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Food and work

The history of Italian company catering
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Italy's delay¹

After World War II, an English study (Curtis-Bennett [1949]) located the early canteen for workers in medieval castles, attended by a multitude of people with different professions, especially in specific periods of the year. According to the same source, the phenomenon spread also thanks to the monasteries and their huge kitchens, which were open not only to monks, but also for wayfarers and pilgrims.

However, the need to eat meals at the workplace on a regular basis, that required the setting up of specific spaces and services, arose after the industrial development, that had led to the concentration of labour force, the acceleration of manufacturing activities, and the strict enforcement of regulations on working time. During this stage Italy, which was industrialized during the 'Second Industrial Revolution', was no exception compared to other previously industrialized countries. In fact, more than anywhere else, while the country was catching up, "the need to establish a working class, of training it to a regular and non-stop work routine, other than farmers' or freelancers', and to bend it to the logic and objectivity of the machine and the manufacturing process obsessed both small employers who had turned their workshops into factories, and people such as A[lessandro] Rossi who had implemented the maximum possible rationalization of such factories" (Merli 1976, 145). This resulted in a semi feudal factory regime, with regulations that, as admitted by contemporary sources², turned out to be stricter than those of other European countries. Therefore, this implied a radical change in the habits inherited from the *ancien régime*, when "people worked and were instructed in a friendly way (...) there was no working time, nor discipline. A good labourer was free to come and go, work or not, as if he was at home, balancing erratic routine with periodical regular attendance"³. In this framework of personal freedom and independence, eating at the workplace was a convivial time shared by attendees, regardless of their placement in the company's hierarchy. Vice versa, "working in factories, labourers are faced not only with a hierarchical structure of command, but also technical pecking order originated by the manufacturing process. The worker's life is no longer regulated by the flow of seasons, voluntary work and family needs, nor by personal skills. Substantially, workers are no longer at the centre of their economic and emotional world and are reduced to mere functions serving the distribution of work, that gives priority to the machine and the production logic of the capital" (Merli 1976, 155). Subsequently, little time is devoted to lunch breaks and rest, although necessary in a workday envisaging up to 14 to 16 hours of actual work. In spite of the need to provide for the worker's meals, factories equipped with canteens are rare, and the few canteens that are set up have the sole aim of keeping workers in the factory/prison morning to evening. A description of spinning mill refectories of the Lucca area, in Tuscany, which is likely to be the case also in other regions, states as follows: "Hardly any spinning mills has a refectory, not even those employing non-local women". When existing, such refectories served as kitchen, dining room and place for food preservation: "There are no chairs, and on the few tables available food is preserved from one week to another; workers eat seated on the cases where plates and cutlery are kept, otherwise they are standing or walking around the refectory and the rooms of the spinning mills". They often eat in the same rooms in which they work, "and breakfast at 8 is always consumed in the

¹ This research has been supported by Cir-food cooperative of Reggio Emilia, and it has been presented at the convention *Ricette in azienda. La ristorazione aziendale fra passato e futuro (Recipes in company. The company catering between past and future)*, Modena, October 11th 2006. Thanks to Riccardo Caporale and Vilma Razzi for their precious services.

² The enquire of Bourse du Travail of Paris in 1888 on european proletariat called tyrannous Italian factory regulations. See ville de Paris, Bourse du Travail, *Annuaire de la Bourse du Travail. 1887-1888*. I vol., Paris, 1889, 281, mentioned by Merli 1976, 147.

³ *Stabilimenti e fabbriche (Plants and factories)* in "Gazzetta dei cappellai", May 1st 1897, mentioned by Merli 1976, 157.

working rooms. Refectories and dormitories in some spinning mills are connected to the storerooms for cocoons”⁴, with the subsequent poor hygienic conditions.

Regarding the kind of food, at the Centurini jute factory in Terni, thousands of women worked for no less than 12 hours, and non-locals were promised board and lodging: at lunch the canteen provided them with pasta and pulses without seasoning, for dinner they had salad or potatoes or broad beans.

