermediary, a position which was bound to be difficult if it showed signs of developing in directions which were unacceptable to the Church hierarchy or if any of its members sought autonomy from the policies of that hierarchy.

114 V. pp.164-8.
115 V. pp.168-74.
116 VII. pp.56-70, 81-9, 109-18; XIII. pp.69-73, 75-9, 80-7, 96-103, 112-22.
117 XV. *Programma, I Sessone*, pp.22-6, 166-9; XIX, pp.23-4.
118 VII. pp.63-4.
The *Opera dei Congressi* was totally submissive to the pope. Each congress was dedicated to the pope with a declaration of submission and profession of their Catholicism:

*Il Congresso è Cattolico e non altro che Cattolico. Imperocchè il Cattolicismo è dottrina compiuta, la grande dottrina del genere umano. Il Cattolicismo perciò non è liberale, non è tirannico, non è altra qualità; qualunque qualità vi si aggiunga, dì per sè è un gravissimo errore: suppone che il Cattolicismo o manchì di qualche cosa che è d'uopo dargli, o, contenga qualche cosa che è d'uopo levargli; è gravissimo errore che non può che partorire scisme ed eresie.*


The telegram sent from the I Congress to Pius IX was of a similar tone:

*I Cattolici riuniti per la prima volta in generale Congresso, cominciamo l'opera loro col prostrarsi umilmente ai piedi della Sanità Vostra, rinnovando la loro piena ed intera adesione a tutte le verità proclamate dalla Vostra infallibile parola e supplicandola ad incoraggiarli e sorreggerli colla sua Apostolica Benedizione.*

Frequent statements of this nature were made at all the congresses. In the dedication of the I Congress to Pius IX it was said that

*nessuna delle nostre proposte avrebbe ragione di essere, se l'autorevole approvazione Vostra non la confermasse.*

The dedication of the *intransigenti* to the papal cause was also to the clergy and the Church, both of which they felt had been dispossessed under the unification of Italy.

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120 I. pp.43-4.
121 I. p.43.
123 I. p.7.
and anticlerical measures taken by the Italian State. Each congress also sent a delegation to an audience with the pope.

The support given by Pius IX to the *Opera dei Congressi* was warm and encouraging and he wrote to the I Congress expressing his joy that they were undertaking the task of helping the Church to draw together the Catholic societies in Italy. He also praised their defence of religion and of the Church in Italian society. To the II Congress he issued a warning against liberal Catholicism, telling the *intransigenti* to remain faithful to the profession they had made at the I Congress which he said conformed perfectly to the judgement of the Sacred See. The support of Leo XIII, who was elected in 1878, was not so unqualified. He continued the practice of sending a papal breve to each congress but his openness, from 1878 until 1887, to conciliation with the Italian State, even if it was always in his mind to be on the terms of the Church, meant that his support for the *Opera dei Congressi* was more tempered. It seems his support for the organisation was far more open and wholehearted after the failure of conciliatory moves in 1887. Gambasin observes that support from the Church hierarchy also seems to have increased following the change in papal policy.

In later years Leo XIII seemed to exert more direct control over the *Opera dei Congressi*. A new statute and regulations issued at the XVIII Congress were drawn up by the Holy See as were the directions on the nature and scope of the action being taken by the Christian democrats which was giving rise to major conflicts within the organisation. The new constitution made structural changes to the organisation and bound it closer to ecclesiastical authority. It was placed under the control of the *Sacra Congregazione degli affari ecclesiastici* and under the new statute no changes could be made to the *Opera dei Congressi* by its members or committees. The president was to be formally appointed by the pope. Papal influence and direction was also clear in the

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126 I. pp.24-5.
127 II. pp.33-4.
128 Gambasin notes that double the usual number of bishops attended the X Congress in 1892 and there was greater support for the establishment of committees. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.42-5, 273-4, 346-8. The role of Monsignor Rampolla, appointed Papal Secretary of State in 1887, may also have played a part. He was a firm supporter of the *Opera dei Congressi*. Tramontin, *Movimento cattolico*, op. cit., p.86.
130 Previously the president was effectively appointed by the pope but then formally elected by members attending the relevant congress. De Rosa regards the new *Statute* as indicating a lack of confidence by the pope in the direction of the *Opera dei Congressi*. De Rosa, *L'azione cattolica*, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.238-40.
breves sent to the congresses which were not only messages of encouragement by also of admonishment.\textsuperscript{131} The admonishing tone was more apparent in the later days of the Opera dei Congressi in regard to the conflict between the hardline intransigenti and the Christian democrats.\textsuperscript{132} However, the ultimate expression of papal power over this organisation was its disbandment by Pius X in 1904 largely as a consequence of conflict between changing papal policies in regard to the Italian State and the direction being taken by the Opera dei Congressi. Whether the Opera dei Congressi was controlled by hardline intransigenti or the Christian democrats, it placed pressure on the more flexible line being taken by the new pope in relation to the Italian State.\textsuperscript{133}

Another factor which had a strong influence over the nature of the Opera dei Congressi and the course it took was its relationship to other lay Catholic organisations. Papal intentions seem to have been that the Opera dei Congressi should lead the Catholic societies and associations, to give them direction and unity but not to encroach on the autonomy and freedom of action of individual societies.\textsuperscript{134} Many intransigenti believed that it would only be possible to combine the strengths of the various societies spread throughout Italy into a coherent Catholic force through harmonious relations and willing cooperation. In reality, however, the Opera dei Congressi emerged as the dominant lay organisation in Italy, which was the cause of considerable conflict within the Catholic movement.\textsuperscript{135}

To a great degree the dominance of the Opera dei Congressi flowed naturally from the nature of the organisation and its papal support, although the latter was not always unqualified as has been noted. The Opera dei Congressi was established as a national body to draw all the fragmented Catholic groups and the stronger ones together into a powerful co-ordinated movement. But what was at issue was the nature of the links between the Opera dei Congressi and other Catholic associations. It was the cause of some conflict because members of the Opera dei Congressi were often also members of other Catholic societies and the crusading role that the organisation took, particularly under the lengthy presidency of Paganuzzi, was directed basically at absorbing those societies. Paganuzzi wanted the Opera dei Congressi to be both a national organisation and the central co-ordinator of the Italian Catholic movement.\textsuperscript{136} The pressure put on active Catholics to allow this absorption into the Opera dei Congressi of the

\textsuperscript{131} II. pp.33-4; XII. pp.19-20; XIII. pp.62-3; XIV. pp.89-90.
\textsuperscript{132} XVIII. pp.96-7.
\textsuperscript{134} I. pp.24-5.
\textsuperscript{135} XII. pp.19-20; XIII. pp.62-3; XIV. pp.89-90; XVI. pp.61-2; XVII. p.50.
\textsuperscript{136} Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.56-9.
organisations with which they were involved also caused opposition from what De Rosa assesses as the best part of the clergy. There was also resentment against what was seen as the *Opera dei Congressi* sapping the strength of other lay Catholic organisations to build up its own strength.\(^{137}\)

Initially, members of the *Opera dei Congressi* were encouraged to become involved in establishing a variety of Catholic associations. At the I Congress, for example, they were exhorted to work to form associations to promote feast days, which were being increasingly ignored, associations concerned with Catholic education, mutual aid societies for workers and women's associations, and to join or found local circles of St Vincent de Paul and various pious associations where they did not exist all of which seems to suggest that the expectations of Catholic activism were exaggerated.\(^{138}\) Similar proposals were made at the following Congress.\(^{139}\) In later years the *intransigenti* were urged frequently to form workers' societies and other socio-economic organisations.\(^{140}\) The early involvement of *intransigenti* from various regions in promoting a range of Catholic associations began to become clear from the V Congress in 1879 when the regional reports started to appear in the Congress proceedings.\(^{141}\) The sense of a more cooperative relationship between the *Opera dei Congressi* and the other Catholic organisations is also suggested by the way the committee structure was listed in the early programs, along with a list of other associations to be promoted and encouraged. It did not stand out by itself as the focus of organisational work as it did later.\(^{142}\)

However, the *intransigenti* did want these autonomous Catholic associations to be associated with the *Opera dei Congressi* and at each congress a list of Catholic organisations that were participating, or had sent greetings, was included in the proceedings.\(^{143}\) In some areas the existence and activity of these organisations impeded the formation of diocesan and parish committees. These associations often also represented the *Opera dei Congressi* in their area while still not wanting to be absorbed by the national organisations.\(^{144}\) In some areas of the North, particularly in the diocese of Brescia, around one third of the parish committees were transformed into workers' societies by 1891, indicating the potential within the committees to adapt to local

\(^{139}\) The proposals at the II Congress included the Third Order of St Francis and associations for the education of young Catholic girls. II. pp.69-72, 141-3.
\(^{140}\) These organisations are discussed in detail in Chapters 10 and 11.
\(^{141}\) See Section I, I. pp.289-90; II. pp.27-30; III. pp.18-24; IV. pp.7-9; V. pp.7-9.
\(^{143}\) This occurred in Piedmont, Liguria and Tuscany for example. VI. pp.222-3; VIII. pp.18-22, Documenti, pp.35-41; IX. Vol.II, Documenti, pp.29, 80-2, 107-8, 129-30; X. p.104, 83-5.
needs. Nevertheless there was also resistance from Catholic groups. In Piedmont, for example, Catholic groups resisted pressure to submerge themselves in the *Opera dei Congressi*. It was only with the emergence of Christian democratic circles that they became involved in a more general movement. There was also resistance from Catholic associations in the South of Italy.

Initial support by the *intransigenti* for relative autonomy of other lay Catholic organisations and the establishment of local branches of these organisations gradually changed as groups more firmly attached to the *Opera dei Congressi* were founded to perform the same tasks or deal with the same areas. There was, for example, encouragement for the establishment of electoral committees to work for the election of Catholics in the provincial and municipal elections. At the early congresses these committees were included as one of many types of associations to be promoted, but by the VI Congress (1883) issues relating to provincial and municipal elections and the electoral committees had been given a separate subsection within the I Section. Associations promoting the observance of Catholic festivals and Sundays as a day of rest, youth sections, university groups and workers' and peasants' societies followed a similar path of development.

Socio-economic associations such as the workers' societies, *casse rurali*, rural unions and Catholic cooperatives were also closely linked with the *Opera dei Congressi*. The II Section put considerable effort into founding these associations, drawing up regulations for their establishment and operation, and giving advice on their activities and the various committees were encouraged to be closely involved in their establishment. These associations did not always want to be linked to the *Opera dei Congressi* as is apparent in the regional reports to the congresses where a number were often described as 'not adhering'.

143 IX. *Vol.II*, *Documenti*, p.50.
148 Unlike the national elections, Catholics were encouraged to vote in these elections because of the local control and influence they gave. II. *Vol.II*, *Documenti*, pp.104-8.
149 This subsection continued to exist throughout the existence of the *Opera dei Congressi*. VI. pp.7-9; X. pp.280-2; XI. pp.17-21; XII. pp.235-44; XV. pp.22-6; XVIII. pp.19-23.
150 Small rural credit institutions. See Chapter 11.
For a number of intransigenti the central role they regarded the *Opera dei Congressi* as having amongst Catholic societies in Italy went further than coordination to a strong dominant role, where the *Opera dei Congressi* became the main organisation to which all other societies had to adhere:

...*Opera dei Congressi*, pur non derogando in nulla alla indipendenza, all’autonomia alla libertà delle nostre istituzioni, nè è un’opera nuova, nè è un’opera differente dalle altre; ma è l’armonia, il complemento, il vigore, la difesa, il sostegno e la perfezione di tutte.\(^{154}\)

The I Section of the *Opera dei Congressi* which was responsible for the organisation and for links with other Catholic associations, frequently put forward proposals which expressed these sentiments.\(^{155}\)

Such attitudes caused problems with a number of associations which resented the role the *Opera dei Congressi* claimed. The conflict was particularly acute with *Gioventù Cattolica* which was ironic given the crucial part it had performed in helping to establish and propagate the *Opera dei Congressi*.\(^{156}\) The struggle between the two organisations began in the early years of the *Opera dei Congressi* with hardline intransigenti, primarily Paganuzzi, pushing for dominance through the *Opera dei Congressi*, and the leaders of *Gioventù Cattolica* resisting this pressure. As a consequence a number of the prominent intransigenti involved in both organisations, notably the President of the *Opera dei Congressi* Acquaderni, withdrew from the *Opera dei Congressi* around the end of the 1870s.\(^{157}\) The situation was not helped by the decision at the VI Congress (1883) to found youth sections in local parishes.\(^{158}\) The proposal was first raised by Paganuzzi in 1881 and was the cause of some conflict within the *Comitato Generale Permanente*.\(^{159}\) It also provoked conflict at a local level because, while some groups

\(^{154}\) VI. p.77. See also VI. 70-88, 35, 85-8. For the central role most intransigenti saw the *Opera dei Congressi* playing see I. pp.120-4; V. pp.392-4; IX. pp.159-64; X. pp.204-6; XI. pp.58-77; XIV. pp.133-5; XV. pp.293-5.

\(^{155}\) Thus, for example, at the VII Congress in 1887 proposals from that Section invited all Catholic societies to unite with the *Opera dei Congressi* and encouraged these societies to represent and found committees of the *Opera dei Congressi* in areas where they had not yet been established. VII. pp.162-4.


\(^{157}\) Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.53-60. Some historians have dated the struggle from later in the 1880s but the conflict had already emerged earlier as the resignations of a number of intransigenti from Bologna make clear. See Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.231-2; Poggi, op. cit., p.17.

\(^{158}\) VII. pp.89-96; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., p.66.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., p.66. The first youth section was set up in the Veneto followed by Lombardy then other regions. VII. pp.64-70, 89-96; VIII. pp.18-25; X. pp.48-51, 83-5, 88-9, 95-7, 99-101, 104-6,
were set up in places where there were no circles of Gioventù Cattolica, they were also established where they did exist.163

Paganuzzi continued to take an uncompromising line despite efforts to resolve the conflict through appeals to the pope. At the X Congress in 1892 Paganuzzi noted that the papal breve to the previous Congress stated that the pope wanted the Opera dei Congressi as the head of Catholic forces. Each society was autonomous in its own sphere of action but it had also to consider itself as part of a whole which was to find its centre in the Opera dei Congressi and general action was to be decided on by the Opera dei Congressi. Paganuzzi went on to charge that some societies had disregarded the papal will and that this was an unpardonable, thoughtless action.161 Papal intervention did little to stop Paganuzzi’s pursuit of Gioventù Cattolica and in fact Leo XIII’s intervention was more a victory for Pazanuzzi, approving as it did the formation of youth sections and assigning a pre-eminent role to the Opera dei Congressi.162

The Opera dei Congressi reached its high point from 1896-7 with diocesan committees in 196 out of 309 dioceses, parish committees in 4436 out of 20191 parishes, 718 youth sections and 16 university circles.163 Added to the committee network were a range of associations started by the intransigenti and other societies which had linked themselves to the Opera dei Congressi. Gambasin concludes that 7672 Catholic institutions were linked to the Opera dei Congressi while 954 chose not to do so.164 The Catholic movement led by the Opera dei Congressi was not large and it was far from reaching the intransigenti’s goal of active representation in each parish and diocese of the country, nevertheless, in the estimation of Candeloro, it constituted a conspicuous force.165 From this high point it was seriously undermined by the Government repression of 1898 from which it did not really recover. At the same time conflict

160 VII. pp.89-96. Candeloro maintains it was done to combat moderate tendencies as well as to absorb Gioventù Cattolica. Candeloro, Il movimenti cattolico, op. cit., pp.231-2.
161 X. pp.301-2.
162 See Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.66-71, 298; Scoppola, Dal neoguelfismo, op. cit., p.59; Candeloro,Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.232; De Rosa, L’azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.94-5. At the XII Congress (1894) it was proposed that Catholic workers’ societies and rural societies found youth sections preferably according to the regulations compiled for those of the Opera dei Congressi. Apparently some had already done so. XII. pp.163-8.
164 His figures give some indication of the size of the movement despite discrepancies. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.321. He also tallies members involved in the committees, the youth sections and university circles at 115,155. Ibid., p.322.
began to emerge more overtly within the *Opera dei Congressi* as the younger *intransigenti* sought a new direction for the organisation with a more open social and political commitment. The conflict between the various factions of *intransigenti*, combined with changing papal policies under a new pope, ultimately resulted in the destruction of the *Opera dei Congressi*. 
Italy's Economic Transformation

The statements, reports and proposals made by the intransigenti on the social question referred generally to structural changes in the Italian economy and their profound social effects. The views put by the intransigenti of the processes of change in Italy were often distorted by their particular ideological perspective but equally more objective descriptions were evident in their speeches to the general assemblies of the congresses. An outline of the structural changes is therefore an essential basis against which to compare and contrast the views of the intransigenti.

For Italy the period stretching from unification to the early 20th century was one of transition in which a predominantly semi-feudal mode of production was being increasingly replaced by a capitalist mode of production. The social and economic processes which were effecting this transformation can be traced back beyond the 19th century, taking place in a fragmentary and complex manner. After unification, however, these processes were accelerated by sections of the ruling class and the ruling fraction in control of the State, one of whose primary goals was the creation of a fully capitalist economy.¹

The various processes of development of a capitalist mode of production have been the subject of much debate and disagreement, primarily in relation to the development of industrial capitalism but also in regard to agriculture. The debate is complex, the detail of which goes largely beyond the limits of this thesis, but essentially it has revolved around the differing significance that has been given to aspects of structural change. More specifically there has been considerable debate over the role played by State policies, available capital and agricultural developments, and there has been disagreement over the models of economic change scholars have used. Gerschenkron, for example, disagrees with the model used by Romeo of a gradual development of preconditions followed by transformation, arguing instead that in the case of Italy some of the preconditions considered essential were either missing, substituted by other factors or occurred at the same time as industrial transformation. Others have argued that many preconditions were not causes but rather characteristics of industrial

development, or consequences of it, that could facilitate development.²

The intention here is not to try to show the development of a capitalist system as a whole in Italy nor to assess the validity of the various interpretations in any detail but rather to set out some of the problems and structural changes which had a major impact on the peasantry and urban workers.

One of the characteristics of the Italian social formation in the late 1800s was the continuing operation in many parts of the country of pre-capitalist forms, including areas where capitalist production was dominant. The contradictions between the two modes of production and the problems resulting from both the contradictory processes and the implementation of capitalist production, largely devoid of any structures to protect workers and peasants, were extreme. These contradictions were also partly the consequence of the alliances within the ruling class, notably between Northern industrialists and Southern landowners, which enabled a fraction of the ruling class to govern the country while other members of the ruling class maintained their power base even though their interests were often divergent from those of the ruling fraction.³ The compromises that this political arrangement entailed helped to maintain semi-feudal structures and social relations in certain regions, primarily in the South, and to impede the development of capitalist forms.

The pressures and conflicts were more acute because of the rapid population growth which occurred during the late 1800s. Overall the population grew from approximately 25,017,000 in 1861⁴ to 26,800,000 in 1870 and around 33 million in 1901.⁵ The increase was more marked in the South.⁶ Because Italy was predominantly

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agricultural, the effects of the increase was most strongly felt in the countryside. The active agricultural population grew from 8,652,000 in 1871 to 9,611,000 in 1901 despite mass emigration. The increase could not be absorbed by the rural economy nor was there sufficient industrial development to alleviate the pressure. The main consequence of the population increases was the growing pressure on resources, that is on land and levels of agricultural production. The pressure was greatest in the South where any increase in agricultural production was rapidly absorbed. The situation remained much the same until mass emigration began from the 1880s. 5,257,911 people emigrated from 1876 to 1900 although some did return.

In addition to the continuing operation of semi-feudal forms and population pressures a number of other major factors stood in the way of the development of a capitalist mode of production. These were the absence of a national market, the lack of an effective communications network and limited capital. The State set about changing this situation although the policies of the various governments may not have been the most beneficial ones to encourage development, to which the political compromises which underpinned the position of the ruling fraction contributed. The action taken by the State, however, did facilitate the process of dispossessioning peasants of their means of subsistence, forcing them to live by selling their labour power, thus assisting in the creation of an essential precondition for a capitalist system, the existence of a class of free labourers.

The principal visible problem as far as the State was concerned was the absence of a national market. Prior to unification only local and provincial markets operated in any genuine form, although there was some regional trade. To encourage the establishment of a national market the new Italian State removed the trade barriers that had existed between the various Italian states and standardised the taxation and monetary systems.

The State put considerable resources into the creation of an efficient communications

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7 In percentage terms the rise was from 57.6% to 59.1%. These percentages were high in relation to other European countries in the same period. Lotte agrarie in Italia. La federazione nazionale dei lavoratori della terra. 1901-1926, ed. R.Zangheri, Milano, 1960, pp.xiv-xv. Figures given by Villani differ slightly and the percentages are higher, from 61.6% to 59.8%. Villani, Storia d'Italia, op. cit., p.930.
8 Davis, op. cit., pp.72-3, 79.
9 Villani, Storia d'Italia, op. cit., p.964.
10 See sources cited in footnote 2 for discussion of this point.
network as a means of assisting the establishment of a national market and of establishing basic links throughout the peninsula politically and economically. In 1859 the railway network was almost entirely restricted to Piedmont, Lombardy, the Veneto and Tuscany. By 1897, through a massive injection of public capital, an effective structure was established although, as with other changes brought about by the ruling class in its capitalist transformation of Italy, the benefits were weighted towards the North rather than the South. Over the period 1870-1900 the number of passengers carried more than tripled and the amount of goods transported increased by an even greater figure. The road network was likewise extended. Prior to unification it was limited, particularly in the South. Furthermore the condition of many roads, again primarily in the South, was so bad that travel was impossible during certain periods of the year in entire regions such as Sicily and Calabria. The expansion of the road network remained limited, however, in the South. The expenditure required to support this expansion of the communications network was massive and it was largely carried out by the State. Private companies did participate but they were heavily subsidised by the State.

Capitalist development was also impeded by the lack of capital due to the restricted economy and limited capital accumulation from agriculture. The limited amount of capital available from agriculture meant that there could not be extensive modernisation of methods of cultivation and that investment in industry remained restricted. The backwardness of the agricultural sector also meant that it could not provide a strong market for industrial and manufactured goods. Moreover the State, in using taxation as a source of capital, further weakened the agricultural sector by depriving it of already scarce capital.

It has been argued that modernisation of agriculture and industrial development occurred only slowly because capital that had been accumulated was not in the 'appropriate hands'. The disposable capital from agriculture tended to be channelled towards the purchase of land and towards commercial, banking and speculative

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13 Sereni, op. cit., pp.6-7; Clough, op. cit., pp.23, 66-7.
15 Blok, op. cit., pp.50-3; Sereni, op. cit., pp.9-10. The State also funded the expansion of a merchant navy although the motivation was not purely economic. Clough, op.cit., pp.71-81; F.Bonelli, _Lo sviluppo di una grande impresa in Italia_, Einaudi, 1975.
activities, many of which were unstable areas of investment. In the South, and also in
certain parts of the North, usury was the main source of capital with interest rates at
25% and higher. Surplus revenue from agriculture which was lent in this manner, was
generally used to extend land holdings or to maintain a leisureed urban lifestyle. Profits
were rarely invested in industrial concerns or reinvested in agriculture with the aim of
improving productivity. In general, it appears that up to the mid-1890s disposable
capital tended to be compartmentalised, being available for investment in railway
construction and in agricultural development in areas such as the Po Valley, but it was
less likely to be available for industrial investment. Some foreign capital did flow into
Italy in the early years after unification when it helped finance the building of the
infrastructure but it was not a reliable source until the mid-1890s and it was frequently
directed towards speculative activities rather than contributing to consistent
development.

People from all sides of the economic debate agree that the restricted amount of
disposable capital for economic expansion and development could only be compensated
for by appropriate action from the State and the banks. Neither of these institutions
was particularly effective in fulfilling this role until the 1890s although there were some
positive achievements. The collapse of many of the banks in the period from 1888 to
1894 highlighted the problems in this sector and the urgent need to restructure it to
ensure a consistent supply of capital for development particularly in industry. After
1894, with the restructuring of the banking system, carried out with the aid and capital
of German banks, capital became available for the first time in sufficiently large
amounts to promote a lasting expansion in the economy. In the period prior to and
after the mid-1890s the State did assume a dominant role in the accumulation of capital
necessary for economic expansion and payment of substantial public debts. Revenue

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19 Ibid., p.238; Barone, op. cit., pp.582-4.
23 The role of the State and the banks, particularly in relation to the 1880s, has been analysed in detail
which cannot be looked at here. The conclusions, while remaining critical, have highlighted the
complexity of the situation and the influence of historical forces which explain, if not justify, the
actions of these institutions. See Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.232-4, 238-40;
Bonelli, Storia d'Italia, op. cit., pp.1201-5; Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., pp.79-83, 87-9, 115-8;
24 Clough and Barone argue that the banks did not play a completely unproductive role prior to the
mid-1890s but that their policies were often unwise given the economic circumstances. It also
appears that their collapse was partly due to the general economic crisis and the unforeseen
Gerschenkron, 2., op. cit., pp.105-6.
25 Ibid., pp.104-5; Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., pp.87-9, 115-6; Clough, op. cit., pp.9-10, 42-4,
59-60; Barone, op. cit., p.579; L.Cafagna, L'industrializzazione italiana. La formazione di una
raised by the State came from a number of sources which included the expropriation and sale of Church property, the sale of certain property belonging to the State, taxation, government bonds and the sale of State railways to private companies.  

Taxation revenue did not form a particularly large percentage of the national income but its significance as a means of revenue and of capital accumulation was far greater because it was, as opposed to other sources of State revenue, involuntary and, given the way the taxation system was structured, extremely regressive, falling heavily on the working classes and especially the rural working class and furthering the separation of peasants from the means of production.  

The taxation system depended heavily on indirect taxes. By 1876 indirect taxes composed 65% of taxation revenue. The grain tax, imposed on the grinding of grain in 1869 and not lifted totally until 1884, provoked violent protest throughout Italy not so much because the tax itself was high but rather because it came on top of already heavy taxes on basic foodstuffs. Moreover the tax fell heavily on workers and peasants because their diets were almost entirely composed of cereals. The following excerpt from a song from the South in this period illustrates the impact of indirect taxation:

...E lu rigistru cu la murta e senza  
marchi di bullo, la carta bullata,  
tabaccu caru, carissimu sale.  
Lu pani ndj strapparu di li mani  
Lu pani nostru o patri e mo languimi  
simu trattati pejo di li cani  
paganu supra l'acqua chi mbivimm  
la curpa eni ca fummo liberali  
l'Italia fatta ndj portau sti mali...  

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27 Taxation revenue was 6.9% of the national income in 1862 and 11.38% in 1880. Clough, op. cit., p.47; Grilli, Grande capitale destra cattolica. Trent'anni di vita politica italiana, Firenze, 1959, pp.16, 28; Sereni, op. cit., p.13; Barone, op. cit., pp.588-9; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.234-5.  
28 Sereni, op. cit., pp.63-4; Clough, op. cit., p.46.  
29 The tax was graduated according to the grain hence the regional incidence of the tax varied according to the variety of grain most commonly consumed. Ibid., pp.44-7; Sereni, op. cit., pp.86-9; Barone, op. cit., p.572.  
30 Sereni, op. cit., p.13.
Another tax which was felt most by the peasantry was the land tax. This tax contributed to the impoverishment of many small peasant landowners and the concentration of land in the hands of wealthier landowners. Large numbers of small landowners were expropriated for non-payment of taxes.\textsuperscript{31} 82,069 expropriations were carried out from 1885 to 1897 for non-payment of taxes. The effect in regions such as Sardinia was severe. There the amount of land expropriated was so great that half the active population was directly affected.\textsuperscript{32} Peasants cultivating land under sharecropping and other contracts also felt the weight of land taxes. One of the peasant representatives at the first congress of the \textit{Federazione dei lavoratori della terra} in 1901 (known as \textit{Federterra}) described certain contracts operating in the Romagna under which peasants renting the land had to pay the taxes owed on it rather than the landowners.\textsuperscript{33}

Uniform taxation of income other than that from real property, such as stocks, bonds and mortgages, was not introduced until 1865 and even in 1876 the land tax brought in a far greater amount than this tax. In addition the tax on this income was widely evaded by wealthier landowners. Some idea of the balance of taxes from 1862 to 1882 is given by the following table.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Receipts from Different Taxes 1862-1882 (in millions of lire)\textsuperscript{34}}
\end{center}

\begin{table}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Direct taxes & Business taxes & Taxes on consumption goods & Various & Total & State lottery \\
\hline
1862 & 129 & 55 & 184 & 6 & 374 & 35 \\
1867 & 226 & 77 & 256 & 8 & 567 & 44 \\
1872 & 334 & 132 & 357 & 6 & 829 & 66 \\
1877 & 355 & 158 & 433 & 4 & 950 & 68 \\
1882 & 388 & 169 & 530 & 4 & 1087 & 72 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Apart from the State taxes there were heavy communal and provincial taxes levied on

\textsuperscript{31} Their position was also exacerbated by the low prices for agricultural produce from the 1870s to the 1890s and the tariff war with France which particularly affected agricultural products.

\textsuperscript{32} Clough, op. cit., p.121.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Lotte agrarie}, op. cit., p.56; F.M.Snowden, From Sharecropper to Proletarian: the Background to Fascism in Rural Tuscany, 1880-1920, in Davis, op. cit., pp.148-9.

\textsuperscript{34} Clough, op. cit., p.45.
items of consumption and on land which fell disproportionately on peasants and workers. Sereni concludes that, in general, while the wealthy landowners and emerging bourgeoisie were also hit by heavy taxes, the greatest burden was taken by the working classes, particularly from indirect taxation. There was some reduction in taxes which reached its limit in 1884 with the total abolition of the grain tax. However, indirect State taxes were then increased and after 1885 there was also considerable increases in local indirect taxes.

The South more than the North suffered from the effects of heavy taxation as capital was drained away from a region where it was already scarce without adequate compensation in the form of public works and industrial development. The effects on peasants and workers were correspondingly greater because of the lack of industrial development which could have absorbed some of the growing rural population which no longer had access to land due to population pressure and because of the manner in which the Southern ruling class passed on the burden of taxation. Investment took place in the North while the South remained largely stagnant, dependent on usury for capital. The prevalence of usury prevented the creation of new forms of investment that could have stimulated new forms of production. Semi-feudal forms continued to dominate social and economic activities.

The undermining of the traditional agrarian economy by processes of transformation already operating earlier in the century, by population pressures and by the direct and indirect effects of State action began to be more evident in the late 1800s. By the end of the century it was apparent that a gradual but perceptible transformation had taken place with a more dominant role played by production for market and the widespread use of capitalist cultivation techniques, mainly specialisation of cultivation, intensive crop rotations, use of fertilisers and machinery. The transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist mode of production in rural Italy had a major impact on the lives of many

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35 Sereni cites a tax imposed in some Sicilian communes which increased in inverse proportion to the amount of land owned. Sereni, op. cit., pp.247-8. In 1907 in most Tuscan communes the local taxes alone reached 15 to 20% of the total income from land. Most were paid by the peasantry. Snowden, op. cit., pp.148-9.


37 Barone, op. cit., pp.569-70, 572, 595-6. Pressure of taxation was one of the protests made at the first congress of *Federterra* in 1901. Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.10-1, 36-7.

38 Sereni, op. cit., pp.76-80, 247; Procacci, *History*, op. cit., pp.333-4; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.122; Davis, op. cit., pp.71-7, 98-100. Sereni gives details of the percentage of tax paid for the various regions in comparison to the percentage of national wealth. The medium wealth per person in the North in the 1880s was 2411 lire per year compared to 1372 lire for the South. Sereni, op. cit., pp.77-8.

peasants, eroding the delicate balance on which their survival depended, and breaking down the various categories of peasants from which process a rural proletariat was emerging.

Capitalist agriculture developed, however, in a fragmented and inconsistent fashion hindered by a range of factors which included the continuing operation of semi-feudal relations of production, the restricted availability of capital exacerbated by government taxation policies, the European agricultural depression lasting from the 1870s into the 1890s, the continuing dependence of many cultivators on backward methods of cultivation which made production particularly vulnerable to natural forces and a series of diseases which affected Italian agriculture during this period.40

At the time of unification a semi-feudal, subsistence mode of production was still dominant in most of Italy although commercial agriculture did play a role, particularly in areas surrounding urban areas.41 Capitalist processes had been evident in areas of the Po Valley from the second half of the 18th century but even there semi-feudal relations lingered on. To a large degree social and economic relations of production had remained unchanged in the countryside following unification. Aristocratic landowners continued to control most of the land to which peasants were granted access by various contracts. By the end of the 19th century there had been some modifications in property relations with some disintegration of aristocratic estates and a greater role being played by an agrarian bourgeoisie or large leaseholders, though in some areas, primarily in the South, the methods of cultivation or organisation of estates remained unchanged.42

The State and members of the ruling class in general were moving to introduce a capitalist economy in the countryside and their actions were undermining the viability of peasant production. Social and economic relations were being altered to more capitalist forms in response to the extension of a market economy, the opening up of means of communication, and competition both national and international although in some regions the establishment of effective means of communication was slow and hence the impact of these factors was somewhat attenuated. The effects of competition from the international market were, however, particularly harsh. Pressure to open up isolated markets also came from landlords who, by changing social and economic relations as well as methods of cultivation, forced the peasants to resort more and more to

commodity production at the cost largely of lowering their own consumption given that
they usually lacked the means, both in terms of knowledge and capital, to improve
productivity.43 Traditional aristocratic landlords were beginning to institute changes to
bring in capitalist cultivation. For example in the North some landowners were setting
up silk-reeling or other types of workshops on their estates for which tenant farmers
had to provide the labour.44

The ability of peasants to subsist purely on their own produce had already been largely
broken down except in very isolated areas by the late 1800s and many were unable to
satisfy their basic needs.45 The majority of peasants could barely produce sufficient
crops to support themselves and their families in a good year, and even then they had to
find additional sources of income such as through domestic production of textiles and
day labour.46 Population pressure negated what progress was made in raising
production levels and in more effective use of arable land. The destruction of domestic
textile production by the development of factory-based production and international
competition, the loss of other vital resources such as access to common land and the
deflection by landowners onto peasants of the burden of taxation combined with the
progressive commercialisation of agriculture, forced peasants to participate in a market
economy. Given that production did not rise notably for some decades and in fact in
many areas decreased due to land depletion, these peasants could only reduce
consumption if they were to compete with the production of capitalist concerns and the
international market. The crisis of the 1880s, when Europe was flooded with grain
from America, Australia and other non-European countries, illustrated with force the
impossible situation most of these peasants faced.47 The impact of the development of a
capitalist system overlaying the continuing operation of semi-feudal relations was
particularly felt by peasants in the South where all the factors undermining the viability
of peasant production had a greater impact.48

One of the processes which was further eroding the traditional rural economy and

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43 Ibid., pp.196-8, 203-4, 214-6; Davis, op. cit., pp.79-80; P.Villani, Il capitalismo agrario in Italia
(sec. XVII-XIX), Studi storici, 7(1966), N.3, pp.504-6.
for comments on this process in parts of Lombardy. Lette agrarie, op. cit., pp.46-7.
45 There is some debate about the extent of the existence of a subsistence economy by the late 19th
century but it appears that it had been broken down in many areas although large numbers of
peasants still remained relatively isolated from a market economy. See Woolf, op. cit., pp.1056-7,
1070-1, 1074; Blok, op. cit., pp.22-6; Villani, Storia d’Italia, op. cit., pp.888-93; Snowden, op.
48 Ibid., pp.216-8, 221-2, 248-9; S.Jacini, I risultati della inchiesta agraria (1884), Torino, 1976,
Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, pp.60-4.
separating many peasants from the land was the sale of State, communal and Church land carried out by the new State to raise revenue. This process can be viewed as an extension of that already underway in the late 18th century of privatisation of public land at the cost of the peasantry. Prior to unification public land was being taken over by large landowners without compensation to the peasants who had been dependent on this land for resources such as wood and food, and for pasture. Following unification such land was taken over directly by the State but ended up in the hands of the large landowners and the emerging landed bourgeoisie because of their control of local administrations, which enabled them to buy this land at very low prices, as well as difficult economic conditions which rapidly impoverished those peasants who managed to obtain some of it. The usurpation of public lands after unification took place on a larger scale. Sereni estimates that roughly one sixth of the land at the time of unification was controlled by the Church, religious organisations, the communes or the State. The State suppressed 40,853 religious corporations up to 1867, selling their property together with communal and State land. The land sold amounted to approximately 2.5 million hectares, the greater part being in the South, Lazio and the islands. The sale of this land deprived the peasants of access to desperately needed land to which they believed they had certain rights which were often crucial for their survival.

Only a small proportion of this land was taken over by the peasants. In general it was sold in larger lots than the peasants could raise capital to pay for. Where they could raise sufficient capital they generally could not manage to keep the land because of depressed economic conditions after 1874, high interest rates on the loans, and backward methods of cultivation which all combined to make their produce uncompetitive and returns too low for them to maintain themselves and pay off the loans. The position of Southern peasants was worse because of the more primitive methods of cultivation, the greater scarcity of capital and hence the lower levels of production. Most of the land went into the hands of the large landowners, both aristocratic and bourgeois, or to the banks. Exploitation of the peasants by the new

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50 Sereni, op. cit., pp.243-4.
51 The greater part of this land was sold between 1868 and 1880, 575,000 hectares being from religious corporations. By 1906, when all the alienated religious property had been sold, 750,000 hectares had been taken. Ibid., pp.135-8; Clough, op. cit., pp.47-9.
52 Sereni, op. cit., pp.143-4.
53 Ibid., pp.135-6, 143-4; Blok, op. cit., pp.38-40, 116-20; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.128.
54 In Sicily up to 1883, of the 92,462 hectares alienated, 48,088 went to the large landowners, 37,551 to medium landowners and only 6,823 to small peasant proprietors. Sereni, op. cit., pp.138-9,
owners does appear to have increased in many cases with harsher conditions being imposed on peasants wanting access to the land than was the case when the land had been rented out by religious bodies.\(^{55}\)

Sereni regards the takeover and sale of land by the State as bringing about fundamental changes. He argues that it altered existing property relations thus encouraging the capitalist transformation of agriculture and the greater participation of an emerging agrarian bourgeoisie. However, he acknowledges that these changes were carried out principally to the detriment of the peasantry and not the traditional large landowners. Moreover he goes on to argue that semi-feudal social and economic relations continued to impede the development of capitalism as well as a distribution of the land involving the peasantry. The only way in which these relations could have been shattered according to Sereni was through an agrarian revolution and it was the absence of this that ensured that capitalist transformation would continue to be fragmented and gradual.\(^{56}\) Sereni's emphasis on the positive results that he believes would have flowed from an agrarian revolution and land redistribution is debatable. These issues were the cause of heated debate in late 19th century and have continued to be so, with important contributions being made notably by Gramsci. Within the peasant movement in the late 1800s there was conflict over the desirability of land redistribution as compared to collectivisation and the reduction of all peasant categories to a rural proletariat. Land redistribution would have done little to resolve the main problems of overpopulation, insufficient land, and capital and inadequate methods of cultivation.\(^{57}\) These problems would have counteracted any positive effects flowing from land redistribution given the low levels of industrial and agricultural development at the time. Where peasants could afford to buy land they generally could not cultivate it profitably. The process of capitalist transformation and the growing dominance of market forces made it increasingly impossible for the traditional peasant economy to function adequately and land redistribution would have only hastened its disintegration. The lack of industrial development in most areas apart from the North, and the low level of agricultural development in the South aggravated the situation by closing off any possibilities of alternative employment.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) Davis and Ginsborg give valuable summaries and assessments of this debate. Ginsborg, op. cit., pp.44-5, 52-61; Davis, op. cit., pp.11-30. See also Lote agrarie, op. cit., pp.lviii-lxxix, 10-1, 35, 51, 71.

\(^{58}\) Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.128-30.
The methods of cultivation of the land taken over by the traditional and bourgeois landowners remained virtually unchanged, a situation that applied primarily to the South. Cultivation remained extensive rather than intensive and the estates were used, as Davis observes, as a base for exploiting the peasant economy surrounding them with new bourgeois owners doing little to improve the mode of cultivation. Particularly in the South, but also in the North, the land was often exhausted by the rotation methods and absence of efforts to replenish the soil. Moreover it seems that the land was frequently used in a more destructive fashion than before unification. One clear example was the extensive deforestation which took place following unification, largely at the instigation of landowners. Not only did it cause severe damage to the land, but it also affected the peasant economy, dependent as it was on resources from the forests.

The traditional agrarian economy was therefore being undermined by a number of processes which were both external and internal to it. The traditional balance, and on the whole, stationary nature of agriculture was threatened by these processes which were moving towards the establishment of a market economy. The adoption by landowners of this new mode of production was by no means a straightforward one being impeded by social and economic relations which were basically semi-feudal and which could be demonstrated to be, in many instances, an effective means of social control. This was partly the reason for the survival until well into the 20th century of sharecropping contracts with ties of personal dependence and the frequent opposition to the creation of a large group of landless labourers. Even so certain changes were occurring in the landowning class with both the emergence of a new landowning bourgeoisie and moves by traditional landowners or their agents, towards commercial farming. These changes were made on the basis of advantage and profit, as well as the pressures from the growing mercantile nature of the agrarian economy, as the national and international markets increasingly made their impact on traditional agricultural social and economic relations. The process varied from region to region but the changes were nevertheless to be found throughout Italy in the late 19th century.

The processes of capitalist transformation were also bringing about fundamental

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59 Davis, op. cit., pp.75-6; Blok, op. cit., pp.116-7; Sereni, op. cit., p.145.
60 Ibid., pp.362-3; Blok, op. cit., pp.18-9.
61 Deforestation occurred mainly in the South but also in the North. It had been widespread prior to 1860 but reached far higher levels after that encouraged by the improved transport system. Sereni, op. cit., pp.201-3, 243-4; Davis, op. cit., p.76; Blok, op. cit., pp.18-9, 40-1, 118-20.
63 Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.112-4, 118-9; Snowden, op. cit., pp.140, 150.
changes in the various categories of peasants, reducing many piccoli proprietari and sharecroppers to landless labourers, from which was emerging a rural proletariat. These processes were creating one of the essential preconditions for a capitalist mode of production, the existence of a large number of free labourers without direct access to the means of subsistence. The piccoli proprietari and sharecroppers constituted the principal groups of peasants in 19th century Italy. By 1901 the peasant labour force in some areas was still all but totally composed of these categories, but in other areas they composed a far lower proportion. By this time there had been a clear degradation of these forms of peasant land tenure, varying on a regional basis but nevertheless discernible nationally. Moreover there were not always clear distinctions between the categories of peasants given that they tended to fit into all or two categories particularly as the traditional rural economy disintegrated. Piccoli proprietari often had to work as casual labourers for part of the year and in terms of standard of living and the nature of their work, there was frequently little difference between piccoli proprietari, sharecroppers and landless labourers, a point that was stressed at the congresses of Federterra.

Not all the peasants were impoverished, as some were able to accumulate considerable resources and came to form a part of an agrarian bourgeoisie. Frequently these better-off peasants were both sharecroppers and small landowners. They reflected the transitional nature of social and economic relations in this period in that while they constituted part of an emerging agrarian bourgeoisie, often they were still operating within, and contributing to, the survival of a semi-feudal mode of production. A far greater number of piccoli proprietari were being impoverished by the progressive destruction of the traditional peasant economy during the late 1800s. Their plots of land were often tiny and while some were able to increase their holdings many more became landless labourers under the economic pressures of the period. Where they had been able to buy land from the sale of Church and state land they were often unable to hold onto it as has been noted. They were caught in a trap of backward cultivation, insufficient financial resources and uncompetitive production balanced precariously on the edge of survival. One delegate to the first congress of Federterra briefly described

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65 Small peasant landowners.
68 Ibid., pp.39-42, 50-9, 61-2, 64-5. One of the few regions where small landowners not only survived but also did reasonably well was Piedmont. Ibid., p.50; Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.116.
69 Ibid., p.116; Sereni, op. cit., pp.265-8, 285-7; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.50. Lawyers, doctors, clerks and others of this type composed another group within this new agrarian bourgeoisie, buying pieces of land mainly from the feudal estates. This group was principally notable in the South. Sereni, op. cit., pp.163-6.
70 Ibid., pp.241-3, 245-7; Barone, op. cit., p.584; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.128; Davis, op. cit., pp.76-7;
their situation:

... anzi in certe occasioni per malattie della vegetazione, per accidentalità atmosferiche, per disposizioni tributarie, per la coalizione dei commercianti e degli industriali, la quale va man mano prendendo la forma di fenomeno stabile e continuo, le loro condizioni scendono ad un livello inferiore di quello in cui si trovano i salariati che essi assumono. 71

Evidence of the diminution of this category of peasant is given by the large decrease in landowners from 1860 to 1900 and the expropriation of peasant landowners because of debts. The decrease of landowners from 4,153,645 in 1861 to 3,351,498 in 1881, and 3,286,691 in 1901 was accompanied by an increase in the size of the average holding. Sereni argues that the only explanation is the expropriation of peasants which, he observes, is confirmed by contemporary sources. He points to the numbers of *piccoli proprietari* who lost their land either through non-payment of taxes or of private debts. From 1873 to 1881, 61,831 small landholdings were taken over by the Treasury for defaulting on taxes, often for small amounts. 124,912 holdings were offered for sale for non-payment of taxes from 1884 to 1892 and 90,847 from 1893 to 1901. 72 70,774 small landowners were expropriated from 1886 to 1900 through legal proceedings for defaulting on private debts. An unknown number lost their land through private arrangements which did not involve legal authorities. For many *piccoli proprietari* a bad harvest, family illness or low prices was sufficient to result in the loss of the land. 73 In the South the situation of the *piccoli proprietari* was even more difficult than in the North. Many had already been forced off the land earlier in the century. 74 Those that remained were also forced to take on more of the burden of the agricultural crisis and of local taxes. 75 The more difficult situation of the small landowners in the South is

*Lotte agrarie*, op. cit., pp.10-3, 34, 39-43. Jacini, in his final report of the enquiry into agriculture and conditions in rural areas, carried out during the crisis years of the late 1870s and 1880s, pointed to the poverty of most small landowners and the precariousness of the situation even of medium landowners. Jacini, op. cit., pp.44-6, 109. Evidence of the difficulties of many *piccoli proprietari* was also given at the first congress of *Federterra* (1901). Many delegates argued that large numbers of *piccoli proprietari* should be able to join the peasant leagues because they could not support themselves on their small holdings and had to work as casual labourers, putting them in a position only slightly removed from that of the landless labourer working for a wage. There was, however, considerable opposition from some delegates to the inclusion of any *piccoli proprietari* because it was felt that they had different interests. *Lotte agrarie*, op. cit., pp.39-44, 50-2, 54-62.

71 Ibid., p.44.
72 Figures for 1882-3 are missing. By 1891, 80,000 of these holdings were still not sold as a consequence of the large offering of land holdings and the often poor quality of the land. Lack of capital and economic conditions probably also played a part. Sereni, op. cit., pp.241-5, 268-9.
73 Ibid., pp.245-7.
74 Davis, op. cit., p.72.
reflected in the expropriation figures. 86% of the holdings offered for sale by the State in 1893 for non-payment of taxes were in the South.76

Apart from ownership of small pieces of land, the other main form by which peasants had access to land was the sharecropping contracts under which produce from the land cultivated by the peasant was divided between the landowner and the peasant in exchange for access to the land. The contract varied from region to region, taking the classical form of mezzadria in Northern, and more particularly Central Italy. In these areas the mezzadrile system was the predominant form of land tenure until the transformation to capitalist cultivation and even then remained dominant in the provinces of Central Italy well into the 20th century.77 Under the mezzadrile system, semi-feudal economic and social relations, particularly in terms of ties of personal dependence, were strongly perpetuated.78 Towards the end of the century the economic and social relations reflected in the form of the mezzadrile contract began to change radically although the changes were often contained within the traditional form of the contract.79 In the South, the sharecropping contracts were different in many ways to those common in the North, having followed a different pattern of development. There the peasants were employed on a basis little different to the landless labourer from an early period.80

The mezzadrile contract was, in theory, a relationship between equals with the sharecroppers being represented as independent farmers entering into fair contracts. In practice, however, the power of the landlords was extensive. The produce was supposed to be divided equally but the tenant's share was usually reduced by various means. Similarly the share going to the sharecropper under other sharecropping contracts often varied considerably. Sharecroppers generally owned little more than their labour power and were obliged to accept from their landlords seed, fodder, implements and draught animals. These advances were deducted from the sharecropper's share of the produce.81 The backward form of cultivation used meant

76 Also in 1893, the incidence of this process was 1 for every 100,000 people in Piedmont, and below 30 in all regions of the North in contrast to 109 in Sicily, 113 in Calabria, 138 in the Abruzzi and 536 in Sardinia. Sereni, op. cit., pp.247-8.
78 Ibid., p.179.
79 Ibid., pp.290-1, 298; Snowden, op. cit., pp.150-2.
80 Sereni, op. cit., p.179.
81 Where advances were made sharecroppers often received less that one third of the harvest. In Sicily it was less than one quarter. Ibid., pp.166-7, 182; Blok, op. cit., pp.55-6; Snowden, op. cit., pp.137-9.
that mezzadri could barely produce sufficient to satisfy the basic needs of their families. In bad years they were forced to ask for advances leaving many in constant debt. 82 In addition the mezzadrile contract usually demanded obligations of the peasants which emphasised its semi-feudal and exploitative nature such as working on other parts of the landlord's estate at low wage rates or for free, supplying the landlord with quantities of olive oil, wine and other products, and taking the landlord's produce to market. 83 Landlords also had the right to evict sharecroppers if they regarded their behaviour or work as unsatisfactory. 84

The sharecropping system operated very differently in Southern Italy where the large estates were generally leased in small portions to peasants on a sharecropping basis. 85 Rather than being represented as a contract between equals, in the South the exploitative nature of the economic and social relationship was always acknowledged and clearly reflected in the harshness of the contracts. Little capital investment was made in the land and the peasant had to provide the necessary tools, seeds and so on, or take them from the landlord at extremely high interest rates. Peasants lived in large villages rather than on the land they were working and had very weak ties, if any, with this land. Frequently they had to lease several pieces of land distant from each other, on a sharecropping basis, and in addition, find other seasonal employment in order to support their families. In Central Italy the bonds between the peasants and the land, and also contracts with particular landowners, were usually far more stable. 86 The contracts offered to peasants in the South were also more varied than those in Central Italy. They were shorter term and on land in varying states of cultivation. 87

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82 Sereni, op. cit., p.182. The debts could be carried over from year to year or paid off by working for the landlord at lower wages than those paid to day labourers, thus reducing the landlord's labour costs to a minimum level. Snowden, op. cit., pp.139-40. Peasants with more resources such as draught animals were able to obtain more favourable contracts. Sereni, op. cit., pp.169-71. Obligations under the mezzadrile contract regarding the provision by landlords of housing, draught animals, tools and the state of the land varied considerably. See Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.109, 111; Snowden, op. cit., pp.136-8. For a description of the sharecropping system in Central Italy see Ibid., pp.143-8; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.110.

83 Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.11, 14, 36-8, 47-8; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.110; Blok, op. cit., pp.67-8; Snowden, op. cit., p.138; Sereni, op. cit., pp.181-2.

84 Sharecroppers could be evicted for immoral behaviour which could mean regular frequenting of cafes, taverns or similar places. Snowden, op. cit., pp.137-8, 148; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.110. Permission was frequently needed for marriage. Sereni, op. cit., pp.180-1; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.11, 14. In certain areas, however, mezzadri were able to maintain a degree of independence from their landlords and their agents until the late 19th century. Sereni, op. cit., p.182; Snowden, op. cit., pp.144-5; Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.110-3.

85 Sereni, op. cit., pp.161-3; Blok, op. cit., p.54.

86 Ibid., pp.46-7, 54, 67; Sereni, op. cit., pp.154-6, 179-82.

87 Ibid., pp.168-9. Under some contracts from Lazio, which was in general little different to the South, the land had to be returned unimproved with vines and olive trees planted by the sharecroppers torn out at the end of the lease. Ibid., pp.166-7, 171-2; Blok, op. cit., p.74; Davis, op. cit., pp.74-5.
Sharecroppers in the South did have fewer constraints on their personal behaviour, nevertheless other demands were required similar to those made in Central Italy. Various 'gifts' had to be made to the landlord which were payments for protection. As with sharecroppers in the North, the Southern sharecroppers were usually caught in a situation of perpetual debt.

The sharecropping system in both the North and the South offered little incentive for innovation creating a static type of agriculture based on the minimum of investment with little commercial potential. In the North there was more substantial initial investment than in the South but little after that. Neither the landlord nor the peasant was likely to want to invest capital given that the returns were then shared and any increase in productivity meant that a larger share went to the landowner usually at the cost to the peasant of more intensive labour, a complaint made by peasant representatives at the first congress of Federterra. The sharecropping system made possible a high level of exploitation of labour power at low cost to the landlord. In the North there was a tendency to reduce the land granted to the absolute limit needed for subsistence. The peasants were expected to increase their labour to the level at which they could support themselves. The variety of crops cultivated by peasants to maintain a subsistence level produced lower yields than would have been obtained through specialised cultivation.

Moves towards more commercial forms of farming which implied either drastic changes in the sharecropping contract or complete abandonment of the relationship, although evident from the late 18th century in provinces such as Lombardy, did not bring about widespread changes until well into the 19th century. By the mid 19th century the sharecropping system was disintegrating in the Po Valley and being replaced by the employment of landless labourers. In the period after 1870 mezzadrie contracts were being rapidly abandoned in the Northern provinces where changes to the sharecropping system were more marked than in those of Central Italy because they

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88 In Lazio sharecroppers often had to work, at reduced rates, on other parts of the landlord's estate. Blok, op. cit., pp.55-6; Sereni, op. cit., pp.79-82, 168-9.
89 Blok, op. cit., pp.55-6.
93 In 1847 in the commune of Molinella near Bologna landless labourers made up 55% of the agricultural population compared to 40% of sharecroppers. Mezzadri were far more numerous in the hills around Bologna. Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.107-8, 111-4.
were better suited to commercial cultivation than the hilly terrain of provinces such as Tuscany. In hilly areas mezzadria remained the principal form of land tenure for some time.\(^4\) In the same period social and economic relations were also beginning to change in Central Italy.\(^9\) Specialisation in particular crops had begun to alter the mezzadrile system making the peasants' work more like day labour although the external framework was still retained.\(^9\)

The creation of a national market and the opening up of Italy to the world market presented to landlords the chance to maximise profits through more intensive, specialised cultivation than was possible under the mezzadrile system.\(^7\) Industrial crops such as tobacco, hemp and sugar beet began to be cultivated in Central Italy, and machinery and fertiliser started to be used on a wider scale. In some areas landlords moved to cultivate their estates as a unit rather than breaking them up under sharecropping contracts.\(^9\) Landlords also began to modify the sharecropping system rather than abandoning it completely by, for example, reducing the size of the pieces of land granted under sharecropping contracts as productivity increases made survival possible on smaller pieces of land.\(^9\) Different types of contracts, similar to those operating in the South, also began to appear in parts of Tuscany. These sharecroppers were all but wage labourers. Most had to look for work as casual labourers or factory workers in small rural industries to supplement their incomes as their crops only partly covered their needs.\(^10\) In certain regions the landlord's share was to be composed of specified crops which increased their share of the marketable crops while the peasant kept the subsistence crops.\(^10\)

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\(^4\) Ibid., pp.113-4; Sereni, op. cit., p.299. By the 1870s sharecropping had largely disappeared from the plain of the Po Valley around Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Reggio and other areas. It was also disappearing around Turin and in lower Lombardy. Ibid., pp.299, 307-8.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp.186-8.

\(^9\) Lyttelton, op. cit., p.116. In Tuscany the changes were slower although still extensive particularly from around 1880. Snowden, op. cit., pp.149-50; Sereni, op. cit., pp.290-1.

\(^7\) Ibid., p.292; Snowden, op. cit., pp.148-9.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp.150-1; Sereni, op. cit., pp.290-3.


\(^10\) The contracts came about by the subdivision of the pieces of land generally leased to sharecroppers which were then offered to the tenants under new terms. The machinery and implements needed for cultivation were leased to them by the landlords. Snowden, op. cit., pp.157-8. According to Jacini the part of the harvest going to the peasant was virtually a wage but in kind. Jacini, op. cit., p.49. It could also be paid in cash.

\(^10\) The most common of these contracts was known as the wheat lease and was found mainly in the Veneto. Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.118-9; *Lotto agrarie*, op. cit., pp.20-1; Sereni, op. cit., pp.290-1. Similarly landlords were able to acquire a greater share of products such as wine, oil and silk which were easily saleable. The production of some crops actually reinforced the sharecropping system although the contracts were modified. This was the case with silk production. Lyttelton, op. cit., pp.118-9.
The changes that were being made to the sharecropping contract under the move to commercial agriculture were part of the transformation of the social and economic relations of production. These relations were becoming more impersonalised and based on a 'cash nexus' rather than the former paternalistic basis, a process which had occurred earlier in the South than in Central Italy. In Tuscany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the landlord was becoming an 'absentee figure' represented by their agent, who was now a manager rather than policeman which had been their former role. Advances of grain took on a more formal aspect of interest-bearing loans rather than the traditional advance from the peasants' share of the annual yield of produce. With the increased use of new farming techniques and machinery, sharecroppers were forced into greater dependence on the landlords and their agents for technical advice and use of machinery which the peasant could not afford. As capital investment increased sharecroppers were subjected to a higher level of supervision by the agent thus reducing the degree of independence formerly possessed by the sharecroppers.

Where landlords began to shift to commercial cultivation within the sharecropping system, the sharecroppers were forced to try to meet higher costs caused by the use of more advanced machinery, fertilisers and insecticides. The landlords also tried to transfer much of the expense of these changes onto the sharecroppers. As many were unable to raise sufficient capital, they had to accept loans at high interest rates from their landlords, and, as a consequence, received a diminishing proportion of the produce. The new crops and methods of cultivation also meant more intensive work and greater risks which were not necessarily reflected in the returns. Including the pressures of higher taxation with these increased costs, peasant debts to their landlords increased considerably especially as other sources of income such as domestic textile production disappeared. The situation was not accepted by the peasants without resistance but they had little power to alter it given the demand for land.

The impoverishment of many sharecroppers is indicated by the drop of almost 10% in taxation revenue from the tax on their personal wealth from 1876 to 1894. According to the Annuario statistico of 1894, the drop was due to the transformation of the

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104 Ibid., pp. 152-3; Sereni, op. cit., pp. 32-4, 183-5, 290-3, 299; Cafagna, op. cit., p. 706; Lyttelton, op. cit., pp. 117-8. Evidence of the increasingly impossible situation of sharecroppers can be found in the speeches of their representatives at the first congress of Federterra where they repeatedly pointed out the inequalities of the contracts by the beginning of the 20th century and the pressures which were progressively impoverishing them. Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp. 11-2, 14, 20-1, 33, 36-8, 47.
contracts.\textsuperscript{105} There is also evidence of increased utilisation of child labour from 1881 to 1901 in provinces where the \textit{mezzadrie} system was most firmly rooted which, according to Sereni, points to the progressively harsher conditions experienced by sharecroppers.\textsuperscript{106} Many sharecroppers had already been living on the edge of survival and the pressure of the changes, combined with the agricultural crisis, was sufficient to reduce them to landless labourers.\textsuperscript{107} Not all sharecroppers were reduced to poverty. Some managed to accumulate fairly considerable resources including land which they leased to other sharecroppers, while at the same time continuing to lease the land they themselves worked on a sharecropping basis, although they did employ casual labourers. More commonly, however, sharecroppers suffered impoverishment.\textsuperscript{108}

Despite the often extensive changes made to sharecropping contracts, the sharecropping system with its semi-feudal economic and social relations continued to operate well into the 20th century. Its survival has been attributed to its capacity to be used to increase productivity through a greater exploitation of labour rather than through a more efficient form of cultivation accompanied by appropriate forms of social and economic relations.\textsuperscript{109} Another factor contributing to its survival was its function as a means of social control. The \textit{mezzadrie} contract was widely praised throughout the 19th century as a way of countering social unrest.\textsuperscript{110}

Even so, the modifications being made to the sharecropping contracts and the shift to commercial agriculture were undermining the system in a fundamental way in the late 19th century. As this occurred the basically exploitative nature of the system was more clearly revealed with a consequent increasing reluctance of peasants to accept the terms of the contracts which were becoming harsher as the processes of capitalist transformation became increasingly dominant.\textsuperscript{111} Wage labour became increasingly attractive to sharecroppers in preference to the degraded sharecropping contracts. Although casual day labour was insecure and low paid the wages were greater than the income derived from the \textit{mezzadrie} system. The desperation of many peasants in the

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{105} Sereni, op. cit., pp.289-90.
\item\textsuperscript{106} The percentage of children from nine to 15 years active in the agricultural labour force in these provinces increased from 8\% to 13.3\% which was above the average in other parts of Italy. Ibid., pp.295-6.
\item\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., pp.139, 148-9, 154; \textit{Lotte agrarie}, op. cit., p.36; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.114.
\item\textsuperscript{108} The emergence of wealthier sharecroppers was more common in the Marches although it did occur elsewhere. Sereni, op. cit., pp.163, 169-71, 279-81, 296-8, 323-4.
\item\textsuperscript{109} See the complaints made at the second congress of \textit{Federterra} in 1906. \textit{Lotte agrarie}, op. cit., pp.148-51; Snowden, op. cit., pp.139-42, 162.
\item\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Lotte agrarie}, op. cit., pp.11, 14, 20-1, 33-7, 47.
\end{itemize}
late 19th century was such that the chance of such an income was attractive despite all the potential difficulties. Many mezzadri must have been in such a position that both choices were equally impossible in terms of survival, particularly as the contracts offered were increasingly impossible to survive on and population pressures increased demand for contracts available.¹¹²

Thus capitalist processes of transformation combined with pressures such as population growth were undermining peasant production and breaking down the peasant categories of piccoli proprietari and sharecroppers, and leading to the creation of a mass rural proletariat.¹¹³ Peasants who were still classified as piccoli proprietari and sharecroppers, but were dependent on employment as labourers for survival were also part of this proletariat. In general, such peasants differed little from landless labourers in terms of income, standard of living and the form of employment on which they were most dependent. Peasants were increasingly forced to look for employment as casual labourers as their traditional economy was undermined.¹¹⁴

The formation of a rural proletariat is a difficult process to establish and quantify given this blurring of categories which is reflected in the various censuses held in the late 19th century.¹¹⁵ It was also reflected in the discussions at the first congress of Federterra over the categories of peasants to be accepted into the peasant leagues.¹¹⁶ In addition the processes of transformation, even in the advanced areas of capitalist activity such as in the North, were complicated by the continuing operation of semi-feudal relations of production. Capitalist forces of production were more often grafted onto semi-feudal relations rather than a radical break being made thus impeding the expansion of a capitalist mode of production.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless significant changes had taken place by the beginning of the 20th century both in the South and the North, so that by 1911, 5,100,000 of a total agricultural population of roughly 10 million, were described as labourers.¹¹⁸

The formation of a rural proletariat was most clear-cut in Northern provinces such as Piedmont, Lombardy, and increasingly Emilia and the Romagna where capitalist

¹¹² Lyttelton, op. cit., p.117; Sereni, op. cit., pp.182-3.
¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.125; Sereni, op. cit., p.324; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.xix-xx, 44.
¹¹⁶ Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.11-2, 33-5, 47-8, 50-7.
¹¹⁸ 2,700,000 of these were from the South. According to Lyttelton, many of the 650,000 classified as peasant proprietors would have had to have found additional employment and hence were virtually a part of the proletariat. Lyttelton, op. cit., p.129.
processes of transformation advanced more rapidly than elsewhere so that by the late 19th century a rural proletariat had emerged. Stable populations of agrarian labourers had formed, swollen by seasonal influxes of migrant workers, in response to the rapid development of agriculture. In the Po Valley the extension of irrigation and intensive cultivation for market, made possible through substantial investments of capital, became more intense in the late 1800s. The extension of irrigated areas brought about profound changes in agricultural production. This land was utilised by capitalist concerns and bourgeois landowners employing wage labourers. In these areas techniques of cultivation were also more advanced although the use of more advanced machinery and of chemical fertilisers remained limited for some time. Agricultural production in the Po Valley more than doubled from just prior to unification to the early 20th century while production in other areas generally stagnated. Expansion took place especially after the mid 1890s, directed primarily by people Cardoza describes as 'agrarian entrepreneurs', as distinct from the traditional landowners. Under these people, methods of cultivation were directed at maximising production and hence profits while reducing costs. Thus they developed modern farms which were cultivated with the use of machinery, fertilisers and crop specialisation. The Po Valley was also a centre of early development of industrial activities based on agricultural products.

These processes of transformation also altered the type of workers required. Nevertheless, the formation of a rural proletariat, devoid of ties to the land other than through a cash nexus, was a slow process. The landless labourer employed on a casual basis was still not the typical agrarian worker on the Lombard plain around 1860. The labour of dependent workers, or of workers on wages paid mostly in kind or by division of produce rather than in cash, continued to play a significant role. It was only in the first decade of the 20th century that payment in cash or predominantly in cash became the main form of payment. However, even if forms of payment remained

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121 Ibid., pp.486-8, 506-8; Sereni, op. cit., pp.262-8, 308-10, 338-9.
122 For example seeding and mowing machines were still not used around 1880 and the use of chemical fertilisers was rare. Ibid., pp.208-9.
123 Ibid., pp.312-5.
124 By 1910 the Po Valley was producing almost one third of Italy's agricultural products on 13% of its farm land. A high proportion of wheat and industrial crops such as hemp, sugar beet and tomatoes also came from the Po Valley. Cardoza, op. cit., pp.176-9; Sereni, op. cit., pp.262-4.
125 Villani argues that this was related to the advanced state of agriculture in this area while acknowledging that the process was a complex one. According to Sereni, the more rapid commercial development of agriculture in the Po Valley resulted in a more rapid separation of agricultural and industrial processes, encouraging capital investment. Villani, *Il capitalismo agrario*, op. cit., pp.488, 506-8; Sereni, op. cit., p.310; Cardoza, op. cit., pp.178-91.
127 In Lomellina, one of the areas of Lombardy where capitalist companies were operating at a
often far from capitalistic these areas saw the formation of a concentration of landless labourers.  