All regulations envisaged a break for lunch and a rest of one and a half hours or two every 10 to 16 hours of actual work, even if this average did not consider the numberless exceptions and violations that happened as a result of production constraints or demonstrations of the employer’s power. For example, “in a textile plant labourers were forced to work for 23 consecutive hours without rest and food, children and women included” (Merli 1976, 201). In Biella in 1897 wool teasers, girls of 15 or women of every age, often with babies, eat at the moving machines (...) while labourers of the A. Viscardi spinning mill in Pusiano (Como) go on strike to have the unraveler stopped for a quarter of an hour for breakfast, in a workday exceeding 11 hours (Merli 1976, 203).

As shown by the accounts above, fledgling trade unions could only focus on the most critical aspects of the “labour question”, trying to organize workers with the aim of obtaining essential rules for their survival (hours and intensity of work, performances of women and youths, hygienic conditions of rooms, etc.), while the matter of food in factory does not emerge clearly from sources, with the exception of the examples above.

However, a few years before the passing of legislation regulating the work of women and youths, in Milan, on the 29th and 30th of June 1900, at the conference on welfare services of provident societies, Argentina Altobelli had proposed that legislation should be passed forcing workshops to build rooms fit for food and rest.

Rooms of this kind of already existed in the areas under the owner’s paternalism, where factories were set in labour villages and work hands paid for the right to work, health and welfare, under a regime of total control that extended to private life as well. These manufacturers took other countries as a model, especially England, where New Lanark – the early labour village founded in 1870 by Richard Arkwright – had become famous at the beginning of 19th century under Robert Owen’s management. The above-mentioned Anglo-Saxon source (Curtis-Bennett [1949]) relates the first fee-paying canteen for workers to this experience, in which the basis of the welfare system took shape. The underlying idea was that a balanced diet could improve the labourer’s health, and therefore his productivity, and Owen is considered the father of industrial catering by the English. Inside New Lanark there were a large store, a kitchen to prepare high-quality food on a large scale (with two or three fireplaces and six cooks) and a dining room turned into a dance hall in the evening. Among the various activities for workers, there was a cooking and catering class for girls.

Even though equally detailed descriptions could not be found – as a demonstration of the little attention paid to this matter in Italy – a similar organization was located in the “Nuova Schio” of Alessandro Rossi, the Italian forefather of industrial paternalism, who opened the canteen in the 1860s (Ciuffetti 2004, 31), while in the canteen built in Crespi d’Adda in 1882 there was a home economics school where girls specialized in cooking different menus, besides a consumer cooperative (Viscusi 1999). A witness who worked in this textile company in the early 1900s remembered years later: “At the beginning we worked non-stop for 12 hours and we ate standing up next to the frame, without having a break. No pauses were allowed, neither to eat nor to do anything else. We were paid to work, then, after the strikes, things changed. (...) There was also Crespi’s kitchen, over there in the square. For lunch they brought to the factory a large pot of soup hanging from a thick stick, and those who wanted could eat even two bowls for free”⁵.

⁴ R. Colli, 750, mentioned by Merli 1976, 189.

⁵ Witness of a worker mentioned by Bernardi 1981, 164-165.

Nevertheless, except for these isolated cases, the principle of improving workers' life conditions with the aim to increase productivity found it hard to take off. On one side, English company catering spread, though unevenly: alongside rare situations in which food was cooked in factory at low cost (worker paid only for raw material, employers bore other costs), or for free for underprivileged groups, in most cases it was only possible to warm up the meal brought from home (Curtis-Bennett [1949]). On the other side, an Italian source dating from 1901 complained that "our governing class has not yet understood that a healthy diet and long resting time are the essential foundation of strong production (...) and, although in all the inquiries there are lots of complaints about low productivity (...) present work conditions are the same as in 1872, because industrialists have never cared about the future of those who are the real makers of social wellbeing"⁶.