Up until 1890 the rural proletariat was mainly concentrated in the central provinces of the North, but after this the emergence of a mass rural proletariat in the more northeastern provinces took on a greater importance in response to extensive marsh reclamation projects which provided a powerful catalyst for the establishment and extension of capitalist processes of transformation in the same way as the irrigation projects did in Lombardy. From 1870 on into the 20th century huge areas of land were made available for agricultural development through marsh reclamation. Rather than being divided up into small peasant holdings the reclaimed land was largely taken over by capitalist companies which brought in techniques of commercial farming, employing machinery and hiring casual labourers who were paid at a daily rate and dismissed when work was not available. As cultivation was of a restricted nature before these changes, capitalist transformation was not fettered by traditional structures and customs in any significant fashion and the projects undertaken were so large, that semi-feudal residues rapidly lost significance. The transformation also brought about changes in the mode of cultivation followed by traditional landowners who were both attracted by the potentially large profits to be made from the new system of cultivation as well as forced to compete with it. Landlords in these areas began to break dependency ties that existed between them and the peasants they employed in favour of employment of peasants on a daily basis. Agricultural labourers constituted an extremely large group in these areas even before the end of the century.

The involvement of capitalist companies and large tenants in these advanced areas of the significant level at the time of unification, half the work force of casual labourers were paid all but totally in cash around 1860, but it was not until around 1880 that permanent workers were receiving a larger proportion of their pay in cash. In other areas of lower Lombardy, around Cremona, payment in kind retained a greater importance. In a commune in the lower Po Valley in 1871 there were only 500 landless labourers whereas by 1897 there were 16,000 out of a population of 66,000. At the time of unification large areas of Emilia-Romagna were impossible to cultivate systematically because they were largely covered by marshes. Landlords in these areas began to break dependency ties that existed between them and the peasants they employed in favour of employment of peasants on a daily basis. Agricultural labourers constituted an extremely large group in these areas even before the end of the century.
North signified a considerable change in land ownership and in the type of cultivation used. The aristocracy continued to possess some importance in the North both economically and socially, notably in Emilia-Romagna, but even so a new landed bourgeoisie and capitalist companies were assuming an important role, extending their landholdings partly at the expense of the aristocracy.¹³⁴ Traditional landowners were not all opposed to the new economic and social relations because of the advantages they could derive from them. Numbers of such landowners were willing to operate either totally or partially within the new economic and social relations.¹³⁵ In some areas landlords established workshops on their estates which were run on a capitalist basis while maintaining semi-feudal social and economic relations in other respects.¹³⁶ These contradictions continued to play an important role throughout the late 19th century giving rise to considerable tensions both in economic and social relations.

Similar processes of transformation were happening to a degree in Southern agriculture in the late 19th century, resulting in growing use of wage labour and the reduction of large numbers of piccoli proprietari and peasants renting small pieces of land to landless labourers.¹³⁷ Not so far removed from these peasants in conditions of work, income and the major source of support or income, were many sharecroppers and those peasants still clinging to small pieces of land.¹³⁸ These processes, as in the North, varied from area to area. One area where the changes were marked and fairly rapid was Apulia, with specialisation in wine production taking place after unification.¹³⁹ In Apulia and parts of Sicily, agricultural production increased in the period from unification to the early years of the 20th century while in other areas of the South it remained almost stationary.¹⁴⁰ Agriculture in areas surrounding cities, such as near Naples, in Lazio and the Agro Romano, also underwent commercialisation through the creation of larger markets and improved communications networks, a result of which was the extensive employment of wage labour.¹⁴¹

Capitalist forms of cultivation were being developed, alongside the peasant forms of

¹³⁴ These changes in land ownership were most evident on the plains of Lombardy and Piedmont, and the marsh reclamation of areas of Emilia. Sereni, op. cit., pp.262-8; Villani, Il capitalismo agrario, op. cit., pp.486-8.
¹³⁶ A delegate at the first congress of Federterra described such a situation in Lombardy where tenant farmers were compelled to provide labour, generally members of their families, for these workshops. Ibid., pp.46-7. Sereni, op. cit., pp.268-9.
¹³⁷ Many peasants had already been reduced to landless labourers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Davis, op. cit., pp.71-2.
¹³⁹ Ibid., p.950; Villani, Il capitalismo agrario, op. cit., pp.481-3; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.xiv.
¹⁴⁰ Sereni, op. cit., pp.312-5.
¹⁴¹ Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.22; Villani, Il capitalismo agrario, op. cit., p.509.
cultivation, by traditional landlords and by an emerging agrarian bourgeoisie. Frequently the new agrarian landowners adopted the approaches of the aristocracy but both groups were beginning to cultivate their land more intensively, investing more capital, specialising in certain crops and employing wage labourers. Land was also purchased by capitalist businesses from the North and by banks.\textsuperscript{142} However, landowners still continued to utilise backward methods of cultivation and forms of land tenure, such as small leases, which were aimed at exploiting the peasant economy.\textsuperscript{143}

The emergence, even if at different rates, throughout Italy of a rural proletariat in the late 19th century, indicated a fundamental change underway from a largely semi-feudal economy to a capitalist one. Semi-feudal residues remained strong but increasingly they were breaking down. Agricultural production was increasingly undertaken on a capitalist basis, a process which had considerable impact on the traditional peasant economy and was reflected in the progressive reduction of large numbers of peasants to wage labourers.\textsuperscript{144}

At the same time as the transformation of agriculture was occurring in Italy, industrial capitalism was slowly and falteringly emerging. The manufacturing stage of production was being transformed into large-scale industry with the introduction of the factory system and its organised system of machinery.\textsuperscript{145} At the time of unification industry in Italy remained at an elementary stage of development and was, on the whole, closely linked to agriculture. There had been some development of industry, for example in textiles and metallurgy, although a large proportion of manufactured goods were imported. Domestic and artisan production constituted the main form of manufacturing, the former expanding for some years after unification.\textsuperscript{146} The establishment of industrial capitalism on a wide scale was hindered by a range of factors, the controversy about which has already been referred to. The major factors were the scarcity of capital, at least in the hands of those who would have put it to use in the development of industry, the lack of an effective transportation and communications network, the limitations of government policies and of the internal market.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{142} One example being the \emph{Banco di Napoli}, whose primary concern was to develop more efficient forms of farming. Sereni, op. cit., pp.254-62, 281-5.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., pp.331-2; 334-5; Villani, \emph{Storia d'Italia}, op. cit., pp.950-3.
\textsuperscript{144} Sereni, op. cit., pp.312-5, 351; Snowden, op. cit., p.151.
\textsuperscript{146} Sereni, op. cit., pp.15, 17-8; Cafagna, op. cit., pp.690-1; Woolf, op. cit., p.1070.
\textsuperscript{147} Candeloro, \emph{Storia dell'Italia}, \textit{Vol.6}, op. cit., pp.232-4, 238-40; Barone, op. cit., pp.568-9, 579. See also footnote 2 above.
By the end of the century an industrial base had been established, primarily in the North, by an increasingly important industrial bourgeoisie, as the result of the availability of large amounts of foreign capital from the new banks, State policies and more favourable international circumstances. Nevertheless industry remained fairly limited in comparison to other European countries and there was still widespread artisan production alongside modern factory systems.148

The labour force employed by industry only gradually emerged as a clearly identifiable urban proletariat due to the slow development of industrial production. A number of industries were based on seasonal work and employed peasants. The latter formed a significant part of the industrial work force for some time while still maintaining close links with the land. In the textile industry, artisan production remained strong until the end of the century because workers were able to perpetuate pre-capitalist relations of production on the basis of their ownership of land. This changed with increasing mechanisation and the introduction of electricity.149 Nevertheless, through the late 1800s the level of industrial development was such that by the beginning of the 20th century there was an identifiable class of urban industrial workers which Procacci estimates at 2,592,687.150 Around 27% of these workers were female, 17% were under 15 years.151

The general pattern of industrial growth in the late 19th century was of a low rate of development, excepting the rapid growth of the communications network, until the 1880s when the first wave of industrialisation occurred, to be cut short by an economic crisis, and then a second wave from 1896 on.152 Both Cafagna and Gerschenkron make the point that it was not until after 1896 that industrial development had expanded to a level which could compensate for population growth, the regression in certain sectors and cyclical downturns. The expansion of the 1880s was insufficient to overcome the structural inadequacies in the economy and was largely halted by the economic crisis

150 Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.31. Procacci excludes children from five to nine years who were employed in large numbers. Procacci, La lotta di classe, op. cit., pp.8-9, 14-6. He also concludes that if one counts only factory production the figure would be approximately 1.5 million. Ibid., pp.12-3. Figures for the late 1800s are misleading because of the different categories of workers included by the census takers which were not wage labourers as such. Villani gives a figure of four million. He includes artisans, miners, building workers and transport workers and he discusses composition of this work force through the late 1800s. Villani, Storia d'Italia, op. cit., pp.953-9.
151 Procacci, La lotta di classe, op. cit., pp.13-5.
152 See Appendix 3 for index of industrial growth.

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from 1888 to around 1893.\textsuperscript{133} The weakness of industrial development meant that the Italian economy was acutely susceptible to fluctuations in the world economy.\textsuperscript{134}

Assessment of the expansionary periods of industry in Italy, as has been noted, has been the subject of considerable debate. Two of the main participants in the debate are Gerschenkron and Romeo. Their disagreement revolves around the qualitative changes in the Italian economy from the 1880s through the 1890s and the relative importance of factors which retarded and accelerated the process of expansion. Romeo places considerable emphasis on the structural changes he believes occurred in the economy from 1861 but with particular intensity in the 1880s. These changes included modernisation of the economic structure, commercialisation of the economy, the appearance of new forms of marketing and creation of a network of infrastructures.\textsuperscript{135} The availability of greater quantities of capital after the mid-1890s enabled the process of transformation to be accelerated on the basis of these structural changes.\textsuperscript{136}

Gerschenkron opposes what he regards as a too orderly model followed by Romeo, whereby preconditions, mainly the creation of the infrastructure, were satisfied first, after which transformation of the economy was possible. Gerschenkron argues that in underdeveloped countries the two processes are often inter-related in a more complex fashion than is allowed for by Romeo.\textsuperscript{137} He emphasises the lack of quantitative and qualitative changes in the 1880s, arguing that radical structural change only came after 1895. According to Gerschenkron, the crucial factor which weakened the growth of the 1880s was the lack of capital and, linked to this, the inadequate policies of the State and the banks in the period up to the mid-1890s in making sufficient quantities of capital available, and in devising policies which would encourage development. His emphasis is thus on the role of the new banking system in providing capital and guidance from the mid-1890s. Hence he discounts the significance that Romeo attributes to capital available in the 1890s and its role in breaking down the old economic structures, regarding it as insufficient to sustain a high rate of growth for a sufficiently long period so as to enable major structural changes in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{138}

The main points at which Gerschenkron's and Romeo's assessments of the industrial

\textsuperscript{133} Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., pp.77, 115; Cafagna, op. cit., pp.691-2.
\textsuperscript{134} Barone, op. cit., pp.587-8, 591.
\textsuperscript{135} The disagreement between the two over Romeo's use of the term capital accumulation goes beyond what is relevant here. For their positions see Gerschenkron, 2., op. cit., pp.98-102, 104-11, 116-20; Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., pp.99-100, 107-18.
\textsuperscript{136} Gerschenkron, 2., op. cit., pp.111-6.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., pp.116-20; Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., pp.107-18.
\textsuperscript{138} Gerschenkron, 2., op. cit., pp.103-9, 116-20.
expansion in the 1880s differ therefore, are on the emphasis they give to the effects of the lack of capital and to structural changes. It could be argued that Gerschenkron does not give sufficient consideration to the structural changes that Romeo underlines. Barone, like Romeo, points to the significance of these changes in the 1880s and their role in creating more openings for capital investment. Alternatively, Gerschenkron's position that limitations were put on structural changes by the lack of capital seems logical. Perhaps the main conclusion that can be drawn is that industrial development was impeded by these factors until the 1890s and took place at varying rates in different industries.

Even in the upsurge from 1896 there were restrictions on development according to Gerschenkron related to factors which he believes limited development in the 1880s, namely government policies, particularly in relation to tariff protection given to industries which he regards as having been a drain on the economy while other areas with more potential received little tariff protection and hence their expansion was retarded. Other factors Gerschenkron regards as having inhibited the expansion after 1896 include the absence of large-scale railway construction and the political situation which was not conducive to economic growth nor to increasing the confidence of potential investors. To a degree there was still a problem with capital because of the opposition, in some quarters, to German capital and the continuing lack of confidence after the banking collapses of the early 1890s. The effects of the tariff war with France, which took place from 1888 to 1898, would have been another contributing factor.

The nature and extent of industrial development in the various sectors of production had a determining influence on the development of an urban proletariat. One of the important factors was the high level of domestic and artisan production in manufacturing. Domestic production was carried out by peasants. One of the main

160 The industries he believes drained the economy were textiles, iron and steel and those which received little protection were the chemical and engineering industries. Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., pp.79-83; Gerschenkron, 2., op. cit., p.117. The policy decisions were related to the power of the relevant industry groups. Ibid., p.117; Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., p.82. Romeo gives a more positive assessment of the State's industrial policy although he is critical of the tariff policy. Gerschenkron, 2., op. cit., pp.120-4. The issue of tariffs is a complex one which is not entered into here for reasons of space. The tariff war with France from 1888-98 did have a severe effect on the economy. Clough, op. cit., p.126; Barone, op. cit., p.587. Barone argues for a re-assessment of the State's role in enabling the creation of an industrial economy. See Barone, op. cit., pp.569-70, 573-5, 584, 588, 591-9.
162 Ibid., pp.87-9.
industries which was organised in this fashion was the textile industry in which
domestic production of textiles and yarns actually expanded after unification and
continued to be a significant part of production until around the 1880s. Woolf observes
that this expansion in domestic production was paralleled by an expansion of small and
medium-sized factories and artisan production alongside the introduction of mechanised
factories. The clothing industry was another area where domestic production played an
important role facilitated by the diffusion of sewing machines. Domestic production
played an important role in the peasant economy providing a crucial income supplement
especially as the population increased thus putting greater pressure on the margins of
subsistence. It was increasingly carried out for a 'capitalist' or 'merchant
entrepreneur' who supplied both the raw materials and the tools, and then bought the
finished goods.

By the end of the century, however, textiles were increasingly being produced within
factories with a high level of mechanisation and a largely unskilled workforce, the
factory owners having used the technical advances to impose control over the
productive process in its totality as opposed to a situation where skilled workers still
retained control of at least part of the productive process. Mechanisation enabled
widespread employment of women and young workers and the discarding of artisans.
Domestic production of textiles began to disappear under the impact of international
competition and the impetus gained by industrial production from the protective tariffs
imposed in 1878. In the North, the emergence of textiles and other industries
provided some compensation for the destruction of domestic production but this was
not the case in the South. The importance of these changes in the textile industry was
far-reaching because of its importance in the manufacturing sector through the late 19th
century when it constituted the largest area of manufacture in terms of national income
and labour force. It acted as the pace-setter of industrialisation, particularly in cotton
production, utilising capitalist production.

The separation between agriculture and industry took place fairly rapidly in the

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165 Ibid., pp.1057, 1071, 1074; Snowden, op. cit., p.145; Sereni, op. cit., p.19.
166 Woolf, op. cit., p.1074.
167 Sereni, op. cit., p.23; Berta, op. cit., pp.1089-93.
168 Cafagna, op. cit., p.706; Sereni, op. cit., pp.32-4.
170 Clough, op. cit., p.66. Along with workers in the building sector and the clothing sector, textile
workers constituted 60% of the working class in the early 1900s. Procacci,La lotta di classe, op.
cit., p.9.
171 Clough, op. cit., pp.60-2; Cafagna, op. cit., pp.706-7; Sereni, op. cit., pp.21-3.
production of yarns and textiles such as silk, cotton and wool. Silk reeling mills had been established by some landlords on their estates. After the establishment of protective tariffs from 1878, there was a shift to textile production, although the production of yarn and material was still most frequently of an artisan nature at the end of the century. By this time, however, weaving was largely carried out in workshops using peasant labour, but separate from agricultural activities. Domestic production of cotton was rapidly overtaken by industrial production after unification and by the end of the century both weaving and production of cotton yarn were dominated by industrial enterprises. Beginning as concerns run by families, the cotton enterprises increasingly assumed the form of corporations from the early 1870s although the mills remained of a medium size. By the early 1900s the cotton industry had expanded to considerable proportions.

The wool industry followed a similar process to that of cotton after unification although it was slower and mechanisation was not as great. At the time of unification there was a degree of industrial production which was already important. Domestic production also supplied substantial quantities of woollen goods for market. Similar to the cotton industry, the early businesses were small concerns, later taking on corporate form. The role of artisans in the wool industry remained strong until the turn of the century when factory owners began to win the battle to dictate conditions of employment to workers through greater mechanisation which enabled them to employ unskilled workers. As production became concentrated in certain areas, and in the face of competition from Northern Italy and abroad, domestic production throughout the rest of Italy, particularly in the South, was increasingly unable to compete and underwent a process of decay both in terms of productivity and prices.

The process of separation between agricultural and industrial activities, visible in the textile industry in this period, was also occurring in relation to other agricultural products which were produced more and more by distinct industries employing a growing work force. With the commercialisation of agriculture food, for example, was

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172 By 1870 the production of silk yarn was already a separate industry although domestic production of silk cloth remained important for some years. Ibid., p.21.
174 Ibid., p.65; Sereni, op. cit., p.21; Lyttelton, op. cit., p.119.
175 Clough, op. cit., p.65; Sereni, op. cit., pp.62-3.
176 Ibid., p.63; Cafagna, op. cit., pp.706-7.
177 Sereni, op. cit., p.22.
178 Berta, op. cit., pp.1086-95; Clough, op. cit., pp.63-5.
increasingly processed in factories, a transformation which led to the concentration of crops in particular areas close to the processing plants. Many of these industries tended to be concentrated in the North although the South did manage to dominate in certain areas such as the production of oil and wine. The food industry was extremely important to the economy and provided one of the largest proportions of national income until well into the 20th century.

Agricultural implements were also increasingly the products of separate industries rather than being made by peasants or local artisans. The transformation varied considerably from area to area, but by the end of the century in advanced areas where commercial agriculture was carried out, agricultural machinery, produced by industrial processes, was more frequently used, as were seeds and fertilisers, likewise the results of industrial production.

Another sector of industrial production which had begun to take on some significance in the Italian economy by the turn of the century, although well behind industrialised countries, was the metallurgical industry. The composition of the labour force was as complex as in other areas such as textiles, but not in terms of pre-capitalist residues. The small artisan workshops had largely disappeared but these industries were strongly dependent on specialised workers, although at the turn of the century artisan-type workers still played a role. The skilled workers did not oppose the increasing mechanisation of production imposed by industrialists but rather welcomed it as a means of improving their position. However, as these industries expanded and as technical advances were made, the position of these workers came under threat as industrialists sought to impose a stricter control of labour and of the work process. Other industries which began to emerge in this period and be transformed from a level of artisan production thus requiring a different work force were the machinery, electrical, chemical and construction industries. Skilled workers in some of these industries were able to maintain a position of some significance well into the 20th century.

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181 Clough, op. cit., p.111.
182 Sereni, op. cit., pp.24, 362-3; Cardoza, op. cit., pp.179-86.
183 In Italy in 1901 it comprised 12% of total industrial production in comparison to 26% for Germany. Clough, op. cit., p.82; Cafagna, op. cit., pp.690-1, 708-9.
184 The latter changes refer more to a later period. Berta, op. cit., pp.1095-1108.
By the beginning of the 20th century a capitalist mode of production was increasingly dominant in both rural and urban Italy. Semi-feudal forms continued, however, to play an important role particularly in the South but also in areas where considerable development had occurred in both agriculture and industry. The State had done much to accelerate the transformation as had an increasingly significant bourgeoisie. Artisan and peasant production was being replaced by a growing use of wage labour and although this process was still fairly restricted by the early 1900s, it had already had a far-reaching impact on the lives of many peasants and urban workers, changing their lives in a fundamental way.
The profound changes that capitalist processes had already brought to rural and urban Italy in the late 1800s, combined with the continuing important role of semi-feudal forms and the economic and social circumstances in which the transition was taking place, were the cause of what was referred to at the time as the social question. The term the social question was used to refer to a range of problems stemming from the economic changes and the accompanying social upheaval as well as to the spontaneous and organised agitations and opposition from urban workers and peasants. Both these aspects of the social question were of increasing concern to the *intransigenti* because of the challenge posed to the established social order as well as the evident suffering they caused. For many peasants and urban workers there had been a gradual worsening of economic and physical conditions through the century. By the late 1880s the combination of developing capitalist processes, the continuing impact of old forms of economic and social exploitation, the agricultural depression, the halting development of industry and the population pressures ensured that the conditions of the masses remained difficult at the least and in most cases worsened considerably. The response from workers and peasants was frequently resistance and opposition, challenging the social, economic and political structures in an increasingly threatening way.

The conditions under which the vast majority of peasants and urban workers existed during the late 1800s were extremely harsh both economically and physically. Woolf argues, in his discussion of the formation of the proletariat in Italy, that pauperism reached new levels from the 16th century to the end of the 19th century as a direct consequence of structural changes. The extent of the changes in the late 1800s was such that the negative effects on peasants and urban workers were extreme. Woolf states that they were increasingly unlikely to be able to support themselves and their families without occasional or permanent dependency on charitable institutions. He also cites as further evidence of the levels of pauperism, declining levels of consumption, growing exploitation of female and child labour, permanent and temporary emigration and the slow emergence of workers’ associations to improve and protect the conditions of workers and peasants.2

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1 Other terms such as the worker question and the agrarian question were also used. The term the social question encompassed both of these.

The conditions under which most peasants lived and worked had never been good. Even without the pressures of capitalist processes on peasant production the mass of the peasantry lived a very precarious existence dependent on favourable weather, good harvests, reasonable health and often the extra income which could be earned through domestic production, primarily of textiles, and any casual labour which might be available in urban areas from industries such as building and mining, or seasonal agricultural work. Many peasants were unable to support themselves and their families from the land they cultivated, living in poverty in unhygienic and squalid conditions, and exploited by landowners who felt no pressure to improve conditions because of the ready supply of labour from the large rural population. Equally, large numbers of small landowners were only barely able to survive, living in circumstances little different to rural labourers. Many peasants, particularly sharecroppers, were often in debt to their landlords or to moneylenders. Oppressed already by older forms of exploitation, these peasants were very vulnerable to the pressures of capitalist transformation.

Growing numbers of peasants had no direct access to land and were forced to rely on casual labour for survival, labour which was increasingly difficult to find as the population expanded. As Zangheri states, to be a landless labourer in Italy in this period meant unemployment and pauperism. Their wages were extremely low as representatives to Federterra’s first congress made clear, and for these low wages they worked extremely long hours, up to 16 and 17 hours per day in summer. Similar comments were made by Jacini in his final report summarising the results of the parliamentary enquiry. It appears that in some areas in 1901 the wages were actually lower than those Jacini had recorded as being paid between 1866 and 1874. In areas where latifondismo predominated as the major form of landownership, that is in the South and the Agro Romano, the lot of the peasants was very harsh. Wages paid to labourers in these areas were meagre and the conditions of contracts entered into by small tenants made their lives extremely hard. Blok describes shepherds and peasants working on such large estates as having a ‘nomadic orientation’, the insecurity implied...
pointing to the hardness of their lives and the exploitation they experienced. ¹⁰

Labourers working in the marsh reclamation areas of the north-eastern provinces endured similarly harsh circumstances living in crude settlements where diseases such as malaria and pellagra were common because of poor hygiene and inadequate diets.¹¹ A vivid description of their lives was given in Avanti! in 1905:

 Una ferrea disciplina grava su questi paria, ai quali, dopo sedici ore di lavoro, non sempre è concesso di recarsi ai vicini villaggi... Sparse nella vastissima pianura sono le case umide, basse, antigieniche, nelle cui stanze anguste, dalle pareti annerite dal fumo, sono costretti a dormire, in forzata convalescenza, uomini, donne, fanciulli, bambini... E uomini e donne hanno l'aspetto convalescente, vecchi anzi tempo, fatti dalla febbre terzana e quartana, sono tratti anzi tempo alla tomba... Unici alimenti quotidiani son polenta e fagioli... il pane è un alimento di lusso.¹²

The situation deteriorated as reclamation work was completed because fewer labourers were needed for cultivation of the land. The severe lack of work for these labourers resulted in fierce competition which kept wage rates at an extremely low level.¹³ The general conditions of the peasants were summed up in an appeal made to the first congress of Federterra (1901):

 Che le condizioni dei contadini siano infelicitissime: che per essi la nuova Italia sia stata fatta invano: che la pellagra, la ignoranza, la disoccupazione, la malaria, abitazioni ferine, i salari insufficienti, affliggano le nostre campagne nessuno osa negarlo; e quando, nella Camera o sulla stampa, uomini di cuore espongono le condizioni dei nostri contadini, un fremito di pietà e di paura, una febbre di buoni propositi corre per tutta Italia...¹⁴

Prefects reports from a number of provinces throughout Italy also give evidence of the precarious nature of the lives of many peasants and workers. Most frequently these references appeared under the heading of Public Security. Bad weather, low prices for agricultural products, low wages, the agricultural crisis, crop diseases, insufficient work and large numbers of migrant workers looking for employment, were some of the

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.53-7.
¹¹ Pellagra is a deficiency disease which can cause madness and death. Procacci, History, op. cit., pp.343-4; Corner, op. cit., p.4.
¹³ Corner, op. cit., pp.4-6; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.xviii.
¹⁴ Appeal to the first congress of Federterra from La Nuova terra, a socialist newspaper from Mantova, 12-13 October 1901. Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.3.
principal reasons given by these prefects for the frequent increases in robberies or
cri mes against property, as they often described them.

In Caltanissetta in 1883 the prefect attributed the higher number of robberies to bad
weather and the consequent limited employment available in the countryside as well as
the effects of a grape disease affecting one of the major products of the province.15 In
1887 and 1888 he referred to bad harvests, low prices for the main products of oil and
wine, the general agricultural crisis and consequently unemployment and an increase in
poverty as major factors in aggravating the conditions of public security. There were
also the added problems of a sulphur crisis, another product of the province, and a
cholera epidemic. He stressed that the lack of work had led to a general period of
misery and poverty.16

The prefect of Reggio Calabria gave very similar reports from 1884 to 1889. He
appeared to be reasonably sympathetic to the plight of the peasants and workers of the
province, stating more than once that, given the conditions, the state of public security
was good. The peasants in his province were dependent on good harvests of the major
agricultural products. In his reports he often repeated his observation that the rural
classes were increasingly poverty stricken, living wretchedly with low wages and little
work available.17 The prefects of Grosseto, Padova, Novara, Chieti, Bergamo and
Lecce all referred to similar problems in their provinces through this period. In some
provinces such as Grosseto and Lecce workers from other provinces were seen as
presenting an extra problem as there were always more workers available than jobs.
Other prefects stressed the problems of little work in winter months, as a result of
which peasants often migrated.

In general the prefects painted a picture of a very low standard of living with poor
sanitary conditions and with little prospect of improvement in many of the provinces
because of the impact of the agrarian crisis on backward economies. These economies
were almost entirely dependent on agriculture and often isolated from any improvement
that may have been gained through trade because of the limited transport system and the

16 Ibid., II Sem. 1887, Parte III, Sicurezza pubblica, Parte VII Appendice e conclusione; I Sem. 1888,
Pubblica Sicurezza, Parte V Condizioni economiche della Provincia; II Sem. 1888, Parte II
Pubblica Sicurezza, Parte V Condizioni economiche della Provincia.
17 Ibid., Busta 14, Reggio Calabria, Report for 1884, Pubblica Sicurezza, Ministero di Agricoltura,
Industria e Commercio, Lavori Pubblici; I Sem. 1885, V Aspirazioni delle popolazioni, VII
Sicurezza pubblica; II Sem. 1885, Sicurezza pubblica; II Sem. 1887, Spirito Pubblico, Sicurezza
Pubblica; Report for 1888, Spirito pubblico, Sicurezza pubblica; II Sem. 1888 Spirito pubblico;
Report for 1889, Pubblica Sicurezza.
outbreaks of epidemic diseases such as cholera.\textsuperscript{18} In some provinces the prefects reported that peasants and workers were increasingly turning to the charitable bodies or \textit{opere pie} and the communal administrations. The resources were usually insufficient to satisfy the needs of these people.\textsuperscript{19} There were also references to the growing numbers of poor people emigrating and the phenomenon was frequently attributed to the conditions of the mass of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{20}

The poverty of many peasants and workers was reflected in declining standards of consumption, ill health and bad housing. The report of the parliamentary enquiry into agriculture and conditions of life in rural areas directed by the conservative landowner and senator, Count Jacini, revealed widespread undernourishment, an extremely high incidence of malaria in the South and poor housing.\textsuperscript{21} While many peasants and workers would never have enjoyed excellent health, good medical services and diet, it does seem that there was a deterioration of conditions through the 18th and 19th centuries. Woolf argues that the change in standards of nutrition began to take place in the 18th century with the spread of maize cultivation. He observes that meat disappeared from the peasants' diet from 1770 to around 1830 and that the consumption of wine increased. This pattern of consumption was commented on by contemporaries from all regions.\textsuperscript{22} It appears that the diet of poorer people in some


\textsuperscript{21} Around Parma and Piacenza pigs were commonly raised by a variety of people but were sold before they were fat as an income supplement. Woolf, op. cit., pp.1052, 1060-1; Blok, op. cit., pp.50-1.
regions continued to deteriorate after unification. In the view of Sereni this deterioration in diet is the clearest indicator of the worsening conditions of rural workers.

Maize and polenta came to form the major part of the diet of many peasants, particularly in areas such as the Veneto, Tuscany and Lombardy, and in some areas almost the total diet. Dependency on maize was such that in these areas of the North pellagra, a deficiency disease causing madness and death, was common. Pellagra and other diseases of malnutrition appeared at a fairly high rate for the first time in provinces such as Tuscany late in the 1800s. Pellagra was also spreading to areas where previously it had been absent. An enquiry in 1889 indicated that it was spreading in 29 provinces, in particular in the Marches, Ferrara, the Romagna and around the Po Delta. It was also relatively common in Lazio, Basilicata and Calabria. The incidence of pellagra was referred to by both the prefects of Padova and Bergamo in the 1880s. To try to improve the situation, some provision was made by communal authorities to supplement peasants’ diets through the establishment of soup kitchens. A peasant representative to the first congress of Federterra (1901) from the province of Romagna succinctly described the diet of many sharecroppers in that province and its effects:

...noi produciamo grano e mangiamo polenta; produciamo vino e beviamo acqua e dobbiamo combattere contro la pellagra.

Zangheri describes the diet of landless labourers in the North in the 1880s as being a *regime nutritivo semi-animale*. Nor had the situation changed very greatly for poor peasants in the early 1900s. An enquiry into the health of such peasants in the Abruzzi region in 1907 revealed a diet which was far from providing for their energy requirements, resulting in physical deterioration amongst the rural labourers.
Malaria was also widespread in both the North and the South causing chronic ill health and death. Around 1900 it killed 183.7 people per 100,000 in Basilicata, the province with the highest incidence. Problems with malaria and what were described as swamp fevers were mentioned in the prefects reports in the 1880s. The prefect of Grosseto stated in a report in 1883 that the population was debilitated by malaria. He continued in subsequent reports to stress the effects of malaria especially in summer, and the dangers of swamps to nearby settlements. In Novara the prefect referred to communes devastated by fevers caused by rice cultivation. Jacini also referred to health problems resulting from rice cultivation in his final report.

The prefects reports indicated generally low standards of health in the rural areas of their provinces. Unhygienic practice, too few doctors, midwives and related practitioners, and polluted water supplies were some of the health problems, other than malaria and pellagra, which were raised at various times by prefects in their reports. Similar comments were made by Jacini in regard to rural areas in his summary report. The main concern of the prefects apart from malaria, however, was with epidemic diseases resulting from inadequate sanitation and serious infectious diseases. Poor health standards and diet made many peasants and workers very susceptible to these diseases. Such diseases appear to have swept frequently through parts of Italy in the late 1800s. Cholera was particularly common and could be devastating. In the province of Lecce a cholera epidemic took on more or less extensive proportions in 1886 according to the prefect. 2,392, approximately 50% of those who developed cholera, died. Smallpox was also fairly common and although there was a vaccine

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36 Jacini, op. cit., pp.56-7, 144-5.
37 Snowden, op. cit., p.153; Corner, op. cit., p.4.
38 *A.C.S., Rapporti dei Prefetti*, op. cit., *Busta 8*, Lecce, Report for 1886, *Salute Pubblica. There was reference to the threat of cholera in Palermo in 1885 and a report from Caltanissetta referring to*
there were problems with the quality of the vaccine and with people not being vaccinated. Apart from the direct physical impact, epidemic diseases such as cholera and typhoid caused an indirect worsening of conditions because they impeded trade, transportation of goods and hence affected levels of employment.

The low standard of public health and its impact on peasants was one of the problems raised at the first congress of Federterra.

...la cui vita [il contadino] è, per un complesso di cause, continuamente minacciata da malattie che trovano terreno fertile nell’abbandono in cui è costretto a vivere il lavoratore della terra e nella inosservanza e inapplicabilità delle leggi igieniche esistenti...

The congress called for laws to protect peasants and to establish standards of hygiene:

...reclama dal governo provvedimenti diretti ad assicurare la rigida applicazione delle leggi vigenti e provvedimenti speciali contro le malattie caratteristiche dei contadini: pellagra e malaria...

Housing conditions in both rural and urban areas were frequently primitive and unhygienic. In many areas peasants lived in hovels. Peasants from the mountainous regions surrounding the Agro Romano who worked on the large estates of the area,
were prevented from building anything more than basic shelters of straw and reeds because the landlords feared that more substantial dwellings would form the basis for claims to permanent rights to cultivate the land. In one area near Rome these villages, where peasants lived for part of the year, were without water.\textsuperscript{42} The housing of the labourers working in the marsh reclamation areas of the north-east was of a similar standard.\textsuperscript{43} In his final report, Jacini referred a number of times to the squalid state of many peasants’ houses:

\textit{...[le] case abitate dalla popolazione rurale d'Italia...per tre quarti almeno, non sono né decenti né igieniche; e, notisì bene, che la questione delle abitazioni comprende la massima parte della questione igienica delle campagne.}\textsuperscript{44}

It appears that these houses often consisted of one room which was shared with animals.\textsuperscript{45} Housing for urban workers in growing cities was also likely to be of a low standard. Woolf cites evidence from the 1881 census of Milan where 10 or more people were found to be living in only one or two rooms.\textsuperscript{46}

The situation of many urban workers in the late 1800s, particularly those only recently arrived from the countryside, was as precarious and difficult as that of many peasants. The greater proportion were very poor, dependent on casual work and charity.\textsuperscript{47} They were, for the large part, unskilled, many coming from the countryside in search of work, employed when there was work, for very low wages and working for long hours in unhealthy conditions with little or no effective government regulation of their working conditions. The work that was available, in building, railways, public works and in the slowly developing industries, was usually insecure.\textsuperscript{48} The situation worsened during the crisis years of the late 1880s and early 1890s, and although the economy began to expand from the mid 1890s workers’ conditions remained harsh.\textsuperscript{49} Health standards in factories and workshops were not regulated and as a consequence working conditions were frequently unhygienic and unhealthy. Industries such as mining imposed terrible conditions on workers.\textsuperscript{50} It was not until 1902 that it was legally established that women should have six weeks leave following childbirth. Nor were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[42] Sereni, op. cit., pp.166-73.
\item[43] Ibid., pp.306-7.
\item[44] Jacini, op. cit., p.150. See also pp.42-3, 45, 109, 149-50.
\item[45] Ibid., p.45; Blok, op. cit., pp.50-1.
\item[46] Woolf, op. cit., p.1076.
\item[47] Ibid., p.1068.
\end{footnotes}
employers obliged to insure workers against work accidents until 1898. Legislation passed in 1898 established a national provident fund for disabled.\(^{51}\)

A significant proportion of the urban work force was made up of women and juveniles, a fact that indicates the harshness of conditions such as to make it necessary that all members of a family unit try to find some means of income. Woolf regards the increasing employment of women and children in industry as one form of evidence of the increasing level of extreme poverty.\(^{52}\) According to Procacci, around 1900 approximately 40% of the workforce was composed of women and juveniles. Industrial concerns preferred to employ younger workers who could be paid less. This implied considerable hardship for older workers for whom there was not even some basic provision for support in old age until 1898.\(^{53}\)

The employment of women and juveniles was largely unregulated. A law passed in 1886 provided some regulation prohibiting the employment of children under nine years old and restricted working hours for children from nine to 12 years. Another law passed in 1902 put further official limits on juvenile employment and introduced some regulation of female employment in industry. The effectiveness of this legislation remained limited however, because it was largely unenforced. Hence the number of children aged five to nine years working ten to 12 hour days remained large as did the general degree of juvenile labour employed in industry.\(^{54}\) The level of female workers also remained high especially in textile and clothing production. Around 1900, 45% of the workforce aged under 15 years was female.\(^{55}\) The employment of women and juveniles in the textile industry was largely the result of mechanisation, which in turn meant the loss of employment for many male weavers.\(^{56}\)

The working day of urban workers was long, largely depending on the conditions laid down by employers and the power of workers to force a reduction, a situation which was generally unlikely given the abundant supply of labour. In 1870 the working day


\(^{52}\) He also argues that women often continued to work after marriage because they could not afford to stop. Woolf, op. cit., pp.1050, 1074-5.


\(^{54}\) Under the 1886 law, children had to be ten years old to work in mines and 12 for night work. In 1902 the minimum age for employment was raised to 12 years and 15 years for night work. Women and juveniles were also banned from working underground. The level of female and juvenile employment did drop by 1911. Seton-Watson, op. cit., pp.90, 296; Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.8-9, 14-6; Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.115, 144; Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol.6, op. cit., p.301; Woolf, op. cit., p.1071.

\(^{55}\) The proportion dropped to a lower percentage for older age groups. It was 35% for the 20-39 year age group. Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.13-4, 16, 25.

\(^{56}\) Berta, op. cit., p.1091.
was often 13 to 14 hours and in summer frequently as high as 16 hours. The 1886 law put some restrictions on juvenile working hours, limiting children under 12 years to a working day of eight hours. In 1902 the working day for all workers under 16 years was restricted to 11 hours and that for women to 12 hours. However, as has been noted, these laws remained largely unenforced.\(^{57}\) By the early 1900s there had been little change for most workers. According to Procacci the working day of Italian workers at this time was the longest in Europe.\(^{58}\) While working hours tended to be lower in industries where skilled workers predominated, as low as nine and ten hours per day, most industrial workers worked for longer hours, generally around 12 hours per day and more.\(^{59}\) In industries where there were high concentrations of unskilled workers and of female and juvenile workers, the hours worked were far higher.

Textile workers worked for at least 11 hours per day and often far longer particularly in Central and Southern Italy. In the smaller workshops which, as Procacci states, still played an important role, where modern industrial practices had not yet intruded, the working day was generally longer, as much as 15 or 16 hours.\(^{60}\) Moreover a weekly day off was not a legal right of workers until the early 1900s.\(^{61}\)

The wages paid to these workers were generally very low, particularly those paid to women and juvenile workers. Higher wages were paid to skilled workers, in the main in industries where artisan production still played an important role. On the whole, however, wages paid to industrial workers barely covered their basic needs. Wages were kept low by the oversupply of unskilled labour, a situation exploited by employers. Increasing mechanisation and the degradation of skills likewise contributed to low wages. Wages remained practically unchanged from 1880 to 1900 but prices did not.\(^{62}\)

Industrial working conditions remained bad largely because of the oversupply of labour


\(^{58}\) Procacci, *History*, op. cit., p.381.

\(^{59}\) Printers had a nine hour day and some metal workers a ten hour day. Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.21-3.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., pp.21-3. In parts of Lombardy around 1901 the children of tenant farmers were often employed to work 12 hour days in workshops established on the estates on which their parents worked. According to the representative to the first congress of *Federterra* who spoke of this situation, these workers often spent two to three hours per day getting to and from the workshops. *Lotte agrarie*, op. cit., pp.46-7.

\(^{61}\) Seton-Watson, op. cit., p.296.

as peasants migrated to urban areas and centres of employment in search of either seasonal or permanent work. A reasonably high number of these workers still had links with the land and continued to do so through the late 1800s but were forced to find additional work to survive. This oversupply of labour in urban areas resulted in intense competition for work, kept wages low and conditions difficult especially because, for the major part, this labour force was unskilled and lacked the power to force improvements which skilled workers, to some degree, were able to do in some sectors.63

The other side to the excessive availability of labour in comparison to employment opportunities which adds to the evidence of the harsh lives of many peasants and urban workers was the high level of unemployment of both groups. There was also a considerable number of workers and peasants who had some employment but not sufficient to survive. In urban areas there was insufficient industrial development to employ the available unskilled workers.64 In addition the contraction at various times of certain industries, such as occurred in the construction industry in Rome in the late 1880s, had a harsh effect on those unskilled workers who had been drawn to urban areas by the possibility of work.65 Unemployment also increased in the late 1880s and early 1890s because of a reduction in public works programs.66 The problems caused by unemployment were referred to by the prefects from a number of provinces in the 1880s.67

Unemployment and under-employment were also endemic in the countryside. Even though increasing numbers of peasants looked for work in urban areas or migrated overseas, the population pressure in the countryside remained considerable - the active rural population increased from 1871 to 1901 and beyond - making conditions very harsh for the bulk of the rural population.68 In rural areas under-employment was characterised by the cultivation of small pieces of land by peasants who were forced to find additional forms of support as well as to lower still further their standard of living. This was particularly so in the South.69 This situation applied to piccoli proprietari and sharecroppers as well as landless labourers, their living and working conditions often being little different to those of the landless labourers.

64 Sereni, op. cit., pp.364-8.
67 See above pp.35-6.
However, the landless labourers generally had a far more insecure and difficult existence. Although their level of unemployment and under-employment varied from area to area, in general it has been estimated by Villani that landless labourers, who constituted between 30 and 40% of the rural population from 1881 to 1911, were unemployed for most of the year and found only insecure and short-term work in both the countryside and urban centres. In 1872 a contemporary calculated that rural labourers in the province of Ravenna could find work for a minimum of 189 days in that year which was only 3.5 days per week. Reports from the beginning of the 1900s indicate a worsening of the situation to an average of 86-113 days or around 2 days per week. Sereni quotes from Avanti! in 1897 which graphically set out the situation in a commune of Emilia:

*Nel comune di Finale Emilia, su 12800 abitanti, oltre 5000 sono dati dai braccianti e dalle loro famiglie. Questi operai non lavorano in media più di 200 giorni all’anno...in media perciò non guadagnano più di L.300 all’anno...Si prevedeva, ma le previsioni minacciano di essere superate dalla realtà. Sebbene non siamo ancora entrati nell’inverno, la mancanza di lavoro getta la classe di braccianti nelle più tristi condizioni...*

Sereni adds that the daily press from 1896 into the 20th century referred to the growing hardship of the rural proletariat in the provinces of Emilia-Romagna. He argues that the problem was more acute and visible in this area because the development of capitalist agriculture and the marsh reclamation projects had resulted in a more numerous rural proletariat and a more rapid breakdown of a traditional peasant economy so that there were fewer peasants struggling to survive on small pieces of land. In these areas the rural labourers had only the alternatives of wage labour in agriculture and where it was available some industrial employment. The situation was exacerbated by the drop in the numbers of labourers needed for agricultural cultivation following completion of the projects and because of the greater use of machinery, often a deliberate policy to reduce manual labour because of the militancy of workers in these areas. According to Zangheri there was work for only two thirds of the labourers or, as he also puts it, the labourers were unemployed for a third of the year. In areas of Emilia-Romagna in 1902 unemployment rates for rural labourers varied from 25% to 66%. Lack of

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72 Avanti!, 20 November 1897. Quoted in Sereni, op. cit., p.345.
73 Ibid., pp.345-50.
75 Ibid., p.xvii.
employment for rural labourers and its terrible effects on their lives was one of the
problems raised at the first Federterra congress.76

Unemployment, although to a lesser degree, was also a problem for increasing
numbers of landless peasants in the South as was under-employment. Peasants often
still had access to land but at a level at which they could barely survive. Sereni cites an
example of landless peasants in the province of Lecce who, from 1896 to 1903,
struggled to force landowners to employ them as wage labourers. He notes that in one
commune they were successful in forcing the employment of 400 such labourers but
the following year 4,000 landless peasants destroyed local roads to force local
authorities to provide some employment through public works.77

The lack of employment in both rural and urban areas and the consequent desperation
of many peasants and urban workers were reflected in the high levels of internal and
external migration, temporary and permanent. Internal migration in search of seasonal
work was common with peasants, particularly rural labourers, frequently looking for
additional employment in the cities and on construction projects such as the railways
and public works. These peasants often found themselves in equally degraded
situations in the cities as in the countryside. Poor peasants from the mountain or
extremely backward regions, migrated in increasing numbers for seasonal agricultural
work.78 One of the representatives at the first Federterra congress spoke of peasants
from Lombardy, including boys over 12 years, leaving their homes for eight months
each year to find additional income to support their families.79 Participants at the
congress also referred to the problems caused by the competition from the waves of
migrant workers in areas where the peasant leagues were fighting for better conditions
and pay. The level of competition for jobs was such that landowners could keep wages
extremely low.80 As many as 65,000 to 93,000 workers would arrive in some areas.81
Permanent emigration overseas was also a choice forced on many peasants and, to a
lesser degree urban workers, by the conditions under which they lived and the
insufficiency of their means of support.82 The number of emigrants from particular
areas could be high. For example, from 1887 to 1901, 64,446 people emigrated from

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76 Ibid., pp.13, 17-9, 27, 73-85, 146.
77 Sereni, op. cit., pp.325-8.
78 Jacini, op. cit., pp.133-5, 138-9; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.xv-xvi, 13-6, 40; Villani, Storia
d'Italia, op. cit., p.944; Procacci, La lotta di classe, op. cit., pp.17-8; Woolf, op. cit., pp.1073-6;
79 Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.47.
82 Ibid., pp.351-8.
the province of Rovigo out of a population of 220,000.\textsuperscript{83}

Not all workers and peasants chose to leave the country nor did those who stayed passively accept the dreadful conditions imposed upon them. Their resistance to prevailing conditions largely took the form of spontaneous protests, but organised opposition also emerged, influenced by various groups such as the anarchists and radicals, and later predominantly by the socialists. Traditional peasant protests remained predominant in the South and contrasted with the emergence of organised agitations in the North which put forward specific demands to improve conditions. The traditional protests were generally of a spontaneous nature such as protests against bread prices and attacks on municipal buildings in protest against taxes.\textsuperscript{84} Although worker and peasant agitation was directed against the social and economic effects of capitalist processes, it also had political dimensions because these effects were inextricably linked to the particular political structure and distribution of power under which the transformation was taking place. It challenged the privileges and powers which the ruling class possessed and were unwilling to give up even in part as the massacres and political repression by authorities illustrated. It was also political because it included demands for democratic rights which interested a wider group than the working class but which were, as Procacci points out, a prerequisite to the development of an effective, organised peasant and worker movement.\textsuperscript{85}

Actual strikes were illegal until 1889 when legal changes raised the specific prohibition against them. Even then limitations remained which made the holding of meetings and strikes difficult. It was only in 1901 that the State partially recognised that workers and peasants had a right to organise and to strike.\textsuperscript{86} Despite the prohibition on strikes and continuing restrictions, such actions increased slowly during the late 1800s and into the early 1900s reaching a peak from 1901-2.\textsuperscript{87} The response of the various governments and the local authorities to the agitations and strikes was in general repressive and frequently bloody.

\textsuperscript{83}\textit{Lotte agrarie}, op. cit., N.29, p.xvi.
\textsuperscript{84} Procacci,\textit{La lotta di classe}, op. cit., pp.125-6, 145; Candeloro,\textit{Storia dell'Italia}, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.49-59. The specific demands were for protective legislation, shorter working hours and higher wages. Ibid., p.39; Procacci,\textit{La lotta di classe}, op. cit., pp.20-3.
\textsuperscript{87} See Appendix 4 for statistics for this period. There are some problems with the figures. Only cases of complete interruption to work were counted as strikes hence not all disruptions were included. Procacci,\textit{La lotta di classe}, op. cit., pp.82-4. See also \textit{Lotte agrarie}, op. cit., pp.xxix-xxxii.
From 1860 to 1870 there were on average 13 industrial strikes a year which were restricted to particular factories and related to local issues. Some of the strikes extended for a reasonable period of time and involved entire groups of urban and industrial workers protesting against low wages, harsh conditions or long working hours. From 1866 strikes and agitations were also directed against taxes and the cost of living. The level of strikes rose after 1870 mainly because of price rises that substantially diminished the purchasing power of wages making the lives of workers even harsher. Of note during this period was what Candeloro describes as una vasta ondata di malandrinaggio in Sicily during 1874 which he attributes largely to the economic difficulties of that year. He goes on to observe that such crimes had profound roots in the social situation of Sicily, in the exploitation of the peasants and the continuing impact of semi-feudal forms, exacerbated by the repressive approach taken by the State. Strikes throughout Italy remained at a high level in the early 1870s then decreased to the end of the decade as a result of improved economic conditions which brought increased employment and an increase in real wages in some areas of employment. The rate of strikes, however, remained above that of the previous decade.

Before 1880 there were sporadic agrarian agitations and strikes in the North. Such protests increased greatly in the 1880s and early 1890s as a consequence of the agrarian crisis which led to worsened conditions, particularly for rural labourers in areas of advanced capitalist cultivation in the North where an agricultural proletariat was forming. From 1887-1891 demonstrations of popular discontent occurred throughout Italy as a result of the worsening agrarian crisis and the general economic situation.

The widespread and severe agitations of the 1890s climaxed in two major crises of 1894 and 1898 which seriously threatened political and social structures. Unrest was particularly evident in Sicily during the early years of the 1890s in protest against such issues as limited access to land for peasants, agrarian contracts, heavy local and State taxation and corrupt local administrations. During 1893 and 1894 peasants rioted in

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58 Violent protests were made during 1868-9 against the grain tax. Procacci, History, op. cit., pp.326-7, 337; Sereni, op. cit., pp.86-9. 257 were killed and 1099 wounded. Ibid., p.89.
59 Ibid., pp.34-5, 55.
60 Ibid., pp.86-7. See also Reato, op. cit., pp.166-7.
62 Extensive protests occurred in 1882 in the provinces of Cremona, Mantova and Parma, and then at an increased level in 1884 in all the provinces on the lower course of the Po, such as Ferrara, Ravenna and the Po Delta, and again in 1885 in the Po Delta region and Mantova. Ibid., pp.299, 302-4; Procacci, History, op. cit., pp.343-4.
63 Ibid., pp.360-2; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.374.
many areas, at times burning toll houses and attacking public offices. The local authorities, acting with the support of the State, forcibly repressed the protests killing 92 people in various incidents from December 1893 until 3 January 1894 when a state of emergency was declared. Approximately 2,000 people were arrested and many more were placed under house arrest. There were widespread protests throughout Italy, particularly by rural labourers in Mantova and Ravenna, against the actions of the authorities as well as in support of specific demands. 1893 had been a difficult year for agriculture in general as a consequence of which many peasants had had insufficient food. All the agitations were met by strong reactions from local authorities.94

There were fewer strikes and protests during 1895 and 1896 because of imprisonment or other restrictions on militants and leaders. In addition meetings were prohibited.95 However, there was soon a resurgence of protests primarily in rural areas. The improvement in the economy which began in 1896 did little to improve conditions for workers. The wages of many urban and rural workers remained just above subsistance levels so that the price rises that occurred only made their situation more difficult.96 The reaction of the State to the revival of agitations and strikes was typically harsh, nevertheless strikes increased in Northern Italy where there were some lengthy stoppages and wage increases and shorter working hours were achieved in some cases.97

More extensive protests took place in all parts of Italy during late 1897 and 1898. In many cases the riots were sparked off by sharp increases in the cost of grain and bread. In rural areas particularly, the agitations often took the form of traditional protests against shopowners, the wealthy and the State. However, the protests frequently went further, expressing opposition to flour taxes, the customs duty on grain and demanding the establishment of municipal bakeries. The demands also had a political element. Frequently the political element predominated with agitations against State repression and in support of basic freedoms. This political character was more common in urban areas in the North. The reaction of the State to the riots and agitations was extreme. A state of emergency was declared in May 1898 in the provinces of Milan, Florence, Livorno and Naples, and control was given to military authorities in all provinces where there were uprisings. In Milan 80 people were killed (2 military) and 450 wounded (22 military). 51 people were killed in other parts of Italy (1 military). Many

95 Ibid., pp.30-1.
96 Ibid., pp.20-1.
97 Ibid., pp.36-8; Lotte agrarie, op. cit., pp.xxxiv-v.
people were arrested, tried before military tribunals and sentenced to long prison terms. Apart from the immediate economic cause of the high cost of bread and grain, the basic reasons for the widespread uprisings were to be found in the harsh conditions of workers and peasants, and the high levels of unemployment. The agitations were portrayed by the State and the conservative press as part of a revolutionary conspiracy but there was no evidence of an organised push for revolutionary change.98

From 1900 to 1904 there was a substantial increase in both industrial and agrarian strikes involving far larger numbers of workers than before, followed by a decrease, then signs of a revival during 1904. Most of the agrarian strikes took place in the Po Valley although a considerable number also occurred in Central Italy, Sicily and Apulia where there was a concentration of wage labourers. Although the protests were frequently traditional peasant riots there was an increasing tendency for agricultural agitations to be more organised with specific demands for better conditions, wage increases and improved contracts. Landowner resistance was largely responsible for the drop-off in agrarian strikes during 1902 and 1903. Moreover there was a strong reaction from local authorities. 26 people were killed and 186 injured in agitations in the South from 1902-4. The deaths provoked some protests including a general strike lasting several days in September 1904 which spread to many parts of rural and urban Italy. Industrial strikes followed a similar pattern and in 1902, for the first time, a particular category of workers, the railway workers, threatened a nationwide strike. The impact of their threat brought success.99

While the agitations and strikes of the first decades of a united Italy were in part spontaneous, the same period saw the emergence of organised opposition to the living and working conditions of the majority of the population in the worker and peasant movements and, as Procacci describes it, their most direct political expression, the socialist party.100 The organised worker and peasant movements that developed in the late 1800s incorporated a diversity of associations ranging from workers' societies involved with mutual aid, resistance leagues, camere del lavoro and federations of these associations. The number of workers' societies increased rapidly after 1860 concentrated in Northern and Central Italy.101 Most of the societies were concerned with

100 Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., p.166.
101 In 1862 there were 445 workers' societies of which only 30 were in the South. There were 121,635 members. In 1872 there were from 1,146 to 1,345 societies with 218,822 members. 41
mutual assistance for workers while some had formed cooperatives. *Le cooperative di lavoro e di produzione* were also being established and were undertaking public works and land reclamation contracts while some were taking on collective leases for cooperative cultivation.\(^{102}\) Other societies, known also as *leghe di resistenza*, were more concerned with setting out workers' demands and supporting strikes. They developed slowly through the 1870s and early 1880s.

From 1884 the organised worker movement was strengthened and a peasant movement began to develop in areas of capitalist transformation in the North in response to contradictory effects of social and economic changes as well as to the effects of the severe agrarian crisis. Under the influence of these movements strikes and agitations began to take on a more organised and less spontaneous character.\(^{103}\) Workers and peasants' organisations expanded and became more militant in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The development of industrial organisations occurred only slowly because of the limited state of Italian industry and because of the tendency for organisation to take place on a territorial basis rather than an occupational one.\(^{104}\)

The Sicilian *fasci* were a particularly notable example of workers' association because of their mass development in the early 1890s and their harsh repression by the State in 1894. Originally formed in the cities, the *fasci* were established strongly in the countryside through 1892 and 1893. Badly affected by the agrarian crisis and the tariff war with France, small landowners, sharecroppers, rural labourers and sulphur miners were attracted to the movement which was responsible for a large number of strikes and demonstrations. The *fasci* were persecuted by the authorities but not on the scale desired by landowners and prefects, and their action was not sufficiently repressive to stop the movement until a state of emergency was declared in 1894. Other Sicilian workers' associations and mainland organisations were banned and meetings prohibited at the same time.\(^{105}\)

were established in the South from 1866 to 1870. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.33-4.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., pp.375, 420.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., pp.33-5, 166-7, 299, 302-4, 374; Procacci, *History*, op. cit., pp.343-4. Procacci describes the nature of the agrarian workers in the area of the Po Valley and how this made agitations more likely to occur there. There workers formed a proletariat, they were not simply peasants without land as was the case in Sicily. Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.87-91.

\(^{104}\) Some categories of workers, however, had formed active organisations, such as the railway workers who set up leagues in the mid-1890s. The printers also had an organisational base before the end of the 19th century. Ibid., pp.32-9; Procacci, *History*, op. cit., pp.374-7.

Despite the State actions and continuing repression, worker and peasant organisations were slowly re-established during 1895 and 1896 and although in some regions, particularly Sicily, this was almost impossible, by 1896 the role played by these organisations was both significant and permanent.\(^{106}\) However, the worker and peasant movements remained fragmented and regionalised with only a degree of national co-ordination coming from the socialists.\(^{107}\) There was further government repression of the *leghe* in Northern Italy after intensive agitation in 1897 and then again in 1898 but by 1899 these organisations had begun to be active again.\(^{108}\)

Worker and peasant organisations both expanded rapidly during the wave of strikes in 1901-2.\(^{109}\) Initially the majority of strikes were not directed by any organisation but by 1902 the reverse was the case.\(^{110}\) Agricultural strikes had a higher degree of organisation than industrial strikes indicating, according to Procacci, the level of efficiency and organisation that the peasant movement had achieved. Industrial organisations remained restricted reflecting the pattern of industrial development. Peasant organisations were reasonably diverse varying from region to region depending on the structure of economic and social relations.\(^{111}\) They remained strongest in the Po Valley. A range of peasant associations such as cooperatives and societies of sharecroppers as well as of rural labourers extended through provinces within Emilia-Romagna.\(^{112}\) In more northern areas the less advanced structure of agriculture made it difficult to organise the peasantry.\(^{113}\) In other northern provinces there was a high level of peasant protest which was unorganised and more of a traditional nature.\(^{114}\)

The agitations of 1901-2 in Central and Southern Italy were also organised to a greater degree than in the past although the total membership and number of associations were far less than in the North.\(^{115}\) In the South the organised peasant movement remained limited to Apulia and parts of Sicily. The peasant leagues in Apulia were established in

\(^{106}\) Ibid., pp.30-3.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., p.34.
\(^{108}\) Ibid., pp.38, 70-7.
\(^{110}\) In 1902 more than 50% of industrial strikes were directed by organisations which had links with either a *camera del lavoro* or a trade federation. Procacci gives a detailed survey of industrial strikes in 1901 and the degree of organisation involved. Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.70-9. Procacci gives a detailed background to this. See ibid., Chapter 2, also pp.70-9, 85-6, 192; Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.155-6, 158-61.
\(^{111}\) Ibid., pp.111-20.
\(^{112}\) Ibid., pp.120-5.
\(^{113}\) Ibid., pp.123-7.
\(^{114}\) Ibid., pp.134-45.
\(^{115}\) Railway workers played a significant role in stimulating peasant protests, establishing links with peasants in areas around the railway lines. Another important factor was the influence of industrial centres although urban socialists and anarchists did little to assist the peasant movement. Ibid., pp.134-45.
centres of agricultural workers and attracted large memberships. Areas of Sicily also saw the development of leagues and work cooperatives which put forward a program of precise demands. Groups formed at the beginning of the 1890s also became active again.

Industrial strikes took place in many industrial centres during 1901-2 including general strikes in Turin and Florence in 1902. In 1902 and 1903 there was a retreat in industrial protests and there was an increase in the number of strikes with unfavourable outcomes for workers. The stronger organisations were able to withstand the effects of these defeats but the newer ones were severely affected.

The peasants also suffered major setbacks as the landowners supported by the State organised against them. In general the peasant movement was severely weakened if not destroyed in many areas where it had flourished in 1901-2. Only in a few provinces such as Emilia, Bologna and the Romagna did the peasant organisations remain active and effective. They did so because of their greater diversity and flexibility diverting their activity into cooperative associations and campaigns for more public works.

Another important organisation formed to assist workers was the camera del lavoro. They were established in towns and cities throughout Italy from 1891. The camere del lavoro were used as a centre for the urban working class although in some cases they had links with peasant associations. The expansion of these organisations was such that it was possible to hold a congress in 1893 at which a national federation was formed. They were affected by the repression of 1894 but then revived and expanded rapidly after 1900. The groups which set them up were various, including workers' societies, socialist intellectuals, and in some cases the local camera di commercio. Anarchists, republicans and more moderate elements as well as socialists were involved in the camere del lavoro. In their early years the organisers generally depended on the

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116 Ibid., pp.145-52.
117 Ibid., pp.152-63; Procacci, History, op. cit., pp.374-5; Renda, op. cit., pp.195-205, 206-72, 293. Renda gives a chronicle of the rural strikes held in Sicily in late 1901, quoting extensively from communications between Sicilian prefects and authorities in Rome, Avanti! and a local socialist newspaper. He also gives details of the pacts being demanded by the peasants and the repressive government action taken against the Sicilian strikes.
120 Ibid., pp.145-52, 304-15. In the view of Candeloro the defeats of 1902-3 were due largely to miscalculations and misunderstandings by the leaders of the leagues and federations. Particularly in the North the strength of the organised resistance of the landowners was not realised by peasant leaders. Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.7, op. cit., p.171.
121 They were modelled on existing bodies outside Italy. For a general background see ibid., p.34; Procacci, La lotta di classe, op. cit., pp.57-70.
municipal authorities for financial support. Although in the program of the *Partito socialista* they were described as *organi della lotta di mestiere* they were not initially union bodies but rather organisations which represented the workers’ societies of each town and facilitated the employment of workers so that they were no longer exploited by private mediators.\(^{122}\)

Given the diversity of the groups involved in the *camere del lavoro* and their financial dependence on municipal authorities their stance was generally conservative and defensive. The program passed at the first congress makes this clear with its concern for the protection of workers within the existing system and not with class struggle. It was also the reason why many peasant leagues did not want to associate themselves formally with the *camere del lavoro* although in some areas there were closer links between these organisations.\(^{122}\) Nevertheless their activities, which included not only employment and mediation but also recreation and popular education, in addition to their creation of a centre for different types of workers, gave them a political character. Moreover their commitment to the achievement of democratic rights and to the development of the workers’ movement in a trade union sense, was a political position.\(^{124}\) They were also politicised in the 1890s by the influence, in some areas, of strong peasant leagues, by the dominant role played by socialists in the majority of the *camere del lavoro* and by the harsh State repression of worker and peasant agitations. Furthermore the fact that they were used as centres for urban workers and in some places the peasant movement gave the *camere del lavoro* the potential to direct agitations and strikes which, in fact, they came to do by directing and coordinating the urban *leghe di resistenza* and occasionally those in surrounding rural areas. They were largely in charge of the general strikes held in Turin and Florence in 1902, Rome in 1903 and the nationwide general strike of 1904.\(^ {125}\)

Moves were also made to establish structures to coordinate worker and peasant associations at a provincial, regional and national level but it was a slow process. Most federations only became effective national bodies at the beginning of the 20th century.


\(^{125}\) Ibid., pp.67, 136-45; Candeloro, *Storia dell’Italia*, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.399-401; *Lotte agrarie*, op. cit., p.xxxiv; Procacci, *History*, op. cit., pp.374-5; Candeloro, *Storia dell’Italia*, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.155-6, 179-81. An indication of attitudes towards the *camere del lavoro* and their role was given in December 1900 when the prefect of Genoa dissolved the local *camera del lavoro* because of pressure put on him by employers who opposed the role played by the organisation in relation to employment of labour. The response from workers, a general strike extending throughout Liguria, forced the decreto to be revoked. Ibid., pp.88-90.
and then many were severely weakened by the reaction of 1902-3. One of the major reasons for the slow development of craft federations was the restricted state of Italian industry until the late 1890s. In contrast to the *camere del lavoro* the craft federations took clearly political and class positions because they represented class-based organisations, that is the union-type workers' organisation.

Agrarian federations of peasant leagues formed at a provincial level began to appear in Northern Italy around 1901, the majority after the agitations of 1901 had begun. They were established in areas where there were concentrations of rural labourers who saw in the federations an organisation which would support, direct and represent them in their struggle with individual landlords and capitalist companies. Through these organisations the peasant movement took on a character of class struggle in a far clearer fashion than was the case with cooperatives and mutual aid societies. Nearly all the federations declared themselves to be socialist and expressed open support for the socialist party although in general their commitment was to a trade union struggle and consciousness rather than to a political class conflict. In some Northern regions the structure of agriculture and the nature of the local peasant organisations impeded the establishment of federations or resulted in the emergence of different forms of provincial organisation. For example, in the Romagna, where there was an extensive cooperative movement, a provincial federation of cooperatives was formed in May 1902. In contrast to Northern Italy attempts to establish agrarian federations or coordinating bodies in Central and Southern Italy were unsuccessful although some federations did exist in Sicily during the years of peasant and worker agitation.

A national federation of peasants - *La federazione nazionale dei lavoratori della terra* (or *Federterra*) - was formed in 1901. It expanded quickly in early 1902 but then suffered

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126 Procacci gives a detailed background on the federations. Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.29-56, 87-115. See also Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol. 7, op. cit., pp.156-61. The *camere del lavoro* were the one exception, in addition to the printers' federation, capable of operating at a national level. The printers' federation was formed in 1872. Through it printers were able to win shorter working hours and wage increases. Other federations were formed from 1886 on. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol. 6, op. cit., pp.166-7, 179-82, 401; Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.31-4. Procacci gives a list of federations and membership existing in the early 1900s. Only four were founded before the period 1900-4. Ibid., pp.31-2.

127 Although the word worker is used here in a broader sense than proletariat, including artisan-type workers. Ibid., pp.26-8, 66.

128 Leagues composed of peasant categories other than rural labourers were admitted to the federations but the majority of members and controlling elements were rural labourers. Ibid., pp.87-97.