Nevertheless, this late 19th-Century paternalistic culture, revived in the twenty years of Fascism, provided the rooting medium for the 'company canteen' phenomenon in Italy.

With reference to the socialist movement in the early 1900s, rather than raising the question of meals in factories, it preferred to focus on the diet of workers labour by setting up specific activities outside the work place, such as canteens and stores near working class districts, and by means of supply and production initiatives, with the aim of reducing the costs of commodities. This is the case of the self-governing authority for consumption in Bologna. This was founded in 1915 by socialist mayor Francesco Zanardi and "it helped working families to resist during the war"⁷. Conversely, over the same period, no example is to be found of the same attention being paid to the matter as was the case abroad, where the proposal to set up company canteens was made to counter the degeneration of labourers' health resulting from phenomena such as alcoholism. The dissemination of canteens in England raised the question of the appropriate standards for both food (sufficient, diversified, savoury and economical) and rooms (comfortable), while during the World War II the socializing benefits collective meals was improved, encouraging the creation of real canteens rather than simple refectories. The foundation was laid of what was going to become a real science in Anglo-Saxon countries, as hoped for by sociologist Dorothy Pound, who worked as supervisor of canteens of British companies in wartime, and warned against leaving catering in the hands of amateurs or non-professionals. (Curtis-Bennett [1949]). This scientific outlook, if anything tinged with utilitarianism, definitely broke with 19th-Century philanthropy. Instead, the need to link meal to factory in Italy belongs to a neo-paternalistic paradigm of Fascism, that revised the 19th-Century principle of total control on worker, already seen in labour villages. The regime involved in company's life not only the worker but also his whole family, without distinction between work – and private life – space, and set up the *Dopolavoro*, a club that organized recreational and cultural activities for workers in their spare time. Company canteens were part of this recreational and welfare system inside the factory, created with the purpose of increasing productivity and curb labour conflicts, in the more general frame of corporative economy. Therefore, the development of company canteen as a means for social control on workers, rather than as labour or trade union claim, seems to be the case also for Italy. Two elements contributed to the creation of the new company welfare: authoritarian paternalism, that did not deny social conflict – unlike in the 19th Century – but rather aimed at repressing it, and an increasing need for policies building consensus and the individual's identification with the process of change arising from the dissemination of Taylorism and the consequent introduction of practises for the rationalization of manufacturing processes. From this point of view, company canteens became an asset in the regime's propaganda on the initiative of fascist *patronage* in plants, as celebrated in the Istituto Luce documentaries. We take as example the Dalmine plant (Fontana 2003) for its long history (it was built in 1906 in the

⁶ Tombesi 1901, 203, mentioned by Guidotto 1979, 46n. Also Roberto Romano (2002 44) mentions the case of a silk weaver that said "our worker does not follow a right diet, and he does not have enough strenght to work. In fact, he works fewer hours and less effectively than the stranger worker".

⁷ Historical archive of the Comune di Bologna, *Relazione morale e finanziaria e relazione dei sindaci per l'esercizio 1918 (Moral and financial report and report of majors for business 1918)*, loose pamphlet.

Bergamo area, thus managing to take part in the last part of 19th-Century paternalism) marked by the transition from private to public ownership (built by the Germans, it became Italian in 1933 under Iri's management). Here in 1934 the company decided to build a canteen for employees, especially for labourer "which would no more be forced to eat outside in the cold"⁸. It was finished in 1935. Managers already used the canteen in the private guesthouse, built in 1925. The company canteen housed 2000-2500 workers a day, and it was also open to labourers from other factories that worked for the same company. Clerks had a separate room, cheaper than the guesthouse, while another room was dedicated to those who ate food brought from home⁹. The building was built next to the caretaker's lodge to shorten distances for lunch breaks, that occurred at different times of the day according to the work shift. The plant was oriented towards the labour village to draw a distinction, including in physical terms, between the place devoted to labourers from those destined to managers and employees ones on the opposite end of the village¹⁰. In line with the self-sufficiency policy (Consolini 2003-2004, 55), the company canteen was supplied by a farm owned by the company located inside the village (the canteen took up all pork production and most cereal production, that was turned into pasta or bread through a mill, a pasta-factory and a bakery).