130 Ibid., pp.111-25.

131 Ibid., pp.141-61. The most important Sicilian federation, *la terra sicula*, was active and successful in representing demands of the sharecroppers and peasants renting small pieces of land. Ibid., pp.152-63.
a setback with the harsh defeats of the peasant strikes in 1902-3. It was revived and reorganised in 1906. Reflecting the strength of the peasant movement, its centre was in the North. Much of the impetus for the formation of Federterra was socialist as was the program although the primary concern was with problems of organisation, the structure of agriculture and the effects of capitalist transformation.132

Another potential means of ameliorating or struggling to alter the social and economic effects of capitalist transformation and the continuing effects of pre-capitalist forms was to be found in the emerging political groups of anarchists, radicals and socialists. These political groups all exercised some influence over the peasant and worker organisations, frequently being involved in the foundation of leagues and societies. Nevertheless they remained distinct from the worker and peasant movements.133 By the 1890s the socialists had attained the predominant influence although wide divisions remained in many regions between their political organisations and the union organisations of the workers and peasants. The emergence of a national socialist party was a slow process partly due to the existence of diverse groups pursuing different political lines which all fell within a broadly socialist position. These groups included the anarchists who exercised a strong influence through this period until the early 1890s when a clear differentiation emerged between an anarchist and socialist position.134 By socialist, workers' associations often meant only that they were class organisations established as part of the struggle of workers or as Procacci describes it la lotta rivendicativa dei salariati.135

From the late 1860s to the early 1870s numerous socialist circles were formed in Central and Northern Italy.136 Initial attempts were made to form a national party in the early 1880s in Romagna and Milan with the formation of two workers' parties. They were influential in Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and urban centres in Piedmont, Liguria and the cities of Livorno and Naples. Attempts to bring the two groups together so as to unite the socialist, worker and anarchist groups were unsuccessful. Even though worker and peasant organisations had expanded and become more militant in the late 1800s there was still little likelihood of the establishment of a national socialist party.137


135 Ibid., pp.66, 127-34, 192.


137 The first group was the Partito socialista rivoluzionario di Romagna formed in 1881. In 1884 it
The basis for a national socialist party emerged in 1892 when the Partito dei lavoratori was founded with a socialist program which differentiated it from democratic bourgeois parties. In 1895 it was renamed the Partito socialista italiano (P.S.I.).

The socialist movement began to draw a mass following from 1891, exercising considerable influence over worker and peasant associations and achieving electoral success, along with republicans and radicals, at a local, provincial and national level. It does appear that socialist support for workers' associations was often not as strong as it could have been, as a recommendation at a congress in 1897 urging greater socialist participation makes clear. Up till the repression of 1894 the socialist movement, along with the union and cooperative organisations, expanded considerably.

The Partito socialista was dissolved in 1894 but was soon re-established and re-structured so as to by-pass the effects of State limitations. The socialists were again weakened by arrests of leaders and dissolving of leagues during 1897 and 1898 but again it was not possible to hold back or destroy the mass support for socialist ideas and organisations so that socialists continued to play an influential role in peasant organisations particularly in the North.

Although the P.S.I. or individual socialists exercised influence over worker and peasant associations the relationship was frequently difficult. At the beginning of the 20th century there was still a separation between the two organisations. In Central

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Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.420. The general situation of unrest and crisis in Sicily that led up to the Fasci movement also stimulated the formation in 1893 of the Partito socialista siciliano which adhered to the Partito socialista. Ibid., pp.431-3. Another group adhering to the Partito socialista in 1893 was the Federazione mantovano delle associazioni di operai e contadini. Lotte agrarie, op. cit., p.xxxiv; Procacci, La lotta di classe, op. cit., pp.99-101.

From 1895 it was possible for people to join as individuals rather than as members of worker and peasant associations. Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.439-40, 446, 448-9; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.30-3.


Italy urban socialists did little to help develop the peasant movement because it was frequently led by sharecroppers who were the predominant peasant category in the region. The situation was similar in Southern Italy where, in contrast to the North, socialists tended to come from the middle class and were more concerned with achieving democratic rights rather than supporting worker and peasant demands. In common with the leaders of the P.S.I., many Southern socialists believed that the conditions in the South were not ready for the formation of worker and peasant movements such as existed in the North. As Procacci indicates, these attitudes were often at odds with the potential that existed for these movements in the South as well as the attempts made to establish them. In Sicily there was a similar problem over the relationship of the P.S.I. to developments in rural areas, to a degree that urban socialism, with its focus on electoral campaigns and democratic rights, had little to do with the socialism of peasant organisers who believed that it would be through their struggles that the conservative and semi-feudal social, economic and political structures of Sicily would be broken down. Both groups, in the opinion of Procacci, remained isolated because of their inability to overcome the limitations of their individual positions.

The emergence of organised opposition to the social, political and economic structures with its range of associations and political groups constituted one side of the social question. The other was the suffering of workers and peasants from which the unorganised protests and organised opposition sprang, suffering which in turn derived from the continuing presence of semi-feudal structures and relations combined with the direct and indirect effects of the development of capitalism. The suffering of workers and peasants was a problem with which the intransigenti, or at least a section of them, could come to terms. The existence of relatively unified and strong worker and peasant movements, expressing strong support for broadly socialist positions, on the other hand, was an aspect of the social question which they could not accept or easily deal with, and was one which caused them increasing concern and conflict.

146 Ibid., 145-52.
147 Ibid., pp. 152-63, 244-5, 363.
The Ideological Formation of the *intransigenti*

How to react to the social question became a central concern for the *intransigenti* from which clear factions appeared within the *Opera dei Congressi*. The conflict between these factions ultimately was to contribute in a significant fashion to the demise of the organisation. There were, however, a range of concerns which they shared and which reflected their intransigent opposition to many of the changes occurring in late 19th century Italy. They also reflected the predominantly ruling class material interests of many of the *intransigenti*. In the later years of the organisation some of these ideas were under challenge from the more moderate faction of the *cristiano sociali* as well as from the Christian democrats as these groups tried to come to terms with the social question although on the whole, these ideas and principles were held to by most *intransigenti*, excepting only in some respects the more radical Christian democrats. These basic ideological positions indicate the line that the *intransigenti* would take in relation to the social question and the points at which divisions began to emerge.

Not only had the temporal power of the Catholic Church been destroyed by unification, but its ideological influence had also been severely undermined by the assumption of power by a ruling faction whose ideological concerns were dominated by moderate liberalism and individualism. The *intransigenti* involved in the *Opera dei Congressi* were, in the main, members of the ruling class. Although excluded from political control of the new State because of their ideological positions and by the *Non expedite*, they remained members of the new ruling class by virtue of their social and economic power, and at a local and provincial level, of their political power. These militant Catholics saw around them the increasing erosion of Catholicism and its replacement by the secular ideologies of liberalism and socialism. They condemned these ideologies as the cause of the increase in antagonism between the social classes, the challenge to established authority whether civil or ecclesiastical and what they perceived to be spiritual corruption, asserting instead that Catholicism had to be restored as the ideology of the State so that social order as they saw it could be restored. The *Opera*

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1 Many were from the landed aristocracy, others were professionals. The leading *intransigenti* tended to be from these groups or from the other large grouping of priests and bishops. This composition changed in later years with the emergence of the Christian democratic movement and its inclusion within the *Opera dei Congressi*. I. p.11; V. p.5; VIII. pp.v-vi; XI. *Parte II, Documenti*, pp.120-9; Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.152-4; De Rosa, *L'azione cattolica*, Vol.I, op. cit., pp.64, 71.
dei Congressi was to be the vehicle for the reassertion of Catholic ideology.

Total rejection of the secular principles which the intransigenti believed were increasingly dominant in Italian society and a reassertion of the central role of the Church and of the pope, formed a major theme which was to run through all the congresses of the Opera dei Congressi. All social problems or evils as the intransigenti described them, were attributed to this process of secularisation, even by more socially aware intransigenti. In a typical example, Monsignor Marinangeli, bishop of Foggia, stated bluntly at the VI Congress in 1883 that all errors were negations of God. He declared that secularisation had gone further than ever before had been the case to the extent that the negation of God had become la formula del sistema scientifico e sociale dell’epoca. Moreover it was not restricted to a few individuals as had generally occurred. This time he believed it involved the whole of society, the separation of the world from God, of society from religion and the State from the Church. In his view the consequences of separation were nihilism, atheism and anarchy. A distinction between civil and religious powers was acceptable to him but he totally opposed a separation of the two because he believed it was directed at the destruction of the Church.

The condemnations of secular ideas, made either directly or indirectly by the intransigenti, frequently did not distinguish between a heterogeneous collection of religious heresies and the secular principles of liberalism and socialism. For many years the intransigenti tended not to distinguish between liberalism and socialism, regarding socialism as the natural consequence of liberalism. In the 1890s, in response to the growing strength of the socialist movement, they came to regard socialism as the greater threat to society and in fact a real threat to the existence of the State. However, this did not mean that their belief in the integral link between liberalism and socialism was abandoned, in particular by those intransigenti who viewed the changes around them in strongly moral terms. Condemning all secular ideas as revolutionary, the intransigenti traced their origins back to the French Revolution and, beyond that to the Protestant Reformation and other heretical movements. According to these militant Catholics the common link between these ideas was their rebellion against the Church.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2} VI. p.46.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{3} VI. pp.43-69. He was probably also referring to the Law of Guarantees passed in 1871 by the Italian parliament which gave legal expression to the separation of Church and State. It was rejected by Pius IX and hence also by the clergy and militant lay Catholics. A.C.Jemolo, Church and State in Italy, 1850-1950, Oxford, 1960, pp.49-51; Procacci, History, op. cit., pp.331-2; E.E.Y.Hales, The Catholic Church in the Modern World: A Survey from the French Revolution to the Present, London, 1958, p.144.}\]
They charged that revolutionary ideas had attacked the central and unifying role of the Church in society.  

The *intransigenti* included amongst their enemies not only the moderate liberals who controlled the State and the more radical liberals, but also those they described as *cattolici liberali*. They included under this label Catholics who had passively accepted secular changes although opposing them in theory, as well as those who were attempting to find some grounds for compromise between Catholicism and the new State. The *cattolici liberali*, who were both lay and clerical, had seen their position condemned by Pius IX in the Syllabus of Errors (1864) and again in 1873 and they were voraciously attacked by the *intransigenti*, particularly in their newspapers. The *cattolici liberali* included conservatives who wanted conciliation between the Church and the new Italian State. Their position was undermined by the intransigent opposition of the Church and State. Nevertheless the conciliatory line never completely disappeared through the late 1800s, enjoying papal support in the 1880s under Leo XIII. It was to re-emerge more strongly in the late 1890s and early 1900s in a loose grouping of Catholics known as the *clerico-moderati* and it was the pragmatic position of these Catholics which was ultimately to gain papal support in preference to the line of most *intransigenti*. The hardline *intransigenti* remained firmly opposed to the line taken by the *cattolici liberali* and later the *clerico-moderati*. Nevertheless by the late 1890s a shift had occurred in the attitudes of some *intransigenti* towards the Italian State, with some *clerico-moderati* emerging from the ranks of the *intransigenti*, advocating Catholic support of the State against socialist attacks and support of the prevailing economic and social structures.

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4 D'Ondes Reggio spoke of the destruction of *l'unità Cattolica* by Protestantism. V. pp.279-323. See also I. pp.54-63, 130-6, 214-5; II. pp.44-7, 81-9, 136-41; IV. pp.105-55; V. pp.24-8, 195-6, 451-5; VII. pp.118-28, 146; X. pp.125-33; XII. pp.81-93, 114; XV. pp.169-77, 179-82; XVI. pp.224-5; XVII. pp.146-8; XVIII. pp.117-23, 140-6, 191-2; XIX. p.39.

5 I. pp.75-83; II. pp.53-61, 90-106, 113; IV. pp.30-2, 49-58.

6 De Rosa, *L'azione cattolica*, Vol. 1, op. cit., pp.49-57, 72-5, 157-62, 170-1, 194-5; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.45-6. Candeloro gives a survey of these Catholics in *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.120-8, 167-98, 208-14. Candeloro distinguishes between the *cattolici liberali* and the *clerico-moderati* on political grounds, arguing that the latter occupied a more intermediate position between the *intransigenti* and the *cattolici liberali*. However, it appears that both from Candeloro's account and that of other historians such as De Rosa that the division was not completely clear-cut. De Rosa states that the two merged in 1904. There appears to be grounds to use the term *cattolici liberali* to refer to Catholics wanting conciliation early in the period and *clerico-moderati* for the grouping of Catholics emerging later who wanted the Catholics to be brought in to support the State against socialist attacks. The range of positions in both loose groupings was wide. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia*, Vol. 6, op. cit., pp.58-9; De Rosa, *L'azione cattolica*, Vol. 1, op. cit., pp.157-62, 194-5; Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.120-8.
In their condemnations of liberalism and socialism, the *intransigenti* not only charged that these ideologies had destroyed the unity of Catholicism but they also singled out common elements which they believed conflicted with Catholic teaching. Their disapprobation was directed principally at the materialism of liberalism and socialism and the effects of materialist teachings on society. Materialism, whether liberal or socialism, challenged Catholic explanations of the world - the role of the Church and its clergy in society, the purpose of people's lives, the existing hierarchical social structure and so on. The challenge of socialist theories to the Catholic justifications of the existing social structure and division of power was far more serious than that posed by the moderate liberalism of the ruling faction because it rejected the traditional Catholic explanations of poverty and of the relative positions of the social classes:

...torrente delle aberrazioni e comuniste e socialiste che disprezzando ogni freno di autorità, minaccia distruzione alla Società ed alla famiglia.  

In the view of the *intransigenti* the effects of materialist ideas were to be seen in most areas of society. The influence of materialism in institutions of learning was particularly abhorrent to them because these institutions had been under the control of the Church for so long. The diminishing influence of Catholic principles as the basis to all knowledge and the effects of this process on intellectuals and on the education of the future wielders of social, political and economic power, the children of the ruling class, were subjects raised at every congress. These concerns appeared primarily in speeches opposing State attempts to remove religious influence from the area of education and on possible means by which such moves could be countered. Congress participants, particularly clerical ones, were horrified at the exclusion of religious principles from education and predicted dire effects for the maintenance of social order.  

The *intransigenti* were also more specific about the effects of materialism on knowledge stressing the damage they believed it was doing to the sciences. *Commendatore* Albèri, a vice-president of the *Opera dei Congressi* at the I Congress, condemned the exclusion of the concept of the supernatural from the natural sciences. He was opposed to, as he put it, theories about human origins which held that people had lived on earth for thousands of years. Another *intransigente* stated at the II Congress that the sciences

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7 Prince Bisignano from the opening speech to the VI Congress. VI.pp.29-30. See also XII. pp.81-93; XIV. pp.196-207.
8 I. pp.97-113; II. pp.170-85; IV. pp.187-200, 348-51; V. pp.145-53. There are similar references for all the congresses although not all refer to materialism but rather to State control of education. XI. pp.193-7.
9 I. pp.47-53.
were now actively working against the Church.\textsuperscript{10} There were now speciose teoriche politiche, economiche e sociali, che inesorabilmente fan capo al tremendo dilemma del cesarismo o del comunismo...\textsuperscript{11}

One of the sciences which the \textit{intransigenti} believed had been adversely affected by materialist ideas was economics. They were opposed to the influence of the theories of classical political economy and of utilitarian and \textit{laissez-faire} ideas on economic processes then taking place in Italy. These theories and ideas were objectionable to the \textit{intransigenti} because of their basis in rationalist understandings of social and economic processes rather than Catholic laws and principles which, the \textit{intransigenti} stressed, were based on divine laws of harmony and were therefore essential to the existence of social order. They went on to argue that these theories were the cause of the unjust treatment of peasants and urban workers which was increasingly evident. One participant, Baron Savarese, stated that materialism was the root of the development of capitalism.\textsuperscript{12}

The \textit{intransigenti} believed that instead of being based on materialism the sciences should revolve around Catholic theology and the scholastic philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas. Their espousal of Aquinas reflected that of the pope who had issued an encyclical in 1879 on the subject urging restoration of the philosophy of Aquinas to science.\textsuperscript{13}

Apart from the effects of materialism on education and the sciences, the \textit{intransigenti} were also opposed to its influence on the arts. Albèri spoke at the I Congress of the degradation of the arts:

\textit{Oggi all'incontro che, nello scetticismo e nel culto brutale della materia, è inaridita la fonte dei grandi e nobili affetti che solo in Dio si alimenta, l'arte discesa dalla sublime sua sfera, spoglia del casto velo che ne serbava l'originale bellezza, fatta strumento alle lusinghe del senso, isterilisce e vien meno, e da conforto dell'animo, e da soave educatrice dei popoli si converte in fomite d'inverecondia e di vanità...}\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} II. pp.44-7, 81-9. See also XIII. pp.137-41; XVI. pp.109-10.
\textsuperscript{11} II. p.130.
\textsuperscript{13} The encyclical was \textit{Aeternis Pairs} issued on 4 August 1879. I. pp.60-2, 105-6; II. pp.81-90; V. pp.347-50, 408-10; VI. pp.43-69; VII. pp.146-50; VIII. pp.29-35; IX. p.72, \textit{Documenti, Vol.II}, pp.7-8. See also Agócs, \textit{The Troubled Origins}, op. cit., pp.17-21 regarding the revival of St Thomas Aquinas within the Church.
\textsuperscript{14} I. p.51. The V Section of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} was directed at returning Christian principles to
Apart from materialism, liberalism also had another fundamental element which was abhorrent to the Catholic understanding of society and which, the *intransigenti* believed, was having deleterious effects on society. This element was individualism.\(^\text{13}\) According to the Catholic view, society was held together by reciprocal rights and duties, by reciprocal and hierarchical relations mediated through the Church. Instead the *intransigenti* saw around them a fragmentation which they believed was the result of individualism. The general argument, put many times through the history of the *Opera dei Congressi*, was that liberal ideas, increasingly dominant from the time of the French Revolution, had broken down social bonds, thus fragmenting society and producing terrible social conflict between the ruling and working classes.

For the *intransigenti*, revolutionary rejection of common collective interests as opposed to individual ones was most clearly seen in the abolition of the corporations which took place at the end of the 18th century. According to Sassòli-Tomba at the IV Congress, the corporations were dissolved in order to breakdown particularly the religious, but also social and economic links between people. He argued that the corporations were the only institutions

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\text{che sfidava tutte le rivoluzioni, poichè derivando la massima forza di coesione dallo spirito religioso, rendeva sempre più stretto il vincolo sociale.}^{\text{16}}
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As a consequence of this political action the workers lost the right to form associations. In the view of the *intransigenti* the right to associate was innate and its denial, they believed, left the workers more constrained than before. Protective elements that had been incorporated in the corporation by virtue of trade regulations as well as collective strength, were thus destroyed leaving workers defenceless and isolated. Looking at the social consequences of these changes, the *intransigenti* argued that under the influence of individualist ideas members of the ruling class had ceased to feel the need to respect the working class and to perform their duties towards that class. Hence there was now an egotistical and indifferent ruling class whose members were failing to fulfill their charitable and protective duties. The *intransigenti* went further to blame the application of individualist ideas to the economic sphere as the cause of exploitation of factory workers in particular, but also of peasants. Medolago Albani was, on one occasion, very critical of the nature of industrial development taking place under the dominance of

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\(^{16}\) IV. p.87. The *intransigenti* were aware of the defects of the corporations. See for example VII. p.214.
individualism:

Sotto l'impero dell'individualismo, il progresso industriale di questi ultimi tempi si presentò sotto un aspetto grossolano e cupidone.17

His view was not an isolated one although other speakers did not necessarily specify the role of individualism. The intransigenti found that the influence of individualism had rendered the motives of the liberals totally self-seeking:

La febbre di aspirazioni pagane che brucia le vene ai seguaci della rivoluzione, e li rende sempre irrequieti ed incontentabili in mezzo a sempre nuovi piaceri, pone l'uomo nella necessità di approfittare di ogni via, più o meno regolare ed onesta, per aumentare la massa del danaro che a lui rappresenta un maggior cumulo di possibili godimenti. Naturale troppo, che sotto l'influsso di tali aspirazioni, l'interesse per la educazione delle classi inferiori non possa albergare nell'animo dell'uomo, per quanto l'ipocrisia convenzionale de' nostri giorni non cessi di porre l'ostentazione di siffatto interesse sul labbro d'uomini a tutti noti pel loro colossale egoismo.18

The intransigenti did not believe egoism and self-interest were restricted to the ruling class. In their view workers were also seeking ephemeral pleasures and individual interests, no longer feeling constrained by hierarchical social bonds and by Catholic beliefs which stressed that harmony derived from duties and virtues not from interests alone. Neither did the intransigenti think that workers felt protected nor see any justification for inequality. Thus they argued that workers were open to the influence of ideas which attacked the basis of the social structure. As Sassoli-Tomba put it, instead of being the natural defenders of society, workers had become its enemy.19

For the intransigenti individualism was summed up in self-interest or egotism and in a denial of common interests. They believed that these attitudes were predominant in industrial centres but were also emerging in rural areas.20 In their criticisms of the breaking of social bonds the intransigenti indicated their attachment to notions of

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17 IX. p.76. As noted above, Medolago Albani was president of the II Section for most of its existence.
19 He was referring to urban rather than rural workers it appears. IV. pp.81-103. See also VII. pp.207, 213-9; VIII. pp.42-4; X. pp.126-8; XVII. p.209; XVIII. p.191.
20 VIII. pp.42-3; X. pp.125-33.
medieval Christendom. There were, however, some qualifications relating in particular to economic developments. Opposition was expressed to placing restrictions on private initiatives che sono fonte di attività mirabile e di grandezza economica.21 Bottini also advised caution in reviving the corporations in case people believed that the intransigenti wanted to revive restrictive regulations 'contrary to the legitimate liberty and real needs of modern industry'.22 He was not the only one who believed that the concept of the corporation had to be adapted carefully to the new circumstances.23 It appears that to many of the intransigenti individual initiatives by members of the ruling class and freedom of action for the individual in the economic sphere were acceptable as long as they were tempered by Christian principles.24

The means by which Congress participants wanted to counter individualistic tendencies was through the establishment of collective organisations, a modern version of the corporations. Within such associations they believed the workers would gain strength through numbers but would be linked to their padroni through a hierarchical structure reflecting that of society.25 It was in the context of stressing the importance of collective bonds and collective action that some intransigenti recognised the proximity of their position to socialist positions. While there was a degree of willingness to acknowledge their similarities there was also a strong desire to distance the Catholic position from that of the socialists. The most obvious difference for the intransigenti was the socialist denial of religion so that any socialist opposition to individualism and egoism was rejected because the intransigenti held that the socialists had no true basis to their ideas. According to Avvocato De Simone speaking at the XVIII Congress in 1901 only Cristo può trasformare il cuore umano all’egoismo sostituendo l’amore universale.26 Bottini had adopted a similar argument at the VII Congress stating that the Catholic position was based on true principles.27 There was considerable awareness amongst some of the intransigenti of the validity of working class demands but again it was emphasised that these demands had to be assessed on the basis of the Christian principles of justice and

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21 VIII. p.33. See also VII. pp.123-5; VIII. pp.27-9. Within the Church itself there was considerable attachment to Aquinas' view of medieval society which was regarded as the ideal in contrast to the turmoil of contemporary society. Agòcs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., p.20; A.Gambasin, Religione e società dalle riforme napoleoniche all’età liberale: clero, sinodi e laicato cattolico in Italia, Padova, 1974, pp.178-83.

22 VIII. p.149-50.

23 See IV. pp.92, 100; VII. pp.149, 223-5.

24 VII. pp.123-5, 149-50; VIII. p.33; IX. p.72; X. pp.126-7; XVIII. pp.140-6.


26 XVII. pp.143-4. See also Gambasin, Religione e società, op. cit., p.185.

27 VII. p.221.
charity, and in the interests of the whole of society.28

Other speakers were far more suspicious of the apparent similarities between the socialist and Catholic positions. Sacerdote Professore Simonetti was reasonably moderate, stating that if the socialists were only raising an economic problem the intransigenti would study the importance of the collective systems the socialists were espousing, but behind their actions was a war on religion which had to be countered:29

Noi siamo al nostro posto, o signori, perché stiamo di fronte a chi inizia la guerra di religione colla scusa dell'ordine economico.30

Monsignor Camilli at the XII Congress, and Monsignor Ruffoni at the XIV Congress, were more extreme in their condemnations, the former describing socialism as the blackest betrayal of the proletariat. To these clerics, the only possible form of collectivism was that which was cemented by Christian justice and charity mediated by the Church. They argued that the ruling and working classes had to be drawn together by their common dependence on Christian faith as taught by the Catholic Church. Socialism was unacceptable not only because of its materialism but also because it attacked the right to property which the intransigenti regarded as fundamental to a stable, hierarchical social structure. The ruling class, however, had to administer that property not as their own but for God. Ownership therefore entailed the exercise of Christian charity towards the working class and thus, in the Catholic view, charity had an earthly and supernatural significance. That collectivism could not be divorced from other fundamental principles without being completely devalued was a point laboured by both Ruffoni and Camilli.31

Non vi seduca il veder che il socialismo s'ammanta di brandelli del Vangelo, proclamando principii che paiono essere consoni ai nostri. Esso ci strappa di mano le armi per ferirci. Ma la sua essenza costitutiva è la negazione del cristianesimo. E una nuova e speciale maniera di guerra contro Gesù, una variazione moderna di quell'eterno tema ch'è la lotta di Satana.32

28 VII. p.221; X. pp.125-33.
30 XVIII. p.186.
32 XIV. p.207.
The attention given to socialism at the congresses indicated the challenge socialism posed for Catholicism which, in a sense, liberalism did not because socialism challenged Catholicism on its own ground, offering workers a totally materialist explanation of their lives and making it extremely difficult for Catholics to respond to this threat without denying the justice of the workers' cause. It also made it difficult for them to espouse any other than some form of workers' solidarity for workers to defend themselves against exploitation and to improve their working and living conditions.

From the perspective of the intransigenti the actions of a State based on revolutionary principles such as materialism could only be evil. The areas in which they believed Catholicism was under State attack were well outlined in the Programma d'Azione dei Cattolici Italiani signed by various leading members of the Opera dei Congressi on 1 November 1875 and published in the Documents of the IV Congress. Catholic institutions, they stated, had been suppressed or were being taken over by the State, pointing to the suppression of religious orders, the closure of seminaries and moves to secularise charitable institutions. The Church was also being excluded from education. The Italian State had moved strongly to undercut the power and influence of the Church in Italian society, seizing a great deal of Church property, suppressing numerous religious bodies and taking over some monasteries and convents. The intransigenti had before them not only the anticlerical actions of the Italian State but also the acute conflicts and anticlerical campaigns that had occurred between the State and Church in countries such as France and Germany. These examples would have also influenced their reactions.

The Programma d'Azione also identified areas which were being influenced more indirectly by secular ideas. These were the press, which was propagating ideas inimical to Catholic beliefs, other forms of communication such as theatre and photography and people's adherence to Catholic social customs, where there was an increasing indifference to the Catholic faith and to the observance of Catholic rituals. These issues were of such importance to the intransigenti that separate sections were set up within the Opera dei Congressi to deal with education and the press, and considerable time devoted to the other areas throughout the history of the organisation.


35 IV. Documenti, pp.348-51.
The major issue over which the intransigenti were vocal in regard to State moves to control or suppress Catholic institutions was that of the charitable organisations known as opere pie. Proposed laws, particularly one of 1890, threatened to alter the nature of these institutions and to affect Catholic control over them.\(^\text{36}\) In opposing such moves the intransigenti accused the State of destroying the patrimony of the Church and of the poor because of the State's need for money. They were also opposed to any change in the spiritual role of the opere pie, regarding such State actions as attempts to secularise these institutions. Philanthropy was no substitute for the spiritual role they believed these institutions performed.\(^\text{37}\) Sassoli-Tomba went so far as to suggest that the State actions would not encourage respect for property amongst the poor.\(^\text{38}\) There was also a reference to the potentially deleterious effect of the sale of property belonging to the opere pie in diminishing land prices as well as the funds of the organisations.\(^\text{39}\)

Considerable time was spent on proposed schemes to counter the State laws.\(^\text{40}\) The intransigenti wanted to preserve the spiritual and material role of these institutions realising that destruction of such aspects would remove another area of Catholic influence.

In a related area of State actions against the Church, participants at the IV Congress (1877) expressed their opposition to a proposed law on the conversion of parish property. Under this law priests would have been paid a salary by the State. The argument used against this proposal was the same as that used in defence of the opere pie: it deprived the Church and the poor of their rightful patrimony. Clearly the proposal also threatened the Church's control over its remaining property and the clergy.\(^\text{41}\)

Another area of great importance to the intransigenti in which Catholic influence was under direct attack by the State as well as being indirectly undermined by secular ideas was that of education. The intransigenti constantly and vehemently condemned State

\(^{36}\) See Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., p.360 regarding this law.


\(^{38}\) II. pp.123-4.

\(^{39}\) VII. pp.154-5.

\(^{40}\) These schemes included the setting up of special associations in support of the opere pie, the organising of petitions and of electoral campaigns to place Catholics on local and provincial councils which had some control over the opere pie. II. pp.120-3, 150-2; VI. pp.290-2; VIII. pp.117-9; X. pp.229-40, 282-5; XI. pp.152-9; XIV. pp.212-23; XV. pp.264-7; XVII. pp.123-8; XVIII. pp.172-5.

\(^{41}\) IV. pp.251-61; VI. pp.290-2. They similarly opposed schemes for civil marriages and divorce. V. pp.39, 308-10; X. p.61; XVIII. pp.85-6.
restrictions on the freedom of the Church to be involved in education, arguing that the
State was infringing a natural right of the Church. They strongly opposed what they
regarded as State intrusion into an area which was, in their view, the responsibility of
the family under the guidance of the Church. Thus they attacked any moves made by
the State to introduce compulsory education and to remove religious teaching from
schools. Above all they rejected education which was not based on the Catholic faith:

L'istruzione per obbligo sotto pena è dettato del Protestantismo, ed è persecuzione
crudele e perturbatrice, perché è divisata a punire i padri che non permetteranno che
i propri figli vadano ad imparare la perdita della fede e della morale.

Lo Stato ha sovranità sulle cose temporali e non sulle spirituali; l'educazione e
l'istruzione hanno per primo fine la vita eterna e poi la terrena. Il governo dello
Stato può cooperare colla Chiesa all'istruzione ed educazione dei cittadini, ma sotto
i di lei dettati; e piacendosi di dare altro insegnamento, che non sia quello delle cose
divine, o che colla morale, la morale è cosa divina, non sia connesso, potrà farlo,
ma a condizione che non sia contraria alla dottrina della Chiesa.

The intransigenti firmly believed that social unrest was due to the teaching of
revolutionary principles in the schools and that only when the teaching of Catholic
principles was reinstated would the working class return to its submissive state within
the social hierarchy:

Dottrina Cristiana è il secreto di vivere contenti nella posizione sociale nella quale si
troviamo.

It was not only the education that working class people might receive if they attended a
school that the intransigenti were worried about, they were also concerned about what

42 For a background on State policies on education see Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.5, op. cit.,
pp.259-80; Procacci, History, op. cit., p.337. At this time a large number of schools were
controlled directly by the Church.

43 See particularly I. pp.112-3; II. pp.191-2; Reato, op. cit., pp.173-4.

44 II. pp.191-2.

45 I. pp.105-6. Candeloro argues there was also concern that people, being able to read and lacking
clerical guidance, would read subversive literature. Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit.,

46 Monsignor Villa speaking at the assembly of Catholic societies held in 1871. I. Documenti,
Documenti, pp.32-4; IV. pp.43-69; VIII. pp.54-60, 110-7; IX. pp.169-87, 192, 194-200, 207-10;
X. pp.133-6, 151-60; XI. pp.17-21, 113-6, 190-8; XII. pp.195-210; XIII. pp.284-8; XIV. pp.23-7;
XVII. pp.164-7; XVIII. pp.226-36.
workers were learning in the growing number of workers' societies:

Si educhi l'operaio al parliamentismo, alle magagne, all'ateismo, alla istruzione elementare, - a quelle perché impettito e gonfio sappia al caso montare la macchina, a questa perché possa leggere i giornali sovversivi e pornografici, sappia avventare minacce ai re, oltraggi all'altare.47

Correspondingly the intransigenti were very concerned about the type of education they thought that children of wealthy families should receive. They believed that as future leaders these children had to be taught good habits and to receive a Catholic education and instruction that was necessaria od utile al loro stato.48

Much of the time spent in discussing education at the congresses dealt with means by which Catholic education could continue to be provided such as the establishment of Catholic schools, particularly evening and Sunday schools for workers and their children, the formation of supportive organisations and assistance to Catholic teachers.49

In general the issue of education was of such importance to the intransigenti that it occupied a prime place at the congresses alongside that of the social question.50

The use of the press and other forms of communication to disseminate ideas other than Catholic ones in addition to the increasing evidence that social customs based on Catholic teaching were not being adhered to, provided another indication to the intransigenti of the influence and impact of secular ideas. In regard to means of communication the intransigenti were primarily concerned about printed material although they were not unaware of the effects of secular ideas in the theatre and the arts in general.51 Initially they strongly opposed the spread of liberal ideas through these means. Later they were more worried about socialist material. Congress participants spoke of a new epoch in which society was being de-Christianised and traditional forms of social control broken down by the ease of communication, abuse of freedom of the press and the consequent spread of a cattiva stampa. The predictions they made in regard to the effects of secular printed material were often extreme. They believed that not only were the ideas spread by journalists leading to the intellectual, moral and religious ruin of the population, but in addition people had declared war on priests, the

47 VI. pp.170-1.
48 II. p.184. See also I. pp.92-3; IV. pp.275-8.
49 I. pp.148-50, 204-5, 213-9; II. pp.170-84; VIII. pp.9-10; X. pp.275-80; XVII. pp.163-4.
50 II. pp.44-7; VI. pp.29-30. The VIII Congress was restricted to the two issues of the social question and education.
The *intransigenti* were primarily worried about the spread of anti-Catholic ideas amongst the masses, particularly those living in urban centres, clearly indicating their concern about any loss of influence of a Catholic ruling class over peasants and workers. At later congresses they more specifically condemned the influence of socialist popular printed material on the working masses. At times they seemed to be unaware of the extent of illiteracy amongst the working classes although there were some references to the use of illustrated newspapers for illiterate people. They believed it was important to try to influence workers through printed material and emphasised the need to produce and widely distribute popular material dealing with issues of interest to workers and peasants and even, it was stated at the II Congress (1875), to defend the material interests of the population. It was also proposed that a popular Catholic press look at the economic problem, investigating in each area the most urgent needs of peasants and workers and promoting remedies that were consistent with Catholic socio-economic theories and actions.

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53 I. p.169.
54 I. p.169.
55 I. Documenti, pp.43-54; IV. pp.159-63; V. pp.216-8; XV. pp.241-2.
56 XV. pp.241-2.
57 Programma, III. pp.18-24; V. pp.216-8. In 1871 68.77% of the population over six years of age was illiterate. In 1881 the figure was 61.94% and in 1901 48.49%. Candeloro, Storia dell’Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.260-1.
58 At the XIII Congress it was proposed that each diocese have a weekly newsheet for il popolo written in dialect. XIII. pp.15-9; XI. pp.211-2; II. pp.194-9.
59 XI. pp.211-2; XIV. pp.241-2. At the XI Congress it was proposed that the popular Catholic press should watch over the communal and provincial administrations, educating the people to demand that these administrations respond to their real needs. XI. pp.211-2. See also I. pp.169-76; V. pp.7-9, 422-3; VI. pp.304-5; IX. pp.14-6, 153-6; X. pp.16-9; XI. pp.211-2; XII. pp.229-34.
Congress participants were urged to constitute committees which would work at a local level to reassert Catholic influence, to produce in large quantities Catholic books, pamphlets and newspapers and to establish local Catholic libraries to make these resources available to the population. Catholic material was not to be solely religious in the view of the *intransigenti* but also to cover economic, political and industrial issues so that readers would not have to look elsewhere for this information. Yet Sacerdote Gerevini still reminded the XV Congress in 1897

*che principale missione del giornalismo cattolico è quella di difendere incessantemente e con sollecitudine speciale i principii e le massime cattoliche, illuminare il publico contro gli inganni ed i sofismi della stampa avversaria, dare potente impulso al movimento cattolico in Italia, e promuovere e favorire l’unione e la concordia degli animi e la organizzazione delle forze cattoliche...*  

Taking a similar line congress participants were reminded that Catholics were not permitted to read printed matter imbued with liberal and socialist ideas unless they had Church permission to do so and even then they were to do so with caution.

Despite the many proposals made in relation to Catholic printed material and frequent exhortations to find greater financial resources and better means of distribution, it was concluded at the XIX Congress that little had been achieved because of the lack of support by Catholics and by the *sproporzione di forza e di risorse di fronte alla stampa avversaria.* Expectations that an extensive Catholic press could be established and that Catholics would refrain from reading the secular press were as unrealistic as the expectations that popular newsheets would be able to influence a largely illiterate working class.

The other main area in which the loss of influence of Catholic principles was evident to the *intransigenti* was that of social customs. The principal examples focussed on by congress participants related to the family, where they believed there had been a breakdown in familial relations and customary roles, and the non-observance of Catholic feast days (including Sundays) as holidays. The family was to the

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60 I. pp.169-76; II. pp.30-1; IV. pp.159-63; V. pp.422; IX. pp.153-5.
61 I. pp.169-76; II. pp.194-9; III. pp.18-24; IV. pp.36-48; VI. pp.304-5; VII. pp.171-4; XI. pp.211-2; XIII. pp.224-5.
63 I. pp.127-8; IV. pp.7-12, 159-63; VI. pp.254-8.
64 XIX. pp.89-92.
Any social or economic change which appeared to threaten the existence, or alter the nature of the particular social relations encompassed by the family, seen in the Catholic sense, was therefore unacceptable. The *intransigenti* pointed to the increasing number of women working outside their homes, often in factories in the emerging industrial centres. To the *intransigenti* this change indicated a degradation of the natural role of women. They believed that the absence of women from their homes would lead to the breakdown of families. The woman was expected to remain within the home providing a focus for the family through her continual presence and exerting a moral and religious influence on her children and husband.66

The *intransigenti* also observed other strains on familial relations such as the frequent absence of men from their homes, the increasing number of young people forced to find work in cities to support their families and the lack of suitable housing. Their comments were almost entirely directed at working class families and their rigid ideological position showed practically no awareness of the economic necessity which forced most working class people to work where jobs were available. Occasionally it was acknowledged that women worked for financial reasons.67 There was, however, some perception that the family was being affected by the social and economic changes which were occurring with the emergence of capitalism. The observation that people were being compelled to migrate to cities in search of work was of this nature as was a speech given at the VII Congress on agriculture in which it was noted that families were being broken up by the nature of industrial work in contrast to agricultural work which strengthened family affections and moral habits.68 Yet while the *intransigenti* touched on these issues they generally returned to limited observations closely linked to their Catholic ideology. These limitations were particularly apparent in their statements that families were being destroyed by lack of piety and the threat posed for the family by liberal and socialist ideas.69 There was a strong element of traditional condemnation of constant 'evils' rather than of new ones.70

The second major issue which indicated to the militant Catholics that Catholic values no longer governed social and economic activity was the non-observance of Catholic

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66 II. pp.141-3; IV. pp.178-86; V. pp.140, 231-8; VII. p.206; VIII. pp.31-2, 97-9; XVIII. pp.85-6.
68 VII. pp.150-1, 156.
69 VIII. Documenti, pp.22-4; XVIII. pp.84, 117-23.
70 I. pp.92-3, 143-4; II. pp.141-3, Vol.II, Documenti, p.5; IV. pp.165-8; V. pp.231-8; VII. pp.150-
1; VIII. pp.97-109, 125-6; IX. pp.134, 216-27; X. pp.221-7; XIII. pp.253-5; XIX. pp.78-84.
festivals as holidays. *Il riposo festivo* was referred to unfailingly at all the congresses and was, from the XIII Congress in 1895, the responsibility of a separate sub-section of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The *intransigenti* were concerned about the lack of respect this non-observance reflected for the rituals of the Church. At the I Congress Monsignor Nardi dwelt on this aspect when he spoke of religious holidays as a manifestation of *la fede* and described a new paganism evident in Rome, the city of the popes.\(^{71}\) Another speaker at the same Congress argued that Catholic festivals were the source of *veri beni anche temporali alla società*...\(^{72}\) Participants pointed out that the seventh day was a holiday according to divine law and was necessary so that people could contemplate religious truths and perform their religious duties. It should be a day given over to religious and moral education of the individual and the family.\(^{73}\)

The *intransigenti* also expressed concern about the effects of non-observance on workers. They were deeply concerned that workers were unable to perform their religious duties because of having to work on Sundays and other Catholic festivals, describing the effects on workers in strongly ideological terms:

...*la profanazione di quelle guidicarono causa potissima di miseria, indebolimento, e corruzione delle classi operaie*...\(^{74}\)

Bottini stated in his report to the VII Congress (1887) that workers had no time to cultivate the spirit nor to contemplate religious truths with the result that they became little more than animals.\(^{75}\) *Il riposo festivo* was, in their view, the time when workers could give time to religious activities as well as to spend time with their families. If they were unable to do so then, one speaker argued, they would be brutalised and would become a constant and tremendous threat to social order.\(^{76}\) Catholic ritual was characterised as a means of subduing the workers, of inculcating patience and resignation as one speaker put it.\(^{77}\)

Amongst some *intransigenti* a more socio-economic interpretation began to emerge. Although the two views were often linked the latter tended to predominate from the VIII

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\(^{71}\) I. pp.68-70.  
\(^{72}\) I. pp.88-9.  
\(^{73}\) I. pp.70-2; V. pp.354-5; VII. pp.203-4; VIII. pp.109-10, 123; XI. pp.177-9; XV. pp.22-6, 178-9; XVIII. p.239.  
\(^{74}\) I. pp.88-9.  
\(^{75}\) VII. pp.203-4.  
\(^{76}\) VIII. p.125.  
\(^{77}\) VIII. pp.131-2; IX. pp.177-8. See also I. pp.126-7; VIII. pp.123-6; XIII. pp.253-5; XV. pp.178-9; XVIII. pp.236-40.
Congress (1890) and was especially evident in reports from the II Section. *Intransigenti* taking this line sketched out, in varying detail, the situation of factory workers whose work was repetitive and oppressive, arguing that these workers, as well as shop assistants, public servants and peasants, needed a day of rest to renew their bodies and their minds. To counter objections that productivity would fall and hence wages would be reduced Bottini stated at the VIII Congress that production decreased if workers were forced to work without a rest.78

Reports on *il riposo festivo* emphasised that it was a natural right given by God to the worker which was being violated and hence contracts denying it were unjust.79 A proposal put to the XI Congress described the violation of this right as an excessive arrogance and a *vergognoso stato d’iniquo servaggio incompatibile con la dignità umana e la vera civiltà*. It went on to state that it was illogical and difficult to expect the conscientious fulfillment of duty and the honest performance of work by a worker whose most legitimate rights were trampled on and whose miserable condition was tyrannically abused.80 In the view of many *intransigenti* the major obstacle to the observance of Catholic festivals by factory and shopowners was greed for profit and materialism.81 The more socio-economic interpretation stemmed from concern about the loss of Catholic influence over the working class although it also derived from a Catholic perspective of people as spiritual and temporal beings.

At the same time as the *intransigenti* condemned actions of the State against the Church and railed against the undermining of Catholic influence by secular ideas, they strongly re-asserted a cluster of principles which they believed were essential for the continued existence of an ordered and peaceful society. These principles could be summarised as hierarchical, paternalistic and socially conservative. In the *intransigenti*’s view society was, or should be, structured from an almost molecular level, tied together by reciprocal and hierarchical relations. Relations between the classes should be hierarchical and cooperative, encompassing both reciprocal rights and duties. Another important element in the Catholic system, the family, was seen as being structured in the same way. These principles all had as their central reference point the Catholic Church, its clerical hierarchy and its teachings. People were expected to participate in

78 VIII. pp.123-7; IX. pp.18-9, 134, 177-80; IX. pp.179-80; XIII. pp.253-5; XVIII. pp.130-6, 236-40.
80 XI. pp.179-80.
81 i. pp.70-2; VIII. pp.109-10, 121-32; XI. pp.177-9; XV. pp.22-6, 178-9; XVIII. p.239. Members of the *Opera dei Congressi* tried to re-establish Catholic festivals as holidays by forming local associations to work at a local level encouraging employers to accept the principle. VIII. pp.109-10; XIV. pp.23-7; XV. pp.178-9.
the rituals of the Church and to apply Catholic beliefs to the conduct of their lives.\textsuperscript{82}

The \textit{intransigenti} believed above all that Catholicism and Catholic principles were of primary relevance to all political, social and economic relations and that without Catholicism, and its institutional and historical manifestation in the Church, society and civilisation even, would fall apart. These attitudes were particularly prominent at the I Congress held in Venice in 1874 because participants were intent on establishing without ambiguities the aims of this new Catholic organisation and on setting out the major complaints of the \textit{intransigenti} in regard to the changes that had been taking place recently in Italy:

\textit{...non si dà benessere sociale, non scienza, non arte, non civiltà all’infiuori del Cristianesimo, né vero Cristianesimo all’infiuori del Cattolicismo; alla difesa e all’incremento del quale dobbiamo adunque intendere con tutte le nostre forze, non solo per l’obbligo positivo che astringe ogni cattolico, ma per quello eziandio che ci impone la qualità di cittadini amanti della diletta lor patria.}\textsuperscript{83}

Such attitudes were common throughout the history of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}.\textsuperscript{84}

For the \textit{intransigenti}, an essential Catholic social principle, the hierarchical ranking of classes, was of divine and natural origin and as such was a necessary part of society:

\textit{La diversità delle condizioni nella società è assolutamente voluta dall’ordine provvidenziale, la filosofia cristiana insegna ad armonizzare i diversi elementi coordinandoli al bene generale mentre assicurano a ciascuno il bene particolare.}\textsuperscript{85}

This natural hierarchy was the guarantee of social order. Equally it upheld the established economic and political interests of the ruling class.\textsuperscript{86} The emphasis the \textit{intransigenti} gave to a hierarchical structure of society was paternalistic. In their speeches \textit{il popolo} or \textit{gli operai} emerge as passive followers or recipients of directions

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82}I. pp.70-2; VI. pp.281-3; IX. pp.151-2; XV. pp.182-6; XVII. pp.78-82; XVIII. pp.172-5, 236-40; XIX. pp.31-2. See Agócs, \textit{The Troubled Origins}, op. cit., pp.22-49, for a useful examination of the importance of these principles in late 19th century Catholic thought. He also notes contradictory currents of thought in the Catholic world.
  \item \textsuperscript{83}I. pp.47-8.
  \item \textsuperscript{84}II. pp.50-2, 154-62; IV. pp. 20-5; V. pp.81-100, 186-94; IX. pp.81-3, 86-93; X. pp.59-67; XI. pp.123-31; XIII. pp.141-5; XV. pp.88-95; XVII. pp.90-7; XVIII. pp.129-32.
  \item \textsuperscript{85}XII. p.114.
  \item \textsuperscript{86}II. p.184; IV. pp.273-9; V. pp.24-8, 123, 410; VIII. p.30; IX. pp.152-3; XVI. pp.66-72, 79-85, 145-7.
\end{itemize}
and information, not as active, reasoning and self-directing people. The intransigenti, on the other hand, given their class position as members of the ruling class (if not of the ruling fraction), naturally assumed the directive role, clearly regarding themselves as the only possessors of a single truth, or unique understanding of the true nature of society. A typical statement was that made at the I Congress in 1874 to the effect that non è possibile che i popoli amino la rivoluzione. The masses were taken in by swindlers, were deluded and mislead according to congress participants. They could not have come to this view by any kind of conviction apart from false and corrupt conviction.87 The social conservatism implicit in the intransigente stress on hierarchical order was also clear in their condemnations of the State suppression of Catholic organisations in 1898. In no way did the intransigenti regard their principles and actions as a cause of social disorder.88

Accepting the social hierarchy as essential the intransigenti went on to speak of reciprocal bonds which held the hierarchy together. These bonds or relations were not equal given their basis in a hierarchical social structure:

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\text{Stato naturale degli uomini, quell'ordine eterno, immutabile, divino, in cui essi vivono ed esistono, non fu mai l'assenza totale d'ogni società, nè una indipendenza, una libertà, un'eguaglianza universale, ma un complesso di rapporti extra-sociali e di diversi rapporti sociali, in ognuno dei quali è notevole la distinzione fra superiori ed inferiori, fra dominio e dipendenza.}^{89}\]

The relations also entailed differential rights and duties:

\[
\text{Iddio benedetto vuole nella umana famiglia diverse condizioni di stato e di fortuna, ma che tutti Egli vuole rannodati in una medesima società; e che mentre prescrive al povero di tollerare in pace la inopia e di rispettare la persona e la proprietà del ricco, impone al facoltoso il dovere di sollevare il povero.}^{90}\]

Above all it was essential that the ruling class exercised authority, guiding and directing

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87 I. pp.59-60, 204-5. Paganuzzi speaking at the close of the XV Congress used such paternalistic terms, quoting the pope:

...o Signori, o fratelli, noi non dobbiamo dimenticare il popolo: quel popolo che il Papa ci raccomanda: quel popolo al quale il Papa ci invia, dicendoci: scendete al popolo, guidate il popolo, condendetemi il popolo.

XV. p.307.

88 XVI. pp.79-85.

89 V. p.59. See also pp.59-73.

90 V. p.28.
their subordinates. Members of the ruling class were seen as sharing in the authority of God either through their riches or their social position.\(^91\) Not only did they exercise authority by virtue of their position they also had a divine right to possess property.\(^92\) However, the ruling class also had duties towards the working class. Congress participants stressed over and over again that the ownership of property could never be divorced from the fulfillment of certain duties towards the poor. It was the duty of the ruling class to protect and provide for the poor, looking after their welfare, providing charitable assistance when it was needed, educating them in their religious beliefs.\(^93\) Beyond the ideological protestations, which were no doubt sincerely made, the *intransigenti* were clearly justifying the wealth of the rich based as it was on the deprivation of the poor.

At the early congresses the paternalism of the *intransigenti* and their assumptions about the rights of a ruling class were strongly evident in the description of the duties of the ruling class and of the working class. There was a particular stress on the exercise of charity to return the poor to their rightful position of submission to their *padroni*. It was pointed out that philanthropy could not do this because of its exclusion of God and Christian principles. In contrast charity was an act of love as well as of duty it was argued.\(^94\) The poor, in turn, were to humbly respect the rich and to accept their guidance. Through such relations the social classes would be bound together receiving mutual spiritual and moral benefits.\(^95\) The material benefits accruing to the workers and peasants would clearly be minimal.

Increasingly however, the poor, the workers, began to be depicted in a more independent position in relation to the ruling class. There was a gradual shift, particularly evident in reports from the II Section, from the stress on charity as a means of binding the social classes together to the importance of justice and of respect for the right of workers in addition to the exercise of charity. Thus there were increasing references to the need for both justice and charity as the basis of a Christian social system. Reports from the II Section, while stressing the rights of the ruling class also described as just the demands of workers in their relations with employers especially in relation to wages and working conditions.\(^96\) Summing up the *intransigenti*'s response to

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\(^92\) II. pp.123-4; IV. p.275; V. pp.120, 126; XV. pp.179-82.

\(^93\) I. pp.84, 113-20; IV. p.275; V. pp.119, 123-4, 126-32, 410; X. pp.16-9; XVIII. pp.215-26.

\(^94\) I. p.137; II. pp.50-2; VI. pp.75-6, 159-60; IX. pp.97-8, 122-35; XIII. pp.255-60; XIV. pp.196-207.

\(^95\) I. pp.50-3, 65-6, 120-4; IV. pp.273-9; V. pp.24-8; XIII. pp.255-60.

the theories of Adam Smith, Voltaire, Saint-Simon and others at the VI Congress for example, Professor Omodei criticised them for the lack of justice as a moral basis.97

The ideal society in which these Catholic principles and dependence on the Church still existed was, for the *intransigenti*, that of rural Italy. They believed that corruption stemming from secular, revolutionary principles, was centred in the cities. In contrast they regarded the countryside as a place of peace and innocence where the order of nature prevailed and people still had respect for the old faith, old attitudes and traditional rural life. Accordingly they praised peasants for what they perceived as the peasants' resistance to irreligious revolutionary and socialist ideas that had their origins in the cities.98 The *intransigenti* were concerned about the increase in rural wage labour, wanting instead to reinforce and extend the existing areas where the sharecropping system of land tenure still prevailed. The sharecropping system most closely incorporated the stable, reciprocal relations between landowners and tenants that were fundamental to the *intransigenti*’s view of society.99 Some *intransigenti*, such as Christian democrat priest, Sturzo, similarly regarded as ideal a settled rural society tied together by organic bonds, but his vision was different from the more conservative ones in that it involved a more equitable order for the peasantry.100

The *intransigenti* clearly were in major conflict with the ruling liberals in regard to ideological principles they believed were fundamental to Italian society. However, Catholic ideological principles were not at all far removed from those accepted by much of the ruling class throughout Italy where, because of the nature of the political unification of the Italian States, there had been little change from the kind of pre-capitalist relations which the *intransigenti* extolled. Frequently the changes the *intransigenti* were objecting to were those consequent to the emergence of capitalism although there were some signs of attempts to clarify what they regarded as positive changes. Though argued in terms of Catholic and hence of divine teaching, their ideas nevertheless clearly justified not only the existence of a ruling class but also particular forms of relations between the social classes which would ensure social stability and continuity. There were also some points at which a number of the *intransigenti* indicated that they could cooperate with the State. One example was the issue of State intervention in regard to social and economic problems. Although the issue provoked considerable conflict, some *intransigenti* argued that it was only through such action

97 VI. p.170.
99 V. pp.118-44; X. pp.259-71.
that social turmoil and suffering could be avoided.\textsuperscript{101}

The social thinking of the \textit{intransigenti} was, in general, little different from that of other members of the ruling class of which they were still a part although it was very different to that of the ruling fraction of the Italian State on many important points. The proceedings of the congresses illustrate clearly the opposition of the \textit{intransigenti} to the new dominant ideology of the State and their attempts to reassert Catholic ideology as the dominant ideology essential to social stability. Thus they attempted to restore Catholic principles to relations between the classes as well as to the conduct of people's personal lives. In part this action, at both a theoretical and practical level, involved an engagement with the nature of the division of power and an appeal to the broader mass of the population, that is the working class both rural and urban. It was at this point that a distinct division began to emerge within the Catholic movement as firstly the \textit{cristiano sociali} began to shift from a hardline position and then as many of the younger generation began to take up and see as just democratic principles which had been utterly scorned by many of the original members of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} as evil and anti-Catholic. Not only did these younger Catholics begin to take up democratic principles, they began to use them as the basis for political action in support of the masses and as a means of the resolution of the social question.

\textsuperscript{101} IV. pp.182, 185-6; V. pp.136-7, 412; VIII. pp.25-35; Brezzi, \textit{Cristiano sociali}, op. cit., pp.265-6, 424-6, 432-45.
A Divided Organisation

The *Opera dei Congressi* was formed by Catholics who described themselves as *cattolici senza aggettivi*, but as has already been indicated, the unity that this description underlined was, in the words of Brezzi, an illusion which covered over intolerances and conflicts and a refusal to acknowledge that there was no one truly Catholic point of view in relation to the social, economic and political situation in Italy.\(^1\) Even in its early years the *Opera dei Congressi* was not the expression of a unified group. A number of factions developed over its history with the divisions becoming progressively more serious and contributing in a major way to the dissolution of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The greater number of divisions occurred and the major factions formed in relation to the social and political line taken by those controlling the *Opera dei Congressi*. There was, in particular, a growing resistance to the dominance, over much of the existence of the organisation, of hardline *intransigenti* whose inflexibility and refusal to recognise the need for change and innovation in regard to the social question contributed greatly to the hardening of the divisions and increasing bitterness.\(^2\)

That there were profound disagreements and the emergence of factions revolving around social and political issues is not surprising given the purpose of the organisation, the 30 year span of its existence and the far-reaching transformations which were underway in Italy during this period. To attempt to keep an organisation like the *Opera dei Congressi* focussed on re-asserting the role of the Catholic Church in Italian society and fighting the increasing secularisation of that society in this context was probably naive. The upheavals that occurred in Italy in this period could not have failed to produce different responses amongst the range of people involved in the *Opera dei Congressi* and particularly in the younger generation of Catholics who became active in the latter part of the 1890s.

For hardline *intransigenti* such as Paganuzzi who was a dominant influence on the direction taken by the *Opera dei Congressi* for much of its existence, the purpose of the organisation was straightforward: it was to defend the Church, to fight secular

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\(^1\) Brezzi, *Cristiano sociali*, op. cit., pp.ix-x.

\(^2\) According to Brezzi the fragmented nature of the *intransigenti* emerged only from the studies of Gambasin and De Rosa. Ibid., pp.ix-x. See Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., p.2. Candeloro also looked at the different factions in his study first published in 1953, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit.
influences within Italian society and to assist the clergy to re-establish the dominance and influence of the Church and of Catholic principles. To achieve these goals the hardline intransigenti believed that all Catholic associations should be subordinate to the Opera dei Congressi and specifically to the controlling body of the organisation, the Comitato Generale Permanente. They opposed any cooperation with groups and individuals which did not hold dogmatically to their intransigent position. This authoritarian and intolerant line provoked conflict early in the history of the Opera dei Congressi, alienating a number of intransigenti who had been involved in its establishment, one of whom was Cavaliere Acquaderni, president in the early years. The intransigenti who either became inactive or left the Opera dei Congressi in the early years because of this conflict came primarily from the gruppo bolognese which dominated the Opera dei Congressi until Paganuzzi became president in 1889. These intransigenti appear to have been more moderate both in their position in regard to the Italian State and to the role of other Catholic societies, particularly Gioventù Cattolica. They believed it was important that the various Catholic associations retained a considerable degree of autonomy. Notable amongst those who ceased to be actively involved in the Opera dei Congressi was Conte Sassoli-Tomba who had been on the original Comitato Promotore, a member of the Comitato Generale Permanente and president of the II Section. He contributed greatly to the work done for the II Section in the early years and his withdrawal weakened the Section considerably.

Throughout the history of the Opera dei Congressi there were periods of turmoil and, at the least, some discontent and disagreement over the inflexible line imposed on the organisation by those controlling it. This discontent or turmoil at times focussed on the presidency. There was the early conflict between the gruppo bolognese and Paganuzzi and supporters of his extreme position which affected the Comitato Generale Permanente during the late 1870s and early 1880s. It appears that a degree of  


4 Other of the leading intransigenti lost by the Opera dei Congressi around this time included Rubbiani, who had also been involved in the II Section, and Flandoli. These intransigenti were prominent at the early congresses and in the work of the organisation. I. pp.11, 17, 27-8, 47-53, 64-5, 120-4, 130-6, 143-4, 274-6; II. pp.11, 16, 47-8, 120-2; III. pp.5-6, 42-5, Documenti, pp.65-8; IV. pp.5, 25-30, 81-103, 165-8; V. pp.5, 118-44, 195-6, 229-31; VI. p.5. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.93, 95-6, 208-13, 263-4, 494-6; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.50, 53-5, 59-60, 65, 98-105, 136-7, 155; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.153, 184, 186-7.

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equilibrium was maintained from 1878 by the presidency of Duca Salviati, a Roman who remained somewhat detached from the internal conflicts. His resignation in 1884 threw the Opera dei Congressi into turmoil because of the difficulty in finding another person who could draw together the various groups. The appointment of a member of the gruppo bolognese, Dottore Venturoli, was to cause further conflict and indecisiveness in the activities of the organisation. Even after his resignation in 1889 conflict continued over the direction in which the Opera dei Congressi should develop. Paganuzzi's election as president six months later meant that a dogmatically intransigent view would dominate the positions taken by the Opera dei Congressi, a situation which was to give rise to conflicts with groups that were in general agreement with the goal of Catholic lay action in support of the Church but were increasingly responding to the changing political, social and economic realities surrounding them. So while Paganuzzi was to strengthen the organisation and make it an effective force for Catholic action his rigid attitudes were to provoke considerable disunity from which the final dissolution largely sprang.

The vehemence with which any view dissenting from a rigidly intransigent position was treated, alienated more moderate Catholics who took a more conciliatory view towards the Italian State and who believed that the field of action of the Opera dei Congressi needed to be broader than religious and ideological. One instance of this approach was the attacks made in the 1880s by the Osservatore Cattolico, a daily Catholic newspaper run by the intransigenti in Milan, on the Catholic movement in Bergamo, and particularly on a Catholic newspaper started in Bergamo in 1880, because its approach was not the hardline one taken by the Milan newspaper. In 1886 the diocesan committee of Bergamo sought the support of the Comitato Generale Permanente against the attacks of the Osservatore Cattolico, but the only support forthcoming was that a papal breve, sent to the bishop of Bergamo in which the Bergamo paper was praised, was published in the bulletin of the Opera dei Congressi. This was not the only instance of problems caused in the Catholic movement by the

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5 The presidency had a dominating influence over the state of the organisation because of its hierarchical structure and the extensive powers given to the president. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.93-9; De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.197-201; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.184, 186-7; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.59-60, 86-8, 296-7.


7 The editor of the Bergamo paper resigned from the editorship and from the diocesan committee as a result of these attacks. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.23-38, 48-50.

8 Ibid., pp.33-8.
Complaints also came from a number of intransigenti from other areas. Moreover it seems that the Osservatore Cattolico had a strong influence over the line taken by the official bulletin of the Opera dei Congressi which provoked opposition from intransigenti such as Medolago Albani who complained that the bulletin was being used solely to promote the Opera dei Congressi and not, as he believed it should be, to support the Catholic movement as a whole as well as putting it in its wider European context.9

Another example of the rigid approach taken was the response to attempts made by Medolago Albani during the mid-1880s to involve in the Opera dei Congressi a group in Rome which was doing some work on social and economic issues. Medolago Albani was aware that the association of members of this group with liberal Catholic ideas and their openness to conciliation with the Italian State would probably provoke some opposition from hardline intransigenti, nevertheless he believed that this group could contribute positively to the II Section. However, the attitudes of Paganuzzi and other hardline intransigenti such as the Jesuit, Padre Zocchi, were such that they refused to differentiate between the political and social views of the Roman group and hence attempts to establish a cooperative relationship came to nothing.10

The positions taken by the different groups within the Opera dei Congressi indicated that they could not but line up in opposition over the responses they thought the organisation should make to the increasingly grave social question and there was in consequence a basic disagreement about aims, and the means to achieve those on which they could agree. Paganuzzi and his supporters believed that the involvement of the Opera dei Congressi in social and economic issues was acceptable inasmuch as it established a lay Catholic movement standing firmly in support of the Church, well disciplined and totally obedient to the clergy and the various committees of the Opera dei Congressi. To these intransigenti, the resolution of the political conflict between the Church and State was primary. Moreover they regarded the acute economic and social problems as the result of the political separation of Church and State and the consequent de-christianising or secularisation of Italian society, which was, in reality, a deliberate

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9 Ibid., pp.216-31; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.239.
10 Candeloro gives a background to this group which centred around a Roman paper, Rassegna Italiana. He describes the Catholics involved as clerico-moderati not liberal and points out they had links to the Vatican. Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.188-91; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.6, op. cit., pp.330-5, 401-4. Brezzi and Gambasin quote from relevant contemporary letters. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.101, 135-43, 267-8, 485-8, 492-3; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.201-2. The attitude of Paganuzzi was such that references made to the Roman group by Toniolo in an article requested by Paganuzzi for the bulletin of the Opera dei Congressi on the situation of social studies in Italy were deleted. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.135-42.
policy of the new Italian State. They saw an advantage in building up a mass organisation involved in Catholic social action which could be directed by the governing committee of the *Opere dei Congressi* for political and social ends, although they always denied the political aspects of their activities. At another level, they also wanted to renew Catholic influence over the masses, drawing them back into the Church and away from socialist and other secular influences.\(^{11}\)

There were, on the other hand, *intransigenti* who, while they shared many of the ideas and goals of the hardline *intransigenti*, saw a need for Catholics to respond to pressing social and economic problems at both a theoretical and practical level and had begun to work on these issues. These *intransigenti* believed that such action was essential if the masses were to be drawn back to the Church because, in their view, only by doing so would the masses come to understand that the Church and ruling class Catholics cared about their moral and material well-being.\(^ {12}\) They were more interested in the strength and effectiveness of social and economic action in support of the urban and rural working classes although this did not mean that they were not also strong supporters of the *Opere dei Congressi* and its stance in regard to the Roman Question. These *intransigenti*, generally described as *cristiano sociali*, were predominantly involved in the work of the II Section. The *cristiano sociali* had two main concerns. One was theoretical, to study and formulate a framework for a new and just Christian social order. The second was practical in nature and involved the establishment of diverse economic and social organisations based on the principle of class cooperation to form a Catholic network by which Catholic principles could be re-established as the guiding ideology of Italian society.

The *cristiano sociali* emerged slowly from amongst those *intransigenti* who were increasingly worried by the conditions of the working classes and the growing incidence of agitations and protests. Some concern was evident amongst the *intransigenti* at the I Congress in a discussion on problems in the countryside although it was couched in charitable and ideological terms.\(^ {13}\) Furthermore Catholics in various areas such as Bergamo and other areas of Lombardy, the Veneto and Rome, had begun to develop activities to assist workers and peasants.\(^ {14}\) However, the *cristiano sociali* did


\(^{13}\) I. pp.130-6.