War and hunger: canteens become a need

With World War II, and the ensuing rationing imposed upon by the war economy and the simultaneous need to ensure physical efficiency for labourers in a procurement system whereby the law ensured less than half of the daily calorie intake for survival, the compulsory setting-up of company canteens, as dictated by Mussolini as a result of increased war-operation pressure, was more a necessity than a political choice¹¹. Indeed, Fascism, being fully aware of the importance of the consumption question, especially with reference to commodities, in maintaining the people's consensus, was extremely cautious in rationing, insomuch that the controlled price/stockpiling/rationing system devised by the regime only provided for a part of the people's needs, with an average slightly exceeding 1000 calories a day, leaving it in the hands of the black market to bridge the gaps of the official market¹².

Such structural disorder of fascist management of supplies reflected on the organization of company canteens, that became the cornerstone of which labour food distribution, conditioning all the market both in industrialized towns and in those with fewer factories.

Further in-depth of this framework can be acquired with a number of local examples (Aa. Vv. 1981a, 15), focussing on Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia, where company catering was going to become successful (in 1981 those regions had respectively 40, 16 and 12% of all company canteens in Italy). During the first year of war in provinces such as Bologna, where productive activities were held down, labour canteens (excluding those that also accommodated clerks) had been considered

⁸ Dalmine foundation, Dalmine fund Spa, board minutes, Lcd A/2, reg.9, May 12th 1934, mentioned by Caroli 2000-2001, 412-413.

⁹ See Luce archives, documentaries, Michele Gandini, *Andando verso il popolo (Going toward people)*, 1941.

¹⁰ See Dalmine foundation, photographic archives, Bruno Stefani, comment of the picture *Esterno del refettorio operai (Outside the workers' refectory)*.

¹¹ We do not have certain informations on Mussolini's measures, above all on the practice, even if all the sources of that period refer to the obligation of company canteens. After these measures, in January 1942 there were 800 company canteens with 260.000 users, in October 2.581 canteens with 550.000 users. The forecast was to reach 3.000 canteens with one million users. (Luce historical archive, Luce paper C0311, *Mensa aziendale in funzione presso gli stabilimenti Pirelli, [Pirelli's company canteen]*, 1943).

¹² "The rationing covered only a part of needs, assuring in average 1.000 daily calories (...) We know instead (...) that the Italian average individual consumption went from 2.631 calories in 1949 to 2.123 in 1943 (in the following two years it hurred to 1800 calories)". Legnani 1991, 111.

“special living spaces” and enjoyed privileges, like meals distribution outside the rationing¹³ card. At the beginning of 1942, instead, those guidelines radically changed: compulsory company canteens lost all privileges, and were forced to accept meal tickets like any other business. As a matter of fact, “compulsory company canteens are levelled to 4th category business even for what concerns the quantity of pasta and rice, that can be served only 4 days a week. Therefore labourers can receive 2.6 kilos as a monthly ration including the amount eaten at canteens and the one bought elsewhere”¹⁴. Guidelines on extra food according to the fatigue of the work performed (classified as standard manual, heavy and very heavy) were issued all through the war period. But the gathering and distribution system did not work and supplies ran out. Therefore ration quantities decreased (at the end of 1944 fat for labourers decreased from 8 to 6 daily grams), some products disappeared from the market, while others had nutritional value seriously damaged by cheaper and easier-to-find ingredients. This forced the regime at the end of 1942 to worry about the diet of workers working in “companies involved in the war. (...) In the light of the canteens’ development and the need to adjust their supply to the state of national procurement, it has been ruled that labourers with a long daily work time and performing work that requires a high consumption of energy can be adequately fed inside the company with a warm soup that is not taken off the rationing card. Starting from next January the 1st, labourers eating at company canteens will receive 100 grams of potatoes (or 20 grams of dry pulses), 60 grams of soup stuff, 8 grams of fats”. Clerks, previously excluded from this special treatment, were then included in this ‘privilege’¹⁵, that was extended with different actions also to categories working in military field, such as railways. To experience first hand the seriousness of food situation, suffice it to think that at the beginning of 1943 lots of companies in Bologna asked for permission to breed pigs to be eaten in their canteens¹⁶.

In more industrialized areas, such as Milan, at the end of 1943 Falk, Vanzetti and the Industrialist Union created the Plant Supply Service, aiming to buy jointly supplies for stores and company canteens at the best possible conditions. This organism drew the attention of German authorities, worried about distribution to employees of military industry. They forced the major companies based in Milan (including Siemens, Alfa Romeo, Breda, Borletti, Magneti Marelli, Pirelli and suchlike) to join the consortium. The biggest problem was the supply of the second course: the first one was supplied by Sepral, but for the second course, that was compulsory in big factories, companies had find their own suppliers. Consequently, they repeatedly asked for the abolition of the second course, with the supply of a more nutritious first course supplied by Sepral. They clearly attempted to unload on industrialists the burden coming from the huge leak in the supply system, to such an extent that in October 1944 it was decided that “purchases for company canteens, stores and collectives are carried out at free prices”¹⁷. Even when Sasi has been merged with Sepral¹⁸, the guideline was to “supply at any price syndicated companies, but taking away remaining availabilities from people and saddling companies with great burdens”¹⁹. This caused “an

¹³ Parri archives Emilia-Romagna, Sepral fund, memorandum of 1941: n. 25 of December 13th, n.273 of October 8th, n.329 of November 22nd, n.348 of December 4th.

¹⁴ Parri archives Emilia-Romagna, Sepral fund, memorandum of 1942: n.399 of January 18th, n.411 of February 2nd.

¹⁵ Parri archives Emilia-Romagna, Sepral fund, memorandum n.743 of December 22nd 1942 and n. 772 of January 28th 1943.

¹⁶ Parri archives Emilia-Romagna, Sepral fund, memorandum n.790 of February 26th 1943.

¹⁷ Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 887, *Carteggio fra Radici e Mele (Correspondence between Radic and Mele)*, October 12th 1944.

¹⁸ With great disappointment of industrialists associated to Sasi consortium, on October 17th 1944 a decree of the province leader created the canteens and stores supply Board. It absorbed Sasi, extending the participation to all the companies with more than 500 employees. It meant, in December 1944, about 120 companies with totally 200.000 workers, besides all their families (see Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 887, *Relazione [Report]*, December 5th, 1944). Clearly last months of war did not allow the perfecting of this operation, because in July 1945 a workers’ Commission asked industrialists to turn Sasi into a cooperative (Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b.160, f. 887, *Lettera riservata all’ing. Decio [Confidential letter to engineer Decio]*, July 25th 1945).

¹⁹ Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 888, *Verbale del Consiglio Amsa (Minute of Amsa meeting)*, December 6th 1944.

illogical supply situation, in which second course was provided for by 1/5 by Food organizations and by 4/5 by the black market”²⁰, that was inevitably encouraged, while industrialists complained that “war restaurant were granted 700 calories per meal, while company canteens 250 calories per meal”²¹. At the same time the problem of finding food was further compounded when the war froze transport, and in January 1945 it was laid down that “The authority can supply a second course only for the next 8 days. (...) 8 days from now some company are likely to be unable to supply not just the second course, but also the first one, unless rice arrives from Vercelli”²².