\(^{14}\) I. pp.257-61, *Vol. II*, pp.179-82; Brezzi, op. cit., pp.3-7. See also B.Bertoli, *Le opere sociali al l*
not really coalesce into a faction until the mid-1880s when the II Section was established on a permanent basis. Even then the cristiano sociali remained a fairly small group.\textsuperscript{15}

From the time of the establishment in 1884 of the II Section as a permanent body attached to the Comitato Generale Permanente conflict began to occur between the intransigenti involved in the II Section and the more hardline intransigenti over the degree of autonomy the Section would be allowed. As has already been noted the various committees of the Opera dei Congressi were not officially informed of the existence of the II Section on a permanent basis until late 1885 despite protests made by the president of the Section, Medolago Albani.\textsuperscript{16} Even then Medolago Albani was unhappy about the title given to the Section by the controlling group of intransigenti in Bologna. It was described as the II Sezione per l'Economia cristiana instead of Economia sociale cristiana which Medolago Albani regarded as more accurate.\textsuperscript{17} Conflict of varying degrees continued to occur between members of the II Section and the Comitato Generale Permanente through the 1880s with members of the latter putting obstacles in the way of action undertaken by the Section, blocking what they regarded as overly independent action and an unacceptable emphasis given to social and economic problems over the issue of the Roman Question.\textsuperscript{18} An early example of the undermining, by leading members of the Comitato Generale Permanente, of independent action by the II Section was the attitude taken towards a proposal made in early 1885 by Medolago Albani that each diocesan committee set up a group to study agricultural problems in their diocese. The proposal was a response to the Jacini Enquiry into agriculture which began to publish its findings from 1882. The proposal was treated with suspicion and following some procrastination and considerable disagreement the only action taken was that a questionnaire regarding agricultural conditions was sent out to the diocesan committees. The questionnaire also lacked any clear indication that it came from the II Section.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16}See letter from Medolago Albani on the subject written in January 1885. Quoted in Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.195.
\textsuperscript{17}Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.99, 148-9; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.195.
\textsuperscript{18}Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., p.xi. Gambasin maintains that the conflict was not acrimonious but rather sincere, cordial and well-intentioned, a view which conflicts with the more credible approach of Brezzi in his study. The subsequent history of the cristiano sociali in following a more independent line in their attempts to gain freedom of action for their activities and the Catholic social movement suggests that Gambasin has downplayed the conflict. See Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.191-2, 196-200, 296-7.
\textsuperscript{19}The original propositions were set out in a letter from Medolago Albani to the Comitato Generale Permanente dated 23 January, 1885. Quoted in Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.194-5. Members of the Comitato Generale Permanente had proposed the questionnaire rather
A similar lack of enthusiasm and clear support for the work of the II Section can be seen in the treatment of an extensive report given by Marchese Bottini to the VII Congress in 1887 on the worker question and the Christian corporation. The study was undertaken by Bottini on the request of Medolago Albani and covered a subject in which European Catholics as well as members of the II Section were interested as part of their search for a form of worker organisation which would effectively counter the attraction and influence of socialist and other non-Catholic workers' associations.20 Although the social question was prominent in the concerns of the VII Congress, Bottini's report was ignored by the Catholic press with one exception.21 In general, the official bulletin of the Opera dei Congressi did little to incorporate and make known the theoretical and practical work of the II Section as Medolago Albani had hoped it would. Brezzi comments that any change in the bulletin would have only led to objections from the hardline intransigenti who saw qualsiasi problema da una visuale diversa dal Medolago.22

The work of the II Section was, in fact, to lead the cristiano sociali into areas where conflict with the hardline intransigenti was almost inevitable given their inflexible stance in relation to the Italian State. The cristiano sociali gradually came to the position that action by the State was essential in relation to the social question in order to give some protection to workers and peasants and to help resolve the agricultural crisis.23 The issue of State intervention in economic and social questions was an important one for all European Catholics around this time but it was bound to be a difficult issue for the more extreme intransigenti.24

than the groups proposed by Medolago Albani and had rejected the first version of the questionnaire prepared by Medolago Albani, stating that it was too long. Medolago Albani made some changes but refused to reduce the number of questions. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.101-13; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.196-9, 206-7, 213-4. The irritation felt by Medolago Albani over the Comitato Generale Permanente's approach emerges clearly in the letters he wrote during this period. See ibid., pp.196-200.

20 VII. pp.201-57.
21 It was also mentioned in the Jesuit journal, Civiltà Cattolica, a year later. The sole article written at the time was by Sacchetto for the Catholic paper, Lega Lombarda. Agócs argues it was due to the impossibility of reviving the corporations and Catholic awareness of the fact. Agócs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., pp.67-8. This may have been partly true but it was probably also to do with opposition to the activities of the cristiano sociali and a general lack of awareness of issues to do with the social question.

24 It was a central matter for discussion at the Congres des œuvres sociales held in Liege in September 1890 in which Medolago Albani participated as the Italian representative. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.355-6, 398-405, 424-6.
The more major conflict was, however, over the independent actions of the II Section, although these did, in part derive from the problems with which the *cristiano sociali* were grappling. In early 1885, for example, there was conflict between the II Section and hardline *intransigenti* over the autonomy of workers’ associations which were often formed with assistance of the II Section but not under its direct control. Medolago Albani was happy for the societies to have a reasonable degree of autonomy but be linked to the *Opera dei Congressi* through the diocesan committees. The II Section was formulating a general constitution but each society was to be free to put together its own regulations as long as they were consistent with the constitution. In Medolago Albani’s view, the societies could then unite together in federations under the presidency of the diocesan committees. Paganuzzi opposed this approach, insisting that the workers’s societies be centralised under the *Opera dei Congressi* with the regulations being imposed by the *Opera dei Congressi*. Medolago Albani still held to his position in 1890.25

Suspicion over the activities of members of the II Section and fears about the possible consequences of their actions also lay behind the reluctance to allow Medolago Albani to participate in the first meeting of the *Unione internazionale cattolica per gli studi sociali ed economici* to which he had been invited. The opposition came on this occasion from the *bolognesi* then controlling the *Comitato Generale Permanente* rather than Paganuzzi although he did share some of their reservations. After considerable correspondence between Medolago Albani, Paganuzzi and other members of the *Comitato Generale Permanente* it was decided that Medolago Albani could attend but not as an official representative of the *Opera dei Congressi*, a resolution with which Medolago Albani disagreed. Further opposition also came from Venturoli, then president, and Casoni, the secretary general, to a meeting of the II Section in preparation for the congress.26 In fact Medolago Albani became involved in the work of the Union and continued to contribute to it because of the obvious benefits to the studies and practical plans of the II Section.27

In early 1888 there was a further clash over the program of social economy that the II

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26 Brezzi, *Cristiano sociali*, op. cit., pp.151-79; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.223-31. According to Gambasin the *bolognesi* were afraid that political problems would be discussed and that the Italian government would use this as an excuse to move against the *Opera dei Congressi*. Paganuzzi saw it as an opportunity to increase its prestige through contact with the international Catholic social movement. Ibid., pp.223-9.
Section had been requested to draw up by the Comitato Generale Permanente. The program was to be submitted to the episcopacy and then made known to the committees of the Opera dei Congressi. The II Section had already begun formulating such a program which was subsequently sent to the Comitato Generale Permanente in Bologna. There were delays in publishing the program and when it was published it was no longer entitled program but rather proposta. It outlined their view of the contemporary situation of society where social order was shattered. They believed the only cure was through a regenerating Christian-Catholic movement under the guidance of the bishops. The program contained proposals for the formulation of an association which would work on and promote theoretical and practical approaches to social studies, and which would be linked to the Opera dei Congressi. The association was to have local branches which were to carry on their own work in this area.  

The proposal for a largely autonomous association was far from welcomed by the hardline intransigenti such as Paganuzzi who tried to impose strict control over the II Section. Despite strong opposition he insisted that a congress focussing on the social question be held in 1890. The opposition was in part due to the crisis over the presidency which was still undermining activities of the Opera dei Congressi. Members of the II Section were also reluctant because of the large part Paganuzzi wanted them to play in the Congress. They felt they lacked the resources and time to prepare adequately for the Congress. Rather than indicating a growth in awareness of Paganuzzi and his supporters the prominence to be given to the social question was largely intended to counter the formation of the association proposed in the program of 1888. The association, the Unione per gli studi sociali was actually established in December 1889.  

The cristiano sociali, because of the lack of support and frustration of their proposals by hardline intransigenti took an increasingly autonomous direction through the Unione per gli studi sociali. The relationship between the Unione and the Opera dei Congressi was not clear, with a large degree of inter-dependence between the II Section and the Unione. This lack of clarity in the relationship is reflected in Brezzi's discussion of the Unione. Brezzi argues that Toniolo and other unspecified cristiano sociali had come to the conclusion by 1888 that their theoretical and practical interests in relation to the social question could not be pursued within the Opera dei Congressi and consequently from 1889 their efforts were diverted into the new association. According to Brezzi,  

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28 Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.295-301, 309-12, 343.  
29 Despite these problems it appears that the Congress itself was a positive one for the II Section with an increasing number of congress members participating in the II Section sessions and a high level of interest evident. Ibid., pp.361, 407-19, 426-30, 445-6, 448-51.
Toniolo sought to obtain the maximum degree of autonomy possible for the *Unione*. However, he also states that Toniolo and Medolago Albani saw the *Unione* as remaining in association with the *Opera dei Congressi*. While the degree and nature of that association was not clear, what was apparent was that the hardline *intransigenti*, which increasingly meant the *veneziani* grouped around Paganuzzi, opposed the autonomous tendencies as would be expected by their attitudes to the autonomy of other Catholic organisations from the *Opera dei Congressi*. It was also clear that the different concerns of the two groups would continue to cause conflict and friction and, because of the greater power of the hardline *intransigenti* and their concern to impose control over the *cristiano sociali*, that this conflict would remain as an undercurrent within the *Opera dei Congressi* weakening the unity which might otherwise have been achieved and the actions of the *cristiano sociali*.

When the pope was informed in late 1889 of the establishment of the *Unione* he expressed his desire that the new association not be independent from the *Opera dei Congressi*, apparently the suggestion of the person who informed him, Monsignor Callegari, bishop of Treviso and a member of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The papal position on the *Unione* and the views of Paganuzzi did little to assist the new organisation although it did have papal support. Nevertheless despite the problems they faced, those involved in the formation of the *Unione* began work to realise their goals. For Toniolo, who put a great effort into the *Unione* and became its president, the organisation was intended to bring about a common position amongst all Italian catholics on the social question. Circles of the *Unione* were established in a number of cities but genuine activity did not really begin until after the publishing of the papal encyclical on the conditions of the working class, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891. One of the goals of the *Unione* was to establish a journal which would allow it to publish material on socio-economic concerns free from the censorship and difficulties members of the II Section had experienced with the official bulletin of the *Opera dei Congressi*. Due to various problems, the first issue of what was a monthly publication, did not appear until January 1893.

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Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., p.239.
32 Ibid., pp.343, 383.
33 Ibid., pp.361-70, 375-80.
34 Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., p.239.
By 1890 the *cristiano sociali* through discussion, study and action, had come to a position where there was a degree of coherence and clarity of direction in their theoretical and practical work as well as commitment to positive Catholic action in regard to the social and economic problems evident in Italy. They still faced considerable opposition from the hardline *intransigenti*. The *cristiano sociali* had supported the election of Paganuzzi as president of the *Opera dei Congressi* believing he would resolve the problems that had arisen while the organisation was under the control of the *bolognesi* but the obstacles put in the path of the *cristiano sociali* did not disappear. Brezzi maintains that under Venturoli's presidency the obstacles derived from fear and doubt whereas under Paganuzzi they were the result of a clash between different political visions. Nevertheless, whether through the II Section of the *Opera dei Congressi* or the *Unione per gli studi sociali*, the *cristiano sociali* were following a commitment and direction which made some attempt to deal with the complex reality around them rather than resorting to purely ideological responses which was often the case with the hardline *intransigenti*.

The position of the *cristiano sociali* was affected perhaps somewhat adversely by the papal encyclical on the conditions of the working class published in May 1891. Brezzi argues that *Rerum Novarum* was intended as an intervention by Leo XIII to exert control over debates taking place within Catholic circles, not just in Italy, over issues such as state intervention in social and economic matters, the right to strike, ownership of property and just wages. These issues had been debated in some detail at the European Catholic congress held in Liege in 1890 and, within Italy, at the VIII Congress of the *Opera dei Congressi* also held in 1890. *Rerum Novarum*, in Brezzi's view, took a step backwards from the position already reached by European Catholics on these issues and hence represented a break in the development of the Catholic social movement including that within Italy. Candeloro on the other hand, argues that the vagueness of the encyclical allowed Catholics to reach quite advanced positions with their social action without directly committing the Church to such action.

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18 Ibid., pp.455-6.
Rerum Novarum did give papal support to the social and economic issues which were of vital concern to the *cristiano sociali* and it appears, not surprisingly, that Medolago Albani attempted to use it to increase the influence of the II Section within the *Opera dei Congressi*.\(^{42}\) Certainly these issues could not be ignored once they had been raised by the pope himself but the moderate stance of the papal encyclical meant that the hardline *intransigenti* did not have to stir themselves greatly from their traditional position of opposition to the Italian State and conservatism in the face of far-reaching social and economic change. These *intransigenti* did begin to profess a dedication to social action - as Brezzi puts it the entire organised Catholic movement *era divenuto sociale* - but behind the appearance of social commitment their basic attitudes had changed very little.\(^{43}\) Consequently they continued to put obstacles in the way of the work of the II Section and to oppose the existence of the *Unione per gli studi sociali*. The seriousness of those obstacles was the more so because of the dominance of Paganuzzi over the *Opera dei Congressi* from 1889 and his inflexible approach to those with differing views.\(^{44}\) Furthermore that dominance was increased by the role in the II Section of men such as Cerutti and Bellio, both Venetian priests and both loyal to Paganuzzi.\(^{45}\)

In the end result, while the *cristiano sociali* were able to achieve some of their aims within the *Opera dei Congressi*, they were unable to bring about any reform of the organisation to make it more responsive to social and economic issues nor were they able to change the balance of power, although their work did contribute to the emergence of the Christian democrats. In Brezzi's view their inability to bring about change within the *Opera dei Congressi* derived from the personalities of the main *cristiano sociali* which led them to take a more studious approach to the social question as can be seen in the stress Toniolo and Medolago Albani placed on a scientific...
understanding of the social question. Brezzi also points to other factors which weakened the potential the Cristiano sociali may have had for leadership. They largely revolve around the opposition of the hardline intransigenti - their lack of understanding of the issues involved in the social question and of the importance that action be taken by Catholics in response to these issues, and their suspicions about the activities of the Cristiano sociali. Brezzi also argues that the division between the Unione per gli studi sociali and the II Section of theoretical and practical action led to a lack of co-ordination and direction in the Catholic social movement. He appears to be saying that this division was a mistake on the part of the Cristiano sociali, a judgement which seems at odds with his earlier discussion of the reasons behind the setting up of the Unione indicating that it came out of the frustrations of the II Section. One possible conclusion regarding the Cristiano sociali is that given the political context within which they were operating both in relation to the Roman Question and to the composition of the Opera dei Congressi and the stance of the dominant group, it is hardly surprising that they failed to carry the Opera dei Congressi along their line. They were able to put social and economic issues more strongly on the agenda of Catholic action but given the continuing conflict between Church and State they could not make these issues the central concern of the Opera dei Congressi. The Cristiano sociali were, however, to influence the line taken by a younger generation of Catholics who were less tied to the Church-State conflict and more responsive to the social and political movements acting in support of workers and peasants, that is the Christian democrats.

The Christian democrats were to form the other major faction within the Opera dei Congressi, emerging as a significant and reasonably coherent though loose grouping from the mid to late 1890s. If the Cristiano sociali had been unable to avoid conflict with the uncompromising line taken by the hardline intransigenti in relation to the Opera dei Congressi, the Christian democrats were even more likely to clash with those controlling the organisation because of the political nature of their activities, their emphasis on social problems, their advocacy of democratic principles in contrast to the hierarchical paternalism of the older intransigenti and their push for reform of the Opera dei Congressi to make it more responsive to the changing social, political and economic


47 Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.466-7. Gambasin argues that Medolago Albani wanted Catholic social action to dominate the activities of the Opera dei Congressi and observes that Medolago Albani did not perhaps take sufficient account of the other facets of the organisation. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.198, 201-2, 205, 213-4. It would seem that the social action of the Cristiano sociali was hampered by the heterogeneous nature of the Opera dei Congressi and by the fears and suspicions of other leading intransigenti.
reality of Italy. The Christian democrats shared the older intransigenti’s desire to bring the masses back to the Church as well as their opposition to socialism and its influence over the urban workers and peasants but they diverged strongly on the ways by which these aims could be achieved. The Christian democrats did not shrink away from the political nature of their activities, an aspect of Catholic action which Paganuzzi and his supporters consistently denied and the cristoano sociali tried to avoid. They were closely involved in the struggle to improve the conditions of workers and peasants, advocating and helping to establish organisations which were directly involved in that struggle rather than the paternalistic mutual aid or charitable societies which the hardline intransigenti and the cristoano sociali supported although in the early years in particular, the organisations established by the Christian democrats often shared the strongly anti-socialist line of the more traditional Catholic worker and peasant associations. Nevertheless these activities indicated a clear political commitment to the working class in a non-paternalistic way in contrast to the adherence by the hardline intransigenti and, to a large extent, by the cristoano sociali, to such concepts as class cooperation and the natural necessity of the hierarchical ordering of society. The Christian democrats’ advocacy of democratic principles greatly offended the hardline intransigenti. The latter did feel some pressure to represent their social and political views as democratic but they did so in such a way as to empty the word democratic of any political implications, and interpret it as meaning only popular Catholic social action of a traditional paternalistic nature. It appears that the conflict between the Christian democrats and the hardline intransigenti worsened as the social problems became more acute and the reaction of the government more repressive. Ultimately it was this conflict together with a shift in papal politics which led to the dissolution of the Opera dei Congressi in 1904. Open conflict did not occur at the general assemblies of the congresses although the conflict was there as an undercurrent at the later congresses and a number of clear admonishments were directed at the Christian democrats.

The first Christian democrat circles were formed just after the XV Congress of the Opera dei Congressi in 1897. The circles developed rapidly during 1898 and 1899 so
that by the first years of the new century these circles could be regarded as constituting an actual movement. In contrast to the struggle experienced by the *Opera dei Congressi* in reviving its committee structure following the government repression in 1898 the Christian democrat groups spread quickly, particularly in Northern Italy where the *Opera dei Congressi* had been strongest. The relationship between the Christian democrat movement and the *Opera dei Congressi* was a difficult one. Not all the young Catholics involved in the movement were directly involved in the *Opera dei Congressi* although many were, while many were only on the margins of the organised intransigent movement. The *Opera dei Congressi* tried to impose its authority over the movement but while many of the Christian democrats were willing to cooperate with the *Opera dei Congressi* and participate in the organisation if they had relative freedom of action and if the *Opera dei Congressi* was reformed along democratic lines, they were equally intent on following an independent course should that freedom and reform not be forthcoming. The situation became even more difficult when the Christian democrats were directed by the pope to submit to the direction of the *Opera dei Congressi* in 1902.

To some extent the Christian democratic movement grew out of the faltering state of the *Opera dei Congressi* with the younger Catholics putting their energy into the new movement while the hardline *intransigenti*, rather than being open to new approaches and ideas, remained stultified and resistant to change. However, the Christian democratic movement also grew out of the activism of the Catholic movement in general in its quest to restore Catholic values and principles to an increasingly secular society, and in particular of its social action, as well as the Catholic reaction to the spread of socialism. They were strongly influenced by the work of the *cristiano sociali* which had developed an awareness amongst some Catholics of the necessity to understand and respond to the social question in its broadest sense. In fact Brezzi states that the movement was grafted onto and germinated from the practical and theoretical work of the *cristiano sociali*. They were also influenced by the general ferment of ideas in European Catholic circles and by the encyclicals of Leo XIII. Equally they were influenced by the democratic and socialist movements in their belief in justice and social renewal and the actions they took, which contrasted with the more traditionally Catholic path followed primarily by the hardline *intransigenti* but also to a large degree by the *cristiano sociali*. Their emergence as a movement was not necessarily welcomed by the *cristiano sociali* because of the Christian democrats' concern with ideas and activities which presented a considerable challenge to the Church and more conservative Catholics, and because of their tendency to act

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53 Ibid., pp. 40-1; Brezzi, *Cristiano sociali*, op. cit., p. 444.
independently of ecclesiastical authority and, despite the cristiano sociali’s own problems with those controlling the Opera dei Congressi, lay Catholic authority as represented by that organisation. Nevertheless the cristiano sociali did give some assistance to the Christian democrats, by trying to draw them into the Opera dei Congressi, mediating between them and the hardline intransigenti and attempting to bring about changes within the Opera dei Congressi which would make it more acceptable to the Christian democrats as well as to themselves.  

The word democracy and the designation, Christian democracy, began to be used at the congresses of the Opera dei Congressi in the early 1890s following the issuing of the papal encyclical Rerum Novarum but their use was essentially conservative and paternalistic. Barone de Matteis, in his speech on Catholic action at the XI Congress (1894), claimed that the Opera dei Congressi:

è l'unica vera e possibile democrazia cristiana, la sola libera realmente e realmente liberatrice, aperta a tutti, premurosa di tutte le classi, di tutti gli stati, di tutti le età, di tutti i bisogni, nel civile e sociale consorzio delle anime immortali. Democrazia schietta e sincera, che non conosce negl'individui altro merito che la virtù, altra tessera che la fedeltà, altro titolo che l'onore; che non conosce altro programma sociale che il dovere e l'onestà, la carità e la giustizia, che unica, perciò vittoriosamente si oppone alla tirannica demagogia degli statolatri e dei socialisti.

Similar statements were made to other congresses.

54 The challenge that the Christian democrats provided to the cristiano sociali and the contrast between the generations and their way of thinking is well illustrated in a letter written from Medolago Albani to Tonio1 in January 1904. Regarding two articles written by Murri he said: Contengono essi degli errori? non mi credo competente a giudicare. Dico solo che e un modo nuovo di parlare di religione, che non ho mai visto usare da scrittori cattolici...Io non ci capisco più nulla e non sono più l'umano del momento.


55 XI. p.143.

Similarly paternalistic and conservative, as was much of the discussion prompted by Rerum Novarum, was the interpretation given to Christian democracy by the leading cristiano sociali, Toniolo, in an article published in 1897 which was intended as a mediation between the younger more radical Catholics and the hardline intransigenti.\textsuperscript{57} It did not mean to Toniolo government for and by the people but rather a more hierarchical, paternalistic order in which the State acted to the advantage of the people, a view which was totally consistent with the ideas of the cristiano sociali which were still closely linked to the traditional Catholic understanding of society and a paternalistic view of the role of the State. In fact Toniolo clearly spelt out that Christian democracy did not imply a particular political order.\textsuperscript{58} However, his interpretation did carry political implications which, as Gambasin notes, could not be clearly set out by Catholics faithful to the intransigent stand of the Church, a position to which Toniolo firmly adhered.\textsuperscript{59} Instead he attempted to place his interpretation in the context of, as he expressed it, the antico ed unico programma cattolico intorno all'ordine sociale.\textsuperscript{60}

However, the political implications of a concept of Christian democracy applied to the social, economic and political reality of Italy could not be avoided for long and the ideas raised by Toniolo and other cristiano sociali did provide a starting point for the younger, more radical Catholics. Moreover, as Candeloro points out, Toniolo's article helped to introduce the concept of Christian democracy into the restricted world of the intransigenti.\textsuperscript{61} The Christian democrats went further, regarding Christian democracy as a 'movimento sociale e politico delle masse' which had as its goal the christianising and democratising of Italian society.\textsuperscript{62} They saw the need for Catholics to respond to the crises in Italy and to the worker and peasant movements in an effective way, offering realistic ways for workers and peasants to try to alter their conditions and recognising the necessity for political and class-based action.\textsuperscript{63}


\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.267.

\textsuperscript{59} Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.467-70.

\textsuperscript{60} Letter from Toniolo to Medolago Albani, 3 July, 1903. Quoted in Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.469.

\textsuperscript{61} Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.267.

\textsuperscript{62} Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.7, op. cit., p.46; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.266-7

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., pp.268-9; Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.40-1, 43-5, 98-100; Agocs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., pp.81-2.
Nevertheless the Christian democrat movement did not represent a closely united and coherent group but rather a loose movement with widely differing positions which frequently provoked major conflicts and ultimately resulted in its fragmentation. The main groups were centred around the Roman priest, Romolo Murri, don Davide Albertario and Filippo Meda in Milan, don Sturzo in Sicily and Giovanni Battista Valente in Genoa. Murri was also responsible for the establishment of a number of journals which propounded ideas and issues of importance to the movement, the most important of which was *Culturo-sociale* which first appeared in 1898. Not all those involved with the journal agreed with Murri’s line but they were united in their opposition to the leadership of the *Opera dei Congressi* and a belief in the need for the Catholic movement to be reformed and made more responsive to contemporary Italy.

Murri represented the more radical wing of Christian democracy, taking a more extreme stance in relation to the Church, the State and society. He fought for the establishment of democratic rights for the masses and vehemently opposed the reactionary response of the State to worker and peasant agitations. However, he strongly believed in the need for a renewal of society and the restoration of Christian principles as the basis for social structures and the State. Thus he opposed the entry of Catholics into politics and their participation in national elections because he saw that they would be used as a conservative force rather than a means of renewal and liberation. In this context he was closer to Paganuzzi than to moderate Christian democrats such as Meda and the group surrounding him in Lombardy. He also pushed for a more active Catholic stand on the social question and for radical reform of the *Opera dei Congressi*. Murri played an important role in the Christian democratic movement and in its impact on the *Opera dei Congressi*. His combative nature, independent action and his general refusal to submit to ecclesiastical authority and to moderate his statements and action ultimately alienated many of his supporters and led to his excommunication. However, by his nature he was also to provide a driving force behind the young Christian democrats and to make clearly apparent many of the contradictions in the Catholic approach to the social

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65 Murri had formed a group of university students in Rome in 1895 to which active young Catholics were drawn and which formed the basis for the group of Christian democrats of which he was leader. The group was absorbed into the *Opera dei Congressi* through the *Federazione universitaria cattolica italiana* which became part of the *Opera dei Congressi* at the XIV Congress in 1896. Murri had wanted the Federation to remain largely independent of the *Opera dei Congressi* but the determination of the hardline *intransigenti* that all lay Catholic activity be under their control made its incorporation inevitable. De Rosa, *L’azione cattolica*, Vol.1, op. cit., p.198; Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., p.39; Scoppola, *La democrazia nel pensiero cattolico*, op. cit., pp.154-5.

question even if, in the end result, he also contributed to the defeat, in the short term, of the impulses behind the movement. Valente shared many of Murri’s ideas although he was more concerned with the reform of the organised Catholic movement.

Meda and his supporters took a far more moderate line than Murri which resulted in frequent conflict with the more radical Christian democrat. Meda was also more interested in taking overtly political action through the formation of a political party. He disagreed with Murri’s radical opposition to the liberal State, believing that there could be a gradual accommodation between the Church and State through gradual transformation of the State. Meda saw the need for the extension of democratic rights and believed that Catholic forces should maintain a certain autonomy, but he was also to shift his position to one of support for the liberal State against the attacks of socialism. De Rosa emphasises the conservatism of Meda’s position by 1904 and observes that Meda’s support for a democratic program had, by then, largely disappeared. By this stage Meda held to a very similar position to that of the clerico-moderati, a group which had begun to emerge through the 1890s in response to the threats to the State from the socialist movement and which wanted to support the liberal State. A number of members of the Opera dei Congressi had begun to gravitate towards the position of the clerico-moderati during these years.

In the early years of the movement, however, the Christian democrats, despite their widely differing positions, were united in their opposition to the domination of the organised Catholic movement by hardline intransigenti such as Paganuzzi who were blocking any opening of the organised Catholic movement to democratic principles and what the Christian democrats regarded as a more effective response to the social question. Nevertheless the Christian democrats avoided open criticism of the leaders of the Opera dei Congressi until after the government repression of 1898 when they began to call for a renewal of the Catholic movement. Notably in April and May 1899, Murri published a series of articles in which he criticised both the hardline intransigenti and

the clerico-moderati and set out the reforms the Christian democrats regarded as crucial to society and the Catholic movement, and the place of the Catholic movement in relation to society. A meeting organised by Valente was held in May 1898 at which proposals for the democratic reform of the Opera dei Congressi, and in particular its social action, were put together. The proposals were conveyed to Paganuzzi by Medolago Albani and Toniolo who were sympathetic to the aims of the Christian democrats and who were involved in the preparation of a petition for the reform of the statute of the Opera dei Congressi. The proposals and criticisms were far from welcomed by the hardline intransigenti. Moreover there was no open response to the petition for reform of the statute. No moves were made to placate the Christian democrats nor were there any signs of compromise as a means of drawing the Christian democrats into the Opera dei Congressi. Instead, from mid-1899 objections to their activities began to be sent to Rome from the directive council of the Opera dei Congressi complaining of the Christian democrats' attitudes to the 'superior classes', their tendency to build up expectations amongst the masses and what was regarded as their intention of establishing an autonomous political party. Warnings were also given to the Christian democrats at the XVI Congressi in 1899 and more particularly at the XVIII Congress in 1901 that their actions had to be approved by the clergy and by those above them in the hierarchical structure of the Opera dei Congressi.

Following the rejection by the hardline intransigenti of the Christian democrat proposals, the Christian democrats increasingly moved in an independent direction. They continued to form new groups particularly in Northern cities. According to Scoppola some of these groups were active and influential in local society and administration. They were able to maintain a relative but uneasy autonomy from the Opera dei Congressi and the claims of its hardline leaders to direct and control Catholic action. In the view of De Rosa the relative autonomy of the Christian democrat movement from the Opera dei Congressi was the reason it flourished.

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71 XVI. pp.79-85; XVIII. pp.96-7, 99-105, 115-7, 163-8,190-207, 215-26, Parte II, Documenti, pp.74-97; XIX. pp.16-8, 21-3, 73-7, 96-7; Scoppola, Dal neoguelfismo, op. cit., pp.72-3; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.276-80; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.182-3; De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.I, op. cit., pp.197, 200-6; Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.41, 45-6, 99-100; Fonzi, Aspetti della cultura, op. cit., pp.347-8. At the XVI Congress of the Opera dei Congressi held in April 1899 Murri did not speak because he had been asked not to by, as he described them, autorevolissime persone.

In 1899 the Christian democrats in Turin put together a program known as the *programma di Torino*, which expressed their aims and principles. The program called for the gradual organisation of society into professional corporative associations, proportional representation of political parties at local and national levels, referenda and what was described as *il diritto di iniziativa popolare*, administrative decentralisation leading to considerable local and regional autonomy, protective legislation for workers, action in support of agriculture, industry and commerce, production, consumption and credit cooperatives and other action in support of workers, reduction of military and public expenditure, tax reform, the repression of usury, protection of civil and political liberties, the widening of the right to vote and finally, the freedom and independence of the Church. The program set out similar ideas and goals to those put forward by Murri in his articles and both Murri's articles and the program followed similar lines to those proposed in a program drawn up by Toniolo in 1894. The importance of the *programma di Torino* was, however, that it set out concrete social and political demands, providing a basis for an organised political movement.

The divisions between the hardline *intransigenti* and the Christian democratic movement, as well as those within the Christian democratic movement, became increasingly obvious in 1900 and 1901. The Christian democrats decided to meet separately from the XVII Congress of the *Opera dei Congressi* held in 1900 but after a call from Toniolo they participated in the Congress and in the meetings of the II Section although separate meetings were held by Murri and plans made to begin a weekly periodical to prepare for a future party. There was no discussion at the Congress of reform of the *Opera dei Congressi* nor of the relationship between the Christian democrats and the *Opera dei Congressi* because, as Candeloro states, it was known that the pope was about to issue an encyclical on these issues. When the Christian democrats' plans for a periodical and party were made public after the Congress there was rapid censure from the Vatican, which had shown some support for the Christian democrats' ideas but opposed such overtly political and autonomous tendencies.

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74 It is reproduced in Valente, op. cit., pp.289-91.

75 That program was known as the *programma di Milano* and was titled the *Programma dei cattolici di fronte al socialismo*. Scoppola, *Dal neoguelfismo*, op. cit., p.72, Scoppola, *Antologia*, op. cit., pp.77-83.


77 Ibid., pp.60-2.


The Christian democrats' room to manoeuvre was further restricted by the conservative interpretation placed on Christian democracy by the papal encyclical, *Graves de communi*, which was issued in January 1901. The encyclical excluded political action, advocated essentially paternalistic aid to the working classes, emphasised that the social question was primarily moral and religious rather than economic, and finally stated that in Italy, Catholic action should take place under the direction of the *Opera dei Congressi*, itself subject to episcopal guidance. The encyclical has generally been viewed as an attempt by the Vatican to control the Christian democratic movement which was developing largely outside the traditional and conservative bounds of the Church and the organised lay Catholic movement. Rossi, on the other hand, sees the encyclical in a more positive light, arguing that while it did seriously limit the autonomy and aspirations of the Christian democrats it also gave the movement official recognition and stimulated its further growth. Murri, not to be repressed by the encyclical, chose to interpret the emphasis on the role of the *Opera dei Congressi* as meaning that the organisation should be reformed along the lines wanted by the Christian democrats and while he acknowledged some of the limitations put by the encyclical he chose to see it in a positive light. The Christian democrats also rejected the paternalistic charitable response to the social question by continuing to develop their activities with the working class.

Despite the encyclical the Christian democrats continued their activities, starting new circles in many towns, publishing the proposed periodical, *Il Domani d'Italia*, forming unions and leagues in various regions, particularly in Lombardy, and holding regional conferences. Moves were made by Medolago Albani and Toniolo to find a compromise between the Christian democrats and those controlling the *Opera dei Congressi*. According to Rossi, Toniolo was also trying to control Murri and weaken

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On the support from the Vatican see Fanello, op. cit., pp.294, 296. See also R. Murri, *Dalla Democrazia Cristiana al Partito Popolare*, Venezia, 1928, p.72.


his group while encouraging the moderate Christian democrats. Further papal direction was given in the papal breve to the XVIII Congress held in September 1901. The breve stated that the Christian democrats should adhere to the II Section of the Opera dei Congressi but it also praised their activities, referring to them as quel drappello di giovani freschi di forze ed alacri di volontà. Around the same time there were new moves by Murri, Valente and other leading Christian democrats to establish a party structure. An agreement was reached between the II Section and the Christian democrats in November 1901 which gave the latter a degree of independence but it was unacceptable to the hardline intransigenti who vehemently opposed any changes to the Opera dei Congressi. Any independence of the Christian democratic movement was then denied by papal instructions issued in January 1902 which directed the groups of Christian democrats to become a part of the II Section and to follow the directions of the presidency of the Opera dei Congressi. Initially Murri’s group wanted to resist the papal directive but most of the Christian democratic circles submitted quickly so Murri was forced to follow. The effect was to break up any radical push within the Christian democratic movement and led to its fragmentation. Moderate Christian democrats took over the leadership of the various organisations and under their leadership and that of the II Section, the Christian democratic unions became more conservative. The instructions were aimed at preventing any further moves by the Christian democrats to form a political party while retaining the strength and vitality of the Christian democratic movement. Instead they considerably weakened the impetus behind the movement and increased the likelihood of a major crisis within the Opera dei Congressi itself. The new statute of the Opera dei Congressi issued by the Sacred See at the same time as the instructions made some reforms to placate the Christian democrats but these changes were far from those they desired.

85 Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.100-1.  
86 XVIII. pp.96-7.  
87 At this stage there were around 150 groups of Christian democrats throughout Italy as well as others which were sympathetic. Murri had plans for the creation of a system of regional committees headed by a national committee and above that an executive commission. Regional federations for Lombardy, Emilia, Liguria and Piedmont were formed in early 1902. Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.96-9.  
88 The Instructions were reproduced in the documents of the XVIII Congress. XVIII. Parte II, Documenti, pp.87-97; Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., p.97; Scoppola, Dal neoguelfismo, op. cit., pp.75-6; De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.234-8, 240-1; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.7, op. cit., pp.186-7; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.294-7.  
89 The periodical Domani d'Italia was taken over by the II Section and transferred from Rome to Bergamo where it was edited by a moderate Christian democrat. The tone of the paper subsequently changed from an openly pro-worker and democratic line to an anti-socialist and conservative one. Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.103-7.  
91 Under the new statute all committees were to have elected as well as appointed members but it also increased ecclesiastical control over the organisation. De Rosa, L'azione cattolica, Vol.1, op. cit.,
The Christian democrats then tried to bring about changes within the *Opera dei Congressi*. The subsequent conflict resulted in the appointment of Conte Grosoli to the presidency of the organisation. Grosoli was a moderate, closer to the position of Meda, whose appointment was acceptable to the Christian democrats.\(^92\) Paganuzzi and other hardline *intransigenti* primarily from the Veneto, moved against Grosoli from late 1903 because they believed he had conceded too much to the Christian democrats. The conflict was apparent at the XIX Congress held in November 1903 although it was not openly dealt with at the general sessions. By this stage the conflict was not just between the hardline *intransigenti* and Murri's group. Rather it included a broader group of people who wanted to reform the *Opera dei Congressi* so as to make it more responsive to the social and political changes occurring in Italy. In De Rosa's view the hardline *intransigenti* were defeated for the first time at the XIX Congress but the winners in the long term were not the Christian democrats but rather the *clerico-moderati* who opposed the intransigent opposition of Paganuzzi and his supporters to the Italian State. Moderate Christian democrats such as Meda and some of the hardline *intransigenti* had already begun to gravitate towards the position of the *clerico-moderati*. The *cristiano sociali* were also manoeuvring to remove the influence of Murri and his extreme position.\(^93\) However, in the short term the conflict between the hardline *intransigenti* and the Christian democrats was the most apparent. Grosoli made it clear to the Christian democrats that they could be largely autonomous while following the general direction of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The shift within the organisation under the presidency of Grosoli to largely Christian democratic positions resulted in a final conflict in mid 1904 following which the *Opera dei Congressi* was dissolved by the pope.\(^94\)

The extent of the splits within the organisation, many of which were directly related to positions taken in relation to the social question, could no longer be covered over.

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However, the dissolution of the *Opera dei Congressi* did not occur solely for this reason. It was also because the new pope, Pius X, while closer to the *intransigeni*, was treading a political line closer to the *clerico-moderati*, so that to direct the *Opera dei Congressi* towards the line of the hardline *intransigeni* or the Christian democrats was to commit the Church to positions which were equally unacceptable to the Vatican.95

Confronting the Social Question

The response of the *intransigenti* to the social question as seen in the proceedings of the congresses underwent a considerable change during the existence of the *Opera dei Congressi*. While the more hardline *intransigenti* clung to moral and ideological explanations, there emerges from the congress proceedings an increasing awareness of the importance of resolving the social question, or at least attenuating its effects, and of the complexity of the contributing factors. Initially the *intransigenti* explained the social and economic problems of the last decades of the 19th century and their political consequences entirely in terms of ideological and political causes. The hardline *intransigenti*, notably many clerical members of the *Opera dei Congressi*, essentially did not shift from this position. Gradually however, a more reasoned, analytical response emerged predominantly from the work of the *cristiano sociali* of the II Section and then later from the Christian democrats although a paternalistic and conservative framework continued to be evident in both groups, particularly the *cristiano sociali*. Both these groups sought to make the social question a primary issue to be dealt with by the *Opera dei Congressi*, a difficult task given the primary ideological and political purpose of the organisation and the moralistic and religious orientation of most *intransigenti* in relation to socio-economic issues. Many *intransigenti* remained unaware of the seriousness of the social question and of the impossibility for any institution with moral claims such as the Catholic Church, its members and associated groups, not to act, at the very least, to alleviate suffering. Nevertheless by the early 1890s the social question had come to form a dominant part of the material dealt with at the congresses even though the conflict between the Church and State remained a crucial, recurring issue for all *intransigenti*.

The proceedings of the general assemblies of the early congresses indicate a fairly limited understanding of the social question on the part of most *intransigenti*. It does appear, however, that greater discussion of issues related to the social question did take place in other sessions and that while the social question was treated in a strongly paternalistic fashion, often in religious terms, there is evidence of the beginnings of a greater understanding of its scope and seriousness. Nevertheless, consistent with the political focus of the *intransigenti*, their early perceptions of the social question derived

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directly from their rejection of the new secular State with its liberal, secular ideology. From this perspective the conditions of the working classes, the form of their employment, social conflict, workers' and peasants' rejection of hierarchical relations, the threat of revolution, all derived from the effects of the political change, the destruction of the temporal influence of the Church and the diminution of Catholic teaching and principles. Hence, they argued, the hierarchical social order had been deprived of its justification and socialist ideas were increasingly influential. Their emphasis was on social or class conflict. The abandonment, by the ruling class, of its duties under the influence of the revolutionary doctrine of individualism, in the view of the *intransigenti*, contributed in a major way to the social unrest of the workers:

Ritenuto come la rivoluzione ha introdotto nei nostri costumi e nelle nostre leggi quel principio d'individualismo che ha prontamente sciolti i vincoli della cristiana solidarietà; ritenuto che in conseguenza di ciò il ricco, il cui amor proprio tollera a malincuore le scorrette teorie del diritto di assoluta eguaglianza, si è confermato nel suo egoismo; è l'operaio, che non si sente più nè amato nè protetto, alla sua volta si è irritato contro l'ineguaglianza sociale, della quale (soppressa le spiegazioni che ne dà la religione e la fede) egli non riconosce più la ragione sufficiente…

Considerando che, rotti i vincoli della cristiana carità per cui una volta alle classi operaie si stringevano le classi agiate, si preparò nella civile società quel mutuo antagonismo, onde il ricco tende ad opprimere l'operaio, e l'operaio a minacciare gli averi e la sicurezza del ricco; e che tale infelicissima condizione non cesserà finché i doviziosi non prendano una parte più attiva a procurare il bene temporale ed eterno dei loro fratelli…

Because of the breakdown of hierarchical social relations that had been justified by Catholic teaching, the *intransigenti* argued, workers were open to the influence of socialism, communism and other revolutionary doctrines. They placed considerable stress on the revolutionary threat that they believed workers posed to society:

Gli operai costituiscono oggi il nerbo delle forze che la miscredenza e la rivoluzione tengono pronte per dare l'ultima decisiva battaglia all'altare ed al trono.
The *intransigenti* emphasised that workers had also been influenced by individualism and egoism so that they were no longer willing to accept their position in the social hierarchy with its associated poverty, powerlessness and submission to the guidance of the ruling class.\(^5\) In summary people no longer believed in or feared another life and thus had lost all internal restraints. Hence in the view of the *intransigenti*, they were seeking the satisfaction of all *dei più sfrenati appetiti*. As a consequence all social order and all reciprocal relations were being destroyed:

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\text{l'accordo nelle famiglie, l'unione tra i coniugati, il pudore nei giovani, l'umiltà nei poveri, la carità nei ricchi, la confidenza fra gli amici, la fede nelle promesse, lo zelo e l'integrità negli uffici.}\(^6\)
\]

These arguments put forward by the *intransigenti* underlined clearly their position in the social, political and economic structures of Italy. What they described as a threat by workers to social order was, as they were aware, an attack on the existing social structure and hence on their social and economic interests and, at a local level, their political power as members of the ruling class. These interests were rarely referred to directly but rather they were referred to in terms of the interests of society as a whole. The hardline *intransigenti*, and also to some extent more perceptive *intransigenti*, were willing to attribute the social question in large part to the political changes that came with unification. They were far less willing to include a major cause of the social question, the economic changes occurring as a capitalist mode of production became increasingly dominant and the relationship of these economic changes to the increasing class conflict. The economic causes of the social question were either not seen as the primary problem by the hardline *intransigenti* or they were regarded as not being a problem at all if members of the ruling class would only act more in keeping with Christian principles. These views derived from the position of most *intransigenti* as members of that ruling class with common economic and, at a local level, political interests. Brezzi argues that the *intransigenti* exhibited a lack of sensibility towards the social question largely because of the predominance in their thinking of attitudes towards workers and peasants, typical of the aristocracy. However, the sincerity of their religious beliefs that a system based on Christian principles with a strong emphasis on the role of charity, would have prevented the emergence of social problems, at least to the degreee to which they existed, should not be totally discounted. Many *intransigenti* unquestioningly linked their religious beliefs with their

\(^5\) I. pp.130-6; IV. pp.81-103; VI. pp.170-1, 315-23; VII. p.207; VIII. pp.42-4; X. pp.126-8; XVIII. p.188.
\(^6\) I. pp.51-3.
material interests, regarding them as upholding their position within a hierarchical social order and their possessions.\textsuperscript{7}

Despite the prevalence and strength of the predominantly political and ideological attempts to account for the contemporary social problems, a more critical and profound examination began to be undertaken by people connected to the II Section from the time of the IV Congress in 1877 although problems within the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} hampered development of the II Section until the mid-1880s. As has been already indicated, it was in fact this approach and commitment to the resolution of the social question as a priority for Catholics that distinguished the \textit{cristiano sociali} from the hardline \textit{intransigenti}. The reports put together by the \textit{cristiano sociali} examined, often in great detail, socio-economic aspects of the social question. Nevertheless despite this shift in approach members of the II Section frequently returned to strongly ideological explanations or retained these as an underlying element in otherwise perceptive and detailed analyses of the social question. This may have occurred because the conclusions of some reports would have gone beyond the framework of the social thought of most \textit{intransigenti} as well as that then prevailing in the Catholic world, both of which upheld a conservative, hierarchical social order. When such conclusions were set out either in reports or put in to practice the entire framework was threatened, or at least undermined, as happened to a degree with the activities of the \textit{cristiano sociali} and then more so with the Christian democrats.\textsuperscript{8}

At times the changing approach to the social question consisted only of greater attention being given in a general sense to workers’ conditions and their oppression as factors in the increasing social conflict. These speeches tended to retain ideological explanations as their central argument. The language used gives some evidence of this approach expressing as it did the Catholic ideology of the \textit{intransigenti}. Initially the increasing class conflict was described as conflict between the rich and the poor, or the anger of the poor against the rich.\textsuperscript{9} Later the terms more commonly used were \textit{padroni} and \textit{operai}.\textsuperscript{10} Thus the language began to reflect more accurately the changed social and economic conditions. These speeches did acknowledge that a general change of a social and economic nature had occurred to which the conditions of workers and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{9} I. pp.133-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} IV. pp.81-103; V. pp.132-5; VII. pp.118-28, 145-50.
\end{itemize}
worker agitation could in part be attributed. A speech given by Medolago Albani at the X Congress in 1892 took such an approach.\textsuperscript{11} He described the social conflict brought about by liberalism, utilitarian and materialist doctrines and then further aggravated by socialism. The social disorder was, he argued, rebellion against authority and social unity which could only be countered by the influence of the Church. He then departed from the line taken by the more politically focussed speeches by describing the conditions, both moral and material, of the workers arguing that it was their duty as Catholics to defend the rights of workers as well as to assist them through the exercise of charity. Medolago Albani's speech placed a more specific focus on the situation of workers and peasants. Nevertheless the strongly ideological caste of the speech is somewhat surprising given that as president of the II Section, Medolago Albani had been involved in examining the social question for seven years and was one of the principal instigators of a more socio-economic analysis of the social question. It may be that material had to be presented to the general assemblies of the congresses in such a form so as to make it acceptable, or at least comprehensible, to the majority of participants. That in itself indicates some of the restrictions imposed on the \textit{cristiano sociali} by the organisation. However, Medolago Albani's approach also indicates the limitations of the thinking of the \textit{cristiano sociali} and the continuing influence on them of the conservative social thought of the Church including the possible restraining influence of the papal encyclical \textit{Rerum Novarum} as well as their largely aristocratic backgrounds.\textsuperscript{12}

Another example of this approach is that of Cardinal Parrocchi speaking on the social question at the XI Congress in 1894.\textsuperscript{13} Although workers and their interests were assigned a more independent role, the central theme of his speech was again that of the threat workers posed to social order particularly under the influence of socialism and anarchism. He argued that economic and moral assistance should be given to the working classes as the best course to take to resolve the social question and to bring the social classes back together. As a cleric his approach was not unexpected emphasising as it did the material and ideological interests of the Church. While there was a shift to a more central consideration of the social question, as could be expected it was still placed firmly in the context of the traditional Catholic understanding of society.\textsuperscript{14}

The main notable shift in the work of the II Section was, however, to a detailed

\textsuperscript{11} X. pp.125-33.
\textsuperscript{12} See Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{13} XI. pp.216-23.
examination of the socio-economic aspects of the social question. The reports not only focussed on the problems of the workers and peasants as well as changes in social and economic structures, but they also frequently expressed open support of worker and peasant demands arguing that workers and peasants were being denied certain basic rights and just treatment. These analyses criticised not only the implications of capitalist development for workers and peasants in the creation of a rural and urban proletariat and the particular social and economic relations as they were imposed in Italy in this period, but also oppressive features of the pre-capitalist system which many intransigenti, in their glorification of the medieval corporation, the mezzadria contract and rural society, implicitly accepted as the ideal social and economic expression of Catholic teaching. The tension between the ruling class ideology held to by most intransigenti, including the cristiano sociali, and the object of the reports coming out of the II Section, the complex issues involved in the social question which demanded a basic comprehension of the demands of workers and peasants and their situation, frequently resulted in contradictory conclusions as the traditional charitable and paternalistic responses were shown to be insufficient while new approaches were only assimilated after considerable struggle within the Catholic movement. In addition the attempts of the cristiano sociali to come to terms with the political, social and economic transformation of Italy were far from assisted by the lack of interest and awareness of the social question by many intransigenti until the early 1890s when the papal encyclical Rerum Novarum made it an issue of importance for all Catholics and when the level of socialist activity and worker and peasant agitations began to reach levels where they could not be ignored.¹⁵

As early as the I Congress in 1874 there was evidence that some intransigenti were aware of social and economic changes as factors in the social question even though they generally approached the social question in strongly religious and biblical terms. Rubbiani, reporting for the II Section did not specifically mention the social question, however, he was concerned with social problems resulting from what he described as corruption in the cities where revolutionary, irreligious and socialist ideas had destroyed people's respect for, as he put it, the old faith and the old attitudes. He also spoke of conflict in rural society stemming from economic and social changes as well as from individual greed. Thus he argued that the contemporary peasant migration to the cities was the consequence of both personal greed on the part of landowners and of speculators leasing the land in addition to worsening conditions in rural areas which included the appearance of new and harsher contracts for peasants and cultivators.

Peasants who fled to the cities to find a better life were, he stated, being reduced to day labourers *senz’altro capitale che le proprie braccia*. Rubbiani was referring to the effects of the increasing dominance of capitalist productive relations within agriculture, by which process peasants were being expelled from the land. Rubbiani’s interpretation was, however, clearly based on Catholic teaching as well as ruling class interests as could be seen in his praise for the hierarchical social and economic relations which, he argued, bound rural society together in contrast to the more fragmented corrupt society of the cities. Moreover the somewhat heated terms with which he denounced the rural problems and their causes and the extent of his condemnations were not reflected in the proposals put to the general assembly which were moderate and restricted in their implications.\(^{16}\)

At later congresses other members of the II Section referred more specifically to the links they believed existed between the problems of agriculture, or the agrarian question as it was called, and the social question. They stressed the disruptive consequences of breaking what they regarded as natural bonds between the landowner and the peasant but at the same time the reports examined to varying degrees the difficult situation of agriculture and of landowners and peasants particularly during the agrarian crisis of the 1880s and early 1890s.\(^ {17}\) While a number of these reports referred only generally to the economic situation of agriculture, others examined it in more detail in an attempt to set out the factors which, in their view, were undermining the stability of rural society and of agrarian economic and social relations.

Sassóli-Tomba illustrated the changing approach in a report he gave to the V Congress in 1879.\(^ {18}\) Although concentrating on an ideological exposition of social and economic relations between the Christian landowner and the peasant in which he extolled the virtues of the sharecropping contract, he also made more critical and detailed references to rural problems. So as to refute any accusations of exaggeration he quoted from an official report describing the appalling conditions in Mantova where processes of capitalist transformation of agriculture were having a disastrous impact on the peasantry as well as producing urban problems. Sassóli-Tomba added the comment that a similar situation existed in other provinces. One consequence was

\[ \text{la scissura tra le due classi e il conseguente sentimento d’ira e d’odio verso la classe} \]

\(^{16}\) I. pp.130-6; Bertolli, op. cit., pp.51-5, 67-9. Bertolli also cites similar comments from Candeloro and De Rosa. Ibid., p.52. Bertolli points out that the Catholics were not the only group with limited understanding of the problems and inadequate solutions. Ibid., pp.69-71.

\(^{17}\) V. pp.120-6; VI. pp.244-6; X. pp.125-33, 160-70; XVII. pp.199-200.

\(^{18}\) V. pp.119-41.
Sassòli-Tomba referred to economic and social factors as contributing to this class conflict and harsh conditions under which the majority of peasants existed and he also mentioned the problem of overpopulation. However, ideological concerns still predominated as his argument returned to the ideal relations which should exist between the Christian landowner and the peasantry in a similar fashion to Rubbiani's speech at the I Congress. Hence while Sassòli-Tomba acknowledged that it was not possible to reverse the developments in industry and agriculture, both in terms of the forces of production and of social and economic relations, in that such a reversal would place outmoded constraints on employers and workers, he argued finally for the re-establishment of pre-capitalist social and economic relations thus contradicting himself.\(^{20}\)

The reports given by the Venetian priest, Cerutti, on the agrarian question also indicated a more analytical and practical approach to the conflict and problems existing in rural areas.\(^{21}\) His reports contained fewer contradictions because the ideological arguments played a far less important role. Instead his central concern was to set out the economic and political causes of the social question and then to propose practical means of countering them. In the first report given at the X Congress in 1892 Cerutti argued that the social question was above all an agrarian question because the greater proportion of the population was engaged in agriculture and the greater proportion of private wealth was drawn from agriculture. The agrarian question, in his view, encompassed the political agitation by the socialists and their campaign to control the rural population, which was manifesting itself in social conflict. Equally he believed it encompassed, as he expressed it, the grievous state of agriculture caused by various economic factors, and the poverty of the peasantry who were forced to emigrate in large numbers. It was the combination of these economic factors with the apathy of the ruling class, he argued, that made it possible for the rural and urban masses to be influenced by socialist propaganda and potentially united against other social groups.\(^{22}\)

The reports Cerutti gave to the XI Congress in 1894 and the XIV Congress in 1896 put forward very similar arguments. They also included criticism of oppressive features of the pre-capitalist system such as usury which still adversely affected the countryside. All the reports gave a pragmatic assessment of the contemporary rural situation and

\(^{19}\) V. p.126.
\(^{22}\) X. pp.160-70.
suggested practical means by which peasant cultivators could be enabled to adapt to it.\textsuperscript{23} Cerutti was clearly concerned about the erosion of the political and ideological influence of landowners, particularly Catholic landowners, over the peasantry. The proposals he put forward were in part aimed at restoring that influence by providing financial and other assistance to enable peasant cultivators to survive in a competitive market. That assistance was directed at peasants who already owned or rented small pieces of land and was of little help to the poorest peasants, the rapidly expanding rural proletariat.\textsuperscript{24} Cerutti did take account of complex factors which were contributing to the social question but the solutions he proposed were only partial ones which indicated an unwillingness, or inability, to challenge in any wholehearted fashion the inequities and exploitation in rural society. In part Cerutti thus illustrated the problems the Cristiano sociali had in dealing with the social question. However, his approach was also influenced by the fact that, although a member of the II Section and aware of the gravity of the social question, he also belonged to the faction of hardline intransigenti and was closely allied to Paganuzzi.\textsuperscript{25}

A significant proportion of time at the general assemblies of the congresses was also devoted to establishing the links between the social question and the development of urban-based industries which the intransigenti frequently addressed as the worker question. The relevant speeches, predominantly those from the II Section, indicated that there was some understanding amongst the intransigenti that the industrial development which was occurring primarily in urban areas, was altering economic and social structures as well as productive relations between employers and workers, and that the consequent transformations were in no small measure responsible for the difficult situation of urban workers and their increasing agitation against it. Sassolí-Tomba made some references to these changes in a speech he gave to the IV Congress in 1877. He briefly outlined the emergence of a capitalist mode of production in urban areas including the creation of an urban proletariat and the dominance of new productive relations. During his speech, Sassolí-Tomba referred to the ways in which the development of modern industry was adversely affecting the position of workers. He argued that because of changes in the terms under which workers were employed and their worsening conditions, workers who had previously been indifferent to revolution were now attracted to it. However, such comments were practically submerged by the overtly ideological caste of the speech. Sassolí-Tomba was predominantly concerned with establishing means of improving the increasingly

\textsuperscript{23} XI. pp.116-23; XIV. pp.151-6.
antagonistic relations between employers and workers. Although he referred to the role of capitalist transformation in bringing about the deterioration of these relations, the other causes which he listed were mainly of an ideological nature such as the breaking of bonds of Christian charity, the loss of respect and love on the part of the padroni towards their workers and of submission and resignation on the part of the workers.26

At the VII Congress in 1887 there were a number of reports on the social question including a substantial one from Bottini. In a regional report from Liguria, the worker question was specifically attributed to the effects of rapid industrial development. The report also stated that the working class was the most exposed of all the social classes to material and moral harm.27 A speech given by d'Amelio at the same Congress on the request of the Comitato Generale Permanente looked in more detail at these issues. He referred clearly to the transformation of structures and productive relations that was occurring in Italy and its effect on the working class. Thus he spoke of the increase in wealth deriving from industry in which the working class had no share. Instead, he argued, workers were being treated as machines by capitalists and entrepreneurs who, in turn, were machines of the State. D'Amelio also briefly outlined the various approaches, both international and Italian, to the class conflict which was springing from this new system, some of which were undermining society and increasing the conflict. Nevertheless as with Sassoli-Tomba's speech, d'Amelio took a strongly ideological approach. His description of the social and economic changes that had taken place since the French Revolution began with the strongly ideological assertion that dopo tanto turbinio di rivolte e di rovine nell'odierna società civile, le piaghe e le miserie sociali sono immensamente cresciute and were the result of the conflict in society of good and evil and he continued to use such terms throughout his speech.28

Bottini, presenting proposals for the II Section at the same Congress on the worker question, referred to social conflict which was occurring throughout Europe and in particular in advanced industrial countries.29 The principal causes that he outlined were the destruction of Christian principles in economic science and in practice, the suppression of a corporative organisation of labour and the recent emergence of big industry. He went on:

nei paesi ove dominano maggiormente, hanno prodotto o l'oppressione degli operai

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26 IV. pp.81-3.
27 VII. p.114.
28 VII. pp.118-28.
Members of the II Section were aware that the worker question was more complex than these brief comments indicated. One of the proposals put forward by the II Section was for Catholics to study the issues more closely in the light of Catholic principles and to publish their conclusions so as to enlighten gli uomini onesti ed amanti del pubblico bene. 31 Even in this reference the Catholic emphasis on harmony and cooperation, and hence the limits their ideological positions placed on both their analysis, and practical action based on it, were evident. It was even more so in a further statement recommending caution in publishing materials:

...sia per non lusingare le passioni e le indebite pretese degli operai, sia per non far credere che si vogliano risuscitare ordinamenti restrittivi, contrari alla legittima libertà ed ai veri bisogni dell'industria moderna. 32

The proposals referred clearly to the transformation of work, to the establishment in Italy of modern industries based on a factory system and requiring a new type of work force which was characteristically isolated, oppressed and in conflict with its employers. It was, in fact, a system which was acceptable to the economic and social interests of the intransigenti so long as certain principles were introduced:

...nella grande industria è necessario ammettere una bene intesa libertà e rispettare le esigenze dei nuovi sistemi, in quanto sono conciliabili colla morale cristiana... 33

Harmonious relations had also to be re-established between padroni and operai so as to tie them into the social structure. Such attitudes underlined again the ruling class interests of many intransigenti including those in the II Section.

Also presented to the VII Congress was an extensive report by Marchese Bottini on the worker question and Christian corporations. 34 The first section was devoted to an examination of the worker question to establish what the problems were. Here too he linked the worker question to the development of modern industrialism. 35 He divided his analysis of the worker question into moral elements and material elements. Under

30 VII. p.149.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 VII. pp.201-57.
35 VII. p.203.
moral elements contributing to the worker question he included characteristics of factory work which indicated an absence of Catholic principles such as workers being subordinated to machines and no longer responsible for producing a complete product, no allowance being made for workers' spiritual and human needs, employment of women and mixing women with men. Another element which he mentioned was that of workers being attracted to irreligious and rebellious movements. Under material elements he listed low salaries, long working hours, lack of security of employment and low health standards in factories. These moral and material elements identified by Bottini as contributing to the worker question, could in fact be grouped under the titles, the introduction of a modern factory system and the nature of the new industrial labour force. What he was examining was the mode of operation of a new mode of production entailing new productive relations which demanded and created a different type of labour force to that which had existed under a craft-based system. Bottini's report set out cogently the position and nature of this new labour force, the oversupply of workers, widespread unemployment, lack of work security, employment of women and children to cut costs, workers powerless because they were obliged to work to live, paid on the basis of competition rather than needs or a just division of product. Bottini concluded that hatred of employers by workers was not surprising but what was surprising to him was that conflict was not more frequent. He attributed this to the restricted development of industry in Italy.

Bottini did not, however, condemn the industrial system on the basis of his examination as one might expect. Instead he expressed his opposition to le esagerate loro applicazioni,\textsuperscript{36} stressing the need to restore Catholic principles to industry. In setting out Catholic objections to the factory system and industrialisation, Bottini also indicated points at which the system was acceptable to the intransigenti. Hence he agreed that workers needed protection including State laws, and that they had just demands, but he warned against encouraging worker demands, thus making clear, points at which socialist principles were totally unacceptable to the intransigenti. In Brezzi's view, Bottini acknowledged the need for changes in the situation of workers but the proposals he put forward were still based on a paternalistic approach to the problem and an explicit acceptance of the necessity for a hierarchical social order for social conflict to be overcome. The clear implication was that workers had to accept their lot until and when members of the ruling class acted to ameliorate their situation.\textsuperscript{37}

Speeches given at the VIII Congress in 1890 by Medolago Albani and Bottini largely

\textsuperscript{36} VII. p.212
\textsuperscript{37} Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.276-9. See also pp.279-82, 286-7.
restated the points made by Bottini at the VII Congress. Both spoke of the situation of industrial workers employed under a system which was not based on Christian principles. In doing so they indicated that their criticisms did not imply wholesale rejection of the development of industrial capitalism, rather they were directed at setting out the need for certain protective regulations for workers. Medolago Albani and Bottini thus distinguished between the system causing social problems and conflict and the principles on which it was based. By doing so they were able logically to support social and economic structures against the attacks of socialists and the organised worker movement whilst agreeing that workers had legitimate demands. However, Bottini did also emphasise a preference for agriculture and the need for its protection over industrial development.38 Nevertheless, the references by these cristiano sociali to the role of the State in social and economic matters presented a new and contentious element given the opposition by the intransigenti to the Italian State. Medolago Albani, in fact, had changed his speech from the topic allocated to him by Toniolo, the duties of the ruling classes towards workers, to this subject following his return from a conference of European Catholics where it was a central concern. That he did so indicated his responsiveness to new currents of thinking in the Catholic world in relation to social and economic problems as well as an awareness that these issues needed to be brought to the attention of Italian Catholics even if his approach still tended to be one of paternalism. While Medolago Albani was pleased with the response at the Congress to the issues raised, his speech was all but ignored by the Catholic press, reflecting continuing problems many intransigenti had in coming to terms with issues involved in the social question and their resistance to new ideas and approaches.39

There were also the more extreme statements on industrial development made by people such as Monsignor Camilli, speaking at the XII Congress in 1894, which contrasted with the tendency to seek a means of adapting to the emerging capitalist mode of production. Camilli, on the other hand, expressed the hope that the modern form of work and product of capital, the proletariat, would disappear. He condemned liberalism as the basis of the economic system under which workers were oppressed to the extent that they were seeking their salvation from socialist and anarchist doctrines rather than the Church. Although referring briefly to the development of capitalism, Camilli was primarily concerned with condemning organised and spontaneous

38 VIII. pp.25-35, 121-32. See also VIII. Documenti, pp.22-4.
39 Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.424-6, 432-47. Members of the clergy and especially of the hierarchy were notably closed to many of the new ideas. Pius X held strongly to a traditional approach to the social question. See Agôcs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., pp.30-3.
rebellions by workers.\textsuperscript{40}

More general comments on the social question were made at later congresses which again focussed on underlying economic problems, the conditions of the working classes and their resistance to their powerlessness and poverty.\textsuperscript{41} In general, however, later congresses devoted more time to reports on specific conditions and practical proposals, mainly relating to organisations, rather than to general discussions. The emphasis was on being practical.\textsuperscript{42} This in part derived from the fact that it was the responsibility of the II Section to discuss the issues and then to put practical conclusions and proposals to the congresses but it was also the consequence of Paganuzzi's approach which laid more emphasis on practical organisation than theoretical study.\textsuperscript{43}

Paganuzzi's control over the direction of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}, his opposition to Catholic social action assuming a more dominant role within the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} and having a large degree of autonomy did result in the \textit{cristiano sociali} redirecting their energies elsewhere as has already been discussed. From the late 1880s the \textit{cristiano sociali}, particularly Toniolo, increasingly took their concerns outside the forum of the congresses to organisations they set up to look specifically at the social question in all its complexity, an action which indicated their social commitment but also their frustration with the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}.\textsuperscript{44} Another factor in the more practical approach to the social question was the dominant role played in the work of the II Section from 1892 by Cerutti. In addition to being more conservative than \textit{cristiano sociali} such as Medolago Albani and Toniolo, Cerutti was primarily interested in practical activity to alleviate some of the socio-economic problems.\textsuperscript{45} Thus the extent of the work undertaken by the \textit{cristiano sociali} does not tend to be reflected in the proceedings of the general assemblies of the congresses in terms of detailed reports rather the later practical orientation towards setting up socio-economic institutions emerges.

However, it was evident that the \textit{cristiano sociali}, despite the continuing presence in their thinking of conservative and paternalistic elements, had developed a more

\textsuperscript{40} XII. pp.81-93.
\textsuperscript{41} XIII. pp.272-7; XV. pp.290-3; XVI. pp.101-5, 220-35.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp.363-7, 385.
\textsuperscript{44} See Chapter 5, pp.116-8 regarding the \textit{Unione per gli studi sociali}. Groups were set up such as the \textit{Circolo dei Buoni Studi} in Palermo in which men who were later to become leading Christian democrats were involved. They held conferences and debates on social and economic issues. Renda, op. cit., pp.31-2.
profound response to the social question and had put considerable effort into studying its various facets and formulating proposals for action. This tendency towards a less ideological approach was probably due to a more realistic assessment by the cristiano sociali of the state of Italian society based on their active involvement in social and economic issues. Such was the case, for example, in Sicily, where Catholics lay and cleric became more concerned about the social question when faced by the worker agitations in 1893 and 1894. Even so most intransigenti, the cristiano sociali as well as the hardline intransigenti, saw the resolution of the social question as coming through the diminution of social conflict and antagonistic class relations. This view led them into contradictory stances in relation to the increasing dominance of the capitalist mode of production, which was producing the heightened level of conflict, because they were opposed to any challenge to the established order or structures (social, economic and political) which went outside legal protests, even if they thought that those structures were in part unjust. It was far from clear to many of the intransigenti as to what position should be adopted on the basis of Catholic teaching which was neither clear nor specific on the crucial issues with which the cristiano sociali were trying to come to terms. Hence the attempt to criticise the principles on which the capitalist system was based as it was applied in Italy while accepting the structures of that system. The cristiano sociali in particular produced a number of critical reports on the capitalist system as it affected agriculture and industry which looked in detail at the conditions of workers and peasants and frequently concluded that their demands were just. Nevertheless they were unable to resolve the contradictions which derived from both Catholic teaching as it confronted reality, and from their material interests as members of the ruling class. Nor did the situation improve after the issuing in 1891 of Rerum Novarum, the papal encyclical on the conditions of the working class, because it appears that while the encyclical encouraged and legitimised Catholic action in relation to the social question, as with most papal documents it avoided making definitive statements and took an essentially moderate position on the social question. In general, discussion of the social question took on more prominence within the Opera dei Congressi but it was not necessarily any more enlightened or freed from the constraints of traditional, formula-like responses except within the groupings of cristiano sociali and then the Christian democrats.