The situation was dramatic all over occupied Italy, with serious repercussions on the population. Accounts of Turin labourers tell that Fiat labourers lost 10-15 kilos, while in Mirafiori men “taller than 1.7 meters weighed only 53-55 kilos instead of 66-70” (De Luna 1990, 84). Therefore, labour claims were soon made for food rations in company canteens. Again in Turin, “the first police report dates back to January the 11th 1943 in Fiat spring department: ‘this morning at 8 o’ clock 600 labourers declared that they would not to work until they received the card for extra bread (...) We take the opportunity to point out that the list extra bread in the spring department was given to rationing office in November 1942. To date, only 50 out of 138 labourers received the extras. We reported long ago on the slowness of the rationing office in issuing extras, causing deep discontent among labourers” (De Luna 1990, 85). From that time on, claims for improvements in the supply system, in which company canteens played a pivotal role, became one of the most important issues of political struggle, starting from the first antifascist strike in Italy’s industrial triangle in March 1943.

The British study on company canteens, which is repeatedly quoted in this paper, also states that the development of canteens contributed to Britain’s victory in the World War II. Indeed, in Anglo-Saxon countries, the issue held great significance from on the private and the public side, as demonstrated by the publication of studies and the allocation of aid to companies, the first scientific publication dating from 1939; whereas in 1940 canteens become compulsory for companies employing over 250 people and the first analysis of nutritional tables for categories of workers was published 1943, to optimize provisions in wartime.

At first sight, this statement seemed full of the emphasis typical of the early post-war period (the text was written in 1949). Nevertheless, the rough reconstruction of the situation in Italy during those years led me into thinking, with all the due simplification, that there is a link between Mussolini’s defeat and the inadequacy of company canteens, which in the end were the visible sign of a much wider collapse.

The canteens in company during postwar: between spread and setback

After World War II company canteens were an unquestionable fact, above all in the most significant and structured industrial set up. Sources of the period were aware of the situation after the end of the war: “In northern Italy during last years of war and in the early postwar (...) company canteens became necessary to get round of restrictions, and particularly because of supplies restrain and difficulties in transports, that prevented workers from moving from workplace to their house. In many cases afterwards, canteens became canteen fringe allowances. Moreover those performances, instead of decaying as the situation normalized, received a specific configuration and a strengthening through agreements between interested categories”²³. In this moment canteens became cause of clash between trade unions and the general confederation of Italian industry

²⁰ Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 888, *Verbale del Consiglio Amsa (Minute of Amsa meeting)*, March 21st 1945.

²¹ Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 888, *Verbale del Consiglio Amsa (Minute of Amsa meeting)*, April 10th 1945.

²² Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 888, *Verbale del Consiglio Amsa (Minute of Amsa meeting)*, January 24th 1945.

²³ Archives of Trade Union Headquarters of Bologna, not. ind n. 9/19-1954, *Mensa e indennità sostitutiva di mensa (Canteen and canteen fringe allowance)*, Filcams, b. 1, f. *Carteggio e documenti (Correspondance and documents)*.

(corresponding to the British CBI), not so much due to the workers' request for a comfortable eating place at the boss's expense, as for an ideological problem very important to 50s workers: was the canteen a worker's right, so that its payment was a wage's increase, or, as boss said, was it a charitable donation as repayment, with the aim to help employee in some uneasiness?

As written so far, we can surely state it was a clash of conceptions, and it represents a clean break. Up to that time canteen establishment has been dictated by a mixture of paternalistic, utilitarian and incidental reasons, according to this owner's logic: the more the worker eats, the best he works. In those years instead, the principle that meal was a right, and it had the same characteristic of compensation of work done imposed itself. The matter was awkward. If seen as part of the wage, canteen should have been taxed, to calculate National Insurance contributions. The clash was exactly on this point, but the solution was not so easy, and it took ten years to reach an agreement. On one side union trade got some acknowledgements, like the document signed with the general confederation of Italian industry at the ministry of Employment in December 1946. In that agreement, canteens, meant both as a food distribution by companies and as a payment, exist only thanks to work done by labourers and from this point of view it is a true wage addition, to be included in it²⁴.