A further shift in the approach of the intransigenti to the social question came with the emergence of the Christian democrats in the late 1890s. Their interpretation of the

social question was not clearly apparent in the congress proceedings because action was
taken to avoid overt conflict at the congresses, but some general statements were made
which had either a critical or conciliatory tone towards the activities of the Christian
democrats. Clearly committed to the cause of the working classes, both rural and
urban, the Christian democrats did not lack contradictions in their interpretation of the
social question. These contradictions derived from the range of moderate and radical
groups within their ranks with differing political interpretations and positions on the
social, economic and political situation of Italy. Thus the Sicilian Christian democrat
priest, Sturzo, took a view of Sicilian society which was unlikely to gain favour with
the hardline intransigenti. Sturzo’s position was based on his understanding of the
specific structures and class relations of Sicilian society. He believed that a choice had
to be made between the landowners and the peasants in the debate over the social
question in its Sicilian form and he had no doubts about which side he was on. Renda
describes Sturzo’s position in the following terms:

La difesa degli interessi individuali e collettivi del contadino comportava un rifiuto
del regime proprietario vigente, una condanna dei rapporti sociali prevalenti
siccome ingiusti, ed una lotta sistematica e organizzata contro il latifondo ed i
latifondisti, siccome fonte di quella ingiustizia.

Murri and his supports followed a similar line. These more militant Christian
democrats came to regard la lotta di classe and resistenza as fundamental features of the
struggle by the rural and urban working classes to establish certain basis rights. On the
other hand Meda, as has been indicated, took a far more moderate approach which
ultimately led him and his supporters to defend the existing social and political order.
The responses of such Christian democrats and many of the intransigenti to the
repressive government action of 1898 as well as to the level of worker and peasant
agitations around these years made clear their concern to be seen as upholding social
order even if it maintained gross injustices thus underlining their essentially
conservative reaction to efforts by workers and peasants to change their situation.
The responses of the *intransigenti* to the complex elements covered by the label, the social question, were themselves complex and contradictory. The more conservative of the *intransigenti* tended to maintain a superficial and ideologically-bound approach. The *cristiano sociali* and the Christian democrats gradually developed a more profound understanding of the problems involved but their responses were also affected by their class positions and ideological stances. The threat of the socialist movement pushed many of them into openly acknowledging their shared interests with the liberal State. There remained only a small group of extreme Christian democrats who believed that the resolution of the social question demanded radical changes in which the Church should and could be involved.
General Comments on Capitalism

While the *intransigenti* tended to ignore, or at least underplay, the role of economic change in the social question, they did spend some time during the general assemblies of the congresses looking at what they believed to be some of the characteristics of the capitalist system of production. Speeches or comments of this nature were predominantly condemnatory although there were some qualifications which indicated that they did not reject capitalism in its entirety but rather certain aspects of it. These speeches on capitalism were not frequent and they tended to be given at the earlier congresses rather than those held during Paganuzzi's presidency, which was consistent with Paganuzzi's desire to avoid theoretical discussions of issues related to the social question. Some of the speeches were made by members of the II Section but a number were made by more hardline *intransigenti*. In general the speeches were strongly ideological in tone, reflecting basic ideological objections to many of the economic and social transformations being brought about by the development of capitalism. The main objection was to the dominance of materialism and individualism in the ideology of the ruling fraction controlling the State and directing economic developments, seen primarily by the *intransigenti* in the context of what they regarded as changed relations between *padroni* and *operai*, and in the treatment of workers, both rural and urban. The *intransigenti* regarded these changes as further steps in the destruction of society begun, they believed, with the French Revolution, the only remedy being the reinstatement of Catholic principles as the dominant ideology of the State and thus social order, harmony and Christian charity would be returned to economic and social relations. That there had always been a gap between the idealistic exposition of these ideological elements and reality was not acknowledged by the *intransigenti*.

The approach taken by the *intransigenti* can be seen in a speech given by Sassóli-Tomba to the IV Congress in 1877. Some of the characteristics of the capitalist system he outlined were the dominance of materialist principles, and of individualism and egoism, resulting in harsh relations between employers and workers, wage rates based on the law of supply and demand and kept at such a low level that workers could not afford to lose their jobs, the dominance of speculators and capitalists, the use of machines rather than workers, factory production, an immense increase in production and an exclusive preoccupation with *l'economia della mano d'opera*. In addition, he stated that workers deprived of Christian principles, were being drawn to theories based on the right to equality with consequent antagonism and hatred between workers.
and padroni.¹ Sassoli-Tomba was not objecting to economic development but rather to the dominance of theoretical principles, attitudes and beliefs over the direction of social, political and economic activity which, he believed, were in conflict with those based on Catholicism. Although he gave some details of the harshness of life for many workers under a capitalist system, his primary concern was to put forward a scheme by which Catholic principles could be re-established as those governing the functioning of social, economic and political structures and processes.²

At the following Congress, Sassoli-Tomba referred again to this conflict between Catholic principles and those then dominant, this time in the specific context of, as he described them, the economic sciences. He stated that Catholics welcomed material advances so long as they did not offend the eternal principles del giusto e del vero, linking reasonable material progress with recognition, by the economic sciences, of the true law of harmony that directed economic facts and natural forces. Instead, he argued, modern economists were ignoring these eternal principles,

facendola procedere a nome del diritto naturale dalla più sfrenata libertà applicata allo sviluppo dei fatti economici, riducendola poi per logica conseguenza a compendiarlisi nella morale utilitaria; ovvero facendola discendere dalla forza a nome del preteso, contratto sociale, riuscendo così a fil di logica alla consacrazione dei più iniqui sofismi socialisti e comunisti.³

Sassoli-Tomba stressed that economic processes had to be understood as being inseparably linked to religious and spiritual principles otherwise their understanding was false and defective.⁴ Not surprisingly in a longer speech to the same congress on the duties of landowners, Sassoli-Tomba made the statement that the production, distribution and consumption of wealth che formano l’oggetto dell’economia, while important, were means not the end of human society and as such had to be subordinated to the greater goals of virtue and the afterlife.⁵ In all these speeches Sassoli-Tomba made clear his overriding concern was with points at which he believed the dominant ideology conflicted with Catholic principles in its effects on economic activity. He was concerned about the direction of economic development but far more so about the motivations behind it. His plea was for moderate economic development contained within a settled, conservative social order based on Catholic principles.

¹ IV. pp.82, 87-9, 99; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.147-8.
² IV. pp.81-103.
³ V. p.409.
⁴ V. pp.229-31, 408-10.
⁵ V. p.137.
The points made by Sassoli-Tomba in relation to economic theories and practice were
expressed in more detail by Barone Savarese in a speech to the VI Congress in 1883.
He was looking at the causes of, as he put it, the grave moral and material conditions of
the working classes which, in keeping with the paternalism of the *intransigenti*, he
believed it was the duty of the wealthy classes to change. He did not think that all the
causes could be altered because of their complexity. Some of the causes he listed were
lack of employment, low wages and high taxes on necessities. Savarese argued that the
high taxes were disturbing

*nuto l'ordine de'fatti industriali, sostituendo una distribuzione artificiale ed
arbittaria, a quella distribuzione naturale dell'annuo prodotto sul quale vivono le
popolazioni.*

He disputed the distinction which, he claimed, was being drawn by science between the
production, distribution and consumption of wealth, maintaining that the distinction
was only methodological. Savarese stated that what economists described as the
distribuzione della ricchezza annuale was but the division of the value of the product
between the different agents who had contributed to make it. Each then took back their
share, thus restoring the productive forces. This distribution and production also, were
disturbed, according to Savarese, by a profusion of government costs and hence of
taxes. Savarese's argument then continued, that lack of work, low salaries and
emigration of workers in large numbers were the result of high taxes and parasitism of
government officials.

Savarese's argument, at this point, was too simplistic, ignoring many of the factors
which were contributing to the adverse situation of workers. These included an
increasing population that could not find sufficient employment given the limited
economic development, the policies implemented by the State to clear the debts it had
inherited from the battles for unification and other foreign involvements and the
determination of the State to establish an effective infrastructure and encourage
economic development. Another criticism that can be made of his argument is that his
emphasis on the role of workers as agents of production was inaccurate, more ideal
than real. This emphasis was, no doubt, a conscious attack on economic theories
which stressed the role of natural laws and which reduced workers to a component of
the production process whereas Savarese, following Catholic principles, regarded

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6 VI. p.315.
7 VI. pp.315-6.
workers as uniquely different. Savarese raised workers to an almost equal position, in terms of power, in relation to employers, when he spoke of the division of the product. In reality, however, the workers did not own a share of the product as a result of their labour, rather they had sold their labour power for wages. Savarese may have been referring to sharecroppers and similar categories of workers but if this was the case, he was still ignoring the complexity of the situation.

Savarese also attributed the discontent of the working classes to, as he described them, superfluous desires of workers created primarily by

false, empie ed antisociali dottrine materialiste del secolo; che movendo guerra alla fede religiosa, ed assegnando un'orgine ed un fine comune agli uomini ed alle bestie, ravvisano unicamente ne'godimenti materiali la meta di tutte le azioni umane.9

In an ideal society, Savarese believed, each class had particular needs suited to their means to fulfil them. These comments reflected the familiar, paternalistic attitudes, including a belief in the natural existence of a social hierarchy and the appropriate rights of each social class. Now, Savarese argued, wealth had ceased to be a means nor was it anymore:

...il benessere individuale e collettive degli individui, e delle diverse classi della cittadinanza.10

Instead it had become the primary goal:

...la molteplicita, e la varietà indefinita de' prodotti, è stata considerata come lo scopo finale dell'associazione civile, e di tutta l'attività umana.11

The balance and harmony that had been maintained by the theoretical understanding and practical application of these principles had been broken down at the end of the 18th century so Savarese claimed:

...l'illimitata moltiplicazione delle cose venali parve essere, non solamente lo scopo delle scienze economiche, della legislazione e di tutte le istituzioni politiche e

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9 VI. pp.316-7.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Savarese went on to argue that protective institutions, namely the corporazioni di arti e mestieri which had regulated trade and production, and provided protection for all social categories which belonged to them, had been abolished in the interests of the absolute liberty of industry and of free competition and thus the emphasis had been shifted from the collective to the individual. Savarese believed that efforts were made to reduce production costs to a minimum as a consequence of these changes. Hence machines were developed which had ended up replacing human labour. Capital had become the principal factor of human industry not just an auxiliary one. Because of the increase in products there was a greater need to create markets so prices were reduced with deleterious effects on wages and superfluous needs created. Savarese returned repeatedly to the central role of materialism. From this moral cause flowed, according to Savarese, industrial development, the extended use of machines and of factories, the monopoly of capital, the suppression of domestic industries, the enslavement of workers to machines, misery and immorality.

Savarese's brief, historical summary was in part accurate in its description of changes that had occurred and its outline of the causes of the impoverishment of workers and peasants. He also identified some of the contradictions within the capitalist system. Overall however, he tended to gloss over complexities in his rush to prove his main thesis which was that all contemporary ills could be attributed to materialism. Moreover, although he was extremely critical of capitalism and its effects, the only conclusion that he offered was one wholly consistent with that traditionally advocated by the Church, which was that the clergy and wealthier classes should assist the working classes both morally and materially in order to make the workers' lives less difficult and above all to preserve social order.

A similar speech was given at the VII Congress in 1887 by Salvatore d'Amelio who had been asked by the Comitato Generale Permanente to speak on the problems of economic science. His speech had similar themes - the grave state of contemporary society, the dreadful conditions of workers and peasants, social antagonism and turmoil, the deleterious effects of economic doctrines and the loss by religion of its central role in society. The bourgeoisie had triumphed over all obstacles, he said,
supplanting the clergy and the aristocracy. He observed that there had been an 
immeasurable increase in the wealth of the industrial world but the working classes had 
not shared in this wealth in anywhere near just proportions. The economic doctrines 
had contributed to this situation because they considered society as an end rather than 
means of human desires and perfection.16

L'uomo venne considerato macchina da lavoro, e il mondo degli esseri intelligenti 
un grande laboratorio dove chi produce non gode; e il capitalista l'impresa, il 
mercante sono le sole macchine dello Stato, le cui ruote...sono unte delle lagrime 
dell'operaio.17

Industry was the source of wealth. He pointed to various theoretical and practical 
approaches to the problems created by such a system of production ranging from 
liberals and social conservatives to socialists but concluded that one of the means by 
which the system needed to be changed was through the State playing a regulatory role. 
He also advocated a return to collective, corporative bodies such as the medieval 
corporation, indicating again the backward-looking paternalism that still dominated the 
intransigenti's attitudes towards contemporary economic structures. D'Amelio referred 
to the establishment in Europe of mutual aid societies and unions by workers to defend 
themselves, as a historical result of the capitalist system.

D'Amelio's observation that workers had been reduced to machinery raises the question 
as to whether regarding labour power as a commodity meant that workers or peasants 
were treated any more harshly under a capitalist system than a semi-feudal or pre-
capitalist mode of production. The lives of peasants, bound to their masters through 
ties of obligations and rents in kind, or of workers under a system of artisan 
production, could be just as harsh as those of the emerging urban or rural proletariat, 
with rapacious landowners or employers taking every opportunity to extract additional 
labour. In fact the lower levels of both the peasantry and the urban working class had 
been experiencing increasing impoverishment well before the late 1800s when 
capitalism began to take hold in Italy.18

D'Amelio was justly critical of the treatment of factory workers but his view of pre-
capitalist society, against which his criticisms were set, were idealistic not realistic, 
justified by a benevolent paternalism looking back longingly to a form of society in

16 VII. p.121.  
17 VII. p.121.  
18 Woolf, op. cit., pp.1050, 1060-1.
which, in reality, life was never easy for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. D'Amelio's objections to capitalism were primarily ideological, reflecting the difficulties the *intrattenenti* had in coming to terms, in a conceptual sense, with many of the fundamental transformations occurring with the increasing dominance of capitalism, their main objection being the rejection by the ruling fraction of the ideological role of the Catholic Church in upholding and justifying a particular social order. They were not objecting so much to the economic changes but rather to the abandonment of Catholic principles from which they believed social stability derived.

To take such a position was not unreasonable given that the weight of capitalist production was still far from dominant and also that they shared with other members of the ruling class the desire to maintain largely pre-capitalist relations while being open to a degree of economic change.\(^1\) D'Amelio argued that Christian principles could not be omitted from proposed solutions to existing socio-economic problems because society derived from God not the will of man, moreover society was the *imagine di Dio*.

D'Amelio also expressed opposition to the intrusive tendency of the State to the pernicious logic with which the State

\[
\textit{si troverebbe autorizzato ad impadronirsi di tutti gli strumenti di produzioni}
\]

in contrast to

\[\textit{l'affermazione del dogma cristiano che non viola la libertà dell'individuo, perché s'inchina al Bene ed all'Ordine universale.}\]

\[
\textit{Libera beneficenza con libero stato e libero comune: questo è la logica conseguenza di tutte le dottrine economiche, che hanno per punto di partenza l'ordine sociale e la dignità dell'individuo.}\]

These comments seem to verge on individualism of which d'Amelio was aware because he added the qualification that these concepts differed from a *laissez faire* approach because they were based on Christian faith.\(^2\) Despite these qualifications there was a clear opening to individualism in the social and economic concepts that d'Amelio was setting out indicating that although the *intrattenenti* expressed implacable opposition to this element of the dominant ideology, they themselves were not free of it.

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\(^{1}\) See Chapter 2, pp.35, 41-2; Brezzi, *Cristiano sociali*, op. cit., p.257.

\(^{2}\) VII. pp.123-6.
Bottini's lengthy report to the VII Congress also included a section in which he examined economic theories that had relevance to the social question. He was concerned primarily with the effects of classical political science.

La scienza economica, detta classica, alla quale dobbiamo in gran parte il moderno industrialismo, fonda le sue teorie sopra il principio filosofico materialista-utilitario, cercando una pretesa armonia fra gli interessi dimenticando i doveri.\(^2^2\)

This harmony did not exist, Bottini argued, because everyone had their own interests and they were often irreconciliable. It was not enough to look simply to interests, one had to include duties for harmony to exist:

La scienza economica classica si occupa delle ricchezze e spiega le leggi che ne regolano la produzione, la distribuzione ed il consumo, ma spesso dimentica il fine di queste ricchezze ossia l'uomo; od almeno se ne foggia uno a suo modo, un uomo produttore e consumatore e nulla altro.\(^2^3\)

But people were more than that, Bottini maintained, arguing that their most important aspects, their moral, social and spiritual needs, had been neglected by economic theory so it had diverted scientific theories from the right path and had led to social disorder. The principle of individualism had come to dominate in social and economic considerations and as a consequence various voluntary societies, by which Bottini meant the medieval corporations and religious confraternities, were abolished.\(^2^4\)

Il principio della libertà individuale fu emancipato dalle leggi morali che indirizzano il libero arbitrio dell'uomo verso il bene, e fu proclamata questa libertà sconfinata come preziosa conquista dell'umanità e come causa efficiente di benessere sociale.\(^2^5\)

Bottini went on to describe the abolition of the corporations in France in the late 18th century which he attributed to the desire to give people in the area of industry complete freedom of action as well as to prevent the association of workers of the same trade. He quoted Adam Smith to the effect that people of the same trade, if they met together, generally ended up conspiring against the public or plotting to raise prices. Bottini condemned the abolition of the corporations in France and their subsequent abolition in other European States including Italy, arguing that an innate right of association was

\(^{22}\) VII. p.213.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
\(^{24}\) VII. pp.213-4.
\(^{25}\) VII. p.214.
thus denied, and as such their abolition was an act against nature and justice. People were less free rather than the opposite. Workers were left defenceless against their padroni.26

Unlike Savarese and d'Amelio, Bottini saw some value in the work of classical political economy:

*L'economia politica classica ha nonpertanto reso dei segnalati servigi, perché come scienza d'osservazione ha scoperto ed ha formulato delle leggi economiche, intorno alla produzione, alla divisione ed al consumo delle ricchezze delle quali l'umanità si è materialmente avvantaggiata.*27

Nevertheless, Bottini believed some of the laws were incorrect and could not be applied without coming into conflict with moral laws. Like Savarese and d'Amelio, Bottini believed that the fundamental flaw in classical political economy was its disregard for moral laws or, as he put it, moral philosophy, however, his criticisms were tempered by a more considered judgement.

Bottini argued that the application of these economic theories harmed not only the moral order but also the economic order. He gave the example of the regulation of prices by the law of supply and demand as expressed by classical political economy. While he agreed that it was true in the majority of cases he believed its extension to wages was erroneous:

*Si è preteso di applicarla anche al salario, sostenendo che il lavoro dell'uomo è una merce, e ciò è inesatto scientificamente, è indecoroso per l'uomo, è dannoso per l'operaio.*28

Bottini denied that labour was a commodity or a thing, rather it was, in his view, an action,

*l'azione dell'uomo che applica le sue forze intellettuali e fisiche per ottenere un risultato (sic) economico.*29

Again the objection was to any diminution of people to objects even for the sake of

26 VII. pp.214-5.
27 VII. p.215.
28 Ibid.
29 VII. pp.215-6.
analysis because to the intransigenti such an approach was a denial of the spiritual and moral aspects of human beings.

Quindi il patto che intercede fra padrone ed operaio quando si stabilisce la mercede del lavoro non è una compra e vendita, ma invece un contratto di locazione d’opera, perché l’operaio non vende nulla di sè stesso, ma concede soltanto, in corrispettivo di un tanto da stabilirsi, l’uso delle sue braccia e della sua mente per uno scopo determinato.30

To regard work as a commodity was to reduce people to machines

che produce e che consuma come tutte le altre, quasi chè non avesse altre funzioni che quelle appunto di produrre e di consumare.31

Bottini believed that this error was very harmful to workers because it established as just, a wage arrived at on the basis of supply and demand, rather than on the basis of the proportion of the benefit that workers brought to the employer or in proportion to the workers' needs. Bottini was aware of the needs of workers. He concluded that Smith had made an error of intellect rather than will, which was proof that even i più grandi uomini, as he put it, could be mistaken if they were not guided by the supreme truths of Christian religion.32

Bottini also pointed to England as proof of the defects in classical political economy where, he argued, these economic theories were applied first and more extensively than elsewhere and there had been great production of wealth but little distribution.33

Infatti in nessun paese d’Europa, come in Inghilterra, la più sconfinata opulenza degli uni fa si disgustoso contrasto colla squallida miseria degli altri, in nessun altro paese si trovano tanti esempi di ricchi Epuloni e di poveri Lazzari.34

Bottini believed then, that the solution lay in restoring morality based on Catholic principles to industry, that is to employers, workers, industrial institutions and economic science that governed it.35 However, he was aware of the problems such a

30 VII. p.216.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 VII. pp.216-7.
34 VII. p.217.
35 Ibid.
solution implied in the contemporary situation of industry where the efforts of one 
*padrone* to raise workers' wages could be destroyed by excessive competition which 
lowered the prices of their products so that the costs of production could not be 
increased. Nevertheless he believed that religious principles could be and had to be 
returned to science.

*L'economia politica è la scienza delle ricchezze, ma le ricchezze servono all'uomo, 
dunque il fine ultimo di questa scienza è l'uomo.*

It was therefore necessary that political economy incorporated a true concept of people 
in all their facets and this could only be given by the Catholic religion. Bottini gave the 
example of liberty:

*La Religione Cattolica dà il vero concetto della libertà e la circoscrive nei suoi giusti 
limiti, varcati i quali diventa licenza ed oppressione del debole. Perciò essa tempera 
la libertà coll'autorità e le presenta ambedue come derivanti da un'origine comune, 
cioè dal concetto di un Dio eterno. Essa inoltre è fautrice di vera libertà, perché 
proclama l'eguaglianza degli uomini.*

Liberty could only be fully understood in these terms. Equally Bottini maintained that 
Catholic religion gave a stable foundation to property, that is gave it moral and religious 
justification, holding it to emanate from a natural right and thus from God. It did not 
derive from the State. He then returned to the paternalistic themes of the *intransigenti*, 
that *padroni* had rights over subordinates because they were conferred on the *padroni* 
by God but they had to be tempered by concern for the well-being of the subordinates. 
Furthermore Catholic morality had to form the foundation of relations between people 
based on justice, charity and the balancing of duties and rights.

Bottini did not oppose, however, the changes brought by mechanisation and other 
technical advances. He recognised the need to acknowledge that a revolution had been 
brought about in industry which he did not want to oppose nor could anyone in his 
view. He believed the problems they faced were the consequence of abuse of these 
means not their use. He pointed to the effects of excessive competition in lowering 
prices to a very low level, so it followed that wages fell, working hours were 
increased, female and child labour used and hygienic conditions worsened. Bottini was

36 VII. p.218.  
37 Ibid.  
38 VII. pp.218-9.
not opposed to competition but only to excessive competition which he believed had to be restrained by protective action.  

Bottini concluded his examination of economic theories with a brief reconsideration of the effects of political economy. It had governed industry to date and had its merits, he said, but it had also opened the way to socialism through its false philosophical principles and its erroneous theories. The only way to oppose these developments was, he argued, through *l'economia politico cristiana* because it was based on true and immutable principles.

*riconoscendo fino ad un certo punto giuste ed eque le domande della classe operaia, può assumerne la protezione e cost sottrarla all'influenza ed al dominio del socialismo.*  

The consideration given here to the theoretical section of Bottini's report is of value because of the perceptive and considered nature of Bottini's comments. He did not dismiss classical political economy and its achievements in an abrupt, ideological manner before moving on to extoll the virtues of Catholic morality as applied to society and the economy as other *intransigenti* tended to do. Instead he examined in some detail the positive contributions made by classical political economy while highlighting its defects. His comments were probably the most detailed ones given at the congresses on economic theories and their effects although they composed only a small part of his report on the social question and Christian corporations. Although many of the points he made clearly derived from the paternalistic and socially conservative attitudes of the *intransigenti* he illustrated them lucidly with examples of relevance such as individual liberty and excessive competition. It was above all not an ideological diatribe but a well-set out survey of the economic theories on which capitalism was based and their practical effects, indicating that members of the II Section were making some advances in their understanding and approach to contemporary socio-economic issues. Furthermore, it again indicated that the *intransigenti*'s opposition to capitalism was far from total opposition despite their severe criticisms.

Medolago Albani, speaking for the II Section made far more emotive and condemnatory comments than Bottini on the effects of the *laissez faire* school, as he described it, when he addressed the VIII Congress (1890) on the need for State intervention in social

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39 VII. p.220.  
40 Ibid. Bottini also presented proposals to the same Congress on the need to study economic science using Christian philosophy as a basis. VII. pp.149-50.
and economic questions to protect the rights of workers. He referred to the \textit{laissez faire} school’s opposition to State intervention as a principle proclaimed by its supporters:

\begin{quote}
E noi vediamo ogni giorno, dopo ormai un secolo di quasi assoluto dominio di questa scuola che ha chiamato sè stessa, con più jattanza che verità, scuola economica ortodossa, a che abbia approdato il famoso suo lasciate fare, lasciate passare! noi vediamo ogni giorno a che abbia condotto il libero gioco delle forze economiche!
\end{quote}

The domination of this school had resulted, Medolago Albani declared, in the domination of the economy by men without faith or interest in justice or charity.

\begin{quote}
...che non hanno altro movente delle loro azioni che il proprio interesse, altro fine della loro vita che il proprio guadagno, tutto si credono lecito purché moltiplichino il loro averi.\end{quote}

As a consequence, Medolago Albani stated, they exploited their workers harshly for their own profits so that there was widespread moral and physical degradation. Medolago Albani’s descriptions of the effects of dominance of these ideological beliefs and their associated actions contrasted strongly with the more measured and considered approach taken by Bottini three years before. It was not that Medolago Albani’s comments were exaggerated but rather that they were being used to an ideological end which was to convince his listeners of the need to support State action to protect workers from the worst abuses. However, by his condemnatory approach, he ruled out any consideration of the potential value of economic development in providing greater employment for example, or of the impetus for such development being anything other than greed.

\begin{quote}
Lasciate passare e sopra i deboli passano i potenti e li calpestano, lasciate fare e sul diritto trionfa l’egoismo, e sulla giustizia la forza abietta e brutale. Si è voluta la libertà assoluta d’ogni cosa e si è trovata l’anarchia.
\end{quote}

Medolago Albani stressed that trampling on the rights of workers would result in their

\begin{itemize}
\item[41] VIII. pp.25-35.
\item[42] VIII. p.27.
\item[43] Ibid.
\item[44] VIII. pp.27-8.
\item[45] VIII. p.28.
\end{itemize}
violent revolt. He accused the *scuola Manchesteriana* of being responsible for the emergence of the socialist movement which cried that *lo Stato debba far tutto*. The Manchester school, he declared, had done so because of its abuse of a sickly liberty which was, in reality, unrestrained licence. He was equally opposed to socialism in theory and practice although he allowed that its criticisms of the contemporary situation were valid. The consequence of socialism would be, he held, tyranny of the State where every personal initiative, every private liberty, and all private property would be destroyed.46

Instead Medolago Albani was proposing that the State must do good, that it had a duty to intervene to protect the laws of justice. As an aside he did extoll the beneficial effects of acts of charity but believed they were insufficient without State action, an argument which led to considerable controversy.47 Medolago Albani also placed limits on the role of the State:

> Salva la giustizia, garantiti i diritti di tutti, tutelato l'ordine pubblico, lo Stato non ha più ragione alcuna ad intervenire nei privati affari di ciascun membro della società, nelle singole imprese, nelle particolari proprietà. Ciascuno può e deve amministrare e condurre i propri interessi come meglio crede. Se ciò non fosse, sarebbe tarpatate le ali a tutte le private iniziative che sono fonte di attività mirabile e di grandezza economica.48

In these comments Medolago Albani indicated the need to make some appeal to individualism, to the economic activities of individuals. It would seem to suggest that on the whole he accepted the existing economic structures and relations so long as they were ameliorated by some protection being given to workers. He returned again to the argument that morality based on Catholic beliefs had to be restored to society.49 The objection to the economic structures was not so much to their nature but rather to abuses of power and to behaviour unrestrained by Catholic beliefs, although one could argue that practising Catholics, by keeping spiritual and economic spheres separate, were just as capable as atheists, of abusing their power. Medolago Albani implied that this was not the case, taking an idealistic view rather than a realistic one.

Medolago Albani also highlighted some of the characteristics of the contemporary capitalist system in his speech to the IX Congress (1891) on the work of the II

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46 Ibid.
47 VIII. pp.27-9.
48 VIII. p.33.
49 VIII. pp.34-5.
His comments on capitalism were similar in tone to those he made to the previous Congress although on this occasion he referred to specific aspects of the system rather than to general ideological motivations. He referred in particular to the threat by capitalists and socialists to the stable ownership of landed property which was of especial concern to him because of the central role he believed landed property played in creating national and domestic wealth. More than that, Medolago Albani and other intransigenti regarded landed property as giving a stable moral and material basis to society. Instead it was being destroyed by capitalists:

*Non è essa da una parte assorbita dai grandi capitalisti, per lo più ebrei, che rifanno quei latifundia che romanos perdisse? e dall'altra, sminuzzata oltre misura, od irretita da enormi pesi ipotecarii, per cui il proprietario non è più tale di fatto, ma è solo castaldo ed amministratore di una banca o di un capitalista qualunque? Non assistiamo noi ogni giorno a vendite forzate di piccole proprietà d'onde è cacciato il secolare padrone dal fisco inesorabile, e mandato ad accrescere la moltitudine dei proletari senza tetto, senza dimora fissa, e quasi senza famiglia e patria?*

Medolago Albani stressed the ideological point that Catholics, following the lead of the pope, had to affirm the ownership of property as an inviolable right, otherwise they made themselves allies of socialism and communism. He combined, in his argument, the impact of capitalist processes and a tenet of socialism as being the same thing, a common interpretation made by the intransigenti until the early 1900s when they began to differentiate more clearly between capitalist processes being promoted by the governing liberals and the proposed form of a socialist system. The failure to see the basic differences between capitalism and socialism in regard to property derived from the intransigenti's preference for a particular form of ownership of landed property as the basis to a social order in which aristocrats formed the pinnacle of a social and economic hierarchy beneath which there was a peasantry, whose access to the land was through obligations and a proportion of products, or ownership of a small piece. To the intransigenti, even the cristiano sociali, the impact of capitalism and socialism was the same, at least in the short term. They were, above all, reluctant to try to understand the differences, thus indicating the severe limitations to their understanding of both capitalism and socialism and their basic characteristics.

Another issue raised by Medolago Albani in his speech was that of the wage rates paid

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50 IX. pp.68-78.
51 IX. pp.74-5.
to workers. He stated that almost every time that workers asked for justice they were
rejected, leaving them in a dire situation, tyrannised by a liberal and socialist political
economy. Again he slid over the two very different systems. He believed that the
harsh actions of employers were due to their financial inability to cede to just demands.
He could not find any other reason sufficient to justify their stand. He went on to
explain that employers were forced to act thus because of unlimited competition which
in turn was caused by individualism and hence by greed.53

Sotto l'impero dell'individualismo, il progresso industriale di questi ultimi tempi si
presentò sotto un aspetto grossolano e cupidò. Si dice: in questa impresa c'è da
guardare del denaro: ma per riuscirvi conviene procurarsi del denaro, molto
denaro. E il denaro si cerca: e il denaro si trova nel credito che si apre a tutti, nelle
banche che si costituiscono in ogni luogo; ed ogni audace che non ha un soldo di
suo mette in piedi delle imprese fenomenali con denari tolti ad imprestato, e non
esita a sopracaricare i guadagni futuri di interessi favolosi. Quindi è che, perché un
guadagno gli resti, è duopo che produca il più che puo, nel più breve tempo e col
minimo costo possibile. E siccome per l'acquisto delle materie prime, e per gli
strumenti, grandi economie non può fare, è sulla mano d'opera che lesina, sulla
mano d'opera la quale non può rifiutare di servirlo anche a vilissime condizioni, 
perché per essa il rimanere oziosa equivale a morire.54

The ills of the worker were also due then, he argued, to badly regulated credit and the
trading of unlimited amounts of money. He interpreted the provision of credit in
traditional terms, quoting the pope:

la divoratrice usura, l'usura vorax, che condannata tante volte dalla Chiesa.55

Usury, he said, was now sitting sovereign in the banks and stock exchanges, becoming
rich in idleness with the money that could have paid for workers' necessities. He did
make the point though, that this modern system was complex and had to be studied in
detail by Catholics.

E tutto quel sistema complesso, involuto, complicato, che è una fortezza
inespugnabile per chi la governa, un mistero per i profani, per chi gli si avvicina un
labirinto da cui non si esce, un fascino a cui non si resiste, una catena che vi tiene

53 IX. pp.75-6.
54 IX. p.76.
55 Ibid.
Yet he returned again to stress that this greed for money and this new system were usury under a new form. While Medolago Albani acknowledged that the new system was complex and different he still concluded that a pre-capitalist and essentially rural society, had certain fundamental characteristics which were identical with those of this new system. Perhaps he did so because, when reduced to a moral level he could sustain this argument and in such a way, furthermore, that the conservative Catholics involved in the Opera dei Congressi, many of whom were unfamiliar with the socio-economic issues in terms other than charitable, could have some understanding of the problems arising out of the capitalist transformations occurring in Italy at the time. The pressures of the occasion of a congress may have contributed strongly to such an approach. However, it also obscured the fundamental differences between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. The provision of money through usury, which was still occurring particularly in rural areas, and the provision and functions of capital under a capitalist system were not the same process. To treat them as identical did nothing to advance the intransigenti’s understanding of capitalism and its implications for the social formation which the intransigenti wanted to recreate.

Medolago Albani returned to the subject of credit in speeches he made at the XI (1894) and XIII (1895) Congresses. On both occasions he dealt with credit in a similar fashion to his approach at the IX Congress, describing its functions in moralistic terms. It was, he said, a powerful instrument of material prosperity in the hands of those interested in justice and honesty, or a terrible temptor of human greed in the hands of people motivated by materialism and egoism. It had to be returned

\[ \text{alle sue vere ed uniche funzioni di giusto ed imparziale regolatore della circolazione monetaria e di soventore ai reali bisogni della agricoltura e del commercio.} \]

Instead, he stated, it was being used for often shameless and disgraceful speculation,

\[ \ldots \text{a scopo di lucro di chi lo esercita, sicchè unico intento degli istituti bancari sia quello di tenere alte le proprie azioni in borsa, e dare agli azionisti grossi} \]

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56 IX. p.77.
57 Ibid.
59 XI. pp.110-1.
60 XI. p.111.
He described it again as devouring usury that consumed private and public wealth, that absorbed the hard earned savings of peasants and workers which could be destroyed in an instant by a failed speculation, and that threatened the social structure itself. The provision of credit, *quell'immorale commercio del danaro*, as he described it, was being exercised in a mode unknown to their fathers. Medolago Albani also pointed to increased class conflict, describing it in terms of the socialists having thrown down the gauntlet to capital, indicating that he was distinguishing to some degree between socialists and capitalists. But, he argued, the *padroni* were tied to the chariot of liberal political economy and would not even listen to the just demands of workers.

The comments made by Medolago Albani to the XIII Congress were along similar lines. Through the establishment of Catholic credit institutions Catholic morality had revived in commerce and industry and even in the *traffico del denaro*, where *laissez faire* policies had dominated for a half century. As Catholics they were entering into

*quel labirinto del credito, della circolazione e della distribuzione del danaro, dove ha quasi dimora e campo trincerato il più grave errore economico e sociale, il capitalismo.*

He also pointed to the evils experienced by the less wealthy classes as a consequence of the *abuso del traffico del danaro* and of *la divoratrice usura*. The II Section was devoting itself in the coming year to the study of Church doctrine in regard to credit, so that through Catholic activity, religious principles could be returned to its provision and operation, thus freeing society from the *incubo* of capitalism and defending it from the threats of socialism.

The extreme nature of the condemnatory references to banks and other credit institutions can, in part, be explained by the speculative activity with which they were involved in these years and the collapse of the principal credit organisations in the early 1890s. In the light of these events many of Medolago Albani’s comments were valid. Nevertheless he omitted any reference to government actions to prevent a recurrence of

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 XI. pp.111-2.
64 XIII. p.149.
65 Ibid.
66 XIII. p.150.
these events, choosing to interpret the activities of the banks as representative of the operation of the capitalist system as a whole rather than looking at State regulation as a means of preventing abuses on a large scale. His main point was that religion was the most secure guarantee of the morality, justice, prosperity and security of social and civil relations, and of economic institutions.\textsuperscript{68} Again his objection was primarily a moral one, drawn from the harsh reality of capitalist processes, but not necessarily one which offered the intransigenti an alternative system, rather a moderate reform of the existing one.

Two other people who looked briefly at the provision of credit were Cerutti and Toniolo, in reports which were primarily concerned with the setting up of Catholic credit institutions.\textsuperscript{69} Cerutti's main interest was in the provision of small amounts of credit to peasants and later to workers. The only credit available to these people was through usury according to Cerutti. Capital which may have been available was flowing instead to

\[ \text{speculazioni disoneste di borsa od in fallaci imprese di commercio e d'industria.} \textsuperscript{70} \]

Cerutti was concerned with finding a practical solution to a structural problem which was the lack of capital available for small undertakings. Sufficient capital for industrial development did not become available on a consistent basis until the mid-1890s and there was even less capital available for small agricultural undertakings.\textsuperscript{71}

Toniolo, at the XIV Congress (1896) gave some evidence of the theoretical work that he was involved with on the provision of credit:

\begin{quote}
\textit{In altra sede, cioè nel recente Congresso scientifico di Padova, si discussero i principii etici ed economici, che deggiono presiedere al credito nel suo concetto cristiano e nelle sue logiche deduzioni; conchiudendo essere falso e pericoloso il sistema economico odierno, che poggia pressochè tutta la produzione sul credito, cioè sul prestito feneratizio, piuttosto che sulla associazione del capitale al lavoro; ed argomentando da ciò la sapienza antica della Chiesa, che coi suo divieti, discipline e freni intorno al mutuo, intendeva a preservare la giustizia ed implicitamente a prevenire il pervertimento dei generali rapporti economici.} \textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{68} XIII. p.150.
\textsuperscript{69} XI. pp.116-23; XIV. pp.186-94.
\textsuperscript{70} XI. pp.117, 123.
\textsuperscript{71} See Chapter 2, pp.37-8.
\textsuperscript{72} XIV. p.187.
\end{footnotes}
He also made some reference to speculation by the capitalist class on the banks and stock exchanges beginning to show signs of diminishing and took this as a sign of a return to Christian principles. The comments made by both Cerutti and Toniolo to the function and operation of credit under an increasingly capitalist economy were brief and general because it was not the purpose of either of them to look at these issues in detail. Although more tempered, both used similar terminology to Medolago Albani and both emphasised the role of morality, based on Catholic beliefs, in regard to the operation of capital. All three men were aware of the importance of capital in the evolving economy and regardless of their loud objections to capitalists and the capitalist system, all three were involved in establishing a Catholic credit movement, indicating a tacit acceptance, at least of existing economic structures.

Ideological references were likewise strong in the speech made to the IX Congress by Gusmini on wages. He gave a brief description of the division of society as he saw it. He described the world as being divided into three great classes almost always in conflict with each other. The first class was composed of capitalists whom he described as pleasure-seeking and living solely on usura sfrenata e sfruttante, the second of padroni involved in trying to establish large industries who may or may not succeed in ascending to the first class, and the third, composed of workers in miserable conditions, deprived of all property and forced to live on the little they could earn from their labour. Corruption had been brought by revolutionary ideas, workers were imprisoned in factories, tied to machines with little choice of finding better employers. It was his belief that the system could be improved but its fundamental faults would still produce social disorder. He acknowledged, however, the impossibility of eradicating the system.

Gusmini's central concern in this speech was with wages and he discussed in some detail the ways in which the level of wages were established and what Catholics regarded as just levels. He pointed to the effects of an oversupply of workers in relation to jobs available and the employment of women and children in large numbers. Rather than basing wages on need, as he believed they should be, they were based on supply and demand. Gusmini quoted St Thomas to the effect that wages were the share, to which workers were entitled, of the fruits of their production, of which they had in part been the cause through their labour. He argued that this definition denied

73 Ibid.
74 Some would argue that they went further. See discussion in Chapter 11.
75 IX. pp.216-27.
76 IX. pp.217-8.
77 IX. p.220.
the socialist claim, championed by Marx and drawn by him from Riccardo, that every value derived from labour, asserting that all the profit of the production was due to the worker. He believed that such a view would never be accepted. He than argued that the owner had a right to the fruits of his property:

...da una parte il proprietario ha diritto ai frutti della sua proprietà, ed il capitalista, anche ritenendo il capitale per sè infruttifero, deve essere ricompensato del pericolo cui pone il suo capitale: dall'altra proprietario e capitalista, molto più se sono imprenditori, concorrono naturalmente e necessariamente anch'essi col proprio lavoro più o meno materiale alla produzione.  

Gusmini was clearly arguing in support of the prerogatives of property owners, capitalist or otherwise, a position which derived naturally from the socially conservative attitudes of the intransigenti. Their opposition to the contemporary social formation and to existing social and economic relations could not provoke them into a more radical stance, because of their basic concern for social order and stability. However, what Gusmini's argument also indicates is that the intransigenti could be drawn upon potentially to defend a predominantly capitalist system in the face of revolutionary challenge as did occur in the early 1900s.

Having set out the rights of owners, Gusmini turned to the question as to what workers were entitled to as a result of their labour. He reiterated his earlier argument that workers were entitled to the proportion they had contributed to production because

il lavoro è per sè medesimo proprietà dell'operaio, perché altro non è che la sua forza in quanto estrinsecata e posta in movimento per ottenere questa o quella produzione, per avere questo o quel frutto.  

Not to pay workers this proportion was, he believed, thievery. However, he also believed that workers had to be paid sufficient to cover their basic needs because while people were made in order to work, their ultimate end was their happiness, work was not their ultimate end but only their immediate end. Gusmini's argument here is interesting because it went beyond justifying the payment of wages sufficient to cover basic needs, that is the thrifty and frugal life of a worker, to suggest there were other social needs that had to be allowed for in the fixing of wages. Gusmini added that if

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 IX. p.221.
the labour produced much more fruit than the worker had a right to higher wages on that basis. In contrast, under the influence of economists, employers regarded

\[ \text{il lavoro dell'uomo come una vile merce, ed il salario come un prezzo} \]

\[ \text{corrispondente, si è stabilito per base della compra vendita la stregua della domanda e della offerta.} \]

He accepted that supply and demand did influence the price of labour but could not accept that these factors could make just what was unjust. He believed these factors should remain only a secondary concern and that the State should intervene to ensure that wages were just.

Gusmini’s argument on wages indicated some of the contradictory attitudes the \textit{intransigenti} held. Condemnation of wage labour and defence of workers was intertwined with defence of the rights of owners and capitalists as Gusmini described them. Furthermore, although he expressed opposition to the role of supply and demand in fixing wages, he indicated, at the same time, a degree of acceptance. What did he mean by these factors playing only a secondary role and how could such ideas be put into practice? At this point his argument was unrealistic. Nevertheless his discussion of wages was one of the most detailed that was given to a congress and gave some indication of its function under a capitalist system although he did not go much beyond Bottini’s consideration of the issue at the VII Congress.

There were several more speeches made at the later congresses which touched on the impact of capitalist processes in Italy. The issues they raised were the effects of uncontrolled competition, wage levels, workers treated as machines and the role of materialist and individualist theories and attitudes. Their approach was similar to that of the speeches already discussed. All of the speeches of this nature made by the \textit{intransigenti} tended to take a strongly ideological approach although Bottini’s report in particular reflected a less automatic response. Despite the high ideological content, their speeches indicate a fairly clear understanding of the basic processes of capitalism though it was not always consistent. That their understanding of capitalist processes was imperfect is not surprising given that the direction of the development of capitalism in Italy was not obvious in the years of the congresses of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} although it was becoming more so by the time of its demise. On the other

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{81}} \text{ Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{82}} \text{ Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{83}} \text{ XI. pp.174-6; XII. pp.81-93; XV. pp.290-1; XVI. pp.219-35.} \]
hand, alongside the condemnatory remarks and expression of sincere concern for
workers, there were some indications that the *intransigentes* could accommodate
themselves to capitalism because of their predominantly conservative concerns in
relation to society and the economy and because of the fact that their objections were
largely moral ones. While most of the speeches referring specifically to capitalism
expressed a desire for the re-establishment of a more familiar and acceptable society, it
was also apparent that accommodation was possible, ideally through the application of
Christian principles to the system.
The *intransigenti* and Urban Conditions

Beyond the consideration of the general effects of capitalist processes, the *intransigenti* also devoted considerable time at the general assemblies of the congresses to the conditions of the urban working class. This class was beginning to increase during the late 1800s as industrial development took off. Even though the urban working class was still vastly outnumbered by that of rural workers, the more general references and major reports at the congresses on the conditions of the labouring masses focussed on urban workers and, in particular, on their employment in factories. The reports on the urban working class were also more comprehensive and thorough than the few given on agriculture and there was a more consistent analysis of the causes of the poor conditions of urban workers. It is likely that the greater focus on the urban working class had much to do with the *intransigenti’s* preference for a stable agricultural society rather than an economy in which industrial production played an increasingly important role. Despite their ideological concerns and the frequent condemnations of the system which was responsible for factory production, the reports given by the *intransigenti* were not reactionary diatribes. Although they regarded these socio-economic changes as a threat to the stability of society they also showed a concern to set out some standards to protect workers and advocated State intervention as a means of guaranteeing certain rights.

The conditions of urban workers were mentioned only briefly at the first few congresses and then largely in relation to peasants migrating to cities in search of work. Cities were depicted as places of evil and temptation where innocent peasants were led astray by revolutionary and sectarian ideas, a theme to which the *intransigenti* often returned.1 The programs of the II and III Congresses listed the following issues which related to urban workers:

*Opere di Previdenza* - *Miglioramento delle abitazioni degli operai*

*Opere Miste* - *Studi* - *Dei mezzi, onde rimediare agli’inconvenienti ed agli abusi dell’industria moderna, quali sono:*

*a) l’agglomerazione degli operai nei centri manifatturieri*

*b) la durata eccessiva del lavoro*

*c) la promiscuità dei sessi e delle età*

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1 I. pp.130-6, 143-4; IV. pp.178-86.
However, none of these subjects was addressed in the general assemblies of either Congress although it appears that the employment of women and children for heavy factory work was discussed in private sessions of the II Section at the III Congress. Also raised at the same time were the issues of employment of women alongside men in factories, payment to male workers of salaries sufficient to support a family, employment of pregnant women and the hours worked by children. A proposal relating to the improvement of workers' homes was approved by the II Section at the III Congress but was not presented to the general assembly of the Congress. The complexity of the issues, a lack of intransigenti capable of positive contribution and of time at the congresses hampered the work of the II Section in these early years. It was not until the IV Congress that the social question was looked at in any detail. On this occasion there were several speeches looking at related issues. For the first time problems relating to workers were the focus of speeches made to the general assembly rather than being referred to in relation to other issues, for example in connection to rural problems. At the following two Congresses some aspects of the worker question were again looked at but the references continued to be at a general level. The first detailed reports did not appear until the VII Congress in 1887 when Bottini presented his lengthy report.

It is probably not surprising that issues relating to urban workers were not examined in any detail until the VII Congress. Up until the V Congress in 1879 there was only limited industrial development with a correspondingly limited workforce which often maintained links with the countryside and was not always totally dependent on income from wage labour. Although by 1879 the agrarian crisis was already causing many peasants to turn to the cities in search of employment, as the intransigenti were already aware, and urban conditions were far from good for many workers. It was only from 1880 until 1888 that the first moderate industrial boom took place. During that period, apart from the VII Congress, there was only one other congress, the VI held in 1883 which was probably too early in the industrial boom for the intransigenti to pay much attention to it. The limited attention given to problems associated with industrial

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2 II. p.30; III. pp.18-24.
3 Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.142-3. The reason that little work was done at the III Congress was its suspension by the prefect.
5 IV. pp.81-103, 163-8, 178-86.
7 VII. pp.201-57.
8 See p.58.
development until 1887 was possibly also due to the restricted nature of the II Section until the mid-1880s and its consequent incapacity to examine adequately the issues involved in industrialisation. According to Gambasin, people such as Sassoli-Tomba and Toniolo, were aware of some of the problems associated with industrial development but their efforts were hampered. Certainly the subjects listed on the programs of the II and III Congresses indicate some understanding although the listing of the subject, *la promiscuità dei sessi e delle età*, reflects the ever-present ideological bias.

At the VIII Congress in 1890 the conditions of the urban working class continued to be considered at some length. Of particular note was a report given by Gusmini on the work of women and children in factories. The raising of this issue was influenced by contemporary discussions of the European Catholic social movement with which some members of the II Section were involved. Gusmini’s report provoked a lively debate in the sessions of the II Section where strongly opposed views were expressed. One of the central concerns of the II Section at the following Congress was the low level of wages paid to workers although some attention was given to other problems. This Congress was held the same year that *Rerum Novarum*, the papal encyclical on the conditions of the working classes, was published. Gambasin maintains that the argument for a wage sufficient to support workers and their families could be put with greater certainty because the concept was put forward in *Rerum Novarum*, thus being validated by papal support. It had been discussed in private sessions of the II Section at the previous Congress. The presentation of a report to the general assembly had been deferred to the next Congress largely due to the conflict this issue was causing amongst Catholics because it involved the difficult issue of the role the State would play in regard to a minimum wage. It seems that the papal document did provide some support for discussions of this issue but Brezzi argues that *Rerum Novarum* also put a brake on these discussions.

At the X (1892) and XI (1894) Congresses apart from a report on *il riposo festivo* no specific reports were given on the conditions of urban workers although there were

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10 VIII. pp.26-8, 97-109, 121-32.
12 IX. pp.68-78, 134, 216-27.
14 Brezzi, *Cristiano sociali*, op. cit., pp.450-4. Although *Rerum Novarum* did not in fact support the establishment of a legally enforceable family wage but rather that such a wage should be voluntarily paid by employers acting out of charity. See *Rerum Novarum*, op. cit., pp.157-8.
15 XI. pp.177-80.
practical reports relating to the organisation of institutions for Catholic workers. It appears, from a letter written by Cerutti to the Comitato Generale Permanente in mid 1892 that there were problems in dealing with both the agrarian question and the worker question at each congress due to the lack of time and complexity of the issues.16 Through most of the 1890s reports and speeches given to the general assemblies of the congresses on urban workers took a practical, organisational approach as did those on the peasants. The more general reports analysing socio-economic causes, even if in a strongly ideological framework, tend to stand out as exceptions in the history of the congresses. The emphasis on a practical approach was, as already has been noted, the result of Paganuzzi's ascendency to the position of president of the Opera dei Congressi and the orientation of the organisation in the direction he desired. The problem with this approach was that a more profound understanding of the situation of the urban working class and the way in which it was being affected by socio-economic changes was necessary to ensure that the practical measures put forward by the intransigenti were the most efficacious and realistic ones.17

The practical approach was further emphasised when the permanent sections were reorganised in 1896. Rather than Toniolo and Medolago Albani's preference that the II Section be divided up according to la distinzione delle classi dei lavoratori, as Gambasin puts it, the II Section was divided up on the basis of the various socio-economic institutions promoted by the Opera dei Congressi.18 The absence of a more theoretical approach in regard to the socio-economic problems on the part of the Opera dei Congressi appears also to have derived from weaknesses within the II Section. Gambasin refers to Toniolo's criticism of the competence of some members of the Section to deal adequately with socio-economic issues.19 However, if that was so it was in part due to the autocratic approach of Paganuzzi and similar-minded intransigenti who had hindered any independent tendencies in the II Section in the 1880s and as a result Toniolo and other cristiano sociali had begun to channel much of their energy

17 Ibid., pp.363-7, 385. Paganuzzi's line was clearly set out in a memo sent from the Comitato Generale Permanente to Medolago Albani in June 1890:
Sembra quindi al comitato permanente che nell' VIII congresso cattolico italiano sulla trattazione degli argomenti di indole economico-sociale, si debbano prendere le prime mosse non tanto dalla dottrina speculativa concernenti il lavoro, il salario od altre consimili, quanto dall'efficacia che hanno e possono avere a seconda dei vari modi onde sono costituite, organizzate e funzionanti, quelle istituzioni pratiche e reali, che dalla consociazione nascente dall' associazione delle persone si ritrae o si vuol ritrarre, la normale organizzazione degli operai ed il benessere economico e morale delle classi laboriose...
18 This approach was the choice of Cerutti and Monsignor Bellio, also active in socio-economic issues. Ibid., pp.409-11.
19 Ibid., p.375.
elsewhere. The effects were probably more serious in relation to issues relating to the urban working class because the emergence of an urban proletariat and other aspects of the development of industrial capitalism were such a contrast and challenge to the socio-economic concepts of the intransigenti.

From the XII to the XVI Congresses there were very few speeches which referred to the conditions of urban workers in more than a desultory fashion. Generally, brief references were made as a preface to proposals for an institution the intransigenti wanted to promote. The virtual absence of more detailed socio-economic reports in the 1890s is surprising. Nine congresses were held in the period from 1890 to 1899, ample time to develop some kind of analysis despite the problems hampering the work of the II Section. The social and economic transformations in these years, the second wave of industrialisation later in the decade and the worker agitations as well as peasant unrest should have provoked more extensive consideration if the intransigenti were to understand the changes underway and be able to offer some realistic avenues for action both for Catholic padroni and lavoratori.

More direct attention was given to the urban working class at the XVI Congress in 1899. Cerutti referred briefly to the conditions of workers in industrial centres before proposing means of providing small amounts of capital to workers, artisans and owners of small urban property. Medolago Albani also mentioned this area of concern in the speech he made on the II Section. More importantly, Professor Simonetti spoke on the subject of the work of the II Section in relation to the Grandi Industrie manifatturiere. Apart from outlining the situation, he proposed the practical study of the economic and moral conditions of the population in areas where manufacturing industry prevailed, setting out points which needed to be examined. A similar speech was made by Simonetti at the following Congress, reaffirming their commitment to the

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20 Although by 1895 the Unione per gli studi sociali and the II Section were basically working together and Toniolo was more involved in the congresses of the Opera dei Congressi. Ibid., p.397. Brezzi argues that the division of effort weakened the cristiano sociali. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.466-7.

21 For example Rezzara’s report to the XII Congress on Camere del lavoro (XII. pp.214-5), Avvocato Kappa’s speech regarding il segretariato del popolo, an institution designed to counter the largely socialist camere di lavoro (XIII. pp.255-60; see also Chapter 10) and Cerutti’s proposal to the XII Congress for the establishment of cooperative di consumo (XII. pp.210-2). The speeches more focussed on workers included that given by Monsignor Camilli on the social question which was couched in strongly religious and ideological terms (XII. pp.81-93), the speeches given to the XIII and XV Congresses setting out a program for Catholic councillors which incorporated conditions for workers employed on local government projects (XIII. pp.241-3; XV. pp.290-3) and that of Monsignor Bellio about il riposo festivo (XIII. pp.253-5).

22 XVI. pp.139-44.

23 XVI. pp.101-5.

24 XVI. pp.219-35.
The program for the XVII Congress (1900) also reflected greater concern about specific conditions of workers.26

Gambasin notes this change in approach, dating it from 1897. He argues that the II Section had from 1892 to 1897 un indirizzo prevalentemente pratico-rurale due to the dominance of Cerutti, Bellio and Scotton in the Section. After 1897 he believes that the Section had a predominantly scientific and industrial orientation as Toniolo, Medolago Albani and other progressive cristiano sociali came to the fore again.27 Certainly the XVI and XVII Congresses gave more time to issues regarding the conditions of workers and their causes but the proposals put to the XVIII Congress (1901) in relation to the urban working class were primarily practical.28 Moreover, il riposo festivo had been moved to the I Section emphasising the religious character of this issue rather than a socio-economic stress as it had when the subject was incorporated in the work of the II Section.29 The material dealt with at the private sessions of the II Section at this Congress may have had a more scientific and industrial orientation but it was not reflected in the material placed before the general assembly of the Congress. It is more than probable that Gambasin is including the practical proposals in this description. Certainly Simonetti's report reflected work carried out in relation to factory employment and workers' rights but it does not seem sufficient to justify the judgement by Gambasin that scientific and industrial considerations predominated at the XVIII Congress.30 The report did reflect, however, considerable concern about the socialist advances. The reports on workers given by the II Section to the final Congress in 1903 were again practically oriented. The first was a lengthy one on unioni professionali which gave a summary of action taken to establish workers' associations from the I Congress and included brief references to various reports made over the years. To some extent this report reflected the socio-economic work done by the Section.31 The other relevant report was on workers' houses.32

The more substantial reports on the conditions of the working classes, given primarily

25 XVII. pp.130-6.
26 XVII. pp.17-22. The four sections listed in the program were:
1. Agricultural industries and institutions for the agricultural classes.
2. Manufacturing industries.
3. Credit institutions for the working and agricultural classes.
4. Emigration.
27 Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.516.
28 XVIII. pp.140-6, 184-9, 248-56.
30 The report referred to farm workers as well.
31 XIX. pp.39-73.
32 XIX. pp.78-84.
by members of the II Section over the lifetime of the *Opera dei Congressi*, described in some detail the situation of urban workers. They indicated considerable concern about the physical conditions of workers - their ill health, low life expectancy, inadequate housing, bad diet and low levels of hygiene. There was also an emphasis in various reports on the moral degradation of many workers, brought about by adverse forces in the cities and towns. The focus of their concern was, however, the factory system and its increasing use for modern industrial production with a consequent expansion in the urban labour force. In their descriptions of the factory system, the *intransigenti* were particularly concerned about the employment of women and children as a major proportion of the labour force, the nature of the work they were employed to do which the *intransigenti* regarded as often being inappropriate both physically and morally, their long working hours and low wages, and what the *intransigenti* identified as new and harsher relations between employers and workers. The *intransigenti* were also concerned about the generally impoverished state of the urban working class and the large numbers of workers who could not find jobs or could only find insecure and short-term employment.

The reasonably detailed descriptions of the situation of workers gave some indication of the social and economic transformations occurring in Italy in the late 1800s as large-scale industry became increasingly important in what had been an essentially agricultural economy. The degree to which the expansion of industrial production and the factory system conflicted with the ideal society of the *intransigenti* is reflected by the relative frequency with which factory production was raised at the congresses. It is even more notable given that industrial development was fairly limited until 1896 and, with some exceptions, it was still limited to the North, a fact which probably reflects the Northern orientation of the *Opera dei Congressi*. However, the identification of the causes and the nature of the economic and social processes, when they were sought beyond simple ideological condemnations of liberal economics, were often contradictory as one would probably expect. Furthermore, while some reports recognised the futility of trying to reverse or halt the changes underway, there was a general tendency to believe that the situation could be resolved or at least ameliorated considerably by the re-establishment of paternalistic and benevolent relations between employers and workers, relations that the *intransigenti* believed had existed in medieval society under the dominance of the Church and the craft corporations. These views indicated a lack of understanding of the extent and nature of the transformations taking place.

33 There was also a tendency amongst the *intransigenti* to regard urban centres as places of evil although they also tended to idealise medieval cities. Gambasin, *Religione e società*, op. cit., pp.177-83, 192; Agócs, *The Troubled Origins*, op. cit., pp.47-9.
place as well as an idealistic perspective of employers in both historical and contemporary terms.

Marchese Sassoli-Tomba gave a succinct summary of the changes that had occurred in industrial production in a speech to the IV Congress (1877) the starting point of which was the situation of workers.34 His approach was completely consistent with the traditional one taken by the intransigenti, exemplified by his advocacy of the medieval corporations and the role of padroni. At the same time his perceptive observations about the development of modern industry seem at odds with this approach:

Invece di capi si hanno speculatori e capitalisti; invece di operai, delle macchine. La bottega scompare, ed è surrogata dalla fabbrica. La produzione s'accresce in proporzioni smisurate: l'economia della mano d'opera diviene l'unica preoccupazione. Quanto più l'agente della produzione è debole e costa meno, tanto più è ricercato e preferito...35

Wages were governed only by the law of supply and demand, he argued and women and children were employed because they were cheap labour. The consequences were workers deprived of their rights and open to the influence of evil and dangerous doctrines which threatened social order.36 Sassoli-Tomba was describing a general historical process rather than specifically referring to developments in Italy where by 1877 industrialisation was still greatly restricted. Nevertheless he regarded the issue as being of sufficient significance in the Italian context to bring it before the Congress.

At the same Congress a report was given on factory work by Ragioniere Benincori.37 He condemned the commercial world with its dishonest industrialists, dominated by cruelty, greed and avarice. While not denying nor wanting to reverse the progress achieved through industrial development, he pointed to the miserable state of le classi più deboli della società.38

Non è il male che appare spudorato ne paesi industriali? Non sono le infermità e le morti, che la statistica ci dice aumentate spaventosamente là dove da qualche anno si aperse un opificio? Prove sicure, solenni, fineste, che, strappati i contadini alle

34 The speech was actually directed at reasserting the role that Christian corporations could play in re-ordering society. IV. pp.81-103.
35 IV. pp.87-8.
36 IV. pp.87-9.
37 IV. pp.176-86.
38 IV. p.178.
loro campagne, fu loro imposto un nuovo genere di lavoro, che male applicato, è loro eterogeneo e corruzione!...Non troviamo noi le tracce del patimento, della fatica eccessiva, su quei volti che altre volte abbronzati dal sole fiorivano specchio di una bell’anima in un corpo sano?...39

Benincori was particularly concerned about the deleterious moral and physical effects of the employment of women and children in factories. In his view the work imposed in many places on women was excessive, damaging their health and shortening their lives:

Una donna tenuta per lunghe ore seduta ad un fornello da filanda, ad un telaio, sorbendosi un’aria morbosa, quasi accecata da un continuo denso fumo di vapore e di polvere, non può che risentirne, per quanto robusta essa sia; e le pallide sue guance provano quanto la scienza medica non falli, quanto detesta questo genere di lavoro.40

While the income from women working helped that of their families, their employment deprived their families of the care women were meant to give. After 14 or more hours of work these women were not capable of responding to the needs of their families he maintained. Female workers often worked alongside male workers. Peasants were leaving their cottages for factory employment. Children were also being exploited, working for 14 hours and more under dreadful conditions and a discipline which was inappropriate to their age. These children had no freedom and were not receiving any education, nor were they given time to learn or practice their religious duties.

Benincori, speaking for the II Section, proposed that the salaries of male workers, combined with those of their children who were old enough to work, be sufficient to cover the essential expenses of the family so that the women need not work. He further proposed that women not be employed to do heavy work, that they be kept away from too much immediate contact with male workers and that they be closely supervised where they were employed to do night work. It was also proposed that they be given an unspecified number of days off for childbirth. If possible women were to be encouraged to take on work that could be done at home so that their domestic duties not be neglected. Industrialists were to be encouraged to employ only children over the age of 12 and to reduce their working hours and those of women to nine hours per day, as well as conceding to them il giorno festivo. Benincori also welcomed the proposed

39 IV. pp.179-80.
40 IV. p.181.
introduction of laws to regulate employment of children.\textsuperscript{41} Benincori's speech was an amalgam of concerns about the moral and physical welfare of workers with his main focus on women and children. He set out clearly the effects of factory conditions on these workers. Yet he indicated that members of the II Section, undeveloped as it was at the time, did not oppose industrialisation or the employment of women so long as the excesses of this system of production were tempered by the industrialists themselves and the State.

Still at the IV Congress Sassòli-Tomba gave another speech for the II Section, this time on workers' homes.\textsuperscript{42} According to Sassòli-Tomba the building programs in many cities were forcing workers out of areas where they had lived, pushing them to the outskirts into unhealthy and morally threatening concentrations where they were cut off from contact with the affluent classes. Apart from the paternalistic concern regarding another instance of the breakdown of relations between the rich and poor which, he believed, should be reversed through the exercise of Christian charity, Sassòli-Tomba graphically described the unhealthy hovels the poor were forced to live in. Consistent with the other speeches made about workers at the IV Congress, Sassòli-Tomba's concern was directed at both the physical conditions of workers and their moral well-being, the latter being viewed from the position and interests of the dominant class. Sassòli-Tomba was expressing fears of the implications of the loss, by padroni, of control over workers, as the latter became more conscious of common interests which were in conflict with those of the dominant class. That control over workers had been exercised more easily when workers were scattered through districts where the wealthy lived.

The next substantial report which examined economic problems and urban workers was that of Barone Savarese at the VI Congress in 1883.\textsuperscript{43} He spoke of the grave moral and material conditions of the working classes, attributing them in part to lack of work and low wages, as a consequence of which, there was discontent and suffering. Savarese linked unemployment and low wages to high taxes which withdrew from industry a large part of the annual profits. Savarese was also critical of the high taxes on necessities which increased the cost of living for working class families and reduced the value of their wages. Apart from these economic causes of discontent, Savarese also pointed to moral causes. He argued that in some cases workers' salaries had been doubled and even tripled but even this was insufficient to stop the discontent. He

\textsuperscript{41} IV. pp.178-86.
\textsuperscript{42} IV. pp.165-8.
\textsuperscript{43} VI. pp.315-23.
believed these workers were discontented because of the predominance of superfluous needs caused by the spread of materialist doctrines.\textsuperscript{44}

Savarese went on to speak of the imbalances created in the economy with the abolition of the medieval corporations and by materialist ideas. Wealth had ceased to be considered as a means and instead had become the main aim of economic activity. Hence industry was freed of all constraints so as to encourage its advance and the last means of protecting workers abolished. Although expressed in moral terms with a note of condemnation, Savarese described clearly some of the basic processes of the development of capitalism and their detrimental effects. He did not qualify his condemnations by acknowledging the benefits of these changes but the actions he proposed Catholics take were, on the whole, conservative, aimed at returning workers to passivity and obedience to the wealthy, actions which did not really challenge the changes.

One of the most detailed reports on workers was that given by Marchese Bottini to the VII Congress (1887) on the worker question and the Christian corporation.\textsuperscript{45} Bottini examined the conditions of workers as one areas from which derived the frequent conflict between padroni and operai in large factories in all countries where modern industrialism dominated. His report was not restricted to Italy but also included examples from England, other European countries and the U.S.A. One of his conclusions was that,

\textit{gli operai non hanno, nel moderno regime industriale, che una ben trista posizione al presente, nessuna sicurezza per l'avvenire e molto meno speranza di migliorare la loro sorte.}\textsuperscript{46}

Bottini divided the factors affecting the conditions of factory workers into difficulties of a moral nature and material difficulties as has already been described. The list of moral difficulties was fairly extensive and included factors which appear to be more material than moral. The factors were the forced work on Sundays of many factory workers despite sacred and natural reasons against it; the debasement of workers by the nature of their employment in factories where they were subordinated to machines rather than machines to workers, a situation aggravated by the division of labour by which workers lacked the skills to make a complete product; the oversupply of labour due to

\textsuperscript{44} VI. pp.315-7.
\textsuperscript{45} VII. pp.201-57.
\textsuperscript{46} VII. p.211.
which owners had no interest in improving conditions and hence there was a widening gap between owners and workers; employment of women and children in factories where they mixed with adult males and were thus in moral danger; the deleterious moral and physical effects of factory employment on children; the absence of women in their homes; the concentration of workers in areas close to factories where, due to demand rents were generally high and housing standards disgraceful; workers' vices resulting from their loss of faith and belief in the future; and finally the loss of restraint of workers through religious or moral beliefs and of hope of improvement in their conditions as a consequence of which they had become instruments of public agitation.  

Under material difficulties Bottini listed wages below that necessary to sustain workers and their families; excessive working hours which were causing ill health and moral problems; insecurity of employment; the unhygienic state of factories and the short lifespan of factory workers.

Given these problems Bottini concluded that it was only surprising that there was not more conflict between padroni and operai. He stressed that he was not opposed to industrialism, just to its esagerate...applicazioni. In Bottini's opinion, efforts by governments and padroni to ameliorate conditions were largely unsuccessful because they did not deal with the root of the problem which was to be found in the relationship between padroni and operai. Bottini also added to the causes of the conditions of workers the effects of economic theories on economic and social relations. He examined contemporary theories and their effects in reasonable detail, arguing that the primacy given to individualism and materialism had resulted in workers being treated as machines. Also excessive competition was responsible for the lowering of prices of products which carried with it the lowering of costs through reduced wages, increased working hours, employment of women and children and so on. Looking then at remedies to this situation, Bottini put forward the proposition that it was a matter above all of restoring morality to industry through the application of Catholic principles involving both rights and duties appropriate to each class. The practical remedy he then turned to was the Christian corporation which would re-establish Christian relations between padroni and operai.

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47 VII. pp.203-7.
48 Bottini discussed the issue of low wages in some detail. He argued that they were being reduced because of the oversupply of labour and lack of work. He was aware that they were being affected by the European-wide industrial crisis. He stated that they were reduced when profits were lower but not increased when profits were higher. He was also critical of the fact that wages were set without taking into account the needs of workers. In regard to working hours he maintained that employers could decrease costs by extending working hours and that government attempts to restrict hours had not been very effective. Regarding wages, he said, workers were paid daily and could be dismissed at a moment's notice. VII. pp.207-11.
49 VII. p.212.
By the time of Bottini's report Italy had experienced a moderate industrial boom which was cut short by an economic crisis in the following year. Even given that boom there was an excessive supply of labour due to an increasing population as emigration figures testify.\textsuperscript{50} The conditions of urban workers was dire. Bottini set out the situation of workers in a lucid and comprehensive fashion, at times with an overlay of ideology which did not detract from his description but rather clarified the points of conflict between the Catholic principles of the \textit{intransigenti} as these principles informed their concepts of an ideal society and economy, and the functioning of the society of which they were a part. Bottini's description of the conditions of workers did not omit an explanation of some of the causes both philosophical and material. Moreover although he considered the relations between \textit{padroni} and \textit{operai} as the root of the worker question he was concerned to establish clearly the effects of the breakdown of these relations in terms which were relatively unobscured by ideological references. He also expressed an openness to government action although he doubted its efficacy.

Bottini's report contrasted strongly with the unrestrained and violent tone of d'Amelio's speech at the VII Congress which covered some of the same issues but in such a way that it tended more towards a repetition of ideological points rather than contributing to a clear understanding of the ideological underpinnings of the capitalist system as it was functioning in Italy. D'Amelio spoke in terms of seething masses, the immeasurable increase of social scourges and miseries and the division of society into oppressors and the oppressed although he also pointed to the immense increase in the wealth of the industrial world in which the working classes had had no share. Similar to Bottini he attributed the misery of \textit{operai} largely to economic doctrines which regarded society as an end rather than means of human desires and people as work machines.\textsuperscript{51}

The theme of factory employment of women and children was raised again at the following Congress (1890) by Gusmini who presented proposals which were primarily directed at setting out regulations for such employment.\textsuperscript{52} His approach was similar to that of Benincori 13 years earlier and Bottini in 1887. Due to the number of proposals that had been approved by the II Section to be put before the general assembly, Gusmini was not able to give a complete report on the issues but rather restricted himself to putting the proposals. The report as it appeared in the published proceedings of the Congress cited in the footnotes similar decisions taken at the Catholic European congresses held around this time, papal statements and instances of State regulation, no

\textsuperscript{50} Clough, op. cit., pp.136-8.
\textsuperscript{51} VII. pp.118-28.
\textsuperscript{52} VIII. pp.97-109.
doubt as support for proposals which would have met with opposition from many intransigenti. The proposals had an undercurrent of strong moral concern based on the role the intransigenti believed women should perform and the debilitating effects on women and children of factory discipline.

Gusmini contrasted the work he believed women and children were meant to do within their homes and their relatively recent but extensive use in factories which he believed was due to the materialism of both industrialists and workers, and unrestrained commercial competition. Gusmini did not distinguish between moral and physical degradation of these factory workers, costretti anch'essi a divenire machine. His description did lean more to the moral side. The central proposal was that State action was necessary for effective action to take place. Related proposals stated that there had to be international regulation since the actions of one State would be ineffective if not followed by others and that such international regulation be established by means of an international convention rather than State legislation. Gusmini argued there was either a lack of regulation or existing laws were ineffective. The regulations he proposed covered exclusion of women from industries particularly dangerous to morality and health and restrictions on age for children; exclusion of women from night work and a minimum age for employment of children; maximum working hours including set rest periods; employment of women prior to and following childbirth; wages and the supervision of child workers. A final general proposal took as its premise the well-worn argument that the problems which they were confronting stemmed primarily from moral causes and that it was only through the Church that the basic causes could be

33 The footnotes appear to have been added after the Congress because they include references to the actual Congress. It is not clear who added the footnotes but it is probable, given their nature, that they were written by a member of the II Section.
35 VIII. pp.100-2.
36 More specifically it was proposed that working hours for women be restricted to ten hours per day with at least one and a half to two hours of rest in contrast to the frequent 12 to 14 hour working day; that women not work for six weeks after childbirth and that provision for lost income be made through appropriata istituti di previdenza, proposals regarding childbirth provoking lively discussion as they did at the Catholic congress at Liege where a proposal that the State establish a minimum wage was not accepted; that children not be employed under 15 years in dangerous or unhealthy industries, that 15 to 18 year olds only be employed if of a healthy constitution and that children not work more than eight hours per day; that children under 15 be excluded from night work and 15 to 18 year olds to have the same restrictions as in unhealthy industries; that children not be employed in factories unless they were from 12 to 14 years old and that children from 12 to 16 work only ten hours per day with at least one and a half hours of rest; that child workers be closely supervised and that an adequate wage be paid. A law passed in 1886 had established nine as the minimum age for the employment of children. VIII. pp.103-8. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.419-21; Brezzi, *Cristiano sociali*, op. cit., pp.450-2; Procacci, *History*, op. cit., p.381.
The lack of effective regulatory legislation meant that women and children were open to harsh exploitation. Because of the various constraints that exploitation was only briefly mentioned in Gusmini's report. Apart from references in the proposals and his introductory remarks, the appended footnotes also gave some indication of the exploitation especially of children in terms of their ages and the hours they worked. However, on the subject of wages and childbirth the generality of the approach reflected the extent of disagreement and the unlikelihood of firmer proposals for some time. Gusmini, while aware of the difficulties in regard to wages, emphasised in the private sessions of the II Section, the deplorable situation of workers. He commented that

*in pratica pare che lavorino padre, madre e figli, e l'operaio è in miseria.*

In fact women were paid approximately a half and children a third of a male worker's wages in this period. Apart from the 1886 law on child employment further regulation did not come until 1902 and even then it was not effective. Although the proposals carried with them considerable problems, not least that of getting the support of the most conservative *intransigenti*, Gusmini's speech reflected the influence of European Catholic social thought on members of the II Section and the work that had been done by the *cristiano sociali* around the social question. The emphasis on moral causes continued to be made but in reports such as this one by Gusmini there was also a more considered approach to the problems of workers.

The issue of *il riposo festivo* was raised twice at the VIII Congress. Deliberations were put to the Congress affirming the religious, moral and physical necessity that workers have Sundays and religious festivals as holidays and proposing that Catholics encourage, and where possible, ensure these days were kept as holidays. It was also proposed that part of Saturday be regarded as a time off. The subject was raised again by Bottini speaking in a somewhat emotive fashion. He emphasised the religious origin of *il riposo festivo*, arguing that as it was now considered that God did not exist,
people were regarded as machines and had no such rights, so *il riposo festivo* was largely not kept, to the detriment of workers. He also stressed the physical and mental necessity of having a day off each week. Not only did workers need time to devote to their religious duties, they also needed relief from factory work.\(^{63}\) Women and children, Bottini stressed, had even greater need of a day off. He argued that workers' productivity decreased when they had no relief from work to counter the contention that production would decrease if Sunday was conceded to them as a holiday. Bottini did not fail to emphasise the moral and religious aspects but these were intertwined with workers' physical needs. What emerges from the speech is the extreme level of exploitation of these workers whose only relief came when they were unable to find work and then they lacked food.\(^{64}\)

The conditions of workers also formed the basis for the speech made to the VIII Congress by Medolago Albani on State intervention in social and economic questions.\(^{65}\) Although his comments were not necessarily specific or detailed they did contribute to the picture of exploitation and suffering that emerged from the reports of the II Section to the general assembly of the Congress. Medolago Albani linked the contemporary social agitation to the suffering of workers. He condemned men of the *laissez faire* school who had dominated society for a century, whose only motive, he believed, was their own interests and whose only goal was their own profit.\(^{66}\)

Medolago Albani went on to describe unhealthy factory conditions, stating that the owners of such factories were infringing the rights of workers and treating them unjustly. His descriptions were very emotive. Women had been torn from their homes to work in factories in dreadful conditions, for long hours alongside coarse and brazen

\(^{63}\) *L'operaio, massimamente quello impiegato nelle grandi fabbriche a motore meccanico, ed ove si applica fino all'estremo limite la divisione del lavoro, è ridotto a fare da servo alla macchina ed a ripetere costantemente lo stesso movimento. Questa occupazione totalmente materiale e sempre uniforme esclude qualsiasi applicazione dell'intelligenza, la quale perciò, per mancanza di esercizio, diventa ottusa.*

VIII. p.125.

\(^{64}\) VIII. pp.121-32.

\(^{65}\) VIII. pp.25-35.

\(^{66}\) *Per il lavoro che impongono ai propri operai, questi si sentono spossati, la loro salute è compromessa, la loro vita angosciata; non importa; essi lo fanno, perché l'ucciderli è guadagno. Per l'impiego delle donne e dei fanciulli in taluni offici ed in certe condizioni, è compromessa la vita delle generazioni venturo, si perde la morale dei nostri popoli; non importa; essi lo fanno a costo dei figli del nostro popolo, a costo della morale del nostro paese essi guadagnano. Per le mercedi spesso illusorie, pagate a chi suda e si consuma per loro, intere famiglie mancano delle cose più necessarie, soffrono il freddo e la fame; non importa, essi lo fanno; colla mercede defraudata all'operaio essi arrichiscono e godono. Lasciate passare e sopra i deboli passano i potenti e li calpestano, lasciate fare e sul diritto trionfa l'egoismo, e sulla giustizia la forza abbiatta e brutale. Si è voluta la libertà assoluta d'ogni cosa e si è trovata l'anarchia.*

VIII. pp.27-8.
men. Children were being physically destroyed. He stressed that all workers needed to rest, that there were limits to their physical strength but these workers also had spiritual, moral and intellectual needs. Medolago Albani argued that the State had to act to prevent this exploitation by passing laws to limit working hours, to declare Sunday as a holiday, to establish health standards for factories and to regulate the employment of women and children. Medolago Albani also believed that the State should play a central role in the regulation of the economy by assisting industries although he stressed that there were limits on its powers in relation to individuals.

As has been noted Medolago Albani's speech was strongly influenced by discussions then being held within the European Catholic social movement on the role of the State in economic issues presenting to the Congress ideas which were new to many intransigenti. Because these ideas were far in advance of those held by many intransigenti, particularly because they entailed tacit recognition of the Italian State which was an anathema to many of them, Medolago Albani was careful in his justifications and in his arguments that charity was not sufficient. His speech reflected a more careful analysis of the links between economic processes and the conditions of the workers on the basis of which, if not yet formal proposals, at least clear areas were delineated where the State needed to intervene to ensure justice and social order.

At the following Congress in 1891 Gusmini dealt with the subject of wages which had been raised in only a very general sense in his report to the previous Congress. His purpose was to analyse the nature of wages in the light of Catholic authorities and to contrast it with the contemporary situation. He described workers as being not unlike slaves, closed in factories, attached to machines

\[ \textit{senza poter mai levare gli occhi per non avere una multa, lavorando senza posa per aver appena tanto da campare la vita...} \]

Padroni were enriching themselves on this labour. He again raised the issue of female and child to which he expressed complete opposition while agreeing that it would be extremely difficult to stop their employment because they were a cheap source of labour and their wages were desperately needed because those of male workers were so low.

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67 VIII. pp.31-2.
68 VIII. pp.25-35.
69 Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.424-6, 448-9. See also above p.143.
70 Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.432-47.
71 IX. pp.216-27.
72 IX. p.218.
He argued, however, that male rates would rise if women and children stopped working, thus reducing the workers available and preventing the terrible competition between workers,

\[ \text{correnza che è la causa, forse precipua della loro miseria...}^{73} \]

Gusmini looked at various definitions of wages condemning the current situation where the labour of workers was regarded as cheap goods and wages were set on the basis of supply and demand, so that the excessive increase in the number of workers available meant that wages had been reduced in a terrible manner. In his view supply and demand should be a secondary element in fixing wages with primary consideration being given instead to the basic needs of workers and their dependents and to what he described as the just share of production owing to workers for their labour. Referring to Medolago Albani's speech to the VIII Congress, he supported the participation of the State as an intermediary to defend just treatment of workers. He also advocated proportional sharing of profits between workers and employers where possible thus leading, it was hoped, to the reduction in the number of wage earners. It was also proposed that small industries and domestic production be encouraged so that women and children could find more appropriate employment.\(^{74}\)

Gusmini's examination of wages and their ideal and actual constitutive elements was the most detailed consideration that had been given to the issue so far at the congresses although some of the points had been made before. The determining role of supply and demand of labour had been condemned at the IV Congress in 1877 by Sassoli-Tomba as had the employment of women and children because they could be paid substantially less. The argument that the wages of male workers be sufficient to cover the basic needs of male workers and their dependents was also raised in part at that Congress. Gusmini's approach to the issue of wages was practical rather than theoretical, elucidating some of the problems members of the II Section saw in the way in which wages were set and their implications for workers. Gusmini linked these problems to economic processes as well as the usual changes in the morality of employers. Through this approach Gusmini gave another graphic picture of the contemporary conditions of workers. The role of personal morality was dealt with more realistically in terms of his discussion of practical means by which workers could be protected. The argument now centred around the necessity of action by the State rather than private charity. Gusmini's speech was not free from contradictions or from

\(^{73}\) IX. p.220.
\(^{74}\) IX. pp.216-27.
deliberations which, through their generality, watered down some of the conclusions which could have been drawn from the speech. Thus the opposition to female and child employment expressed at one point quite firmly was then qualified at the end of the speech. Furthermore, statements that by removing women and children from the available workforce, male wages would increase, were highly unrealistic. Their employment was characteristic of the early stage of capitalist industrial development and it was also indicative of the poverty of workers' families. The only realistic means of regulating the composition of the workforce was, as Gusmini recognised, through State legislation.

The proposal read by Gusmini to the IX Congress regarding the institution of profit-sharing where possible in industry was again presented in an expanded form to the XI Congress in 1894. Concern about the setting of wages on the basis of the law of supply and demand was reiterated. The II Section was proposing the extension of profit-sharing between employers and operai to as many industries as was possible so as to ensure the worker had a just share in the results of his or her labour and social conflict avoided. To propose such a system in regard to large-scale industries was unrealistic because of the difficulties involved and the unlikelihood of employers making such radical concessions to workers as members of the II Section were aware. Yet although idealistic the proposals indicated the II Section was seeking other solutions which were consistent with their principles. The language of the proposals also contrasted with the earlier emphasis on morality. There were now frequent references to justice for workers and protection of their rights.

The II Section returned to the question of il riposo festivo presenting proposals to both the XI and XIII Congresses. The first set of proposals strongly stressed the religious role of the observance of Sundays and other religious festivals as holidays for workers, their non-observance, it was stated causing profound moral disorders and perceptible economic harm:

Considerando che, per la indebolita Fede di non pochi cattolici, il maggior ostacolo che s'incontra ad ottenere l'osservanza del divino precetto del riposo festivo è in molti l'avidità del guadagno, la febbre della concorrenza e la tema di un grave

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73 Woolf, op. cit., pp.1070-1.
74 XI. pp.174-6.
75 It was stated that such a system of payment was not based on the norma assoluta di giustizia but on a mere accidental fact. XI. p.174.
76 XI. pp.174-6.
78 XI. pp.177-80; XIII. pp.253-5.
svantaggio economico a proprio danno, per l'improba pertinacia dei violatori di esso precetto...  

The paternalistic language used contrasted with other reports which were being made by the II Section by this time. The last of the proposals made to the XI Congress referred to workers' rights. The stress was not on health but on the violation of a natural right. It went on to say that conscientious work could not be expected from a worker whose legitimate rights were being trampled on and whose miserable condition was being tyrannically abused. It was not the free choice of the worker who often had no choice because of a desperate need for work, while it was imposed by employers greedy for profit. While the language was a step back to the emotive and paternalistic diatribes of the extreme intransigenti, concepts such as legitimate rights and justice were firmly in place.

The second set of proposals was briefer but some comment was made on the conditions of workers. By 1895 it was noted that il riposo festivo was limited to small industries and local small trade so that only a limited number of workers had this relief. In many places the observance of these days as holidays had meant workers suffered material loss because their wages were reduced. It was argued that the loss of work time could be compensated by a light increase on other days of the week and was also compensated in part by the greater productivity of the worker, an argument which had been used before. Il riposo festivo was again described as a principle of natural justice.

The next substantial reports on urban workers were those given by Professor Simonetti to the XVI and XVII Congresses on workers employed in the factories of big industry. Simonetti spoke of agitations by workers around 1899, describing questa povera moltitudine as being discontented with itself and with the constituted order. It was time, he declared, that the voice of Christ resurrected resound over the uproar and the miseries and the disputes in workshops, and that the workers be returned to the control of the Church. The II Section was bringing to the notice of the intransigenti the antagonistic relations which existed between padroni and operai in large industry, proposing that they support the cause of the workers but not in hatred of employers.

XI. p.178.
...che la Religione esige, che la moralità reclama e di cui l'individuo, non più schiavo ma libero, ha necessario e urgente bisogno.
XI. p.179.
XI. pp.179-80.
XIII. pp.253-5.
XVI. p.220.
rather mediating between the two.  This course of action was necessary because it was
prompted by Christian benevolence but also, Simonetti argued, because of the
injustices done to factory workers in terms of wages. His statements on wages were,
however, very general, for example, his qualification that the level of wages was
influenced by many factors and references to reasonable payment and just amounts.

There were also other issues which were of importance, according to Simonetti, -
health standards, observance of *il riposo festivo* as an expression of respect to
humanity, weighed under the yoke of manual labour, and of respect to religious
authorities, protection of women and night work, especially of children. While all of
these issues reflected the physical conditions of workers, Simonetti put them in a
religious context. He also referred to statements by the pope on the conditions of
workers. Working class people were at the mercy of many ills and dangers, one of
which was socialism. But while Simonetti referred in a somewhat paternalistic fashion
to the role of religion in drawing workers back to the Church he also stressed the
injustices done to workers by the oppressive relations existing between workers and
*padroni*. He argued that it would be easy to stir up workers by preaching against the
rich because workers

> *ha la fantasia preparata e pronta all'incendio dalla contemplazione di miserie reali,*
> *dal sogno di abbondanze e felicità non conseguibili, e dal malcontento e dall’invidia*
> *e dall’odio e da giusti risentimenti a lungo covati fin nel midollo dell’ossa...*  

He contrasted the living and working conditions of workers with the comforts of the
rich. Many *padroni* and entrepreneurs, he said, remained in the pitch black of the last
century and saw nothing beyond their own patrimony and would be pleased if the
*intransigenti* represented workers,

> *come una razza di incontentabili, che non vuol capire come qualmente si potrebbe*
Although stating that there was no doubt about the dreadful conditions of the proletariat, it was imperative, he believed, that they study the circumstances of proletarian life.92

Simonetti stressed the dangers of becoming involved in the struggle between capital and labour, quoting the pope on this point. He also emphasised the complexity of the issues involved. For example he said that competition was gradually becoming more agitated, with new goods constantly flowing onto the great markets and battles between producers of similar goods. There was also competition between distant areas because of the ease of communication. These changes were influencing wages, working hours and conditions. While some of the conditions were the result of exploitation by owners, some were also beyond their control. Simonetti was aware that further study had to be given to these issues as well as making improvements which were already possible.93 Simonetti believed they needed to understand these issues if they were to be involved in mediating between workers and padroni. Yet while he stressed that they had to gain the trust of the employers, he was emphatically on the side of the workers. There were not only just wages but also just prices and he praised Catholics, lay and clerical, who were working with the proletariat not in terms of paternalistic charity but on an equal level. As workers wanted to discuss their cause alone, he said, with little trust for those outside of their class, it was up to Catholic workers to spread Christian principles and for new preachers to move out of the churches into the homes and clubs of workers. It was a fight to attract workers out of the socialist camp.

Simonetti was quite passionate on these points but while his speech was often emotive and unclear and contained frequent allusions to their Catholic beliefs, there was an apparent change in approach. It was not a reiteration of the ideological diatribe that the hardline intransigenti were always capable of producing. Instead there was a consciousness that workers had their own interests separate from those of the employers and that they had a right to pursue those rights within certain limitations. Perhaps this is one of the contradictions in the speech, the earlier stress on accommodation and social control through the institution of the Church, then towards

91 Ibid.
92 XVI. p.227.
93 Other factors he regarded as affecting the situation were:

   La perfezione delle macchine, il capitale di dui si dispone, il trasporto delle materie, la vicinanza di forza motrice, l'abilità dei lavoratori, gli orari, e simili fattori, impediscono la parità delle condizioni.

   XVI. p.229
the end of the speech, an emotional defence of workers and encouragement of action to be taken by Catholic workers. Simonetti was proposing that Catholics act as mediators between workers and *padroni* but the implication was that it was more from the workers' side. However, the generality of his analysis of causes of the worker question and his acknowledgement that it was often difficult to act as mediators because of lack of knowledge of all factors raise some doubts as to the effectiveness of any action Catholics might have taken.

Simonetti's speech to the XVII Congress expressed similar concerns to his earlier speech. He again focused on the rights of workers and the need of Catholics to work with them and for them, to help them to escape from oppression. He described the enquiry the previous Congress had called for as looking at the conditions of workers in Italian industry so as to reveal the abuses perpetrated against workers because of greed and unrestrained competition by those holding the great means of production. The concerns were those that had been raised frequently by the time of this Congress - health standards, working hours, wages, night work and the employment of women and children - but also to study factual conditions and industrial production so as to draw logical and informed conclusions. Simonetti reported that some work had been done although he also indicated the vulnerability of workers giving them specific information, when he said that these workers were likely to have to change employers if they did so. Again there was an emphasis on returning workers to Catholicism but Simonetti also expressed strongly practical goals for ameliorating the conditions of workers. He even went so far as to propose that it was acceptable, where necessary, to join with their enemies to defend the rights of workers, meaning presumably the socialists.94

The general survey of the more substantial reports made by members of the II Section to the congresses gives some idea of their understanding of the conditions of the urban working class and the causes of these conditions. They clearly identified the most obvious forms of exploitation: the exceedingly long working hours, harsh physical conditions, abysmally low wages such that even if all members of a family worked, they still lacked sufficient money to cover their basic needs, consequent poor housing and ill health. They were also aware of the effects of a vast oversupply of labour in keeping conditions of employed workers bad, apart from the large numbers of workers who could not find work. They were deeply concerned about the employment of women and children which conflicted with their concepts of the natural roles of women in particular as well as the migration of peasants to the cities in search of jobs. To some

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94 XVII. pp.130-6.
extent they identified the causes of these conditions but their explanations were often entangled with religious and moral sermonising on the evils of humanity. This was particularly so whenever they tackled the problem of relations between employers and workers. Even so their reports give some indications of the emergence of an urban proletariat, the composition of that proletariat, the expropriation of large numbers of peasants from the land and of the economic processes which were causing these changes.

These were not the only references to urban conditions and economic processes although they were the most detailed. There were other references, often in speeches on specific, practical matters, some as early as the I Congress. They highlighted the same problems of poverty, exploitation, insufficient jobs, the exodus from the countryside and the consequent antagonism between the classes and growth of the socialist movement. They also spoke of the effects of unlimited competition and badly regulated credit on the conditions of workers. Problems with access to credit for workers were also raised. Both the detailed reports and the other references gave a fairly clear outline of conditions but less so of the economic processes that caused them. By the beginning of the 1900s industrial development in Italy was still limited but there had been a notable expansion in factory production and a related demand for a larger urban workforce. The relations of production under such a system were different to those between padroni and operai under a pre-capitalist system, particularly from the paternalistic relations encompassed within sharecropping contracts. The intransigenti, with their origins mainly in rural Italy, wanted to maintain those old relations of production although even then their concepts of those relations were somewhat idealistic. Their objection to the changes probably lay more in the loss of social control over the urban and rural working classes than with the other aspects of economic change.

The congress reports do indicate some changes in the thinking primarily of the II Section in relation to the urban proletariat. Charity was still mentioned but increasingly they brought up issues of the rights of workers, just treatment and the necessary intervention of the State. Moreover the rights of workers were identified as being different to those of the employers and not only different but often in conflict. The hardline intransigenti such as Paganuzzi did not accept many of these ideas which were put forward by both the Cristiano sociali and the Christian democrats. The congress

93 I. pp.130-6; V. pp.195-6; VI. pp.90-1; VII. pp.150-3; IX. pp.68-78; X. pp.125-33; XI. pp.110-3; XII. pp.81-93,214-5; XIII. pp.241-3, 255-60; XV. pp.290-3; XVI. pp.139-44; XVII. pp.193-7; XVIII. pp.184-9; XIX. pp. 78-84.
reports also indicate that the causes of the economic changes were most often identified as being moral and religious ones. Other explanations were put forward but they lacked the consistency and detailed research and even then they were often entwined with religious and moral explanations. On the other hand, while the efforts of the II Section were somewhat inconsistent, they were at the same time putting considerable effort into practical schemes and projects to ameliorate the problems they had identified.
The *intransigenti* and Conditions in the Countryside

Apart from the attention paid to the situation of the urban working class, it is clear from the reports made to the general assemblies of the congresses that the *intransigenti* were also aware of the extremely harsh conditions under which the majority of peasants existed. However, while rural conditions in general were a major concern to some *intransigenti*, it appears that they were not of general overriding importance in the context of the congresses. Although referred to fairly regularly through the congresses, the state of rural Italy did not occupy the general assemblies to any great degree when compared to the time given during reports on socio-economic material to the conditions of urban workers. On the other hand, some reports do indicate that certain *intransigenti*, in particular the *cristiano sociali* and later the Christian democrats, were closely involved in trying to alleviate the working and living conditions of the peasantry and that a considerable amount of theoretical work on the rural situation was being carried on outside of the congresses. The level of that work is not necessarily reflected in the congress proceedings.

Agrarian conditions were only briefly mentioned at the I Congress although it appears that they were discussed more fully at the separate sessions of the II Section. They were not referred to again until the IV Congress in 1877 and then only in relation to the health of peasants, in particular those working in marshy areas. The agrarian question was looked at in more detail at the V Congress (1879) in a speech by Sassóli-Tomba on the social question. At the following Congress in 1883 the agrarian question again received little attention at the general assemblies although it was the subject of one of the private sessions of the II Section. More extended discussion of the issues might have been expected given that by this time the agricultural crisis was severe and its impact on the peasants, combined with the increasing dominance of the capitalist mode of production in rural Italy, was clear. Extensive protests by peasants had also begun to occur in the Po Valley in 1882. Furthermore the *intransigenti* were not unaware of the Jacini Enquiry into the state of agriculture and the *condizioni della classe agricola*.

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2. IV. pp.261-5.
4. VI. pp.88-91, 244-6; Trezzi, op. cit., pp.73-7.
5. Ibid., p.73. See Chapter 3, N.91. Sassóli-Tomba had outlined conditions at the previous Congress four years before. V. pp.124-6, 136-7.
the results of which were being published in the early 1880s. In fact it was proposed at the VI Congress that the local committees of the Opera dei Congressi study the sections of the Enquiry relevant to their areas and report back to the Comitato Generale Permanente.

It appears that the proposals regarding the agrarian question, while of great concern to some intransigenti, did not result in much activity in the period following the VI Congress. Some action was taken, however, by intransigenti from Bergamo. It also seems that there was considerable activity around this issue involving members of the II Section in early 1885. Medolago Albani, president by then of the II Section, stressed the importance of the agrarian question and the necessity of studying it in depth in a letter to the Comitato Generale Permanente in January 1885:

La questione agraria si impone gravissima al nostro paese, ed è parere della II sezione del comitato generale permanente che essa è assai complessa, abbraccia gran parte dei problemi economici e sociali ed ha grandissima attinenza con la vita politica, morale e religiosa dei popoli, sembra che prima di cercarne la soluzione, sia cosa assolutamente necessaria lo studiarla ed il conoscerla seriamente e profondamente sotto tutti i suoi svariatissimi punti di vista.

To gather exact information on the agricultural situation, particularly in the light of Jacini’s Enquiry, and to formulate useful, just and theologically acceptable proposals to resolve existing problems, Medolago Albani proposed the establishment of special committees by each diocesan committee, a proposal which was not welcomed by the Comitato Generale Permanente. In the end the only action taken was the sending of a questionnaire to diocesan committees. Only 13 of the 108 committees replied.
Gambasin suggests that Medolago Albani may not have taken account of the difficulties his proposals created for the Comitato Generale Permanente. In his view the proposals implied that the Opera dei Congressi should give a far greater emphasis to the social question and that State legislation was necessary to lessen the socio-economic problems, both courses being unacceptable to the intransigenti controlling the Comitato Generale Permanente. Regardless of Medolago Albani's intentions or understanding of the situation, what does emerge from the incident are the conflicting approaches and motivations which were being taken in relation to socio-economic problems by the militant Catholic movement, and the potential in the future for even greater conflict.

The agrarian question was dealt with in greater detail at the general assembly of the VII Congress (1887). Proposals were put to the Congress to favour agriculture over industry. Although greater attention could have been expected given the problems of agriculture and the conditions of many peasants, it was not forthcoming at the general assemblies partly because Medolago Albani considered that the issues needed to be examined in greater depth than was possible by the time of the Congress, especially because he was aware of probable objections from many participants. At the following Congress in 1890 there was effectively no mention of the subject. A memo had been sent from the Comitato Generale Permanente to Medolago Albani prior to the VIII Congress outlining the areas it wanted the II Section to report on at the Congress. They included detailed considerations relating to agriculture. It appears, however, that time constraints and other commitments of members of the II Section, added to the complexity of the issues involved, prevented the demands of the Comitato Generale Permanente from being met. These events were indicative of the tensions and conflicts between the Cristiano sociali and Paganuzzi and his supporters over the approach that the militant Catholic movement should take to the social question. On the one hand there was Paganuzzi's belief that all problems could be solved through practical action and adherence to Catholic principles, while the Cristiano sociali, on the other hand, believed that it was necessary to undertake extensive studies so that the problems were

*all'Opera nostra.*
12 Ibid., p.198.
13 VII. pp.150-8. There was also a brief mention in Bottini's lengthy report. VII. pp.242-3. For information on preparations for the Congress and problems which hindered the extent of the material dealt with see Trezzi, op. cit., pp.91-6.
14 There had been an article in the official bulletin of the Opera dei Congressi in March 1887 clearly outlining the agrarian question. It is quoted in Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.244-5. See also ibid., p.246; Trezzi, op. cit., pp.92-6. Trezzi points out that the program for the VII Congress dealt more comprehensively with agrarian issues than what emerged in the general assemblies. Ibid., p.96, N.93.
15 There were references in the program to Catholic rural organisations. VIII. pp.ix-x.
fully understood and the most effective and appropriate action then be decided upon.\textsuperscript{16}

Rural problems surfaced again at the IX (1891) and X (1892) Congresses with, however, a change in approach becoming apparent as increasingly the material was concerned with practical measures directed at alleviating problems rather than general reports looking at the structure of agriculture and its relationship to the agrarian question.\textsuperscript{17} From the X Congress on, references to agricultural conditions were made primarily in the context of encouraging the establishment of a range of institutions which, it was argued, would help to resolve the agrarian question through the provision of practical assistance and the reassertion of Catholic principles as the basis of rural social and economic structures. These reports were generally brief with limited reference to conditions of agriculture.\textsuperscript{18} There were also some references in regional reports given to the congresses.\textsuperscript{19} As has been noted in regard to the material presented on the situation of urban workers, the shift in emphasis to an organisational approach in the material presented to the general assemblies of the congresses on the agrarian question reflected the dominance of Paganuzzi's approach. It was also a consequence of the central role played by Cerutti in the II Section from 1892. Cerutti shared Paganuzzi's push towards the establishment of a network of Catholic socio-economic institutions under the direct control of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}, and was himself involved in considerable organisational activity in rural areas not only in his own region of the Veneto but also elsewhere in Italy.\textsuperscript{20}

Although the conditions of the peasantry did not occupy as much space in the congress


\textsuperscript{17} IX. pp.74-5, 218, 225, 227, \textit{Documenti}, pp.18-9; X. pp.130-1, 160-70, 259-71.


\textsuperscript{19} Gambasin points to the predominance of deliberations on the agrarian question put to the congresses from 1892 to 1896. Gambasin, \textit{Il movimento sociale}, op. cit., p.446. While the resolutions on agrarian matters may have dominated they were all brief and primarily to do with rural organisations. It appears that there were no studies of considerable depth on the agrarian question being undertaken within the sphere of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} in these years. Ibid., pp.501, 535-6.


\textit{È fuor di ogni dubbio che la classe degli agricoltori cotanto numerosa ha bisogno di un pronto aiuto, di una organizzazione cattolica che la sottragga a funeste conseguenze e che metta al servizio della buona causa una forza cost rilevante fino ad ora inattiva...}

Quoted in Gambasin, \textit{Il movimento sociale}, op. cit., pp.402-3. As has been noted already, during this period, Medolago Albani and Toniolo were directing their energies elsewhere. Ibid., pp.388-9. See pp.116-8.
general proceedings as the conditions of urban workers, they were clearly of considerable concern to some intransigenti.

...lo stato attuale delle nostre popolazioni agricole, dei nostri coloni, dei nostri braccianti è deplorevole... 21

E noi vediamo ogni giorno sotto al bel cielo d'Italia, ove al mite raggio d'un sole, che sorride, dove le aure sono profumate dal fior della vite e dell'arancio, i figli di questa, un giorno, alma parens frugum incapaci di più ricavare dalla zolla il vitto per la povera famiglia, noi li veggiamo questi poveri coloni, entro a capanne ove penetra il vento, dove passa la poggia, dove nel verno si gela e si arde nella state, questi figli, nel cui sangue un cibo malsano, un'acqua corrotta, una vita peggiore della morte depongono a lento andare i microbi della funesta pellagra, i figli di questa Italia col cuore affranto volgere ad altre terre il pensiero ed il passo perché in patria si muore o di pazzia o di fame! 22

Concern about peasants' conditions was, however, part of a more general concern about the state of agriculture and the situation of landowners in addition to that of the direct cultivators and, to a lesser extent, intermediary groups. This approach is hardly surprising given that many of the intransigenti, and certainly the leading intransigenti, were members of the landowning aristocracy who drew their wealth and power from the land or were conservative bourgeoisie. 23 The intransigenti regarded the stability of social, economic and political relations in the countryside and the material prosperity of what they termed, the agricultural classes, as the essential basis to the prosperity of Italy as a whole.

L'agricoltura è per fermo l'industria madre ed attrice di ogni altra; è quella nella quale più direttamente trova il proprio sostentamento l'individuo, la famiglia più stabile assetto, l'umanità intera maggiore copia di aiuti a conservare e crescere la morale e fisica vigoria. 24

21 V. p.120.
23 Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.152-4. Members of the Comitato Promotore of the Opera dei Congressi were predominantly aristocrats or professionals. I. p.11. The Comitato Generale Permanente, apart from the increasing number of clergy, retained that makeup. For example, VIII. pp.v-vi. The members of the II Section had a similar composition, for example, Conte Medolago Albani, Marchese Rezzara, Professor Toniolo and Don Cerutti. Trezzi, op. cit., pp.67-71.
24 XVI. p.101. See also VIII. p.33; IX. pp.74-5.
The concern of the *intransigenti* about the state of agriculture and the agricultural population was evident from the I Congress in 1874 in the report given for the II Section by Rubbiani. Here and in subsequent reports or references to agriculture, the *intransigenti* sketched a picture of a countryside where poverty and ill health predominated, and where the traditional economic and social relations between the landowning class and the direct cultivators, the peasants, were undergoing far-reaching changes, exacerbating the conditions of many peasants and forcing large numbers to migrate to the cities or to other countries. In Rubbiani’s report and other speeches on agriculture references were made to large numbers of peasants being unable to satisfy their basic needs of shelter and food. The *intransigenti* spoke of inadequate sustenance and ill health resulting from impoverishment:

...è là dove il contadino soffre e soffre terribilmente e vedesi ogni anno, ogni giorno discendere dalla sua primiera posizione economic; e sotto al bel cielo d'Italia, sulle irrigue pianure del Po e della Piave, sulle pendici feracissime del Vesuvio e dell'Etna, egli muore di fame; o, con cielo incognito - muta il bel cielo natio.

Reverend Zulian spoke at the IV Congress on behalf of the II Section on the poverty and ill health of many peasants, in particular those working in irrigated meadows or rice fields. These peasants frequently suffered from malaria and other diseases caused by working in swampy areas, he observed, and as a consequence lost part of their wages. Sassòli-Tomba also expressed concern over the bad health of peasants and the high incidence of the deficiency disease pellagra at the following Congress, quoting from a report presented to the provincial council of Mantova by a commission set up to study the epidemic proportions of pellagra in the province. Likewise at the VI Congress, Rezzara commented on the physical deterioration of peasants due to an inadequate diet:

*La scrofola e il rachitismo dominano dovunque; nell’alta Italia e nella media aggiungete la pellagra che fa conquiste terribili.*

At the X Congress (1892) Cerutti, reporting on the work of the II Section in relation to the agrarian question, emotively described the state of peasants who were forced to...
chose between leaving their country or dying from starvation or madness which was a consequence of pellagra. He went on to propose practical measures to counter this situation.\textsuperscript{31} The incidence of pellagra was also referred to at the same Congress by Monsignor Andrea Scotton.\textsuperscript{32}

On the other hand, the \textit{intransigenti} were capable, even when reporting on behalf of the II Section, of producing ideological speeches which contrasted strongly with the more objective observations made by Zulian, Sassoli-Tomba, Rezzara and others. The speech given by \textit{Avvocato} Mezzetti for the II Section at the VII Congress (1887), extolling the virtues of the agrarian life as opposed to that of the urban working class, took such an ideological approach. Mezzetti described the class of agricultural workers as \textit{la robustezza personificata breathing l'aria pura e ossigenata dei campi e dei colli}. He went on to draw an idealised picture of rural labourers living to old age after a vigorous life. Nor, in his view, did the agricultural labourer suffer from lack of food:

\begin{quote}
...il cibo frugale le si converte in buon sangue, ha minori bisogni dell'operaio industriale, e si soddisfa con poca spesa...
\end{quote}

He did acknowledge that where casual labourers were employed the conditions of some peasants were very wretched due to the low wages they were paid. However, he believed that sharecroppers had a very satisfactory existence.\textsuperscript{34} Mezzetti's comments on the conditions of the peasants, even given their qualifications in regard to day labourers, are rather surprising given that they were made in 1887 in the midst of a severe agricultural crisis, the effects of which on the peasants were clearly evident. They were also somewhat at odds with the previous and following reports from the II Section which indicated an awareness of the real, as opposed to idealised, conditions under which most peasants lived although there was a common belief that the lives of peasants would be greatly improved if sharecropping was more widely practised.

Another aspect of the bad conditions suffered by many peasants to which the \textit{intransigenti} referred was inadequate housing. On a few occasions it was noted that peasants were unable to pay their rents and were forced to leave their homes. The references to peasant housing were not numerous nor did the II Section put forward a detailed examination of this problem but it was often included with those other aspects

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{31} X. pp.160-70. \\
\textsuperscript{32} X. p.265. \\
\textsuperscript{33} VII. pp.151-2. \\
\textsuperscript{34} VII. pp.150-8.
\end{flushright}
of the impoverishment of the peasantry, ill health and insufficient diet.\textsuperscript{35}

Members of the II Section stated on a number of occasions that the terrible physical conditions suffered by many peasants were largely due to insufficient employment, low wages and consequent widespread poverty. These problems were cited in the report on Mantova which Sassóli-Tomba quoted to the V Congress.\textsuperscript{36} Quoting the report Sassóli-Tomba described the agricultural labourers of Mantova as being:

\begin{quote}
sempre scarsamente retribuito, se si eccettuano poche settimane dell'anno, manca affatto tutte le volte che la condizione economica dei proprietari e degli affittuari e l'andamento della stagione non lo consentono...l'offerta del lavoro superando di gran lungo la domanda, masse di operai divenuto inoperose e siano gettate colle loro famiglie nelle più crudeli angustie della fame, e de' suoi cattivi consigli.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Mezzetti also conceded that the conditions of certain peasants were bad because of the meagre wages.\textsuperscript{38} Scotton, in his speech on agriculture to the X Congress, described as exploitation the treatment of agricultural labourers employed on the ricefields and large estates of Northern and Central Italy, who were paid less than was needed to support themselves and their families. He described crowds of barefooted, emaciated people invading the towns and demanding charity, almost all of these people being the sons of rural wage labourers.\textsuperscript{39}

The poverty of many peasants was a point made frequently by Cerutti in his speeches to the general assemblies of the congresses. Cerutti maintained that peasants were unable to improve their situations because they had no access to credit at a low cost. The only finance they could get was from usurers at extremely high rates of interest and consequently, he argued, their position was worsening.\textsuperscript{40} Scotton also referred to the impoverishing effects of usury in Sicily.\textsuperscript{41} The references to these problems were not lengthy. Cerutti, for example, did not describe in any great detail the situation of these peasants and the way in which usury operated in rural areas, nor how it fitted into rural economic structures. Rather his reports put forward brief, pragmatic assessments of the contemporary rural situation, then suggested practical means by which peasant cultivators could be assisted to raise their income to a level that could sustain both them

\textsuperscript{35} V. p.125; IX. pp.74-5; X. pp.161-2, 264-5; XIX. pp.78-84.
\textsuperscript{36} V. pp.125-6.
\textsuperscript{37} V. p.125.
\textsuperscript{38} VII. pp.151-2.
\textsuperscript{39} X. pp.264-5.
\textsuperscript{40} X. pp.130-1; XI. pp.111, 116-7; XIII. pp.149-50, 225; XIV. pp.151-6; XVI. pp.139-44.
\textsuperscript{41} X. p.268.
and their dependents.

Apart from unemployment and low wages another of the factors members of the II Section regarded as contributing to the miserable conditions of the peasantry was that of low productivity deriving from the type of cultivation used by most peasants. Cerutti, in particular, was involved with this issue both in his reports and in his practical activities in support of agriculture. At the XIV Congress in 1896 Cerutti, while arguing that agriculture was being badly affected by oppressive taxes, lack of capital, usury and the external market amongst other factors, focussed on the forms of cultivation peasants were using which depleted the soil and did nothing to return fertilising elements. Thus, in his view, the level of productivity was lowered and the conditions of the direct cultivators exacerbated.

Cerutti blamed the low level of agricultural production not only on the exhaustion of the soil but also, as he put it, on false conceptions of political economy about agriculture. He argued that these views of agriculture denied the fundamental role it played as a source of wealth for the economy and propagated the belief that the soil's fecundity was inexhaustible and that physical work alone was sufficient to feed the increasing population. His argument about political economy is rather confusing. He appears to be combining facets of capitalist and socialist theories as he believed they impinged on the state of agricultural production and soundly condemning them. Yet he had earlier observed that scientific methods were now being applied and that improved methods of cultivation, including the use of fertilisers, were beginning to be put into practice, changes that were occurring under capitalist agricultural production. What he seems to be doing is combining a strong ideological claim, in keeping with the position of the intransigenti in favour of the predominance of agriculture, with a realistic appraisal of the destructive nature of much peasant cultivation.

At a more realistic level, Cerutti argued that one way of improving the conditions of the peasantry was to increase the fertility of the soil through the use of fertilisers and other modern, scientific forms of cultivation. In particular he was advocating the use of a system of cultivation devised by a Catholic, Solari, which was designed to return nitrogen to the soil. Cerutti and other intransigenti also advocated the adoption of other means by which agricultural production could be raised. These included the establishment of various societies and cooperatives to provide information, capital and agricultural tools, seeds and chemical fertilisers at low rates. None of these proposals

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42 XIV. pp.151-6. See also XVI. p.142; Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., p.59.
43 XIV. pp.154-5.
challenged the existing productive relations between landowners and the direct cultivators. Nevertheless, while the concepts were at times muddled, and the proposals perhaps utopian and conservative, as Rossi puts it, Cerutti’s references to forms of cultivation indicated a recognition, on the part of the II Section at least, of some of the basic problems which composed the agrarian question.\textsuperscript{44}

It could be argued that the references made by the \textit{intransigenti} to the conditions of the peasantry were brief in comparison to the seriousness of the situation, the precarious balance on which many peasants survived, or failed as the emigration figures indicated, and their evident physical suffering, all of which was finding an outlet in support for socialism and peasant leagues, in agitations and increasingly strikes. The approach taken by the \textit{intransigenti} including members of the II Section, however, was to place these references in the context of the general state of agriculture where they tended to be subsumed by either arguments over relations between landowners and direct cultivators or outlines of Catholic socio-economic organisations which were directed at providing practical assistance. Such an approach indicated an intertwining of ideological and practical concerns which was not surprising given the ideological and class position of the \textit{intransigenti} and the scale of the economic and social transformations which were occurring around them. It was also likely to influence the measures proposed by the \textit{intransigenti} to alleviate and resolve agrarian problems. The tendency of the \textit{intransigenti} to start from the interests of the landowner with paternalistic concern for the peasants only began to be questioned with the emergence of the Christian democrats, the more radical of whom started from the interests of the peasants. Their viewpoint tends not to emerge in the congress proceedings because of the action taken to avoid conflict at these public occasions but it clearly motivated the activities of Christian democrats such as Sturzo in Sicily and supporters of Murri.\textsuperscript{45}

The II Section presented a number of general surveys of agriculture to the congresses which sketched out some of the problems faced by agriculture and reflected the far-reaching processes underway as a backward and largely pre-capitalist agricultural sector was being transformed to capitalist production while at the same time struggling under the impact of the severe agricultural crisis which affected Europe from the mid-1870s until well into the 1890s. The report given by Rubbiani to the I Congress outlined

\textsuperscript{44} Rossi, \textit{Le origini}, op. cit., p.59.

\textsuperscript{45} Renda, op. cit., pp.58-66. Renda quotes Sturzo extensively on this point. Sturzo believed that in Sicily a clear choice had to be made for the masses and a re-ordering of society, for example: \textit{Una ricostruzione sociale s’impone, s’impongono un ordinamento nuovo della proprietà rurale, un rapporto più equo e cristiano tra capitale e lavoro, un’educazione morale e politica rispondente agli ideali della sana democrazia e della vera religione}. Quoted from an article by Sturzo, 20 April, 1902. Ibid., p.60.
some of these processes occurring in the countryside. He spoke of the attraction of other means of income which was drawing people from agriculture, materialist desires, the influence of governi rivoluzionarii in degrading landed property, the emergence in the countryside of new landowners intent on seeking greater profits and unconcerned about the effects on peasants, and the exodus of peasants from the countryside to the cities as conditions deteriorated. Zulian, in his report to the IV Congress, briefly referred to landowners being replaced by greedy leasees, and the poverty of the direct cultivators who were migrating to other places or to America in search of better conditions.

Sassoli-Tomba, in his turn gave an exposition which focussed on the role of the Christian landowner and the nature of the social and economic relations between Christian landowners and the peasantry, looking at the ideal situation and at what he regarded as detrimental changes that had taken place and were continuing to do so. The changes he referred to included the deplorable state of the agricultural population, the harm done to agriculture by the applicazione di falsi principi, the undermining of principles upholding the ownership of property and the nature of work, the degradation of landed property by the absolute application of free competition, the neglect by landowners of their duties which he regarded as one of the major causes of misery and demoralisation in the countryside, the proletarisation of many peasants, the absorption of small property into large property, changing contracts offered to peasants and the establishment of capitalist cultivation which he viewed as acceptable so long as the landowner exercised his duty of patronage. Although not discussed in any detail, Sassoli-Tomba did allude to the impact of national and international competition on a largely subsistence economy and of capital accumulation by the State in the form of heavy taxation as basic factors underlying the problems of unemployment and antagonistic class relations.

Another report which referred to some of the problems and changes within the agrarian sector was that given by Mezzetti to the VII Congress on the state of agriculture. Mezzetti stated that agricultural conditions were currently bad and that it was necessary to improve them per ottenere la prosperità dell’agricoltura e degli agricoltori. Recognising that there were other relevant aspects such as the improvement of cultivation and animal rearing techniques, he raised as the principal problem for

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48 V. p.119.
49 V. pp.119-44.
50 VII. p.153.
agriculture, the impact of the financial policies of the Government on landowners. The landowners were, he said, beset by

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\text{crudeli distrette, nelle quali li pongono le esigenze dell'Erario, il sistema vigente di legislazione e gli ordinamenti amministrativi e finanziari dello Stato.}^{51}
\]

Mezzetti argued that there had been a degradation of the position of agriculture and of the income to individual landowners with far higher taxes on land than on other forms of property. Thus, he said, landowners were increasingly being forced to sell their land to pay the taxes. Mezzetti was also critical of the contracts being offered to many peasants, expressing opposition to the use of day labour by tenants leasing large estates.\(^{52}\)

Cerutti also cited some of the factors which he believed were contributing to the bad conditions of agriculture in his speech to the XIV Congress in 1896. They included oppressive taxes, lack of capital, usury, the impact of the external market, inadequate techniques of cultivation resulting in low rates of productivity, and the dominance of false conceptions of political economy in relation to agriculture with consequent undermining of the pre-eminence of agriculture and the moral degradation of the rural population.\(^{53}\)

These surveys or summaries of factors impacting on agriculture were often couched in moral and religious terms, so that while they gave some indication of socio-economic processes their framework was strongly ideological:

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\text{...noi siamo convinti che [the causes of the agrarian question] hanno la loro origine negli errori deplorevoli sulle nozioni prime della proprietà e del lavoro, nella conseguente diffusione di massime antisociali, e nel pervertimento dei costumi...}^{54}
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This ideological statement, made by Sassóli-Tomba to the V Congress in 1879, was probably to be expected made, as it was, before the establishment of the II Section on a permanent basis when the intransigenti's approach to socio-economic problems was considerably limited. However, Cerutti was equally capable of stating to the XIV Congress that,

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
\(^{52}\) VII. pp.150-7.
\(^{53}\) XIV. pp.151-6.
\(^{54}\) V. p.136.
la questione sociale in Italia, la quale è naturalmente agricola, è prodotta
dall'affievolimento dei principii morali del cristianesimo nelle popolazioni...

a statement which was objected to by don Portalupi, president of the Unione agricola regionale lombarda. It would have been acceptable, however, to most of the Congress participants. The ideological emphasis was at times weaker, and at other times stronger. There was not a progression from strongly ideological to objective socio-economic reports. Apart from the ideological and class positions of the intransigenti, the ideological caste of many of the speeches not only on agrarian problems but also on the social question in general, would have been encouraged by the occasion of the congresses when Catholics from all parts of Italy were drawn together to foster their opposition to the 'revolution' and to the breakdown of religious values in Italian society. Even if members of the II Section did not unconsciously use an ideological framework or emphasise ideological aspects of the agrarian question, they would have been aware that this approach would evoke a more positive hearing.

Not unexpectedly the responses of the intransigenti to the processes of transformation in agriculture were equivocal. Here and there amongst the ideological condemnations, signs of an acceptance of some of the processes do emerge. Sassóli-Tomba, for example, stated that they could not reverse the changes nor fetter their development. Moreover, the proposals they put forward did not challenge the changes in any fundamental way. One example is that of the casse rurali, set up by the intransigenti to provide rural credit to peasants at low or no cost. These organisations tended to assist the survival of certain sectors of peasant agriculture in the face of competition from capitalist production but they did not push the balance back towards peasant production nor was there any support for land redistribution to peasants except from Christian democrats such as Sturzo. There was a pragmatism derived from the economic interests of many intransigenti.

There was, however, a fundamental transformation underway in the agrarian sector to which the intransigenti expressed strong opposition. It was the change in productive relations between the landowners and the peasantry. For the intransigenti this transformation involved a variety of aspects ranging from increasing use of contracts

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55 V. p.137.
other than sharecropping, the deterioration of contracts and the growing use of day labourers. They also identified a new type of landowner who was leasing large areas of land and whom they described as speculators. All of these changes, they argued, were producing antagonistic relations between padroni and peasants. Their statements about these processes were no less ideological than those they made in relation to other areas of agriculture but the processes they referred to were clear. Their concern was over the expanding importance of agricultural production carried out on a capitalist basis with the concomitant development of a rural proletariat, rather than through traditional forms of land tenure, and the gradual emergence of bourgeois landowners in place of aristocratic landowners whose interests in relation to the land were different to those of the new padroni. The intransigenti may not have put their concerns quite so clearly but these were the processes they were most opposed to in regard to agriculture. Many of their speeches on this subject had a utopian flavour of a future where Christian landowners would wisely and paternalistically manage the affairs of peasants who had access to the land on the basis of sharecropping contracts. On the other hand, even in this case, the intransigenti were willing to accept a situation less than their ideal, proposing means by which changes could be made to productive relations which would partially satisfy their ideas. Furthermore, the various factions within the intransigenti often took different positions on the capitalist transformations of agriculture.

The intransigenti were concerned at the deterioration in the conditions of the sharecroppers and the appearance of harsher contracts although the references to these issues at the general assemblies of the congresses were, in fact, relatively few. They were aware from the I Congress that sharecroppers were being impoverished and reduced to the level of landless labourers, faced with a choice between harsher contracts or expulsion from the land.59 Similar comments were made at the IV Congress by Zulian60 and Sassoli-Tomba also referred to this process in his report to the V Congress on the duties of Christian landowners towards the peasants cultivating their land. The report he quoted on conditions in Mantova described the absorption of land held under mezzadrile contracts into large holdings so that the peasants who had cultivated small pieces of land as mezzadri or other categories of tenants, were now reduced to landless labourers.61 Mezzetti's speech to the VII Congress mentioned the impact of the bad state of agriculture on peasants because landowners lacked the resources to help carry peasants through the bad years.62 At the X Congress, Scotton looked specifically at the mezzadrile system. He observed that it had previously been spread throughout Italy but

59 I. pp.133-6.
60 IV. pp.261-2.
61 V. pp.124-5.
was disappearing and being replaced by *locazione*, that is the leasing of land for monetary rent. In the North of Italy, he said, *mezzadria* had disappeared while in Central Italy it was still operating strongly. Referring to Sicily, he noted that though sharecropping was common there, the situation of the peasants working the land under these contracts was bad because the only capital available to them was on the basis of usury and their crops and produce were bought up by *incipitatori*.

The contract of *mezzadri* remained for the *intransigent* the ideal form of access to land by peasants. References to sharecroppers were often put in the context of exhortations that landowners return to this system of agricultural production, indicating the opposition of many *intransigenti* to its disappearance. To the *intransigenti*, *mezzadria* or some other form of 'just' sharecropping was the ideal because of the particular social and economic relations which operated under this system. Both landowner and sharecropper were drawn together in a close relationship which touched most aspects of the peasant's life. One aspect of that relationship was, as Sassóli-Tomba put it,

*quella legittima influenza che il proprietario esercitava sul proprio colono, peculiarmente atta a farlo partecipare ai benefizi della solidarietà cristiana che tra loro vigeva.*

Or again:

*L'intervento del proprietario è onnipotente per ottenere dal mezzadro l'osservanza de'suoi doveri religiosi e civili.*

Apart from scattered references extolling the virtues of *mezzadria*, the more extensive references were made to the V, VII, IX, and X Congresses. A proposal put to the V Congress by Sassóli-Tomba stated:

*Il Congresso riconosce che tra i diversi sistemi di conduzione delle terre, il più idoneo a ristorare e favorire nelle campagne l'armonia tra le due classi, e che più affeziona e lega ai campi il lavoratore, è la mezzadria, basata però sopra i due canoni della reciproca equità nel riparto delle rendite e delle spese, e dell'incontestata autorità del padrone.*

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63 X. pp.259-71.  
64 V. p.124.  
65 V. p.132.  
66 V. pp.411-2.
In his speech Sassoli-Tomba argued that *mezzadria* was, the system of cultivation which best fitted with the relations they believed should exist between landowners and their workers. In his brief description of the system he stressed that it had to be based on justice and authority. Justice was to protect the peasant. Authority belonged to the landowner and it was extensive, including the type of cultivation to be used, rotation of crops and marketing of livestock as well as aspects relating to the personal lives of the peasants.  

At the VII Congress Mezzetti similarly praised the system of *colonia parziaria* or sharecropping and listed its benefits. Sharecroppers had secure and continuous work, they could increase their work knowing that the harvests would thereby be increased as would be their profits, they were more partners of their *padroni*, which he stated, gave them a certain power and brought together the interests of the sharecroppers and landowners, and finally in bad years the *padrone* would assist the *coloni* by making advances which would be repaid in good years. Mezzetti regarded *colonia parziaria* as an important means of improving the conditions of peasants and as Sassoli-Tomba had done eight years before, put a proposal to the Congress in support of this system. Despite the similarities in approach, Mezzetti's point about the sharecropper being almost a partner of the landowner did conflict with Sassoli-Tomba's stress on the authority of the landowner over the sharecropper. It also conflicted with the reality of the relationship as it was practised in Italy which was closer to Sassoli-Tomba's view. The power the landowner had might have been tempered by paternalistic impulses in some landowners, which was the ideal that the *intransigenti* propounded, but the extent of that power clearly indicated the potential for exploitation should the landowner or their agent be even slightly unscrupulous. These were aspects of the relationship which, however, the *intransigenti* often avoided.

Another set of proposals regarding *mezzadria* was included in the documents of the IX Congress. They were not put to the general assembly for lack of time but they do indicate that the II Section was continuing to work on the issue. The proposals were not extensive, basically restating the need for *mezzadrile* contracts to be revived in areas where they had ceased to be used. The final extensive reference to *mezzadria* was made at the X Congress by Monsignor Andrea Scotton. He was concerned not with

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68 Mezzetti, in describing sharecropping stated, _in certo modo lo nobilita e gli attribuisce un certo potere nella coltura del fondo, e di più pone il suo interesse in armonia con quello del proprietario._ VII. pp.151-2.
69 VII. pp.154-6.
70 IX, *Documenti*, pp.18-9.
whether mezzadria was the most opportune, secure or profitable system but whether it was closer to the Christian spirit than leasing the land for a monetary rent.\textsuperscript{71} He compared the two systems, stressing the role of the mezzadria system in maintaining social harmony and control. He also emphasised its stability and security for the sharecropper and he argued that the system did not hold back agricultural progress. Scotton indicated awareness that the system could function unjustly but he regarded this as resulting from \textit{la mancanza di timor santo di Dio}.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover he regarded injustices as the exception and did not believe that the system should be condemned on the basis of exceptions.\textsuperscript{73}

After the X Congress there was little mention of the virtues or problems of sharecropping systems because of the shift to practically-oriented reports prefaced or dotted with general descriptions of the difficulties of agriculture and the miserable conditions of many peasants. This disappearance of sharecropping from the business of the II Section which came up at the general assemblies may have been due to the impracticality of re-establishing such a system as the primary form of land tenure for the peasantry. By this stage day labourers were being used more and more extensively in agricultural production as the \textit{intranzigenti} acknowledged. In general the references to sharecropping were not numerous but they are significant when seen in the context of the relatively infrequent discussions of the agrarian situation compared to those on urban workers. The support expressed for the mezzadrie system was sincere if unrealistic deriving from ideological concerns both because sharecropping systems suited the paternalistic and hierarchical principles on which the \textit{intranzigenti} believed society should be based, and because these systems constituted an ideal means by which the power of the aristocratic landowners could be retained and perhaps even extended. As such the support of the \textit{intranzigenti} was an expression of conservatism from a part of the ruling class which was seeing the rapid encroachment of a rural bourgeoisie and the growing influence of the socialist movement in rural areas.\textsuperscript{74}

The \textit{intranzigenti} made some mention of the fact that the deterioration of contracts was in part due to the increasing appearance in the countryside of a different type of landowner to the traditional aristocratic landowner. According to Rubbiani the discrediting of agriculture had rendered inevitable

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} X. p.261.
\item \textsuperscript{72} X. p.267.
\item \textsuperscript{73} X. pp.259-71. \textit{Mezzadrie} contracts were also mentioned briefly in Bottini’s report to the VII Congress. VII. pp.242-3. See also IX. pp.218, 225.
\end{itemize}
Rubbiani argued it was the greed of these new *padroni* and their increasing numbers which was forcing peasants from the countryside, unable to survive under the new contracts. He believed the cause to be largely in the terms under which the land was being leased to the new *padroni* as well as in their being motivated predominantly by a desire for profit. As a consequence the countryside was being thrown into turmoil, and the traditional hierarchical, paternalistic social and economic relations which had ensured harmony and peace were being cast aside. Zulian made similar comments at the IV Congress and Sassoli-Tomba likewise referred to these changes although he was speaking of the ideal situation and setting out means by which landowners should reassert their benevolent and paternalistic authority over agents managing their estates and the peasants cultivating them. Scotton also spoke of rich leasees who were cultivating the land using day labourers or subletting pieces to poor tenants. In his view, these leasees had a different relationship to the peasants cultivating their land based on monetary income alone and making no allowance for the varying circumstances of the peasants.

The *intransigenti* believed that the antagonistic relations between landowners and peasants and the miserable conditions of the latter were not only due to the invasion of the countryside by speculators but also by the abandonment on the part of the traditional landowners of their Christian duties towards their dependents. They made the usual ideological reference to the ideal situation which is unlikely to have ever existed or only in a few areas because the conditions of the peasantry under sharecropping contracts were rarely flourishing. However, their reports also indicate that like the new *padroni*, the aristocratic landowners had begun to adopt capitalist relations of production, hiring peasants’ labour for monetary pay rather than through the various semi-feudal forms involving payment in kind and obligatory labour on the landowners’ estates at different times of the year, and allowing their estates to be leased out to large leasees who cultivated them using day labour or sharecroppers taken on under more exploitative contracts.

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75 I. pp.133-5.
76 I. pp.130-6.
77 IV. pp.261-2.
79 X. pp.264-71. See also IX. pp.74-5.
Rubbiani and Sassóli-Tomba both referred to the neglect by landowners of the duties by which they believed harmonious relations were maintained, arguing that landowners were renting out their estates to the speculators, taking the highest bidder in order to maximise their incomes rather than considering the implications for the peasants.80

Sassóli-Tomba outlined to the V Congress what he believed to be the duties of landowners. They included residence on their estates, the exercise of authority over the peasants they employed, instruction of these peasants and the direction of cultivation.81 Instead, he believed, landowners were failing to oppose social disintegration and peasant unrest by sheltering in the cities although he accepted that legitimate reasons could exist for landowners to lease their estates.82 Both Sassóli-Tomba and Rubbiani stressed the role of landowners in ensuring that moral and religious standards were maintained amongst the rural population. In addition to these references, criticism of landowners for neglecting to protect their authority over the peasants and for failing to maintain harmonious, paternalistic relations in the countryside was often made at the congresses in the context of speeches and reports on Catholic charitable and socio-economic institutions. From the I Congress the *intrusigenti* encouraged landowners to use such institutions to counter the undermining of their authority.83 Hence the shift to practically-oriented reports in the 1890s did not mean that criticism of the landowning class disappeared but rather that it was contained within reports which put forward practical means by which the changes in the countryside could be dealt with.84

Some of the criticisms of landowners, for example the references to absentee landlords, and considerations regarding rent and control over agents reflected a concern for just

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80 I. pp.133-6. Proposals put to the I Congress condemned the leases by which estates were often rented and recommended to the landowners that they be closely informed about the activities of the leasees or agents and investigate the moral character of the leasees or agents before entering into agreements with them. I. pp.135-6.

81 I. quello di residenza ne'suoi possessi; 2. quello d'istruiarsi nelle scienze agronomiche; 3. quello di seguire nella coltivazione delle sue terre quel sistema che meglio s'avvenga all'esercizio del patronato; 4. finalmente quello di argomentarsi a conciliare nel miglior modo possibile, coll'attuazione del dovere di patronato stesso, quel qualunque diverso metodo di coltivazione delle sue tenute che indeclinabili circostanze gl'imporrano.

V. pp.129-30. See also V. pp.127-30.

82 V. pp.126-7. In that case he argued that the landowners should be careful whom they took on to manage their land. They should always supervise their agents closely and exercise influence over them. V. pp.130-2. He also included advice regarding the rent to be charged to leasees and warned landowners accepting unrealistic rents which would have a negative impact on the direct cultivators. V. pp.134-5. The more conservative *intrusigenti* wanted the duties of peasants towards landowners equally stressed as those of landowners towards peasants. Agòcs cites a resolution from the II Congress of the *Unione cattolica per gli studi sociali* in 1896 where the resolution accepted by participants first emphasised the peasants' obligations of justice toward the landowner. Agòcs, *The Troubled Origins*, op. cit., pp.226-8.