However, until 1955 only trade union action was able to obtain some agreements with companies that acknowledged this principle and back paid. In most cases, the Bench intervened, and it always passed positive judgements. In the end the agreement with the general confederation of Italian industry was reached on April, 20th 1956 at the ministry of Employment and it was signed by all trade unions (and it is significant that the three most important trade unions – Cgil, Cisl and Uil – agreed on this demand even if at that particular moment they were on bad terms between them). Canteen allowance was then considered useful to calculate old age and notice fringe allowance, festival and holidays, and Christmas bonus. They further set up methods of pay back. Yet to this day this is still a subject of union bargaining, as we will see.

At the beginning of 50s national condition of company canteens was very diverse, as a witness of the period summarizes in a letter to Giuseppe Di Vittorio, national Cgil leader:

In some plants (it's not right to generalize) the canteen has no comfort: shaggy bench and small stone tables, without tablecloth, non hygienic tableware, smelly and grim surroundings (it seems civilization is outside the door). The worker picks up his meal in these conditions, with his hands still dirty, for there is no room for personal cleaning. The first dish is as cheap as possible, and it has always the same taste... then the second one: you can not understand if liver is liver, and what part of the animal are you eating, and there are always the usual stewed potatoes (very damp!). Everything is swallowed up with a half liter of the worst wine, for they want to save something on the wine as well... It takes a really hardy stomach to digest...

Or else you have to bring all from home, wine included. I know a lot of workers who prefer bringing from home the kettle of soup of the previous day, and I also know a lot of workers who prefer going to the restaurant, where they can have some decent food and a glass of good wine, rather than going to the canteen, even if it is very expensive for families. (...) There definitely is a great difference between these canteens and the Marelli's one in Sesto San Giovanni: people in charge of the canteen are paid by the Society, and they can't speculate for they are controlled by a specific Commission. As canteen allowances, workers are paid 1500 lire per month, and they spend 1970 lire per 25 meals, therefore they eat very well spending only 470 lire per month: well seasoned pasta or risotto, a good and varied second dish, some good wine as well. There are workers living around who prefer eat at the canteen²⁵.

Let us study in depth this frame, remembering that statistics at the beginning of the 1980s underlined how the company canteens phenomenon asserts itself above all in companies with most clerks (in 1981 the 85% of canteens were in relation to companies with more than 1000 employees,

²⁴ Historical archives of Cgil of Rome, Circ. N. 169, March 23rd 1947.

²⁵ Historical archives of Cgil of Rome, *Atti e corrispondenze, Spacci e mense aziendali (Acts and correspondance, Stores and company canteens)*, f. 265, Italia Carminati, *Migliorare le mense in appalto (Improving canteens out by contract)*, Domodossola, August 14th 1953.

the 70% between 500 and 1000, the 50% between 200 and 500, the 20% between 20 and 200), as proof of the politic and union clout of hands since postwar.

All over the 1940s and 1950s the diet was the main worry of the lower class, for it was still the main cost for working families, while food ration in factories were linked to the heaviness of work (normal, heavy and very heavy). At Breda for example, the 'special meal' has been cut out only in 1968²⁶, because hands didn't want to give up to an important achievement that war difficulties had sanctioned, and also because workers, politically grown up thanks to the Resistance, claimed a responsibility role in the politic and economic reconstruction of the Country. For example, in Milan they asked industrialists to turn Sasi (plant supplies service) into a labour cooperative. Engineer Giovanni Falk, one of the most active promoter of this service during wartime, "said that is better not to thwart to workers' claims"²⁷. For this reason, workers were driven into demanding control over canteens, at least in main factories. Where the trade unions acted, shop committees had the chance of being represented in company catering's vigilance committees; this representation assured supply to people, veteran and internees too during Liberation, when canteens had a crucial role in food distribution managed by the Cln (National freedom committee) and the Allies. Collective memory indeed remembers factories as a open place, full of sympathy.