83 I. pp.135-40; II. pp.50-2, 69-72; IV. pp.273-9; V. p.414; VI. pp.88-91, 244-6, 281-3; IX. pp.74-8; XI. pp.111-2; XIII. pp.246-51.

treatment of peasants. Of equal or even greater importance was a concern for social stability and opposition to socialist groups which the *intransigenti* shared with many other members of the ruling class. The points they made regarding the duties of landowners were, however, unrealistic because of the increasing shift towards capitalist relations of production which was breaking down and undermining more traditional social and economic relations in the countryside although it was a fragmentary process which took place over a reasonably lengthy period of time. The end result probably could not have been foreseen by the *intransigenti* but the transformations were of such a degree by the early 1900s that the *cristiano sociali* and more so the Christian democrats, were responding in a more pragmatic fashion, with the more radical Christian democrats starting from the point of view of the peasants rather than the rural landowners. They did not believe that social conflict was unacceptable but regarded some degree of conflict as necessary for peasants to achieve just treatment. They also believed that peasants' interests were separate from those of the landowners and opposed the usual paternalistic Catholic approaches.

Although the *intransigenti* regarded as ideal the productive relations encompassed by sharecropping systems, they often qualified their statements, acknowledging that in some regions of Italy other systems were more appropriate to the local situation. Scotton, for example, compared the advantages of *mezzadria* vis-à-vis tenancy with cash rent, pointing out the insecurity of the peasants under such a system and the inhuman treatment to which these peasants could be subjected. However, he went on to say that small farms worked directly by the *padroni*, or with the assistance of workers or tenants with certain just agreements regarding rent and division of profits, were acceptable. The brief report put together by Scotton which was included in the documents of the IX Congress also made similar points. Sassóli-Tomba, for all his insistence on *mezzadria* as the system of cultivation most consonant with Catholic principles, also recognised that it could not be applied to all regions. He accepted that in these areas cultivation necessarily had to be carried out as a large-scale industry using machinery and wage labour. He did not expand on why the cultivation in these areas

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85 Sturzo for example advocated the breaking up of the large estates into small peasant holdings. Renda, op. cit., pp.60-2. It was a more radical response than most of the *intransigenti* were willing to consider. Agôcs, *The Troubled Origins*, op. cit., pp.160-1.

86 X, pp.261-4. He set out means by which the circumstances of tenants could be maintained at reasonable levels. X, pp.268-70.


88 *Sonvi vaste plaghe, in cui la diversità delle basi sulle quali sono stabiliti i rapporti tra proprietario e colivatore non permettono quella continuità di relazioni, e quella fusione di esistenza che fanno quasi come una grande e sola famiglia di tutti coloro che in diversa misura s'interessano e contribuiscono alla produzione del suolo. Sonvi tenute che debbono necessariamente essere condotte col metodo della vasta coltura diretta, esercitata a mo' delle grandi industrie col sussidio
should 'necessarily' be carried out under this different system involving different relations between the padroni and the workers and different techniques of cultivation. Instead he had accepted the changes but he did go on to set out ways in which the padroni should behave in order that the system should be more acceptable to the Catholic perspective. Thus the padroni should try to establish close relations with the day labourers, to pay them fairly and promptly and even to offer them access to small pieces of land which they could cultivate on a sharecropping basis. Sassoli-Tomba also made the comment that times had changed and that they could not return to the past but conditions could be tempered.

It would appear that members of the II Section were aware of the impossibility of returning all of rural Italy to a semi-feudal state, the social and economic relations embodied by the mezzadria system being basically semi-feudal. They must also have been aware that levels of productivity under such a system were not high although Scotton did try to counter this argument. The provision of capital at little or no cost to certain categories of peasants through the casse rurali would have helped them raise their productivity through the introduction of improved techniques of cultivation. Even so the levels of productivity achieved through capitalist systems of cultivation and the clear inability of peasants to compete successfully must have given the intransigenti some indication of the forms of cultivation which would eventually be predominant. The qualifications made by some of the cristiano sociali suggest that they recognised these processes. At the same time it may have been difficult to do so publicly in any detail. At one level this may have been due to the ideological conflict involved. It could perhaps be argued that the congress reports indicate that some intransigenti were beginning to work through the implications of the social, economic and political changes for rural society. However, there was also opposition within the Opera dei Congressi to such openings such as in the late 1880s when the studies of the II Section on the agrarian question provoked fears amongst some intransigenti, it seems because of a possible challenge to forms of land tenure and ownership.

The work of some Christian democrats in rural areas indicated a rather different approach to those taken by both the hardline intransigenti and the cristiano sociali. Around the turn of the century some Christian democrats were working on the

delle macchine e coll'opera dei giornalieri o braccianti.
V. p.133.
99 V. pp.133-4.
100 V. p.137. Also one of the proposals Mezzetti put to the VII Congress was that sharecropping should be preferred per quanto consentono l'indole della coltura e le condizioni locali. VII. p.156.
91 X. pp.265-6.
establishment of affitti collettivi under which a cooperative of peasants leased land directly from the landowner without the intervention of a third party. The land could then be cultivated by various systems. Affitti collettivi were set up in Sicily and around Trevigilia.93 Basically they were directed at ensuring that whatever profit could be made went directly to the peasants cultivating the land not to a third party. Portaluppi, who was involved in setting up affitti collettivi around Treviglia, presented a report to the XIX Congress on the subject. He depicted the peasants as being responsible people who, given the opportunity and support through cooperative associations, could manage the land competently, a view which contrasted with the paternalism of earlier reports on agriculture.94 Affitti collettivi were unlikely to have become widespread because of the political and economic situation in the early 1900s but they did offer to peasants a means of adapting to the changing economic circumstances.95 In terms of the Opera dei Congressi, this report from a Christian democrat was an exception in the proceedings of the general assemblies of the congresses and was unlikely to lead the socio-economic work of the II Section in a new direction because of the degree of opposition from older intransigenti.96

Although the intransigenti indicated on some occasions openness to other systems of cultivation, including the use of day labourers, they also expressed strong opposition to the emergence of a large rural workforce composed of wage labourers and they frequently condemned the conditions under which these peasants existed. Rubbiani commented on this process in his speech as did Zulian.97 The report quoted by Sassoli-Tomba to the V Congress described this process in Mantova, where there were far too many landless labourers looking for work in relation to jobs available:

*L'agricoltura esercitandosi sempre più fra noi per mezzo di lavoratori avventizi, si avvicina di egual passo alla grande industria e ne corre le vicende, nelle quali avviene ormai troppo spesso che l'offerta del lavoro superando di gran lunga la domanda, masse di operai diventino inoperose e siano gettate colle loro famiglie nelle più crudeli angustie della fame, e de'suoi cattivi consigli.*

These landless labourers were often forced to abandon their homes because they could

93 Affitti collettivi are discussed in more detail in Chapter 11.
94 XIX. pp.73-7.
95 See Chapter 11.
96 Affitti collettivi were mentioned at the XVII Congress. XVII. pp.199-200.
97 ...oggi per una serie di svariate e tutte terribili circostanze [mezzadri] si sono visti ridotti a giornalieri, senza altro capitale che le proprie braccia...
I. pp.133-5. See also IV. pp.261-2.
98 V. p.125.
not pay the rent and either became nomads or migrated to the cities and overseas. There was increased crime and the local authorities had to provide more assistance. Similar comments were made at the following congresses about the plight of the landless labourers and their increasing numbers.

Twelve years later, Medolago Albani again described the increasing numbers of these peasants who had been expropriated from their land and hence were...

...proletari senza tetto, senza dimora fissa, e quasi senza famiglia e patria. 100

He was particularly concerned about the threat these processes posed for the stability of society, a point also made by Sassóli-Tomba and by Scotton in his brief report to the IX Congress. At the following Congress Scotton also referred to the landless labourers whom he described as being reduced to a herd of slaves and he quoted Rerum Novarum to the effect that these workers had a right to a wage sufficient to sustain themselves and their dependents, which was usually far from true:

Il semplice salariato sta peggio. Ha la casa, e la chiamo casa tanto per dire. Ha la zappatura e la rincalzatura di due o tre campicelli da farsi la polenta ne’mesi d’inverno. Ha un certo numero di fascinelle da accendere sotto l’orciuolo, e colla sua nidiata di bimbi dee mangiare, vestirsi e darsi bel tempo con cinquanta o sessanta centesimi al di, per vivere, vecchio anzi tempo, d’accatto, e morire pellagroso allo spedale. 103

He also regarded the landless labourers as open to socialist and anarchist influence. 104

The analysis then, that the intransigenti made of the state of agriculture and the conditions of the peasantry was reasonably wide-ranging. Their reports reflected a basic understanding of some of the factors affecting agriculture and the peasants but the insights were often inextricably intertwined with ideological and religious concerns. They were troubled by the disappearance of sharecropping contracts and the growing use of day labourers, changes they attributed to economic processes but also to changing social relations or, in their words, the neglect by landowners of their duties.

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99 V. pp.124-6.
100 IX. p.75.
101 IX. pp.74-5.
102 V. pp.124-6; IX. Documenti, pp.18-9.
103 X. p.265.
104 X. pp.259-71. See also VII. p.156.
They usually held before themselves an idealised vision of a stable, harmonious rural society based on the performance of reciprocal rights and duties. The reality was very different. Large numbers of peasants maintained a very precarious balance which population pressures, international and internal competition, heavy taxes and few prospects of alternative employment could only adversely affect. Under these circumstances the increasing erosion of pre-capitalist relations under the pressure of the growing dominance of capitalist production could only exacerbate the difficulties of the peasants.
Apart from the application of Christian principles to society and the economy, what else did the *intransigenti* have to offer in the way of solutions to the grave social question which predominantly encompassed the effects of capitalist transformation within Italy? As has been seen they wanted a reassertion of Catholic values within Italian society, a return to a medieval utopia where the Church stood at the pinnacle of a hierarchically-ordered society mediating between the 'superior' and 'inferior' classes, where pre-capitalist relations were dominant in the countryside and urban life, where the masters and landowners exercised their paternalistic rights and duties, and workers and peasants respected those above them and accepted from them their tutelage and assistance. From some *intransigenti*, however, there was an indication of more contradictory responses, of an acceptance of some of the economic, social and political changes and an awareness of the complexity of the changes. These contradictory responses were also evident in the other major area of activity which was of concern to the II Section, the organisation of the masses into a range of Catholic socio-economic associations.¹

The socio-economic organisations promoted by the *intransigenti* had two main aims, to provide assistance to workers and peasants within organisations which were based on principles of Catholic morality and religion and to prevent workers and peasants from being drawn into liberal, and later socialist, organisations. The socio-economic associations that the *intransigenti* established, or hoped to establish, were varied. Initially they were primarily charitable, expressing the benevolent paternalism of their founders or influential members who were usually aristocrats or well-off members of their local communities. In these associations workers and peasants were meant to play a passive role, responding to the initiatives of their 'superiors'. Organisations providing charitable assistance to poor peasants and urban workers remained as one constant form of Catholic action through the late 1880s and into the new century. Gradually other types of socio-economic organisations were set up in association with the II Section of the *Opera dei Congressi*. They were often still based on concepts of benevolent assistance and Catholic morality but they also incorporated mutual aid and self-help mechanisms. The workers' associations were meant to be composed of both

¹ These socio-economic associations were generally referred to as *il movimento economico-sociale cattolico*. 

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Organising the Masses
workers and *padroni* but while some associations were founded by aristocrats or the bourgeoisie, the *padroni* were always reluctant to join so these organisations never came to represent the harmonious mixing of the social classes which the *intransigenti* constantly advocated. Nor did these associations fulfil the hopes of the *intransigenti* for the revival of medieval corporations in a more modern form which they believed would help overcome the problems facing Italian society. Instead the Catholic workers' societies and federations, although they remained largely apart from social and economic agitation in support of working class demands, represented the initial steps towards genuine Catholic unions.

The importance of charitable assistance to the *intransigenti* as a means of resolving or ameliorating the social question was reflected in the initial title of the II Section, *Opere di carità*, as well as the significant weight within the concerns of the Section in the early years of the *Opera dei Congressi*, of organisations with charitable aims.\(^2\) The words *Economia cattolica* were not added to the title of the II Section until the VI Congress in 1883. *Opere di carità* did not disappear from the title until late 1885, the new title, *Economia Sociale Cristiana*, indicating greater emphasis within the Section on socio-economic theory and action rather than on charitable organisations. However, charitable activities did not disappear completely from the program of the II Section, even reappearing in the title of the Section at the XVII and XVIII Congresses, held respectively in 1900 and 1901.\(^3\) The range of charitable organisations listed in the program of the II Section at the early congresses was extensive. Included were such associations as the *Società di San Vincenzo de' Paoli*, the *Società delle Dame di Carità*, the *Opera della visita dei poveri infermi agli Ospedali*, the * Patronati dei ragazzi poveri* and the *Case di Ricovero per i poveri abbandonati*.\(^4\) Members of the *Opera dei Congressi* were urged to support such organisations. If there was a local need but no charitable association providing for it, they were urged to establish appropriate institutions.\(^5\)

The *intransigenti*, in extolling the virtues of charitable institutions, made it clear that these organisations had a number of purposes which could not be considered separately


\(^3\) The programs of the X to the XIV Congresses (1892-6) listed *Opere Pie* as a separate sub-section of the II Section. X. pp.16-9; XI. pp.17-21; XII. pp.27-31; XIII. pp.15-9; XIV. pp.23-7. Works of charity were listed as a separate sub-section of the II Section at the XI Congress in 1894 and the XIII Congress in 1895. XI. pp.17-21; XIII. pp.15-9.

\(^4\) Program of the II Section, I. pp.290-1.

\(^5\) I. pp.120-4, 113-20, 137-9; II. pp.50-2, 69-74, 127, 163-70; IV. pp.165-8, 219; V. pp.178-80, 195-6, 405-6; VI. pp.281-3; VIII. pp.71-4, *Documenti*, p.37; XI. pp.67-8, 93-7; XIII. pp.246-51; XV. pp.273-4; XVII. pp.61-2, 197-9; XVIII. pp.140-6. Most of the Catholic associations which were connected to the II Section in 1875 were of a charitable nature. Reato, op. cit., pp.181-2.
without distorting the meaning of these organisations to devout Catholics. They were to provide material assistance to the sick and poor, including the unemployed, and they were to provide religious education. They were also, the *intransigenti* stressed, to protect the *grandi masse proletarie* from revolutionary doctrines, drawing them back under the influence of the Church and uniting the rich and poor in bonds of friendship. While these institutions were paternalistic in nature, dominated by Catholic aristocrats and bourgeoisie who expected passive compliance from the poor, it is too easy to stress the function of social control these institutions performed for these Catholic members of the ruling class. Clearly social control was one aspect but the motivations of religious duty of the rich to the poor and concern for the religious education of the poor should not be forgotten. In fact they believed that assistance to the poor minus the religious and moral adjuncts would lead only to disaster. The *intransigenti* saw charitable assistance as an interweaving of duties, responsibilities and submission, binding together the rich and poor.

One type of charitable organisation that the *intransigenti* were involved in setting up which had a predominantly charitable function was the *cucine economiche* or soup kitchens. The *cucine economiche* were meant to compensate for the inadequate diet of many peasants and urban workers which was leading to widespread disease:

*Lo scrofola e il rachitismo dominano dovunque; nell’alta Italia e nella media aggiungete la pellagra che fa conquiste terribili. Gli uomini della carità e quelli della scienza concordi affermano che la causa di questi mali sta precipuamente nella cattiva e nella insufficiente alimentazione.*

Apart from alleviating the suffering of the peasants and urban workers the *cucine economiche* also performed other functions typical of Catholic charitable institutions:

*...le cucine economiche...hanno giovato assai ad accostare alla classe dirigente la classe lavoratrice, hanno procurato maggior credito ed influenza ai cattolici che le dirigono, e, quel che più importa, giovarono indirettamente a ravvivare il sentimento della cristiana carità...*
Reference was made to the establishment of Catholic *cucine economiche* by Rezzara at the VI Congress (1883). He mentioned some in Rome which had existed for 'many years', and in Bergamo as being the best organised. Others had been set up since the end of 1882 primarily in the North but they also existed in other areas. There was no detailed information given on *cucine economiche* in the congress proceedings apart for the proposals put to the VI Congress urging their establishment. However, the regional reports regularly referred to their existence in various areas and to the fact that workers' societies had often set them up. These references suggest that the *cucine economiche* did not have the same significance for the *intransigenti* as the more frequently mentioned workers' societies and rural organisations such as the *casse rurali*.

The concept of Catholics establishing societies specifically for workers pre-dated the *Opera dei Congressi*. Five workers' societies appear on the list of Catholic associations which sent messages of support to the I Congress. Other were also in existence. The idea of forming such societies was taken up by the *intransigenti*, some of whom had probably been involved in their establishment. From the I Congress on there were frequent references to the need to promote these associations and the various committees of the *Opera dei Congressi* were all urged to work to establish them. Leading members of the *Opera dei Congressi* were always concerned to establish strong links with the Catholic workers' societies, and later the federations, with a primary aim of maintaining control over the movement of Catholic workers and these institutions were also urged to maintain close links with the *Opera dei Congressi* through the II Section. The nature of the bonds between the *Opera dei Congressi* and the Catholic workers' societies was a source of continuing disagreement between

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10 The one in Bergamo was established in 1881. Both the one in Bergamo and the one in Rome were established by members of *Gioventù Cattolica*. VI. pp.88-9, 181-2. They were also reported to exist around Naples. VI. pp.169-70.

11 VI. pp.88-91. It appears that they were discussed in sessions of the II Section at that Congress. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., p.184.


13 They were the *Unione di Operai Cattolici* of Avigliana, the *Società Operaia di mutuo soccorso* of Bologna, the *Unione di Operai Cattolici* from Cuneo, a workers' society from Rovigo and the *Società Operaia Veneziana di mutuo soccorso*. I. pp.257-61.

14 The oldest was in Genoa. It was established in 1854. The *Unione cattolica operaia di Torino* was founded in 1871. Rezzara reports 18 existed in 1874, most set up after 1870. V. pp.451-5; IX. p.138. See also Reato, op. cit., pp.181-2. The *intransigenti* used the word *operaio* to apply more generally than to urban workers. Some of the societies were composed of peasants. IX. p.143, *Documenti, Vol. II*, pp.59-61, 80-2; X. *Parte II*, *Documenti*, pp.42-4; XI. pp.46-9, *Documenti*, p.76.


16 IX. pp.151-2; X. pp.204-6; XII. p.166; XIII. pp.170-1.
hardline *intransigenti* and *cristiano sociali* such as Medolago Albani. The II Section was closely involved with these societies, giving advice and assistance but Medolago Albani wanted the societies to have greater autonomy than people such as Paganuzzi were willing to concede.\(^{17}\) Not all the Catholic workers' societies wanted to be linked to the *Opera dei Congressi* and not all of them were formed by its members.\(^{18}\) However, regional reports to the congresses indicate that the committees or some of their members, particularly in provinces such as Lombardy, were closely involved.\(^{19}\) In some areas the Catholic workers' societies acted as the local representatives of the *Opera dei Congressi* in the absence of parish committees.\(^{20}\) In other areas such as Brescia many of the existing parish committees were transformed into Catholic workers' societies, confraternities and similar organisations.\(^{21}\)

The *intransigenti* thought that these societies could perform a number of useful functions. They believed they could provide another type of Catholic institution which would serve to reinforce and re-establish Catholic influence in Italian society especially amongst the impoverished masses and counter the threat of socialism and liberalism. They would also provide practical assistance based on self help rather than charity, although paternalistic assistance of the rich to the poor was a frequently mentioned aspect of the workers' societies. They were also seen as the initial step in establishing corporations based on the model of medieval corporations, uniting *padroni* and workers in one organisation and gradually leading to the establishment of a series of articulated bodies. The reality was ultimately far from this utopian view.

The Catholic workers' societies, generally known as *società operaie cattoliche di mutuo soccorso*, had a variety of functions. Primarily they provided financial assistance when members were ill, too old to work, unable to work or experiencing financial problems. They also provided loans on easy conditions. Their financial resources came from members' contributions and charity.\(^{22}\) Various associated institutions were often

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17 In the mid 1880s the II Section put together a statute for these societies, which was itself a cause of friction. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.210-3, 219-20, 268, 411-4. IX. pp.213-4. In 1887 the official bulletin of the *Opera dei Congressi* published the *istruzioni per l'ordinamento e gestione delle società di reciproca carità per le classi industriali* prepared by the II Section. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., p.262.

18 IX. Vol. II, *Documenti*, pp.92-101. In 1896, of the 621 existing societies, 167 were classed as *non-aderenti* to the *Opera dei Congressi*. The figures for 1897 were 884 and 231 respectively. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.454-5.


20 This was the case mainly in Liguria. X. pp.27-8.

21 IX. *Documenti*, p.49.

22 The contributions varied as did the subsidies paid. Rezzara reported on the differences and different provisions to the IX Congress. IX. pp.142-5.
grouped around them. These included *casse di risparmio*, institutions providing life insurance, cooperatives selling food and clothes at modest prices, banks, pension and welfare funds, charitable institutions and youth sections. Some had committees which found employment for members without work. To provide for the moral and religious edification of their members the societies usually set up libraries and organised regular conferences generally on religious subjects, pilgrimages and religious instruction for members and their children. They also had the usual trappings of such societies as a report on these societies in Liguria described:

*Quasi tutti hanno il loro stendardo, il loro Circolo, il loro giardino di ricreazione; molte hanno la fanfara; cinque la banda musicale completa...*  

Membership of workers' societies was not restricted to men, reflecting a recognition that women also worked outside their homes and had need of similar benefits such societies offered to male workers. However, it appears that the societies were generally segregated.

According to the reports of the *intransigenti* the Catholic workers' societies were to have a clearly Catholic nature. Catholic principles were to form the basis on which they were established and the manner of their operation. Members were to be practising Catholics whose lives conformed to the Catholic ideal of a moral and frugal worker.

In the view of the *intransigenti* one of the central roles of these societies, apart from giving material assistance, was to reassert the influence of the Church over workers and to spread amongst them religious doctrine and beliefs.

*...dare appoggio morale e materiale ai cattolici operai esercenti arti, industrie e commerci, col mantenere vivo in essi il sentimento religioso, fortificarli con buon esempio, eccitarli all'adempimento dei doveri del Cristiano, e promuovere le opere che meglio occorrono all'uopo, e specialmente quelle di mutuo soccorso.*

The obverse of this role for the *intransigenti* was that the Catholic workers' societies were intended to oppose revolutionary doctrines, and to save workers from atheism and...
destructive struggle against their *padroni*. Workers were regarded as composing a potentially dangerous mass which had to be controlled:

*Queste due classi [gli operai e gli agricoltori] che compongono la parte più numerosa dell’umana famiglia possono esserne la rovina, o aiutare la rigenerazione sociale...*  

Within workers' societies not based on Catholic principles the threat posed by workers, the *intransigenti* stated, was extreme:

*...la principal forza della rivoluzione e il più grave ed imminente pericolo sociale son constituiti dalle più o meno organizzate coalizioni operaie...*  

Even if they were established with the best of intentions, the *intransigenti* believed they would degenerate into subversive and anti-religious associations.  

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The *intransigenti* believed that workers and peasants were exploited, initially by the liberals and then by the socialists, to achieve the dominance of their ideas, and part of their motivation for being involved in setting up Catholic societies was to oppose those of the liberals and the socialists.  

Consistent with their hierarchical view of society, the *intransigenti* frequently portrayed workers as passive instruments of anticlerical forces, open to the influence and control of people who did not have their best interests in mind.

*...sgraziate genti le quali, prive dei doni di fortuna, ma ancora più mancanti di istruzione, di principii religiosi, di fede, abbrutite dai vizi, si fanno cieco strumento di coloro, che sollecitandole con menzognere promesse, mirano ad aizzctrle contro le classi più favorable, ad interporre una barriera fra la generosità del ricco e la miseria del povero...*  

In actual fact the *intransigenti*, in their concern for the maintenance of a given social order and control over the masses, differed little from those moderate liberals who were involved in setting up workers' societies as a means of exercising their control over the

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27 V. p.166.  
28 VI. pp.292-3.  
30 ...la rivoluzione si rivolgeva particolarmente agli Operai, per trovare nella loro forza materiale, e nella loro morale perversione una base sicura di operazione... V. p.452. See also I. p.140; IV. pp.81, 88-9; VI. pp.29-30; VII. pp.140-1; VIII. pp.42-4, 71-4; IX. Documenti, Vol. II, pp.77-91; X. p.126; XI. pp.111-2, 219-20; XII. pp.81-93, 114; XIII. pp.100-1; XVIII. pp.140-6, 184-9; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.131-2, 151-2, 365.  
masses. A major motivation for the *intransigenti* in establishing workers' societies was then that of social control, of drawing the social classes together in harmony within a natural hierarchy. Each society, they believed, should reflect that hierarchy with membership of both workers and *padroni*:

*Occorre l'Associazione, nella quale abbia il suo posto naturale il contadino, il fittibile, il proprietario, l'operaio e il padrone, stretti nel vincolo della fede e della carità cristiana, sotto gli auspici della Chiesa e l'influenza del Clero.*

Control of individual Catholic workers' societies by ruling class Catholics and by the clergy was assured through their structure and through the insistence on the dominance of principles of paternalism and charity. The role of these societies as a means of social control was also seen in the specific rejection of class struggle and resistance as a means, acceptable to Catholics, for workers to establish and defend the right to basic standards on such matters as wages, hours of work and working conditions. In his report to the IX Congress (1891) on Catholic workers' societies, Rezzara noted that the statutes of many of the societies that had responded to his questionnaire prohibited strikes. Also a part of the motivation of the *intransigenti* to establish a network of workers' societies was a genuine concern about the material situation of workers but it may be questioned as to whether it was as strong as those of social conservation, opposition to revolutionary doctrines and that over the loss of religious influence. Certainly conditions of poverty, squalor and exploitation were not new. Moreover many of the references in the congress proceedings to Catholic workers' societies were made in the context of the threat of these societies to the socialist movement. Whatever the degree of concern over workers' material conditions, the *intransigenti* did realise the

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34 Ibid., pp.16-7.

35 VII. pp.140-2; IX. pp.70-2; XII. pp.81-93, 108-10, 114.

36 IX. p.149. At later congresses it was acknowledged that strikes were permissible but only in exceptional circumstances and with many precautions. XVII. p.209; XVIII. pp.184-9.

37 VI. pp.304-5, 315-21; VII. p.114; IX. pp.69-71; X. pp.127-32; XVIII. pp.140-6. In my view Gambasin goes too far in his assessment of the nature of the concern of the *intransigenti*. He comments in regard to the work of the II Section at the VIII Congress:

*Nelle intenzioni di questa buona gente cattolica non si mirava ad un utilitarismo politico sociale religioso ma davvero era in prima linea il bene del povero popolo per un senso di carità e di giustizia cristiana.*

central role played by material assistance in workers' societies. A number of references were made to the necessity for such assistance if the Catholic societies were to compete successfully with the non-confessional workers' societies.38

As has been noted some Catholic workers' societies already existed prior to the foundation of the Opera dei Congressi and it appears that there was a gradual increase in the number of these institutions although it always remained restricted.39 Regional reports sent to the VI Congress (1883) referred to their existence in Piedmont, Emilia, the Romagna, Liguria and around Naples.40 It appears that they also existed in some numbers in other provinces of Northern and Central Italy including Lombardy and the Veneto.41 Rezzara reported to the IX Congress (1891) that 284 Catholic workers' societies had responded to a questionnaire he had sent out and he thought that approximately 100 had failed to reply perché non voluto o potuto rispondere.42 Corresponding to the distribution of the committees of the Opera dei Congressi, these societies were concentrated in the provinces of Northern Italy, particularly in Lombardy where each diocese had one. There were far fewer in Central Italy, while in the South they existed only around Naples and in Sicily.43 204 dioceses had no such institution. The size of the Catholic workers' societies varied from fewer than 50 members to the largest which had 12,304.44 Some of these societies had been parish committees of the Opera dei Congressi. In the diocese of Brescia around a third of the 145 parish committees had been transformed into workers' societies or had merged with existing workers' societies.45 Rezzara did in fact report the existence of a further 102 societies at the X Congress in 1892.46

At the XV Congress in 1897, Monsignor Scotton reported the existence of 1105

38 V. pp.172-3; XXI. p.43; VIII. pp.42-4; IX. pp.69-70; X. p.127; XIII. pp.100-1; XVIII. pp.143-4; Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.262; Rossi, Le Origini, op. cit., pp.15-6.
39 According to a report by Rezzara to the IX Congress there were 18 in existence by 1874. Six new societies were established in 1875, three in 1876, seven in 1877, two in 1878, four in 1879, six in 1880, 12 in 1881, 25 in 1882, 30 in 1883, 29 in 1884, 36 in 1885, 27 in 1886, 21 in 1887, 13 in 1888, 16 in 1889, 14 in 1890 and 14 in 1891. IX. p.138.
42 Again most were from Northern Italy. 27 new societies had been founded since 1891. X. pp.244-6.
societies, by then in most areas of Italy but following the same pattern as before.\footnote{XV. pp.155-8. A report to the XIV Congress gave more details on members and how these societies were linked to the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}. XIV. pp.138-45.} After 1897 there appears to have been some drop off in numbers. Medolago Albani, summing up the activities of the II Section at the XVI Congress (1899), stated that while numerous societies continued to flourish hardly any new ones were being established while other Catholic socio-economic associations were then being founded.\footnote{XVI. p.103.} By the XIX Congress there were only 825.\footnote{XIX. p.8.}

At the VI Congress (1883) it was proposed that the Catholic workers' societies be grouped together in regional federations, which would regulate individual societies, approve the statutes of new societies and generally provide support for individual societies and promote the spread of the movement. The regional committees of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} were directed to be actively involved in the setting up of these federations.\footnote{VI. pp.304-5.} Proposals were also put to the VIII Congress (1890) and IX Congress (1891) on the establishment of regional and diocesan federations.\footnote{VIII. pp.42-4; IX. pp.211-6.} The federations were regarded as giving strength and protection to the movement of Catholic workers' societies while not encroaching on the autonomy of individual societies.\footnote{VIII. pp.42-4. It was thought that the federations would give greater protection to workers than a local society could. Gambari, \textit{Il movimento sociale}, op. cit., p.422.} It also appears that they were to oversee the moral and religious state of individual societies.\footnote{IX. pp.212,215. The report for the IX Congress explained the necessity for federations in terms of these bodies \textit{rendano completa l'organizzazione}. IX. pp.213-5.} The federations were seen as reflecting the hierarchical structure of the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}.\footnote{IX. pp.213-5. See also X. pp.258-9.} The reports stressed the bonds between the federations and the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}. They also made clear the active role members of the clergy were to play in directing and assisting the federations.\footnote{VIII. pp.42-4; IX. pp.211-6. Each diocesan federation was to have a committee composed of representatives of each workers' society from which a president and a segretario federale were to be elected. The committee was to compile a constitution for the federation which was to be submitted to the local bishop or archbishop, who was also to appoint a priest to represent him on the committee of the federation. Regional federations were to be formed along the same lines drawing their committees from the diocesan federations. IX. pp.212-3, 215.} By the IX Congress federations had been established in the Northern provinces of Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy and the Veneto however they were never numerous.\footnote{IX. p.214. By the VIII Congress there were 60 Catholic workers' societies in Liguria linked to a regional federation. VIII. Documenti, p.37.} There were also federations in Sicily and near Rome.\footnote{IX. p.149, Vol. II, Documenti, pp. 29, 46-8. By the XII Congress in 1894 federations existed in
How successful were the Catholic workers' societies in performing the functions the *intransigenti* believed they could? The network of societies was certainly too limited to re-establish Catholic influence and oppose the spread of liberal and later socialist ideas, one of the primary aims of the organisations in the view of the *intransigenti*. Although they tended to be concentrated in areas where the socialist movement was strong, an interesting fact in itself, the number of societies, even at their high point from 1891 to 1897, was too few to make an overall difference. However, in the areas where they were concentrated, such as in the Northern provinces and parts of Sicily, along with other Catholic socio-economic organisations they must have had considerable local influence particularly in the countryside where the Church, through the parish priest, still had considerable influence over the local population. They tended to be concentrated in areas where the socialist movement was strong, an interesting fact in itself, the number of societies, even at their high point from 1891 to 1897, was too few to make an overall difference. However, in the areas where they were concentrated, such as in the Northern provinces and parts of Sicily, along with other Catholic socio-economic organisations they must have had considerable local influence particularly in the countryside where the Church, through the parish priest, still had considerable influence over the local population. Moreover, when viewed alongside the other Catholic socio-economic organisations, the Catholic workers' societies did have some influence.

It would appear, however, that the influence of the workers' societies was restricted to certain social groups. Candeloro surmises from Rezzara's report to the IX Congress that as most of these societies *avevano sede in piccoli paesi*, they probably involved peasants and artisans more than other categories of workers. Put alongside the continuing growth of the socialist movement through the late 19th century and into the new century and the extent of worker and peasant agitation in this period, it would seem that the Catholic organisations did not have the intended effect in countering socialism amongst the masses excepting perhaps in certain, restricted geographical areas. Furthermore the *intransigenti*’s aim of establishing mixed associations of *padroni* and workers as a means of asserting the dominance of *padroni*, guided by Catholic principles, over workers and ensuring the submission of the latter, also largely failed because, as has been stated already, while wealthy Catholics did exercise considerable influence over these societies, the *padroni* did not join in the numbers that the *intransigenti* had hoped. The restricted number of Catholic workers' societies also meant that the material assistance they offered workers was limited in comparison to the needs, given the extent of unemployment and extreme poverty. Thus it would seem that these societies did not achieve the aims of the *intransigenti* except in a few areas.

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60 Ibid., p.245.
As far as providing assistance to workers to change their situation and establish certain basic rights the outcome of these societies was contradictory. On the one hand they did not offer to workers a really effective means to improve their conditions. The intransigenti believed that these societies would provide protection to workers at the same time eliciting a paternalistic response from padroni. The historical reality was otherwise. The conflicting interests of the padroni and workers could not be combined within one institution without the interests of one side being compromised. These mixed associations could not genuinely support workers' interests in contrast to workers' associations based on class struggle and resistance which were based solely on workers' interests. Instead of supporting workers to fight for better conditions, the workers' interests were compromised by these bodies which confused motives of paternalism, charity and assistance and which attempted to draw together social classes with little in common.\(^6\) On the other hand these societies did represent a shift from purely charitable bodies to ones which, to some degree, were concerned with just treatment of workers. Moreover given that the padroni did not join these associations in any great numbers the reality was that they were an initial move towards Catholic organisations formed solely of workers and based purely on workers' interests. Their purpose may have been to control as well as to assist workers, but in practice one indirect effect was that they helped to make workers aware of basic rights.\(^6\) These were aspects of the workers' societies which, given their ideological outlook, the intransigenti, excepting only the Christian democrats and some cristiano sociali, would not have acknowledged.

The Catholic workers' mutual aid societies were, the intransigenti believed, a means by which institutions based on medieval corporations could be established.\(^6\) The revival of corporations was first raised at the I Congress when it was proposed that the società di mutuo soccorso fra gli operai cattolici could possibly be modelled on the antiche Corporazioni d'arti e di mestieri.\(^6\) Further support for this idea came from Sassoli-Tomba at the IV Congress.\(^6\) The characteristics he stressed were the same as those the intransigenti saw the workers' societies as ideally possessing - mixed membership of workers and padroni hierarchically ordered, a central role given to religion and Catholic morality, established duties of both groups of members, provision of work, economic and charitable assistance and a prevailing spirit of faith and charity. These institutions

\(^{61}\) Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.16-7, 32-5; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.235.


\(^{63}\) I. p.140; IV. pp.81-103; VII. p.256; IX. pp.151-3.

\(^{64}\) I. p.140.

\(^{65}\) IV. pp.81-103.
were to be surrounded by others based on principles of cooperation, solidarity and mutuality. Through such institutions, Sassóli-Tomba believed, workers could receive protection but also be taught

la disciplina del rispetto, della sottomissione e del pudore.\textsuperscript{67}

The fundamental idea behind the corporations was, he stated, Christian solidarity between padrone and worker.\textsuperscript{68} He did concede, however, that the corporations would have to be adapted to the new social conditions and that they could not be revived without alteration.\textsuperscript{69}

Bottini paid considerable attention to the concept of the corporation in his lengthy report to the VII Congress in 1887.\textsuperscript{70} He believed that these institutions could remedy the social question.\textsuperscript{71} He listed similar characteristics to those given by Sassóli-Tomba ten years before. He defined corporations as:

\textit{una associazione permanente costituita in forma gerarchica fra padroni (imprenditori) ed operai, addetti ad uno stesso ordine di produzione, affine di cooperare a scopi comuni d'indole religiosa, morale, civile ed economica.}\textsuperscript{72}

It seems that they were to apply to manufacturing industries.\textsuperscript{73} Bottini believed that the mutual aid societies could be used as the basis for establishing corporations but his vision of the corporation was a much more complex institution than the existing societies. He saw them as assisting in the regulation of industries, mediating in disputes over wages, hours of work and other conditions.\textsuperscript{74} Similar sentiments were expressed at later congresses and while some details were given on the envisaged structure of modern corporations and the areas they could regulate, the speeches remained on a general level which had little practical outcome.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{67} IV. p.95.
\textsuperscript{68} IV. p.92.
\textsuperscript{69} IV. pp.81-103.
\textsuperscript{70} VII. pp.201-57.
\textsuperscript{71} VII. p.201.
\textsuperscript{72} VII. p.221. See also pp.222-3, 254.
\textsuperscript{73} VII. p.221.
\textsuperscript{74} VII. pp.254, 256. There were also two other speeches made to the VII Congress on corporations. VII. pp.129-42, 145-50. See also Brezzi, \textit{Cristiano sociali}, op. cit., pp.282-3.
\textsuperscript{75} VIII. p.30; IX. pp.152-3; X. pp.128-9; XI. pp.112, 219; XII. pp.90-1; XIII. pp.147-8; XV. pp.260-2; XVIII, Appendix, \textit{Avvertimenti Generali}, p.76; XIX. pp.39-40. Gambasin gives a good summary of the responsibilities the intransigenti thought the corporations could take on. Gambasin, \textit{Il movimento sociale}, op. cit., pp. 425-7. There were far fewer references to the corporations in the 1890s although some associations being promoted were analogous, for example
One of the prime functions of the corporation was, according to Toniolo its chief proponent amongst the intransigenti, to control the working class. By doing so such institutions would also stop class conflict so the intransigenti hoped. Agócs stresses the conservative nature of the corporations which were intended to counter the influence of individualism and ideas of equality. Support from the intransigenti for such an institution was indicative of the limitations in their social thinking. They were looking back to medieval society for a solution to modern problems. They were aware of the enormous difficulties there would be in establishing such institutions but they still held on to a belief that it was possible to gradually establish corporative structures as a means of re-organising society. Candeloro describes the Catholic support for corporations as utopian, arguing that it could not be sustained because the corporations had no appeal to workers who, in Candeloro's view spontaneamente si orientavano verso le organizzazioni di classe.

While the hopes for a revival of the corporations came to nothing, Brezzi argues that the theoretical work carried out on the subject was not useless in that it was one step in the work done within the Catholic social movement. The model of the corporation was also the basis for two other organisations promoted by the intransigenti through the 1890s, the unioni rurali and the unioni professionali. These institutions were intended to combine a variety of functions of a socio-economic and religious nature, and, as with all the other organisations they advocated, were to draw together both padroni and

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75 Agócs quotes Toniolo to this effect in a statement made in 1901. Agócs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., p.61. See also pp.51-2, 58, 61-2. In a letter to Medolago Albani in 1886, Toniolo stated:

Il regime corporativo insomma è la società organizzata in consorzi minori, che hanno per fine interessi speciali, opposta alla società individualista presente. Questa è un'accozzaglia di uomini, quella un esercito diviso in corpi d'armata, brigate reggimenti, compagnie...con proprie gerarchie ed autorità.

Quoted in Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., p.184. See also pp.183-93, 281-2, 285.

76 Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.425-7; VII. p.256; IX. pp.70-1; XIX. pp.39-73; Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.117-8, 127, 279-80. Brezzi maintains that Medolago Albani rejected the idea of corporations as antiquated which seems at odds with the latter's advocacy of corporations at the IX and X Congresses. Ibid., p.127; IX. pp.70-1; X. pp.128-9. Brezzi adds that Medolago Albani, it seems, was inclined to a gradual realisation of the corporative system. Brezzi, Cristiano sociali, op. cit., pp.186-8. Agócs argues that the silence in the Catholic press over Bottini's report to the VII Congress was due to the realisation in the Italian Catholic world of the impossibility of reviving corporations. Agócs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., pp.66-8. It is more likely that the silence was related to the limited development of Catholic social thinking in Italy and opposition to activities of the cristiano sociali by hardline intransigenti. See Chapter 5.

77 Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.249.

The establishment of *unioni rurali* was first proposed at the IX Congress (1891). The proposal put to the general assembly was brief but it appears that these organisations had already been discussed at length within the II Section. It was not until the XII Congress (1894), however, that the functions of *unioni rurali* were outlined in some detail in a report made by Toniolo. There were only brief reports on *unioni rurali* at later congresses. The regulations presented by Toniolo at the XII Congress stated that *unioni rurali* would be promoted and coordinated by the II Section. A later report by Toniolo was specifically concerned with the links to the *Opera dei Congressi* and set out at some length the mechanism by which the connection should be made.

The *unioni rurali* were to be composed of all those involved in agriculture in a local parish, to defend their moral, civil and economic interests and lead to their moral and material improvement. Social solidarity was of central concern. The various social categories were to be drawn together into *una costituzione organica ed una rappresentanza permanente*. The concession was made, however, that they could be formed by *coltivatori* or landowners alone so long as it was only a temporary measure and that class struggle was totally excluded from their activities, an interesting concession which suggests that the level of class cooperation was not what the

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80 The corporative nature of these institutions was stressed on a number of occasions. XIII. p.147; XV. p.199; XVII. p.208; XIX. pp.39-40. A lengthy speech made to the XIX Congress gives a history of the approach taken to the corporations and the work done on them within the II Section. XIX. pp.39-73.

81 It appears that they were skimmed over because of lack of time. Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., p.403. It was intended that they be looked at in greater detail at the following Congress but the reference made was only a general one. IX. p.227; X. pp.164-5.

82 XII. pp.225-8. He also presented one to the XV Congress on *Unioni rurali*. XV. pp.199-203.

83 XIII. pp.147-8; XV. pp.199-203; XVI. p.142; XVII. pp.199-200.

84 XII. p.228.

85 They were to be closely linked to the parish and diocesan committees of the *Opera dei Congressi*. Interestingly the point was made that *unioni rurali* were only to be formed where *sentono vivo il bisogno*. Otherwise existing forms of Catholic associations were to be allowed to develop according to local needs. XV. pp.199-203. See also Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.408-9.

86 They were to be:

*la unione di coloro che hanno rapporto coll’agricoltura, a difesa dei propri interessi ed a miglioramento materiale e morale di tutti i membri e di tutta intiera la classe.*

IX. p.227. They were to be open to landowners and *agricolari di qualunque categoria: coloni, fittaiuoli, enfiteuti, livellari, agenti o fattori di campagna* and day labourers residing in the area. XII. pp.225-8; XV. p.199.

87 *Scopo complessivo e finale delle Unioni rurali e quello di dare una costituzione organica ed una rappresentanza permanente alla classe rurale; insinuando e mantenendo in questa lo spirito di solidarietà e promuovendo o favorendo quelle istituzioni e provvedimenti che giovino al comune benessere e miglioramento del ceto campagnulo.*

XII. p.225.

88 XII. pp.227-8.
The unioni rurali were also to perform a variety of other functions which flowed from and contributed to their central role of social solidarity. They were to promote institutions and measures that were to the benefit of the rural population. The institutions included casse rurali, cooperatives providing for collective purchase of food, tools, seed, fertilisers and so on, cooperatives providing for the sale of agricultural products, and insurance societies. The unioni rurali were to assist agricoltori e braccianti disoccupati in finding work and to ensure that the work contracts were just and also to assist members in the resolution of legal problems. They were to act as centres through which information and advice could be obtained sponsoring conferences and producing pamphlets to spread information on various agricultural practices. They were also to provide information relating to temporary and permanent emigration and to act to assist people emigrating by mediating with the transport companies and agents. Further they were to promote forms of land tenure favoured by the intransigenti, that is piccola proprietà fondiaria and sharecropping, to be involved in the resolution of conflicts between capital and labour through the constitution of arbitration boards, and to support and promote financial or legislative reforms which would benefit the rural population.

By the XIII Congress (1895) there were unioni agricole in the Veneto and Lombardy although Medolago Albani stated that none of them had so far implemented all the functions these institutions were intended to perform. The lists of adhering associations which sent greetings to the congresses from 1895 on mention only a handful of these institutions. Rossi notes the existence of about 100 unioni rurali in Piedmont around 1901 di carattere economico-corporativo e non sindacale. 109 unioni agricole diocesani were listed as existing at the XIX Congress in 1903.
The unioni rurali or agricole do not seem to have been very successful and it appears that where they were established they did not measure up to the ideals of the intransigenti. No doubt this was because of the wide variety of functions assigned to them and the immense problems in developing and instituting them both in relation to existing economic, political and social structures and in terms of building up support from both peasants and landowners. These organisations do indicate, however, the thinking of the intransigenti in relation to rural problems and possible solutions. While there was some provision for assistance to peasant members, the emphasis was on the promotion of harmony between the classes and the representation of interests which were predominantly those of the padroni and only indirectly those of the peasants. They were designed to prop up and perpetuate a type of agriculture which was predominantly of benefit to aristocratic landowners. Indirectly some categories of peasants could have benefited but it was questionable as to the benefits to the large numbers of landless labourers which existed in excess of the needs of agriculture or of its capacity to employ them.93

The other institution promoted by the intransigenti which was based on the corporation was the unione professionale for urban workers and employers. The unione professionale were referred to very briefly at the XI Congress (February 1894) and then again in a short summary given by Rezzara to the XII Congress (September 1894) on the recently established camere del lavoro.94 Their functions were not listed in greater detail until the XVII Congress in 1900.95 The unioni professionali industriali were to perform similar functions of representation and defence for urban workers and padroni as the unioni rurali were intended to perform in the countryside.96 They were to collect and disseminate information on industry, the industrial working class and day to day problems, to set up and run employment exchanges for unemployed workers, to intervene or advise on work contracts, wages and working conditions, to foster the establishment of Catholic socio-economic institutions and to generally maintain religious and moral conduct in opposition to socialism.97

93 Gambasin points out that this was to be expected given that the proponents were possidenti. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.172-3. See also Agòcs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., p.77.

94 XI. p.112; XII. pp.214-5. Toniolo had referred to unioni professionali in an article written in 1893. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.385-6. They were also occasionally described as leghe cattoliche del lavoro. XVIII. pp.265-6. The European Catholic Congress held in Liege in 1890 voted to discard the word corporative and use professional instead. This may have influenced the name used by the II Section. Agòcs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., p.69.

95 XVII. pp.206-9.

96 XII. pp.214-5.

97 XVII. pp.206-9. Details on the structure of these unioni was also given. XVII. pp.206-7. General proposals was also put to the XVIII Congress. XVIII. pp.185-9. See also XIX. pp.67-71.
Little seems to have been achieved in the way of unioni professionali up to 1899 most probably for reasons similar to those which prevented the spread of unioni rurali. After the turn of the century there was some development of the unioni professionali which was actively supported and spread by the Christian democrats in areas such as Tuscany and Lombardy. However, the nature of the unioni encouraged by the Christian democrats was different from the corporative organisations the intransigenti had envisaged through the 1890s and still cherished as their ideal in the early 1900s, developing as they were into trade unions. At the XVIII Congress (1901) Toniolo spoke of an encouraging number of unioni professionali having been established and at the XIX Congress (1903) 229 were listed as existing.

The problem which was emerging for the intransigenti in the establishment of such institutions based on a mixed membership of padroni and operai was that neither class was particularly willing to participate in a mixed union. Gradually they were forced to concede that these unions could be formed simply by workers, not only because of the reluctance by both classes to join the same organisations but also because of their concern to organise workers into Catholic institutions to counter the increasing influence of socialism and growing worker agitations. Gusmini, in summarising the studies carried out by the II Section over 30 years, made the point that unioni professionali:

_devono essere in se stesse semplici, ossia formate da un solo elemento sociale,

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98 XIX. p.55. Rossi states that they were practically non-existent until 1901. Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.56-7.
99 For example the view of the unioni put forward in Gusmini's speech even though it was conceded in regard to unioni rurali that they could be composed only of workers or peasants. XIX. pp.39-73; Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.60-73.
100 XIX. p.8.
102 XIX. p.45. Gusmini also referred to a similar statement being made by Medolago Albani to the XI Congress. XI. p.112. He also referred to an example given by Medolago Albani at the XI Congress, of padroni in Bergamo who were in favour of unioni professionali composed of operai and padroni when there were strikes of cotton workers, silk weavers and peasants, but after the strikes were over they no longer supported such institutions, an example which indicated the cynicism with which padroni treated such institutions. XIX. p.50.
Although the final goal for the intransigenti was still that of the mixed union from which they believed order, harmony and social well being would flow, Gusmini underlined that such unions were exceptions and stressed the need to give una rappresentanza collettiva alla classe lavoratrice. Nevertheless these unioni, even though composed only of workers, were not to be based on the principle of class struggle. According to the programma di Milano it was legitimate for workers in these unions to proceed per la via di una legale resistenza alla rivendicazione dei propri diritti but was this genuinely possible if the reality of conflicting class interests was continually denied?

Another type of organisation advocated by the intransigenti which was modelled on the corporation was the segretariato del popolo, first mentioned at the XIII Congress in 1895. It was to promote the working class, representing workers and their rights, and giving advice and assistance to them. Charitable aspects were also stressed. The segretariato del popolo was based on institutions which had been set up by the Society of St Vincent de Paul in France and were being copied in Italy with some modifications. Workers could go directly to the segretariato del popolo for advice on legal problems, resolution of disputes, assistance in dealing with authorities, arbitration of work contracts and other problems they might confront in their vita religiosa, civile ed economica. The only existing segretariato del popolo had already helped set up cooperative societies. As a consequence of such assistance it was believed they would contribute to resolving il problema economico-morale che agita la società presente, as the intransigenti expressed it, drawing together the social classes.

The approach taken to these institutions in a report to the XIII Congress, while it indicated some awareness of the problems faced by workers and their powerlessness to

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103 XIX. p.67.
104 XIX. pp.67-9.
106 XIII. p.148. How they were to relate to the unioni is not clear. Gambasin states that their transformation was augured at the XIII Congress. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.438-9. In Toniolo’s proposals on Unioni professionali put to the XVII Congress it is stated that, in regard to legal protection of the working class each unione professionale was to coordinate or exercise the office of the Segretariato del popolo. XVII. pp.208-9. A brief report with proposals was given to the same Congress by Kappa who placed the segretariato del popolo in a charitable context. XIII. p.255.
107 XIII. p.259.
108 XIII. p.258. For full report see XIII. pp.256-60.
resolve their situation, was couched in far more strongly paternalistic terms than the reports on the unioni rurali and unioni professionali industriali. For example, Kappa spoke of generating in workers a sentiment of gratitude that reconciled them to society in contrast to socialist theories which brought about hatred.  

Both Candeloro and Rossi describe the segretariato del popolo as being set up to oppose the camere del lavoro. The intransigenti did support certain functions of the camere del lavoro in protecting workers, and some Catholics had been involved with these organisations. However, by the XII Congress (September 1894) they had come out in opposition to them, proposing their own institutions. The Catholic institutions were set up in various parts of Northern Italy from the mid-1890s but it seems they were fairly restricted. Candeloro is perhaps being too harsh when he says of the segretariato del popolo:

*In pratica la loro attività fu relativamente scarsa e servì soltanto ad intralciare qua e là l’attività delle Camere del lavoro.*

However, it is a judgement which one suspects is reasonably accurate.

The unioni rurali, unioni professionali industriali and segretariato del popolo as envisaged by the intransigenti were utopian structures too far removed from the realities of the social agitations and economic transformations Italy was undergoing through the late 1800s and early 1900s. For these institutions to effectively exercise powers of mediation in labour conflicts, to represent workers and peasants in legal disputes and similar activities, they needed to be given some legislative recognition and force, a step which the Italian governments of the period were most unlikely to make.

Another idealistic expectation was that the two classes of padroni and operai could be brought together in a relationship of harmonious cooperation. The contemporary

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109 XIII. p.259.

Ho visto operai rasciugare furtiva una lagrima al conseguire una somma da anni contestata od allo scorgere componda una vertenza o appianata una difficoltà da essi creduta insuperabile, e serrandomi la mano li udii esclamare: veramente essi sono gli amici del popolo. Ed io ho alla mia volta in mio cuore esclamato: e voi dimani sarete i nostri.

XIII. p.257.


111 XII. p.134; XIII. pp.84-6, 148; XIV. Documenti, pp.62, 66-8, 71, 79, 85, 93, 103-4.

112 Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.249.

113 Such a judgement is supported by Gusmini’s summary of Catholic responses to the camere del lavoro given to the XIX Congress in 1903. XIX. pp.48-52.

114 Their activities were consistent with some laws but the point still stands as was recognised by the intransigenti. XIX. p.46, 62-8.
historical reality gave few grounds to support their expectation. The *intransigenti*, particularly the *cristiano sociali* and the Christian democrats, were aware of the conditions of the working classes and of the great divisions between the working and dominant classes but, excepting only the Christian democrats, the *intransigenti* were unable to see that the interests of these classes were so different that they could not be reconciled without the reconciliation, forced or otherwise, being at the cost, as it always was, of the working classes. As members of the dominant class the *intransigenti* could not fail to share many of the ideological positions of the liberal ruling fraction. Thus their advocacy of modern forms of the medieval corporation, strongly imbued with paternalism and notions of charitable assistance, indicated their distance from the experiences of the working classes, urban and rural. These institutions were of primary benefit to the dominant class, directed at maintaining hierarchical order and social peace and opposing the spread of socialism. The concern of the *intransigenti* to oppose socialism may to some degree have been due to their fears for the souls of workers and peasants, but it was also strongly motivated by their material interests.

More realistic than the mixed unions modelled on corporations were the Catholic unions formed only of workers which began to emerge in the 1890s, primarily later in the decade. Although still influenced by many of the ideological concerns of the conservative *intransigenti*, these unions were based on the interests of workers and hence were more likely to appeal to workers than the interclass institutions. While these unions were set up to provide workers with a means of defence through a collective body with material, religious and moral assistance, they took the form of simple unions because, as has been indicated, *padroni* were reluctant to join mixed associations and because of the concern of *intransigenti* at the spread of the socialist movement and the level of worker and peasant agitations. By the late 1890s it also appears that the mutual aid societies were no longer being founded and there was a shift towards the establishment of different types of associations. The Christian democrats were actively involved in establishing simple unions. They did so because they shared the older *intransigenti*'s fear of socialism but also because their concern about the conditions under which workers and peasants lived and worked led them to line up more clearly on the side of workers and peasants against the *padroni*.

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The main development of the Catholic union movement occurred outside the period of this thesis, that is after the dissolution of the *Opera dei Congressi*. Nevertheless its origins lay in the mid to late 1890s, in the activities of the Christian democrats and in the work of the *cristiano sociali* even if this development did not take the form that the *cristiano sociali* wanted. The number of Catholic unions was not large but their geographical concentration points to a degree of influence in certain areas. From five unions in 1899, the Catholic union organisation increased fairly rapidly from 1901 so that by late in that same year national and regional trade federations were being proposed. 109 unioni operaie and rurali, covering 103,668 workers were represented at the first *Congresso professionale cattolico* of Northern Italy, held in January 1902, while in Sicily in 1903 there were 28 unioni professionali. The increased union activity of the Christian democrats was in part prompted by the wave of socialist strikes during these years and in part by the papal encyclical on Christian democracy, *Graves de communi*. Although there was this rapid increase in Catholic unions they still lagged far behind the socialist unions. The Catholic unions continued to multiply until 1903 when there was a decline because of the conflict within the Catholic movement. They began to increase again after 1906.

The geographical distribution of the Catholic union movement as with the *Opera dei Congressi* was strongest in Northern Italy, and then primarily in Lombardy where it

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118 Ibid., p.46.
took off from 1900. Priests and Christian democrat circles were responsible for setting up numerous union organisations and in some cases Catholic workers' societies were transformed into unions. There was considerable union activity in other areas although not to the same degree. In Piedmont there were pockets of activity mainly in rural areas while there was a reasonable number of unions in Tuscany, involving mainly more radical Christian democrats. In Liguria there was an initial burst of action which did not last. Only a few unions existed in Emilia-Romagna, the Marches and Lazio. Apart from Sicily, around Naples and a few other isolated places the Catholic union movement did not exist in the other provinces.\(^{123}\) The development of the Catholic workers' and peasants' unions was not a straightforward progression.\(^{124}\) Rather there was a series of advances followed by regression or stasis and a shifting importance of these organisations in relation to other Catholic socio-economic institutions such as cooperatives. More traditional Catholic views still had influence over the development of the social movement, the complex shifts and balances within it going, however, well beyond the existence of the *Opera dei Congressi*.\(^{125}\)

The variation in the categories of workers and peasants who joined the Catholic unions gives a further indication of the disjointed nature of the Catholic union movement and its uneven development. The more militant and active workers and peasants were already firmly within the socialist camp.\(^{126}\) Hence the Catholics turned to less united categories as Murri described writing in 1903:

> ...[azione cristiana sociale], trovando occupate le città, dovette rivolgersi di preferenza al proletariato rurale, ai ceti borghesi minori, alle agglomerazioni artigiane delle città secondarie: e trovò masse meno omogenee, maggior complessità di interessi, concorso insperato di piccoli e medi proprietari; ma insieme resistenze più varie e minori attitudini a una vigorosa azione sociale


\(^{124}\) Sanseverino, despite his qualifications, tends to portray it as such. Sanseverino, op. cit., p.231.

\(^{125}\) According to Sanseverino the Catholic social movement was only slowly and with difficulty transformed into a Catholic worker movement. Ibid., p.231. Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., pp.138-40, 61; Renda, op. cit., pp.170-1, 178-9, 187; Gambasin, *Il movimento sociale*, op. cit., pp.531-3; IV. p.94; V. p.392; VI. pp.29-30; VII. pp.140-2; VIII. pp.42-3; IX. pp.70-1, 152-3; XI. pp.111-2.

\(^{126}\) As Rossi puts it

> ...i cattolici scontavano il ritardo con cui si erano rivolti all'attività sindacale e che li aveva tagliati fuori non solo dal legame con i settori più avanzati della classe operaia, ma anche dalle grandi masse del proletariato industriale e agricolo, costringendoli a ripiegare sulle categorie più disgregate, più diverse da interessi corporativi, meno pronte alla solidarietà e alla lotta.

The Christian democrats were successful in drawing in various categories of rural workers in areas such as Lombardy and Sicily, and they also attracted some industrial workers primarily from the textile industry. The heterogeneity of the Catholic unions, as Murri observed, put limits on the type of action that could be undertaken and severely restricted the potential for a unified national movement. It also meant that the unions were susceptible to the influences of local conditions and groups. The different stages of development and composition of the working classes in the various regions also affected the success or otherwise of the Catholic unions. In provinces such as Bergamo and Brescia the type of land tenure, predominantly sharecropping, and the predominance of small and medium size local industries, favoured the existence of Catholic organisations such as cooperatives, casse rurali and mutual aid societies.

There are few references in the congress proceedings to workers' unions, the only ones being those already cited in relation to simple unioni professionali. There are, however, some hints of conflicting attitudes amongst the different factions within the Opera dei Congressi. The cristiano sociali, while retaining as their ideal, mixed organisations, clearly supported the diffusion of simple unions, which were regarded as class organisations, although with certain constraints that they believed would keep these unions away from class conflict and maintain in them a clearly confessional character. The union activity of the young Christian democrats was referred to in a general fashion at the later congresses, mainly in the form of indirect or direct criticism of the Christian democrats' mode of action. Their activities in support of the masses were praised but it was stressed that they should be undertaken in deference to the

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127 Quoted in ibid., p.65.
128 Around Pavia in Lombardy the Catholic rural unions were composed of obbligati, braccianti, piccoli affittuari and small landowners. In Tuscany there were leagues composed of mezzadri and others from female industrial workers. Ibid., pp.65-74. In Sicily in 1906 the Catholic peasant leagues were composed of piccoli proprietari, piccoli fittavoli, coloni, mezzadri, braccianti salariati and obbligati in the proportions, 32.96%, 15.08%, 13.09%, 35.64% and 3.21%. Renda, op. cit., p.202. Agocs, The Troubled Origins, op. cit., pp.154-5.
129 Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.65, 70-4.
130 Ibid., pp.56-8. These organisations were of greater use to the local workforce. Similarly in Piedmont the Catholic union movement was in part restricted by the predominant presence of an agrarian middle class. Ibid., p.67.
131 Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.385-71; XI. p.112; XVII. p.206; XVIII. pp.188-9; XIX. pp.45, 57-8, 61. Toniolo put forward a mechanism in a letter written in March 1901 to Cardinal Rampolla del Tindaro:

*Dovunque finora le unioni di soli operaï tengono rapporti pacifici coi padroni, mediante commissioni miste di arbitrato, sono ispirate da schietti sentimenti religiosi e in docile dipendenza dal clero.*

Quoted in Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.61-2.
authority of the Church and the *Opera dei Congressi*, a criticism of the Christian democrats' tendency to take independent action. It was also stressed that religious and moral principles should always be emphasised in the organisations they were involved in setting up, that their activity should be in no sense political nor should it lead to class hatred but rather to class cooperation and respect for authority, civil and religious. Thus the older *intransigenti* underlined yet again the central role they believed charity, paternalism and obsequious obedience should play in worker and peasant organisations.132 However, the more radical Christian democrats at least, did not back away from their commitment to the cause of workers and peasants, and their acceptance of the inevitability of class conflict, indicating a major difference between the Christian democrats and the hardline *intransigenti* not only in orientation and approach but also in the meaning the Catholic socio-economic movement had for each faction. For most Christian democrats it was an end in itself whereas for the hardline *intransigenti* it represented another means of defending the position of the Church against the Italian State.133

The unions advocated by people such as Sturzo, the Sicilian priest, were autonomous class organisations through which workers and peasants could defend their rights and fight their oppression and poverty. They recognised that workers had distinct interests from employers which could not be represented adequately through mixed organisations. These Catholics could not ignore the example presented to them by the socialist movement then spreading rapidly through the establishment of socialist unions which offered workers a means of opposing their oppression.134 They did not reject class

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132 XVI. pp.83-4; XVIII. pp.190-200, 215-26, *Il Parte, Documenti*, pp.77-97; XIX. pp.13-5. Some idea of the tone of these admonishments is given by the following quote from the *Istruzione della Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari sull'Azione popolare cristiana o democratico-cristiana in Italia* issued by Cardinal Rampolla on 27 January 1902. It was a quote from *Graves de communi*.

*Bisogna rimuovere dal concetto della democrazia cristiana l'altro inconveniente, cioè che, mentre essa mette ogni impegno nel cercare il vantaggio delle classi più basse, non sembra trascurare le superiori, che pure non valgono meno alla conservazione e al perfezionamento della società...Per l'unione naturale della plebe con l'altre classi, resta anche più stretta dallo spirito di fraternità cristiana, tutto ciò che di bene si fa per sollevare la plebe, ridonda anche a vantaggio di quelle; tanto più che per raggiungere l'intento è conveniente e necessario il loro concorso...Bisognerà principalmente procurare la benevola cooperazione di coloro che per nascita, per censo, per ingegno e per educazione godono di maggior autorità tra i cittadini. Se manchi questa cooperazione, troppo poco si potrà intraprendere di ciò che conduce al conseguimento dei desiderati vantaggi del popolo. Certo la via sarà tanto più sicura e breve, quanto più saranno molteplici e intensa la cooperazione dei cittadini più ragguardevoli.*


134 Ibid., pp.59-62, 65-6, 171-3, 178; Agócs, *The Troubled Origins*, op. cit., pp.78-81; Sanseverino,
cooperation but they accepted that unions, in representing the rights of one class only, were thus implicitly opposed to the dominant class. More specifically the Catholic unions organised by the Christian democrats were concerned with achieving improvements in the living and working conditions of workers and peasants through reform of agrarian contracts, regulation of payment, reduced working hours and higher wages. The *cristiano sociali* had looked at these conditions often through the 1880s and 1890s but from the viewpoint of the dominant class, or *padroni*, concerned to offer assistance to ease the situation of the working classes whose position was, they believed, at the bottom of a natural hierarchy. The speeches of Medolago Albani exemplify this approach. The approach of the Christian democrats was different in that their union organising was directed at the elevation of the workers and peasants and was focussed on the working classes from their perspective. Not all Christian democrats shared this position, which in itself was an evolving one in relation to events and transformations occurring in Italy in the early 1900s. However, the union activity of the more radical Christian democrats did have political implications.

Another point at which there was a divergence between the Christian democrats and the older *intransigenti* was over the degree of Catholic character the unions should have. For *cristiano sociali* such as Toniolo it was essential that the workers' unions, as with other Catholic socio-economic organisations, possess a clearly Catholic character. On the other hand, there was a tendency amongst Christian democrats to be less rigid, to leave it to the unions themselves to decide on this issue. Some Christian democrats preferred the unions not to be confessional at all or at least to be open to workers other than practising Catholics. To exclude non-practising Catholics, these people believed, would greatly reduce the number of workers who would join the unions and

op. cit., p.231.


,...riconoscendo il contrasto e la lotta degli interessi e delle classi nella produzione e nella vita pubblica, e accettando come mezzo estremo della tutela degli interessi degli umili, la resistenza legale e lo sciopero...tende a rimuovere la presente anarchia dei rapporti economici, mediante la costituzione ed il riconoscimento legale della rappresentanza degli interessi, l'organizzazione corporativa e la determinazione per legge dei mezzi di intesa e accordo fra le varie classi.


consequently restrict the potential field of action open to the unions.139

However, all factions of *intransigenti* could agree on the anti-socialist purpose of the Catholic unions as is amply clear from the congress proceedings.140 The Christian democrats were particularly aware of the need to provide institutions which could provide similar means of defence for workers to improve their conditions as were offered by socialist unions and *camere del lavoro*.141 There is practical evidence of this anti-socialist aspect of the establishment of unions. Rossi points out in his survey of the formation of the Catholic unions that in each area where they existed, they sprang up at the time of socialist agitation and strikes.142 There was, however, it seems a degree of dissent from the strident anti-socialism of the *intransigenti* and some groups of Christian democrats. Rezzara, for example, expressed the opinion that the Catholic unions were not successful in the province of Bergamo because of the tendency to use them to oppose socialist influence rather than to undertake careful preparation.143 Valente, a Christian democrat closely involved in union organisation, indicated a tendency amongst some Christian democrats, to try to find some common ground with the workers' movement and at a local level in a number of places Catholic workers did frequent the local *camera del lavoro*.144 Furthermore Rossi argues that the involvement of the Catholic leagues in the agitations of 1901-2 was not negligible in some regions.145 Rather than an open shift away from strident anti-socialism, these examples indicate perhaps an openness amongst some Christian democrats to redirect their focus towards the general goals of the workers' movement, to improve the conditions of the working classes. There was the suggestion of considerable common ground but it was a complex relationship both in terms of theory and practical organisation.

Rossi gives a valuable assessment of the Christian democratic movement in relation to the worker movement, concluding that despite the divisions and contradictions within

139 Ibid., p.166; Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., pp.61, 74-5.
142 Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., pp.55-6, 64-73. Agocs argues that Christian democracy emerged in response to the socialist challenge. While the Christian democracy did find much of its impetus in opposing socialism, it seems that amongst many Christian democrats there was a sincere concern for peasants and workers even if part of their concern was for workers and peasants to be drawn back into a revitalised Church. Agocs, *The Troubled Origins*, op. cit., pp.129-30.
145 Rossi surveys their involvement and indicates that while in a number of instances their involvement was not negligible it was not always the case. Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., pp.78-90, 92-3; XII. pp.108-10. Renda gives information regarding the Sicilian agrarian strikes of 1901 and Catholic involvement. Renda, op. cit., pp.278-83.
the former, it represented a shift in thinking and action, bringing about

*un profondo processo di svecchiamento delle strutture e dei metodi dell'intero movimento cattolico*...\(^{146}\)

The response of the more radical Christian democrats to the social question then was to work to establish autonomous workers' unions which carried with it an attempt to keep the movement away from the control of the *Opera dei Congressi*.\(^{147}\) The unions, however limited and contradictory as they often were in practice, did represent a major shift away from the ideas of resurrecting medieval corporations and setting up interclass organisations whose projected functions could only be implemented in a highly regulated social and economic structure in which these Catholic theories were consonant with those of the State, a situation far from the reality of Italy in this period.

Equally the unions were a major advance on the charitable organisations in that they offered workers a means of asserting their distinct rights, recognising that workers had separate interests to the dominant class and that these interests had to be respected if there was to be any solution to the social question. However, the fresh approach of the radical Christian democrats was negated by the hardline *intransigenti*, by cristiano sociali such as Toniolo and by the hierarchy of the Church, a formidable array of forces.\(^{148}\) With the papal instructions of 1902 which removed any autonomy from the Christian democrats, putting them firmly under the control of the II Section of the *Opera dei Congressi*, the crisis within the *Opera dei Congressi* during these years and its dissolution in 1904, and the informal support given by the Church to the Italian State at this time, the clerico-moderati were in the ascendency. Not only was the Christian democratic movement thrust into crisis but not surprisingly so was the Catholic union movement which the Christian democrats had been instrumental in establishing. Already lacking in unity and strength the Catholic union movement was decisively impeded by the action taken to control Christian democracy and empty it of its potentially radical content. A wave of conservatism in social action and a reassertion of paternalistic benevolence pushed back the challenge of Christian democrats such as Murri.\(^{149}\) There was also a reassertion within the Catholic movement of the importance of cooperative organisations and institutions the purpose of which pointed to considerable common ground with the liberal fraction controlling the State. These institutions were directed at improving the situation of certain categories of peasants and

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\(^{146}\) Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., p.96.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., pp.86-97.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., pp.98-101, 114.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., pp.103-10; Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, op. cit., pp.297-8, 303-4.
workers, not through a challenge to the economic and social relations then existing between *padroni* and *operaio* as the unions were but rather through moderate reform, the effect of which was to shore up the status quo.\textsuperscript{150}

Other Solutions

The charitable organisations, mutual aid societies for workers and peasants, corporations, segretariato del popolo and unions were not the only organisations proposed and promoted at the congresses by the intransigenti as a means of resolving the social question. The other forms of organisation they put forward were more purely economic in purpose although these institutions were also intended to perform a religious and moral role as well as to prevent social conflict and restore harmony between rich and poor. They mainly took the form of credit institutions - Catholic banks, casse rurali which were local credit societies, and later, casse operaie - but they also included various types of cooperatives which generally provided a broader range of economic assistance.

Catholic support for credit institutions was evident from the early years of the Opera dei Congressi. These institutions came to take a variety of forms although the early references were not specific as to the type of credit institution to which they referred. This ambiguity probably reflected a lack of work in terms of studying the needs and possible institutions which could provide help, and an absence of practical activity. By the early 1890s the references in the congress proceedings specifically refer to the main forms of Catholic credit institutions which were evolving. They included the banks, casse rurali and casse operaie. The purpose of all these institutions was to provide credit for peasants, workers and small landowners who had little access to credit apart from that available from usurers. They were intended to provide capital to assist agriculture which the intransigenti regarded as in great need of finance to improve cultivation methods, and also to assist small industrial projects. Similar institutions were being set up by liberals at the same time as the intransigenti were beginning to establish theirs with similar motives, to reaffirm their control over workers and peasants through the provision of practical economic assistance. The intransigenti regarded the Catholic institutions as operating on a different basis to non-Catholic credit institutions which they described as being involved in voracious speculation.

Credit institutions were first mentioned in a congress program at the III Congress under

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1 M.Degl'Innocenti, Geografia e strutture della cooperazione in Italia, in Sapelli, op.cit., pp.8, 10.
2 Ibid., pp.5-8.
3 XI. pp.110-3; XIV. pp.186-94; XVI. p.102.
Opere e studi nuovi of the II Section. The program referred to Casse di risparmio or savings banks and the point of discussion was:

In qual modo potrebbero adoperarsi le Associazioni cattoliche perché questo mezzo de previdenza venisse accettato dalla universalità degli Operai italiani.4

According to Gambasin, proposals relating to these institutions were discussed in private sessions of the II Section but not in the general assembly because of time limitations and a lack of reporters for the II Section.5 The curtailment of the Congress may also have contributed. Although credit institutions did not appear in the program until then, there was an earlier reference to them which indicated concern on the part of some Catholics for the setting up of credit institutions. In a letter to the commission which was responsible for proposals for the I Congress, dottor Pecci, president of a society for Catholic interests in Viterbo, stated that it was necessary to create Catholic banks to help provide for the temporal needs of workers.6

Savings banks were included in the program of the IV Congress but if they were discussed at meetings of the II Section they did not result in a report coming before the general assembly.7 However, again there was evidence of support for such institutions being expressed to the Opera dei Congressi. In October 1878, Paganuzzi received a letter from a Venetian Catholic expressing this idea.8 Prior to the V Congress in 1879 the Comitato Generale Permanente received a letter from Inda de Kermaeret, a French professor involved with the French Catholic social movement who had been invited to attend the Congress but was unable to do so. In his letter he gave some information on the establishment of banchi popolari cattolici in France. Their purpose, he said, was to assist rural and urban workers by providing material support through a Christian institution which brought the different social classes together. These were to be familiar themes in discussions on Catholic credit institutions at the later congresses. He suggested that if more detailed information was required that they contact the founder of these banks, a French Franciscan friar.9

From the V to the X Congresses (1879-92) there were scattered references to the need for Catholic credit institutions. The speakers stressed the moral and economic role

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4 III. pp.18-24.
6 The letter was dated 12 September, 1873. Quoted in Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.129-30.
7 IV. pp.7-12.
8 Quoted in Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.151.
9 Ibid., pp.163-4.
these institutions could play, citing French and English examples of credit institutions for workers. They recognised the genuine need for credit from sources other than usurers who exacted a harsh toll, but they also generally included warnings about what they described as the propaganda of their adversaries, stressing that Catholic credit institutions would counter the threat of this propaganda and of social disintegration. In a speech at the VI Congress on the moral and material conditions of the working classes which stressed the contribution of economic problems and moral decadence, Barone Savarese underlined this combined purpose of Catholic cooperative banks and Casse di risparmio. Apart from providing material assistance preservando gli ascritti dall'estrema miseria, he saw them promoting the development of

industrie casalinghe, dalle quali dipende in gran parte la moralità, il benessere, e la relative agiatezza delle classi operaie nella città.

By the X Congress in 1892 credit institutions had taken on greater prominence. There were some indications at earlier congresses that Catholic credit institutions were being set up in Italy. At the VII Congress (1887) d'Amelio observed that some Catholic institutions were in existence which enabled workers to save and gave them access to life insurance. There were also some references to the existence or recent establishment of small banks in regional reports to the congresses. At the VI Congress (1883) the report from Rome stated that the Società Artistica Operaia di carità reciproca had recently founded a banca di risparmio. A report to the following congress from the Naples region referred to the establishment of a banca popolare cooperativa by a Catholic workers' society in Castellammare at the beginning of the previous year. Both institutions were flourishing according to the reports. Catholic banks were also being established in Liguria and Lombardy in these years. When Rezzara reported to the IX Congress in 1891 on credit institutions that had been established, eight of the 14 he mentioned were in Lombardy. Most of them were small banks.

Catholic banks were never referred to or reported on at the general assemblies of the congresses to the same extent as other Catholic credit institutions. The only detailed report specifically on Catholic banks made to a congress was that given to the XIV Congress (1896) by Toniolo when he presented a list of guiding principles for their

10 V. p.67; VI. pp.304-5, 320-1; VII. pp.122-6; IX. pp.76-9; X. pp.219-21.
11 VI. pp.320-1.
12 VII. pp.122-3.
13 VI. p.157; VII. pp.81-9.
15 The others were in the Veneto, Piedmont, the Romagna, Liguria and Naples. IX. p.146.
regulation. Nevertheless the intransigenti certainly supported their establishment and were actively involved in a number of them. There were 33 such banks in existence by the XVI Congress in 1899. Medolago Albani reported to that Congress that each important centre in Northern Italy had a Catholic bank. Elsewhere in Italy the numbers were far fewer. Toniolo commented on this distribution in his report but noted that they were spreading to provinces such as Emilia, the Marches and Apulia. By 1903 it was reported that the number of banks had doubled to 66. Some of the banks had agencies in smaller towns. These banks were not closely linked to the Opera dei Congressi. The number of banks which sent greetings to the congresses was always far less than those in existence. However, the intransigenti did strongly support their establishment both in their statements and in practice and the II Section offered practical assistance. At a meeting of delegates from Catholic banks held in March 1899, it was decided that the II Section should act as co-ordinator between the banks, represent their common interests and ensure the maintenance of Christian principles as integral to their operation. A number of intransigenti were actively involved in these banks.

Catholic banks, according to the intransigenti, were to provide assistance to agricoltori, i piccoli industriali e i commercianti with loans and savings facilities. They also saw these banks as playing a role in providing capital for smaller Catholic popular institutions such as casse rurali, assisting in the financing of other Catholic economic and social projects and providing a place for the deposit of the funds of Catholic workers' societies. They urged Catholics to deposit their capital in such banks. In his report, Toniolo set out regulations for larger banks dealing with merchants and

16 XIV. pp.186-94.
17 XVI. p.104.
18 XIV. p.188. See also XII. pp.129-30; XIV. Documenti, pp.81-3, 88-91, 105-10.
19 XIX. p.8. By 1905 there were 79 Catholic banks. Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., p.37.
20 The Catholic bank in Brescia had agencies in at least six other small towns. XI. Documenti, pp.40-6. The Catholic bank in Verona also had agencies. XIII. pp.112-22.
21 Four banks sent greetings to the XI Congress, three to the XII, four to the XIII, five to the XV, eight to the XVI and six to the XVIII. XI. pp.36-8; XII. pp.33-49; XIII. pp.35-40; XV. pp.42-50; XVI. pp.46-8; XVIII. pp.49-55.
22 They decided not to form a federation but preferred to remain autonomous with the II Section assisting in coordination. XVI. Appendice, Parte I, pp.290-2. The banks were from Ferrara, Bologna, Bergamo, Vicenza, Verona, Este, Padua, Venice, Vobarno, Taverno, Patti, Macerata, Modena, Parma, Ancona, Camerino, Milan, Fermo, Udine, Pescia and Piacenza.
23 For example Medolago Albani, Rezzara and Conte Acquaderni were involved with such banks. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., p.180. In Brescia members of the diocesan committee were involved in founding the Banca Cattolica di San Paolo. VIII. Documenti, pp.52-4. In Capriolo, Lombardy, the diocesan committee also formed a bank. X. Documenti, pp.35-6.
24 XI. Documenti, pp.40-6.
industrialists, and popular banks which had a more restricted sphere of activity, lending small amounts to members only.27

The *intransigenti* depicted these banks as institutions based on Christian principles of justice and charity rather than egotistical speculation in pursuit of large profits which, they maintained, was the goal of non-Catholic banks.28 Such comments made at later congresses were probably justified given the banking collapses of the mid-1890s but it appears that the emphasis on the role of principles of justice and charity in Catholic banks was more an ideological claim than a consistent reality. As with the other organisations the *intransigenti* were involved in setting up, the banks were regarded by them as another means of reasserting Catholic influence in Italian society, of re-establishing close connections between the Church and society29 and of maintaining and restoring their ideal society with its hierarchical distribution of power, predominance of agriculture, small industrial concerns and stable ownership of land by small landowners. A major role in the founding and running of the Catholic banks was played by the Catholic landed aristocracy, the same group to which most of the *intransigenti* belonged.30 Many of the references to credit institutions in the congress proceedings referred to their role in maintaining social stability and opposing the spread of socialism.31 The Catholic banks were also intended to oppose the spread of popular banks then being set up, often by democratic and radical groups.32

However, if the intention behind the founding of Catholic banks was to assist in a return to an ideal Catholic society, these banks did not refrain from involvement in the processes of capitalist transformation which were leading to a very different society. The Catholic banks gradually became involved in the industrial expansion of the 1890s. Loans from these banks were used not just to fund agrarian and commercial projects

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27 Toniolo looked specifically at agrarian credit and the regulation of loans through *casse rurali*. XIV. pp.186-94. The purpose of Catholic banks, as stated in the statute of one in Piacenza was: *di estendere i benefici del credito e del risparmio ai propri soci, alle società cattoliche, alle casse rurali cattoliche di prestiti ed a tutti coloro che presenteranno garanzie morali e materiali, favorendo in ispecial modo la conservazione e lo sviluppo della piccola industria e della piccola proprietà.* Banca cattolica Sant'Antonino of Piacenza. 1906. Quoted in Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., p.282.


29 There was, in fact, a high level of participation of members of the clergy in the governing bodies of the Catholic banks. Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., pp.281-2, 285.


32 Secular popular banks were set up slowly from 1864 to 1882, then increased rapidly to 730 in 1893, far in excess of the numbers reached by the Catholic banks. They were affected by the banking crisis but began to increase again after 1897. Degl'Ippocenti, op. cit., pp.6-8.
but also small and medium industrial concerns mainly in Northern Italy. Through these processes, as Rossi puts it, the interests of the leading Catholic groups and the liberal bourgeoisie became intertwined. He does indicate opposition from the II Section to the involvement of Catholic banks in speculative ventures but he argues that, on the whole, these banks showed themselves to be little different to the non-Catholic banks. Some intransigenti did express opposition to the undermining of certain principles in the day to day activities of the Catholic banks but it was, in fact, unrealistic to expect that the banks would have been able to remain uninvolved in the economic transformations then taking place. The reality of their actual operation led to their gradual modification. Moreover even if they had kept to purely Catholic principles as the intransigenti understood them and funded only agrarian and small industrial and commercial projects which was their professed sphere of action according to the intransigenti, these banks could not have reversed the changes. It was more likely that they would be gradually drawn into the emerging capitalist system.33

From the X Congress in 1892, the general support expressed for Catholic credit institutions came to focus on the small cooperative parish institutions known as casse rurali which were to become the most important of the Catholic cooperative societies. The emphasis on the casse rurali reflected the intransigenti’s desire to make more capital available for agriculture, in particular for peasants. General references were made to the utility of casse rurali in Medolago Albani’s reports to the congresses on the work of his Section. The references reflect the intertwining of concerns which motivated so many of the organisational activities of the intransigenti, a genuine desire to provide material, moral and religious aid to peasants combined with an interest in maintaining social stability and opposition to socialist organisations.34 The importance placed upon the casse rurali and credit institutions was indicated by the formation from the XI Congress (1894) of a sub-section of the II Section to deal with these institutions.35 The Venetian priest Cerutti was responsible for the work of this sub-section and it was in this capacity that he gave regular reports on the development of casse rurali. He was also actively involved in the establishment of casse rurali and other cooperative societies, primarily in the Veneto, for which he received much applause from the intransigenti.36

33 Rossi argues that the process increased after the beginning of the 20th century. See Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., pp.286-92; Rossi, Movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.272-88. See below for further discussion on this point.
34 X. pp.125-33; XI. pp.110-3; XIII. pp.145-52; XVI. p.102.
36 X. pp.100-1; XI. pp.116-23; XII. pp.210-2; XIII. pp.225-6; Tramontin, L’enciclica <<Rerum Novarum>>, op. cit., pp.109-10. For further information on Cerutti see S. Tramontin, La figura e
Cerutti advocated the casse rurali and other cooperative organisations as a means of alleviating the situation of peasants, which he described in brief but graphic terms, as well as improving the state of agriculture. In some of his reports he gave greater emphasis to the desperate economic situation of peasants paying interest rates of 60 to 100 to 200% on money borrowed from usurers, and the terrible physical conditions under which they lived. Peasants and agriculture in general, he argued, were also burdened by oppressive taxes and competition from the external market. In later reports he expressed concern about the cultivation methods used by many peasants which produced low yields because the fertility of the soil was being depleted. At the same time, consistent with the approach of the intransigenti to the social question, he stressed moral and religious reasons as causes of the poor state of agriculture and warned against socialist influence.37

Casse rurali were intended to remedy the state of agriculture by providing interest-free loans to peasants and small landowners for basic needs and improvements, the purchase of tools, seeds, fertiliser, land and so on.38 The loans were made from a fund which was built up from low membership fees. The casse rurali were also to provide a centre where new ideas about improved methods of cultivation and the use of machinery could be discussed and popularised. Their other purpose was to draw the social classes together - both peasants and landowners of a particular parish were to constitute these cooperatives - and to restore the priest to a respected position in his local community. The proposals put before the congresses advocated that local priests as well as lay Catholics actively promote casse rurali. Parish priests played an important role in the founding of casse rurali in Northern Italy and Sicily. The activities of a cassa rurale was to be limited to a particular parish as it was thought that this would strengthen them by maintaining local interest and concern. They were to be grouped together under federations and to follow strictly regulations published by the Opera dei Congressi.39

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l'opera sociale di Luigi Cerutti. Aspetti e momenti del movimento cattolico nel Veneto, Brescia, 1968. Cerutti gave his first report on behalf of the II Section to the IX Congress in 1891. He was elected to the directive council of the Opera dei Congressi and to the II Section in 1892. He wrote various manuals and pamphlets on casse rurali and cooperatives. Gambasin, Il movimento sociale, op. cit., pp.401-9; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.252; Ciuffoletti, op. cit., pp.133-5.


38 Cerutti gave a list of examples of loans and their purposes to the XI Congress. XI. p.121. The casse rurali differed from the popular banks which were also formed on a cooperative basis in that they did not have share capital. There were clear distinctions between the organisations. XV. p.279; Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol. 7, op. cit., n.35, p. 44.

39 They were also to be confederated around a superior Catholic credit institution. X. p.169. It was also proposed at the X Congress that the casse rurali be established under the rules of manuals
In setting up *casse rurali* the intransigenti were using an institution which was first established in Germany in 1847 and then later in Belgium and France. Cerutti referred to these precedents and stressed the role Catholics played in their establishment although in fact in Germany they were set up by a devout Protestant. The first *casse rurali* were set up in Italy in 1883 by Leone Wollemborg, a liberal economist and Jew from Padua. His *casse rurali* did not have a religious character, however, he did seek support from parish priests because of the strong local Catholic influence. As a result the local priests became interested in the concept of *casse rurali*. Catholics in Northern Italy began to establish them in 1891. Cerutti referred to their appearance in Italy in 1883 but he neglected to mention Wollemborg and his political inclinations. He also failed to mention that by 1892 there were 72 *casse rurali* in the Veneto set up by Wollemborg. According to Candeloro the Catholic *casse rurali* were far more successful than those established by Wollemborg and the Catholic ones were later to outnumber considerably the liberal-inspired *casse* which is not surprising given the degree of Catholic influence in rural areas.

In his speech to the X Congress (1892) regarding *casse rurali*, Cerutti referred to organisational work undertaken in Treviso (Veneto) where in nine months 17 such cooperatives had been founded and a further 26 were in the process of being formed. By 1892 Catholic *casse rurali* had also appeared in other areas of the Veneto and were being founded in the Marches and Sicily. At the XI Congress (1894) Cerutti was able to report the existence of 69 *casse rurali*, most still in the diocese of Treviso. By the XV Congress in 1897, they numbered over 700 and had spread to Emilia-Romagna.
Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, Apulia, Calabria and Sardinia. They continued to be most numerous in the Veneto where there were 409 in existence followed by Lombardy with 110 and Piedmont with 80. The other regions all had considerably less. The rate of increase was rapid and the total number considerable by the late 1890s even if they were geographically restricted.\textsuperscript{47} Casse rurali continued to increase after the government repression of 1898 but at a lower rate.\textsuperscript{48}

It was intended by the \textit{intransigenti} that the casse rurali be closely linked to the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}. This was not always the case although the majority were. In 1899 approximately 200 of the 1000 Catholic casse rurali did not adhere to the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}.\textsuperscript{49} Nevertheless the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} was closely involved in their development. The II Section took responsibility for giving them advice and assistance and the diocesan committees were frequently involved in their promotion and foundation. In the early 1890s the diocesan committee of Treviso took on the role of promoting casse rurali amongst Catholics as well as founding them, and diocesan committees in other areas of the Veneto and in Lombardy, similarly assisted in their foundation.\textsuperscript{50}

The casse rurali did not always keep to the principles propounded by Cerutti and set out in the various regulations. Cerutti stated at the XVII Congress that:

\begin{quote}
...le istituzioni anche di carattere economico, devono...avere in mira come scopo precipuo il perfezionamento religioso e morale...in alcune casse rurali disgraziatamente si è sacrificato questo principio a concetti di pura speculazione.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{47} XV. pp.155-8. XII. pp.97-103, 108-10, 130-3, 135-7; XIII. pp.75-9. In the diocese of Bergamo 29 were established from February 1893 to May 1895 covering a total of 1401 members. XIII. pp.130-1; XIV. p.211, \textit{Documenti}, pp.105-10. Rossi, Degl’Innocenti and Gambasin give slightly different figures for 1897. Gambasin’s figures total 703, Rossi 691 and Degl’Innocenti 779. Gambasin states there were 419 in the Veneto. The figures quoted in the text are from the report to the XV Congress. In 1896 there were only 379 of which 350 were in Northern Italy. Gambasin, \textit{Il movimento sociale}, op. cit., pp.455-6; Rossi, \textit{Le origini}, op. cit., p.25; Degl’Innocenti, op. cit., p.9; Candeloro, \textit{Il movimento cattolico}, op. cit., pp.252-3.


\textsuperscript{49} X. pp.162-3; XII. pp.108-10, 141; XIII. pp.80-2, 98-9, 112-22; XIV. pp.71-9. It was recommended in 1895 by the \textit{Comitato Generale Permanente} that diocesan committees have representatives in the local casse rurali and form diocesan federations where the numbers were sufficient. Gambasin, \textit{Il movimento sociale}, op. cit., pp.412-3.

\textsuperscript{50} XVII. pp.195-6.
He put forward proposals stressing the necessity for *casse rurali* to be set up according to the regulations published by the *Opera dei Congressi*. They should also, he said, be carefully supervised by rural clergy and *cattolici intelligenti* and always be informed by a purely Catholic character. References to the *casse rurali* always emphasised that members should be above reproach both morally and religiously. At both the XV and XVIII Congresses proposals were put restating membership criteria, suggesting that such criteria were not always observed:

*...che siano accettati per soci soltanto persone che, sotto il riguardo religioso, morale ed economico, diano le maggiori guarentigie e sicurità.*

It also appears that *casse rurali* were involved in granting loans which were not consistent with the purpose of these institutions. Congress participants at the XVIII Congress were reminded that *casse rurali* should keep to the principle that they were to provide credit to small landholders and peasants, and that large loans and loans to non-members through members were not consistent with their aims.

The establishment of institutions based on similar principles to *casse rurali*, but in this case to assist workers, was proposed by Cerutti at the XVI Congress in 1899. Although there were reports on the usefulness of credit institutions providing small loans to urban workers from early on in the existence of the *Opera dei Congressi* and reports on the establishment of some of these organisations, it was not until the XVI Congress that they were specifically examined and proposals presented. The *casse operaie di risparmio* were intended to assist workers, artisans and small urban landowners through the provision of small loans made from a fund accumulated from membership fees. The purpose of the loan had to be stated by the applicant and approved by the administration. Workers who participated had to save one lira a week.

As with all these Catholic institutions, the *casse operaie* had moral and religious ends. They were seen as a means of drawing workers back to the Church as well as educating urban people, primarily workers, to save rather than spend all of their wages. The

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52 Ibid.
54 XVIII. pp.252-3.
55 An outline of the fundamental concepts behind *casse operaie* and a constitution were given in the Documents appended to the proceedings of the XVI Congress. XVI. Documenti, pp.38-44. Workers had to save 50 lire before they could obtain a loan and loans were proportional to the amount saved. S.Tramontin, *Le prime casse operaie cattoliche in diocesi di Venezia (1898-1904)*, BASMCI, II 1967, p.104.
moral aspect of workers learning to save and be frugal was emphasised. Economically, it was argued, they would save workers from the rapacious grasp of moneylenders. Cerutti, in his speech to the XVI Congress, outlined the situation of workers deeply in debt to usurers, to such an extent that they could never extricate themselves without some external assistance.  

Cerutti put forward similar proposals and made similar introductory remarks to the XVII Congress in 1900. In both these reports he urged priests, in particular, to work to set up these organisations. The committees of the Opera dei Congressi were also to disseminate information and provide assistance. He returned to the subject at the following Congress held in 1901 although on this occasion he placed more emphasis on their moral and religious role. He also noted that they were a very effective defence against socialist propaganda. The proposals exhorted that all

...gli industriali cattolici ed i grandi proprietari rurali, che usano salariati fissi, favoriscano in tutti i modi la fondazione di queste utili istituzioni.

Cerutti also advocated that these institutions initiate the setting up of various types of cooperatives. The first of the Catholic casse operaie was founded in April 1898 in Murano in the Veneto with 11 members. By the XVI Congress a year later it had reached 59 members and had begun to give loans. In 1900 Cerutti reported that 16 had been established, some of which were flourishing. One had even been established in Sicily at Agrigento and their development in Bergamo was also notable. These institutions were probably of great assistance to operai who were in a position to save one lira a week as they gave them access to loans which did not carry the burden of large and often outrageous

56 XVI. pp.139-44, Documenti, pp.38-44; Tramontin, Casse operaie, op. cit., pp.105-6, 110-1.
57 XVI. p.143; XVII. pp.193-7. People interested in setting up casse operaie were advised to consult a manual, Manuale pratico delle Casse Operaie Cattoliche, which set out basic principles to be followed. XVII. p.195; XVIII. pp.255; Tramontin, Casse operaie, op. cit., pp.113-7.
58 XVIII. p.250-1, 255. He also held a conference on the casse operaie during the Congress. XVIII. p.133.
60 Ibid.
61 XVI. pp.140-1, Documenti, p.38. Some similar institutions existed early on. The Unione operaia cattolica in Turin founded in 1871 had a cassa cooperativa di piccolo credito for its members. V. pp.451-5; XI. p.62. Cerutti was involved in the founding of the cassa operaia on Murano where he was a parish priest. Tramontin, Casse operaie, op. cit., pp.101-7. Late in 1898 Cerutti was advocating the establishment of casse operaie in other parts of the diocese. Ibid., pp.107-8.
62 He noted that in a few months savings had reached 45,000 lire and loans conceded 61,000. XVII. p.194.
63 XVII. p.194.
interest. However, their effectiveness at a broader level was no doubt greatly restricted by their limited number. By the XIX Congress they had increased to 44 but this was still very small compared to the needs of workers.64

Historians assessing the Catholic banks, casse rurali and similar credit institutions have generally concluded that they did reinforce Catholic influence and provide effective assistance within certain strata of society, primarily in the North but also in some other areas such as parts of Sicily, although they did not solve the problem of lack of credit. It appears that these institutions were mainly of use to moderately well-off peasants, small landowners, tenants of small pieces of land and sharecroppers. Procacci argues that they were successful in areas where small holdings predominated, providing effective support to enable the middle level peasants and small landowners to free themselves from usury and survive the impact of the severe agricultural crisis and the development of a capitalist economy. Most exclude the landless labourers as benefiting from Catholic activities as they regard them as gravitating more 'naturally' to the socialist movement which represented their interests in a more genuine fashion.65 Candeloro believes that these institutions probably made a significant contribution to the revival of agriculture in the areas where they were established following the agrarian crisis of the late 1800s by supporting the more prosperous, and some poor peasants and landowners through practical assistance.66 The concept behind these organisations made it unlikely that they could assist landless labourers. Members of the casse rurali, for example, would have had to have lived a reasonably stable life style, settled in one parish with a sufficiently dependable income to save money each week. Landless labourers usually could not count on such certainties and were forced to migrate in search of seasonal work. Moreover, the unequal geographical distribution of the Catholic organisations restricted their effectiveness to a local or regional level.67 However, it does seem that these institutions did much to reassert Catholic influence

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64 XIX. p.5. The società operaie cattoliche di mutuo soccorso may in some circumstances have offered similar services to members but their numbers were also restricted. Workers did not have to deposit one lira a week if they were out of work. Tramontin, Casse operaie, op. cit., p.104. They appear not to have been restricted solely to workers. Ibid., pp.109, 118-9.


67 Degl’Innocenti makes the point that the liberal casse rurali were also aimed at small landowners, tenant farmers and sharecroppers affected by the lack of capital except from usurers. Degl’Innocenti, op. cit., pp.8-10.
amongst the particular social strata to which they appealed."

While Catholic credit institutions were directed at sustaining forms of landholding and relations of production which were being undermined by both the agrarian crisis and the impact of the development of production carried out on a capitalist basis, some of these institutions gradually became involved in the processes of capitalist development, in financial processes, industrial projects and agricultural improvements. Candeloro argues, for example, that the Catholic banks involved primarily the small and middle bourgeoisie of the towns and they fairly rapidly began to fund industrial projects, which ran counter to their original intention of supporting agriculture. According to Rossi, savings from Catholic financial institutions flowed into industrial and commercial projects more than agricultural, and as such these institutions acted in a manner little different to non-Catholic ones. It was not so much that this was unacceptable in terms of their intentions but rather a conflict between the ideological statements and the practical activities of these organisations. Candeloro maintains that these banks served to draw the agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie together and into the capitalist system which was not how they were represented by the intransigenti. Not all the Catholic banks were run by the intransigenti, who were at one level opposed to the capitalist system, but they were involved in sufficient numbers for the intransigenti's statements about the banks to be judged in relation to their actual activities and involvements. Rossi makes much the same point, arguing that the Catholic forces played a decisive role in the subordinate insertion of workers in a social and productive order in which paternalism, repression, exploitation of labour and underconsumption predominated, those workers coming from rural areas where Catholic influence was often dominant. In his article, Rossi covers the same argument although more briefly. In his view the Catholics were reasserting their hegemonic role in relation to peasants, primarily in Northern Italy, through these institutions and that their activities and predominant concerns of social conservatism began to coincide with those of the liberal bourgeoisie, above all after 1898, but also before.

Not all the intransigenti would have followed this trend, but it was a development which was more likely to occur with the credit institutions because of their primary economic role whereas the unions set up by the Christian democrats tended to run in a

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69 Rossi, Movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.262-3.
70 Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia, Vol.7, op. cit., p.44.
71 Rossi, Movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.279; Ciuffoletti, op. cit., pp.99, 110-1, 136. One example was Rumor from Vicenza. Rossi, Movimento cattolico, op. cit., pp.269-72; IX. p.211.
72 Rossi, Le origini, op. cit., p.35.
contrary direction. There has been some disagreement with Rossi's argument on the basis that he has reduced the motivations of the *intransigenti* and other Catholics to purely socio-economic ones and that he has not sufficiently established the existence of links between the Catholics and liberals prior to 1904. In my view he has persuasively argued his case but he has tended to oversimplify the motives of the Catholics, disregarding their religious ones. However, there remain the emerging contradictions between their religious motivations reflected in their ideological statements and the actual activities of the credit institutions.\(^{74}\)

The II Section also advocated and worked to establish cooperatives other than the *casse rurali* and *casse operaie* which were intended to assist peasants and workers and keep them away from the socialist movement. They were primarily agricultural cooperatives of various types and they were often connected to, and supported by, *casse rurali* or Catholic workers' societies.\(^{75}\) These cooperatives were not as extensive as the *casse rurali* and, as with the *casse rurali* and Catholic banks, they were concentrated in the North. Cooperative organisations were mentioned reasonably early in the history of the *Opera dei Congressi*. The II Section, in recommending the setting up of regional Catholic workers' federations to the VI Congress in 1883, proposed that one of the functions of these institutions was to form *società cooperative di consumo* for members especially in cities and larger villages.\(^{76}\) At the VII Congress four years later, in a report from the *Comitato regionale napoletana* it was stated that a Catholic worker's society at Castellammare was investigating the possibility of establishing *magazzini cooperativi di consumo*.\(^{77}\)

The questionnaire which formed the basis to Rezzara's report to the IX Congress in 1891 on Catholic workers' societies asked if individual societies had established, amongst other organisations, *società cooperative di produzione*, *società cooperative di consumo* or *società di mutuo assicurazione del bestiame*.\(^{78}\) From the replies, which may not have accounted for all Catholic cooperatives in existence, it appeared that there were 10 Catholic *cooperative di consumo*, mainly for storage of foodstuffs. There were only two *cooperative di produzione* founded by Catholic workers' societies:


\(^{76}\) VI. pp.304-5.

\(^{77}\) VII. p.83.

\(^{78}\) IX. p.137.
quella di Castellammare di Stabia che ha fondato una officina meccanica, e quella di Castellarano e Casalgrande nell’Emilia, che ha stabilito un forno sociale.79

There were also only two società di mutua assicurazione del bestiame. Most of the cooperatives were in Northern Italy.80 Cooperative di lavoro and production had already begun to be set up in urban areas in the 1860s and 1870s by non-Catholic groups. They were set up amongst artisans of particular trades and, according to Degl’Innocenti, had a strong corporative character.81 In comparison Catholic activity in this area occurred very slowly and remained restricted in the early 1900s.82

The main impetus for the spread of Catholic cooperatives came again from Cerutti. In his speech to the general assembly of the X Congress (1892) he proposed the formation of agricultural cooperatives of various types in individual parishes. They included unioni for the collective purchase of grano, seme, bachi, macchine agricole, concimi chimici, solfato di rame, zolfo, ecc, unioni for insurance against hail and fire damage, cooperative bakeries and irrigation cooperatives.83 Cerutti stressed the need of peasants for assistance in purchasing food and machinery, and in reducing costs to a minimum level, which could largely be achieved through such cooperatives. He also pointed to their urgent need for access to insurance against hail damage and deterioration of animals which, it appeared, other Catholic societies could not provide.84 Similar cooperatives were being established at this time in rural areas by liberals.85

Other proposals were also put to the X Congress by the II Section on the value of cooperatives and the need for Catholics to establish them, referring to the benefits they could bring to the working class. There was particular emphasis on the foundation of credit and consumption cooperatives.86 The second set of proposals related specifically to cooperazione di consumo. They set out practical measures for the basic functioning of a cooperativa di consumo which were intended to assist in overcoming difficulties experienced in establishing these associations.87 In a statistical report on Catholic worker and agricultural societies it was noted that insurance institutions were increasing

79 IX. p.146.
80 IX. pp.137, 146-7, 150.
82 In 1903 there were 30 Catholic cooperative di produzione. XIX. pp.5-8.
83 X. p.166.
84 X. pp.167-8. Sample statutes for insurance cooperatives and those for collective purchase were included in the documents of the Congress. X. Parte II, Documenti, pp.65-71. See also Ciuffoletti, op. cit., pp.133-5; Candeloro, Il movimento cattolico, op. cit., p.252.
85 Degl’Innocenti, op. cit., p.8.
86 X. pp.219-21.
87 X. p.258.
but there was no further specific information on cooperatives. Further proposals were put to the XII Congress (1894) by Cerutti regarding the cooperative di consumo. He noted the value of such Catholic associations to workers in helping them to escape usury and of the danger of them being in the hands of those the intransigenti regarded as enemies. He proposed that food stores be set up in parishes where the cost of living was high or similar liberal or socialist associations were attracting workers. It appears that these cooperatives spread throughout the Veneto, Lombardy and Liguria at the end of the century. Initially they were set up in rural areas, later spreading to the towns and cities.

The congresses from the mid 1890s had references to cooperatives but not in large numbers or great detail. Medolago Albani referred to the use of this form of association for purposes other than credit to the XIII Congress (1895), listing animal insurance, dairies, cheese factories and bakeries. He proposed the formation of federations to assist with administration, funds and the maintenance of overtly Catholic character. He also observed that there were indications that Catholic cooperatives were spreading to Central Italy and Sicily. The regional reports sent to this Congress indicated a considerable increase in Catholic cooperatives providing insurance for animals. Other references from these years indicated a slow increase in Catholic cooperatives and support from the II Section for their establishment. Another type of cooperative mentioned was that for the construction of workers' houses.

A quite different form of cooperative with which the intransigenti were involved in later
years was the *affittanza collettiva* under which a group of peasants took on the lease of a piece of land which they cultivated on a cooperative basis. Such cooperatives were referred to briefly at the XVII Congress in 1900. Their major advantage, according to Cerutti who spoke about them, was that they cut out intermediaries who made the situation of tenants and wage labourers far worse. They were also to improve cultivation methods and the conditions of labour.\textsuperscript{95} There was a more extensive report on collective leases at the XIX Congress (1903) where these cooperatives were described as forming an important part of the program of Christian democracy. Portaluppi, a Lombard priest, pointed to the role speculators had begun to play as agriculture was increasingly carried out under a capitalist system. These speculators were leasing land from the owners and then renting it out in various ways or cultivating it using wage labour so as to maximise the returns well above that paid to the landowner. Portaluppi argued that the agricultural masses were capable of cultivating the land on their own behalf with the support of a collective approach. He stressed the capability of peasants in a way which, while still to some extent paternalistic, contrasted with the approach of the older *intransigenti*.\textsuperscript{96} There were also references to the importance of collective action, and of the organic constitution of society where peasants and landowners could be drawn together, which echoed the familiar refrains of the *intransigenti*.\textsuperscript{97} Portaluppi then outlined the means by which collective leases could be undertaken and ways of avoiding the many potential problems. In addition to assisting peasants materially, the cooperatives were to give advice on cultivation and undertake collective purchase of machinery, manure and other requirements. 

Conspicuous by its absence was any discussion of the role landowners should play, the emphasis being instead on the role of the peasants acting in association with each other.\textsuperscript{98}

Attempts to undertake collective leases were first made in Northern Italy in the 1880s by peasants acting with socialist support. These early attempts were largely unsuccessful and it was not until the early 1900s that there was any real development.\textsuperscript{99} Some socialist ones were set up in Sicily and in Northern provinces in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{100} These collective leases formed part of a struggle to provide more adequate employment

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\textsuperscript{95} The rural unions were to promote these cooperatives. XVII. p.200.

\textsuperscript{96} *Non è pertanto opera intesa solo a portare un maggior vantaggio economico al lavoratore della terra, ma a creargli tutta una nuova posizione sociale più elevata, più indipendente materialmente e moralmente, più degna della sua dignità umana, della libertà dei figli di Gesù Cristo*.

XIX. p.74.

\textsuperscript{97} See XIX. p.74.

\textsuperscript{98} XIX. pp.73-7.

\textsuperscript{99} Renda dates them to 1883 whereas Degl'Innocenti gives 1887. Renda, op. cit., pp.144-6; Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., pp.22-3.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., pp.22-3; Renda, op. cit., p.147.
in the countryside.\textsuperscript{101} The first Catholic one was established in Lombardy in 1901 and by 1904 there were 25 Catholic collective leases in Sicily.\textsuperscript{102} Both Sturzo and Portaluppi were independently involved in setting up these cooperatives. Sturzo had some thought about such a cooperative from 1896 but obstacles prevented his idea from being implemented until 1900.\textsuperscript{103} The Catholic collective leases differed from the socialist ones in that they were generally aimed at supporting small peasant landowners or cultivators rather than the socialisation of the land.\textsuperscript{104} Moreover the socialist collective leases were linked to peasant leagues and \textit{camere del lavoro} while the Catholic ones were generally linked to credit institutions.\textsuperscript{105} Both Renda and Degl'Innocenti note that the collective lease was an entirely original Italian cooperative form which, both socialist and Catholic, took on some importance in the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{106}

By the XIX Congress in 1903 the Catholic cooperatives were not numerous but they had, according to Degl'Innocenti, achieved a stable presence in Italian society.\textsuperscript{107} It was reported to the XIX Congress that there were 30 Catholic \textit{cooperative di produzione} and 149 \textit{di consumo} in existence.\textsuperscript{108} The number of insurance cooperatives was not mentioned but Degl'Innocenti observes that in 1904 there were 223 such cooperatives providing for the insurance of animals with over 30,000 members. There were, in addition, cooperatives for insurance against hail damage, fire and life insurance and, by 1905 as has been noted, 54 Catholic cooperative leases.\textsuperscript{109} These cooperatives were mainly formed through the \textit{Opera dei Congressi} and were supported by the II Section with practical help and advice. It was advocated on a number of occasions at the congresses that these societies be closely linked to the \textit{Opera dei Congressi}.\textsuperscript{110}

Cooperatives covering a similar range of activities were established by groups other than the Catholics in the 1880s and 1890s, primarily in the North. They were often promoted in the countryside by the liberal bourgeoisie as a means of improving and modernising cultivation methods and socialist leagues were also involved in the

\textsuperscript{101} Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., p.23.

\textsuperscript{102} Renda, op. cit., p.144. By 1905 there were 54 Catholic collective leases, 35 in Sicily and 19 in Lombardy and the Veneto. Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., p.37.

\textsuperscript{103} Renda, op. cit., pp.148-51.

\textsuperscript{104} In Sicily there was less of a distinction in practice. Ibid., pp.154-63.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., pp.166-8; Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., p.25.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p.25; Renda, op. cit., pp.166-8.

\textsuperscript{107} He includes the mutual aid society. Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., p.37.

\textsuperscript{108} XIX. pp.5-8.

\textsuperscript{109} Quoting a study by Rezzara (1906) he writes that there were 104 \textit{cooperative di consumo} with 11,625 members, 17 \textit{cooperative di lavoro} with 1255 members, 48 \textit{cooperative di produzione} with 5,059 members. The latter were mainly cheese factories, dairies and wine growing cooperatives. Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., p.37.

\textsuperscript{110} X. p.221; XII. pp.210-2; XIII. pp.170-1, 145-52; XV. p.280.
movement. To some extent the intransigenti were following the example of these
groups, in believing that such societies could provide considerable assistance to
overcoming the social question. The cooperatives came to cover a reasonably large
number of members throughout Italy.\textsuperscript{111} By themselves the cooperatives were too few,
and too restricted in geographical distribution up to the time of the dissolution of the
*Opera dei Congressi* to make a general difference to the situation of peasants and
workers. This was even more so with the Catholic cooperatives which were further
weakened by the lack of a coordinating federation.\textsuperscript{112}

The value of the Catholic cooperatives derived more from their participation in a
network of Catholic socio-economic associations which, as a whole, appears to have
made a positive difference to certain sectors of the population, predominantly in rural
areas and mainly small landowners and better-off peasants. As regards their religious
and moral aims, they probably did help to reinforce Catholic influence in rural areas in
particular but it is unlikely that they produced the moral and religious changes within
the population that the intransigenti so desired. They did not draw the masses back to
the Church. The credit institutions and the cooperatives brought equivocal results
which reflected the contradictions which emerged amongst all factions of the
intransigenti as they confronted the social question. Those contradictions were perhaps
more evident with the more purely economic institutions because they ultimately laid the
ground for an accommodation to the capitalist system. Even if they helped older forms
to survive, in practice they were altered by their contact with changing socio-economic
structures and relations.

\textsuperscript{111} Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., pp.11-5, 17-20, 27-32. A census of cooperatives in 1902 numbered them
at 2,823 with over a half a million members although it was argued that the latter figure was closer
to one million. 39\% of these cooperatives were consumption cooperatives with 181,594 members,
20.6\% *di lavoro* and production with 56,671 members, 16\% were cooperative banks and *casse rurali*
covering 132,736 members and 6.3\% were *consorzi* and *sindacati rurali* with 26,642 members.
62.1\% were in Northern Italy, 20.3\% in Central Italy, 17.6\% in the South. 75\% of members were
from the North, 16\% from the Centre and 9\% from the South. Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., pp.33-5.
For general information on the cooperative movement in Italy see the essays by M.Degl'Innocenti,
Z.Ciuffoletti and G.Bonfante in Sapelli, op. cit., pp.3-252.

\textsuperscript{112} Attempts to establish such a federation in 1903-4 were hampered by the dissolution of the *Opera
dei Congressi*. A federation of *casse rurali* was established later. Degl'Innocenti, op. cit., pp.8-9,
26-7.
Conclusion

The *Opera dei Congressi* was established by conservative Catholics to oppose the anticlerical actions of the new Italian State and to counter the increasing secularisation of Italian society which, these Catholics believed, largely derived from the political changes brought about by unification and the displacement of Catholicism from its central role in Italian society and its replacement by individualism and materialism. The *Opera dei Congressi* was to be a vehicle for Catholic protest and activism, a means by which individual Catholics and the fragmented Catholic associations could be drawn together into a single united Catholic movement which would stand in defence of the pope, the Church and Catholicism as fundamental elements of Italian society as the many members of the *Opera dei Congressi* understood it.

Through their concern to reassert the role of Catholicism in Italian society and their attempts to delineate basic characteristics of society which, from their conservative viewpoint, they believed had to be restored for it to be a truly Catholic society, the *intransigenti* were led to confront the extensive social problems then prevalent in Italian society. They faced a society experiencing profound social change brought about by the development of a capitalist economy, a world which was very different from their notions of an ideal society. The impact of economic transformation and its social effects on the mass of workers and peasants, combined with the exploitative features of still-prevalent semi-feudal residues and pressures such as the rapidly growing population and harsh government policies, was, for the vast majority, severe dislocation and suffering which left many with little choice but to migrate. The traditional peasant economy was being increasingly undermined by competition both internal and international from agriculture carried out on a capitalist basis. Large numbers of the growing population were excluded from access to the land and forced to migrate to centres of capitalist production, urban areas or to other countries to find an alternative means of livelihood. In addition there was the development, although still very restricted through the late 1800s, of industry and of factory production which was creating an urban proletariat, the greater part of which could only find insecure and infrequent employment and when these workers found jobs they generally laboured for long hours under harsh and unhealthy conditions, receiving wages on which they could barely survive. The *intransigenti* were not only confronted by the extent of these changes and the evident social problems, they also faced the increasingly severe challenge to the existing social structures and economic transformations by workers and
peasants as they agitated to secure basic rights to reasonable living and working conditions and to protection from exploitation, a struggle which for many, was for a radically different social, political and economic order.

These far-reaching changes and the heightened level of social conflict challenged the social thinking of the *intransigenti* and the traditional responses made by Catholics to the suffering of the masses. The *intransigenti*’s approach to the problems that encompassed the social question was strongly coloured by their political and material interests as well as by their sincerely held religious concerns about what they perceived to be the loss of influence of Catholicism over the fraction of the ruling class controlling the State and over the mass of the Italian population. They were, in the main, members of the ruling class, drawn from the landed aristocracy and professional ranks of lawyers, doctors and accountants, and while they were excluded from national political power exercised by a liberal fraction, they continued to hold their position as members of the ruling class by virtue of their economic interests and their considerable political influence at a local level. Their understanding of society and their approach to social problems was thus coloured by an amalgam of Catholic beliefs and conservative concerns which they shared with many other members of their class.

The *intransigenti* believed that society was held together by a divinely-inspired hierarchical social order and hence a natural inequality between people, the exercise of reciprocal rights and duties between the classes, ties of benevolent paternalism on the part of the *padroni* and respectful submission on that of the workers and peasants, the observance of Catholic rituals and customs at both a general social and personal level, and the unifying and mediating role of the Church and its clergy. As far as it was possible the *intransigenti* wanted Italy to remain rural. Their vision of an ideal society was that of a settled countryside where essentially semi-feudal relations still held sway and the landowning aristocracy and clergy were the respected leaders of local society. Instead the traditional, stable rural society to which the *intransigenti* appealed was being radically transformed while industrial development was producing a different urban society through the introduction of factory production and the creation of a new type of workforce and new relations between workers and employers.

The response of the *intransigenti* to these changes was varied. The hardline *intransigenti*, led by Paganuzzi, had some concern for the issues encompassed by the social question, particularly after the papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, was published in 1891. However, their thinking remained blinkered by their extreme conservatism and the total primacy they assigned to the defence of the papacy and the Church in Italy.
They never ceased to oppose initiatives taken by other *intransigenti* which suggested that socio-economic issues should be equally a priority for the *Opera dei Congressi*. In their view these initiatives had to remain subordinate to, and indeed contribute to, the resolution of political and religious questions by returning the masses to the Church and marshalling them as a force to oppose the Italian State. These Catholics were acting in an essentially political manner although they always publicly denied the political dimensions of their actions. Their response to the social question was basically that all social problems could be resolved through the exercise of charity and benevolence combined with practical assistance from Catholic institutions and, above all, the restoration of Catholic principles to society and Catholic beliefs to the lives of individuals.

On the other hand there was, within this movement of conservative Catholics the gradual development of a social consciousness, of a greater understanding of the issues involved and of the need for Catholics to respond to the social question in a more meaningful way if the greater part of the population was either to be kept within the Church or drawn back to it. There was, amongst these *intransigenti*, some understanding of the moral obligation of Catholics to be actively involved in opposing obvious injustices and providing practical means for workers and peasants to improve their lives. These *intransigenti* also showed some comprehension that political accommodations at a Church-State level were no longer sufficient for Catholic principles to govern society but rather that Catholics had to be involved in actively assisting workers and peasants if those principles were to have any relevance to them.

The *cristiano sociali* remained largely bound to paternalistic ideas and responses which were often highly unrealistic as was evident with the inter-class organisations they proposed and their support for the establishment of a modern version of the medieval corporation. However, their theoretical and practical work within the II Section of the *Opera dei Congressi*, the *Unione per gli studi sociali* and the other organisations with which they were involved in their local communities, reflected a gradual shift from the traditionally charitable approach taken by Catholics to social problems even if at times it still retained elements of that approach. The emergence of this shift and the conflicting processes which led to it, come out clearly in proceedings of the general assemblies of the congresses of the *Opera dei Congressi*.

The work of the *cristiano sociali* also laid the groundwork on which the more socially and politically committed Christian democrats were to build. The thought and action of the Christian democrats indicated an even greater shift in the conservative Catholic
world, particularly because these young Catholics largely disregarded the Roman Question and instead assigned primacy to the social question. Moreover, they did not avoid the political dimensions of the social question, a course of action which the other factions of *intransigenti* had always attempted to take. These Catholics approached the social question with fresh ideas and greater openness to possible Catholic responses than the older *intransigenti* had been able to do and unlike the older *intransigenti* many of the Christian democrats abandoned the paternalistic benevolence and charity which they believed belonged to the past, and sought to work with peasants and workers on an equal level. Not all the Christian democrats were so open and there was within this broad grouping, basic political conflicts with the more conservative Christian democrats ultimately choosing to defend the Italian State against the attacks of the socialist movement and thus abandoning the more radical commitment of some elements of Christian democracy. The challenge from the Christian democrats was obvious in the later congresses of the *Opera dei Congressi* as were the acute tensions it provoked although the older *intransigenti* clung to their old ideas until the dissolution of the organisation and were able to win many of the power struggles with the younger Catholics.

The motivations behind the socio-economic institutions set up by the *intransigenti* and their practical outcome reflected the evolving approaches of the *intransigenti* and the conflicts and contradictions which emerged within this movement. Opposition to the socialist movement was a primary concern for all *intransigenti* including the Christian democrats but also important was the provision of material assistance combined with moral and religious teaching. However, the diverging responses to social and economic change appeared here too in the types of organisations which evolved, the involvement of the different groups and the development of the institutions. These organisations were never great in number but the network composed by them did have some importance in areas such as the North and parts of Sicily. Furthermore, they do have some significance in revealing Catholic approaches to the social question.

The Catholic worker and peasant organisations were initially advocated by the *intransigenti* as a means of controlling workers and peasants and ensuring their submissive inclusion within a social hierarchy, obedient to their 'superiors' whether lay or clerical. Gradually these organisations began to be more focussed on the needs of workers and peasants and their right to just treatment by employers and landowners. Because of the reluctance of *padroni* to join these organisations they evolved into simple unions, which with the involvement of the Christian democrats, accepted the inevitability of class conflict and struggle as a necessary step for workers and peasants
to take to defend themselves. These organisations did not generally challenge the status quo in the way that the socialist organisations did but their practical effect was to make some peasants and workers aware of their collective interests and basic rights to reasonable living and working conditions and freedom from exploitation.

The more purely economic institutions, the Catholic banks, casse rurali and the cooperatives, which were strongly supported by the intransigenti, were based on an attempt to restore Catholic principles to economic processes. However, they came to reflect an accommodation to the developing capitalist system, an accommodation which was to go much further in the years after the dissolution of the Opera dei Congressi, rather than imbuing capitalism with what the intransigenti believed to be just and right principles. It would, no doubt, have been unrealistic to have expected otherwise, to believe that a small group of Catholics could influence economic processes rather than that the economic institutions which they set up would be incorporated into the capitalist system on a similar basis to secular economic institutions. Some of the Catholic organisations, the casse rurali and the cooperatives, did provide support for more transitional forms of production and the continuing viability in some areas of peasant agriculture for example, but on the whole these organisations provided a means by which conservative Catholics were incorporated into a capitalist system.

What is revealed by an analysis of the approach of the Catholics involved in the Opera dei Congressi to the social question is the diverging paths taken by Catholics in response to the profound transformations occurring in late 19th century Italy. The more hardline intransigenti refused to abandon their old ideas and attempted, through the Opera dei Congressi, to return Italy to their notions of an ideal society. However, some recognised that, as Catholics, they had to respond in a more effective manner which took into account the nature and extent of the changes. For these Catholics the social question raised questions of social justice and led to practical action to alter the situation but even amongst these Catholics such ideas caused conflict as the older cristiano sociali still held to paternalistic ideas. On the other hand the Christian democrats, again not without contradiction and conflict in their ideas and activities, showed that a more open course of action was possible and in fact necessary for Catholics to take. Their challenge was denied by the Church hierarchy by the dissolution of the Opera dei Congressi of which they had gained control, but it was a challenge which remained to be taken up again in the future by Italian Catholics.
Articolo I.

Articolo II.
Scopo del Congresso è di riunire in generali adunanze i Delegati e i Membri delle Società cattoliche italiane, e tutti i Cattolici conosciuti per le loro devozione alla causa della Religione, affine:
1. di informarsi dello stato delle Opere già esistenti in Italia;
2. di provvedere alla loro maggiore diffusione;
3. di procurare la fondazione di nuove Opere;
4. di concertarsi sui modi coi quali Associazioni ed individui possano più efficacemente concorrere alla difesa dei diritti di S. Chiesa, e rinvigorire nei popoli lo spirito religioso.
E esclusa ogni trattazione d'indole politica.

Articolo III.
Membri del Congresso sono:
1. I Delegati delle Associazioni cattoliche italiane, che intendono farvisi rappresentare.
2. I Membri attivi delle Associazioni cattoliche italiane aderenti a questo Statuto, muniti delle opportune credenziali del loro Ufficio direttivo.
3. I Cattolici Italiani conosciuti per zelo religioso o per dottrina, che, nominati Soci Aderenti, accettino il presente Statuto in tale qualità.
5. Le persone invitate dal Comitato Promotore.

Articolo IV.
Le società Cattoliche italiane, che accetteranno di prender parte al futuro Congresso, sono invitate a dichiare i fondi, che intendono somministrare al Comitato Promotore per le spese del Congresso medesimo.
Essi possono inviare al Congresso cinque Delegati, uno solo per ciascuna Sezione.
Articolo V.
L'accettazione della nomina di Socio Aderente viene dichiarata mediante obbligazione di contribuire per due anni una quota anticipata, non minore di lire cinque ogni anno.

Articolo VI.
I Membri, di cui ai paragrafi 2 e 4 dell'Articolo III, pagano L.10 per una sola volta nel ricevere il loro biglietto di ammissione al Congresso.

Articolo VII.
Le Società cattoliche ed i Soci Aderenti stanno in diretta corrispondenza col Comitato Promotore, aiutandolo col loro consiglio e trasmettendo al medesimo colla maggiore possibile sollecitudine i documenti e le materie, che credono utile di sottoporre al Congresso.

Articolo VIII.
E ufficio del Comitato Promotore:
1. Mettersi in relazione con tutti i Rev.mi Ordinari delle Diocesi Italiane.
2. Procurare le adesioni delle Società cattoliche.
5. Scegliere il luogo, e determinare il tempo in cui si radunera.
6. Nominare ivi un Comitato speciale, acciocchè prepari i locali per le riunioni, e riceva i Membri del Congresso.
7. Invitare le principali Associazioni cattoliche estere ad inviarvi un loro Rappresentante.

Articolo IX.
Il Comitato Promotore termina i suoi lavori coll'aprirsi del Congresso, e consegna al Presidente di questo:
1. L'Archivio.
2. Il resoconto economico degli incassi e delle spese occorse, e la cassa.
4. La nota dei documenti e delle materie proposte agli studi e alle deliberazioni del Congresso.
5. L'elenco degli Oratori iscritti, coll'indicazione delle materie, su cui chiedono di parlare.

Articolo X.
Le materie da trattarsi nel Congresso sono classificate secondo l'ordine seguente:
1. Opere religiose e Associazioni.
2. Opere di carità.
3. Istruzione e Educazione.
4. Stampa.
5. Arte cristiana.

Articolo XI.
Una funzione religiosa precede l'apertura del Congresso: e nelle prima adunanza vengono nominati l'Uffizio del medesimo e gli Uffizi delle Sezioni.

Articolo XII.
Il Congresso di divide in cinque Sezioni, e ciascuna delle quali è incaricata di esaminare e studiare le materie che vengono affidate, secondo l'ordine stabilito dell'Articolo X. Gli studi poi e le conclusioni delle Sezioni vengono presentati per mezzo di uno o più Relatori alle deliberazioni del Congresso riunito.

Articolo XIII.
Ogni Membro del Congresso può prendere parte agli studi della Sezione che più gli aggrada: perciò dichiara, almeno quindici giorni prima della riunione del Congresso, al Comitato Promotore, la Sezione prescelta.

Articolo XIV.
La durata del Congresso sarà non maggiore di cinque giorni.

Articolo XV.
Chi desidera di essere iscritto per tenere discorso nelle adunanze generali deve donare notizia quindici giorni prima della riunione del Congresso, indicando la materia del discorso. Discorsi sono limitati a venti minuti.

Articolo XVI.
Il Presidente di mantenere ordine...
Articolo XVII.
Il Congresso di accordarsi sul luogo e il tempo per il prossimo congresso e di nominare il Comitato Permanente.

Articolo XVIII.
Il Comitato Permanente pubblica altresì e distribuisce il Resoconto del Congresso, mette ad effetto le risoluzioni prese, e custodisce l'Archivio e la Cassa consegnatagli dall'Uffizio del Congresso medesimo.

Articolo XIX.
Il volume che contiene gli Atti del Primo Congresso Cattolico Italiano si trasmette:
1. Alle Associazioni cattoliche che presero parte al Congresso.
2. A tutti i Soci Aderenti, anche non intervenuti al Congresso.
3. A coloro che sborsarono L.10 nel ricevere il loro biglietto di ammissione.

The Statute was signed by Aquaderni as President and Rubbiani as Secretary and dated November 1871. It had also been viewed and approved by Cardinal Trevisanato.¹
In the Statute given in the Documenti of the II Congress, the words Scopo del Congresso (Articolo II above) had been replaced by those of Scopo dell'Opera dei Congressi indicating the greater permanence of the organisation by the II Congress.
There was also reference to the role of the Comitato Generale Permanente in the latter Statute:
Il Comitato Permanente, costituito a norma delle deliberazioni del Congresso Cattolico di Firenze:
1. Procura l'adesione delle Associazioni ed Opere cattoliche e di nuovi Soci;
2. Sta in relazione colle Rev. Curie Vescovili delle Diocesi Italiane;
3. Raccoglie, ordina e prepara le proposte da discutersi nei Congressi;
4. Nomina il Comitato Locale, e gli assegna i fondi necessari al suo compito;
5. Nomina il Presidente generale e i Presidenti di Sezione e Sottosezione, almeno un mesa prima del Congresso;
6. Convoca il Congresso;
7. Assiste ai lavori del Congresso e delle Sezioni;
8. Riceve la consegna dell'Archivio del Congresso per unirlo all'Archivio del Comitato;
9. Cura la pubblicazione degli Atti del Congresso;
Il Comitato Permanente costituisce Comitati regionali e Comitati diocesani, Delegati e Soci Corrispondenti, che lo rappresentino e coadiuvino nelle diverse regioni e diocesi.²

¹ I. pp.13-7.
² Article II, II. Vol.II, Documenti, p.94.
### Appendix 2

**Location & Dates of Congresses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Venezia</td>
<td>12-16 June 1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Firenze</td>
<td>22-26 September 1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>9 October 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Bergamo</td>
<td>10-14 October 1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Modena</td>
<td>21-24 October 1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Napoli</td>
<td>10-14 October 1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Lucca</td>
<td>19-23 April 1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Lodi</td>
<td>21-23 October 1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>Vicenza</td>
<td>14-17 September 1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Genova</td>
<td>4-8 October 1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>15-17 February 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>Pavia</td>
<td>9-13 September 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>Torino</td>
<td>9-13 September 1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV</td>
<td>Fiesole</td>
<td>1-4 September 1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV</td>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>30 August-3 September 1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVI</td>
<td>Ferrara</td>
<td>18-21 April 1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVII</td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>1-5 September 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII</td>
<td>Taranto</td>
<td>2-6 September 1901</td>
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<td>XIX</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>10-13 November 1903</td>
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Appendix 3

Index of Industrial Growth

Annual average rates of growth of Italian industrial output 1881-1908

<table>
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<th>Period</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>1881-1888</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888-1896</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-1908</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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</table>

Annual average rates of growth of the six index industries for 1881-1908 (percentage change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Industry</th>
<th>1881-1888</th>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>1888-1896</th>
<th>1896-1908</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metalmaking</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>-7.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemicals</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foodstuffs</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Source, Gerschenkron, 1., op. cit., p.76.
### Appendix 4

**Rural and Industrial Strikes¹**

**1880-1904**

Number of Strikes, Strikers and Strike Days in Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Strikes</th>
<th>Strikers</th>
<th>Strike days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>91,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8,272</td>
<td>95,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5,854</td>
<td>25,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>12,900</td>
<td>111,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>23,967</td>
<td>149,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>34,160</td>
<td>244,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10,951</td>
<td>56,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>25,027</td>
<td>218,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>28,974</td>
<td>191,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>23,322</td>
<td>215,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>38,402</td>
<td>167,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>34,733</td>
<td>258,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>30,800</td>
<td>216,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>32,100</td>
<td>234,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>27,595</td>
<td>323,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>19,307</td>
<td>125,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>96,051</td>
<td>1,152,503</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>76,570</td>
<td>1,113,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>35,705</td>
<td>239,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>43,194</td>
<td>231,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>80,858</td>
<td>493,093</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>196,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>197,514</td>
<td>2,539,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>109,327</td>
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<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>124,834</td>
<td>1,368,001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Source, Rossi, *Le origini*, op. cit., pp.411-2. Rossi draws the figures from the Ministero dell’Economia Nazionale, Direzione Generale del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale, *I conflitti di lavoro in Italia nel decennio 1914-1923*, Roma, 1924, p.315. Zangheri speaking of these figures observes that they can only be seen as approximate because of errors and omissions. He states that all strikes of landless labourers employed on works of marsh reclamation and public works were excluded even when the nature of the work and the composition of the labour force were obviously of an agricultural nature. He cites 1883 as an example where he argues that at least a dozen strikes by such labourers could be added in his view. The figures also omit the more traditional types of agitations which generally took place in the South. *Lotte agrarie*, op. cit., pp.xxix-xxxi. Procacci also speaks of the difficulties with the strike statistics although he is referring to different tables. He notes that the criteria used cause problems. Only complete interruptions to work were counted so certain actions were not recorded. Procacci, *La lotta di classe*, op. cit., pp.82-4.
### Number of Strikes, Strikers and Strike Days in Agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Strikes</th>
<th>Strikers</th>
<th>Strike Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>4,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>1,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8,857</td>
<td>53,761</td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3,846</td>
<td>9,623</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>3,780</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>1,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>2,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7,795</td>
<td>33,877</td>
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<td>1892</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3,504</td>
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<td>1893</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12,390</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4,748</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,765</td>
<td>20,565</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
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<td>24,135</td>
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<td>1899</td>
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<td>1,895</td>
<td>7,475</td>
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<td>222</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>94,756</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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\[2\] There are no figures for this year. See Ibid., Footnote 1., p.412.
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Atti e documenti del XV Congresso Cattolico Italiano tenutosi a Milano dal 30 al 31 agosto e dal 1 al 3 settembre 1897, Breganze, 1898
Atti e documenti del XVI Congresso Cattolico Italiano tenutosi a Ferrara dal 18 al 21 aprile 1899, Breganze, 1899, 1900
Atti e documenti del XVII Congresso Cattolico Italiano tenutosi a Roma dal 1 al 5 settembre 1900, Venezia, 1901-2
Additional Material relating to the intransigenti

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