However, in the following decade things deeply worsened, at least in the most structured set up, like Breda in Milan, where its canteen "was famous for the treatment assured to employees". In 1948 the meal, partially paid by workers, was constituted by a first dish (pasta or rice), a second dish and a side order, a quarter liter of wine (or fruit), with the option of eating without seasons. Additions were assured to some categories (heavy workers, pregnant women and those younger than 18); there were evening and holiday meals for shift workers, and it could be possible to choose between canteen and fringe allowance. 5.475 meals were served per working week, 1.730 on Saturdays and 390 on Sundays. Menu was sumptuous and varied²⁸. At the beginning of 1949 an agreement created a labour and managerial commission to study the new situation arisen after an increasing diseconomy of the service directly managed by Breda²⁹. This service was once efficient and it had better price than military government. The payment of the fringe allowance would not have been profitable for company and it couldn't do economy of scale on management costs, unless canteen was used by enough employees. Options were either give the service out by contract, paying all employees fringe allowance, or make the canteen compulsory, suppressing the choiche of the fringe allowance³⁰. In 1951 5.856 workers ate at the canteen, while 5.644 workers preferred fringe allowance³¹. In the same year, despite of the audit of the service for which factory was renowned, "Breda canteen was still the best one, and its cost (...) is much higher than northern industries costs"³².

Thus between 1952 and 1963, the management took no further interest in the matter and it entrusted Lucio Mussini with Breda canteen direction. In 1959 Mussini wrote:

²⁶ See Isec of Milan, Breda fund, internal Commission (IV section), b. 3, f. 2.

²⁷ Isec of Milan, Sieb fund, b. 160, f. 887, *Lettera riservata all'ing. Decio* [Confidential letter to engineer Decio], July 25th 1945

²⁸ Isec of Milan, Breda fund, b.48, f. 455, *Funzionamento delle mense. Prestazioni* (Working of canteen. Performances), s.d.

²⁹ Isec of Milan, Breda fund, loose pamphlet, *Accordo per la Società Italiana Breda di Sesto San Giovanni* (Agreement for Breda Italian company of Sesto San Giovanni), January 25th 1949.

³⁰ Isec of Milan, Breda fund, b. 33, f. 384, *Relazione sul servizio delle mense aziendali* (Report on company canteens' service), December 31st 1951.

³¹ Isec of Milan, Breda fund, b. 48, f. 455, *Rendiconto gestione mese gennaio 1951* (January 1951 management report).

³² Isec of Milan, Pietro Sette, *La Breda al giugno 1951. Esame della situazione, proposte di provvedimenti*. (Breda at june 1951. Study of the situation, suggestions of measures).

Messrs direction, for a long time by now premises were built instead of a lot of canteen's rooms, that have been pull down. Canteen is by now a wretched thing, it contains 300 persons and it rubs along waiting for better days. My staff pay has been always the same (...) for over ten years and I couldn't increase it because of meal price (130 lire per first and second dish). My staff claims an increase of its wage, to avoid resigning for better paid posts. Finding staff with such a bad pay is very difficult to me. Moreover, most of commensals leaves the canteen because its rooms look wretched and there are no comforts at all. If these rooms were more comfortable and better equipped, I might please office-workers too, granting them service at the table with a very low addition on meal cost. I myself still pay 350.000 lire as year's rent. It is the same amount I paid when commensals, that today are 350, were thousands. (...) Moreover, the telephone has been took away, worsening the precarious situation in which I already work³³.

Even the same manager complained that employees ordered meals by a near restauranta³⁴. Therefore, industries tried to get rid of workers' diet costs, once the war emergency stopped. They faced hands that didn't want to use that service, even if it was excellent, and preferred fringe allowance and self-governing meals. This is what happened at Fiat, where cooking service has been established in 1940 and until 1947 it had four kitchens displaced in the main plants. After employees decrease it remained only one kitchen, which prepared 20.000 daily meals on average, and sent them to other plants inside big metal containers. This kitchen cooked 10.254.996 meals in 1948, decreased to less than 6.500.000 the following year, to 2.538.000 in 1952, to 846.000 in 1957, to 553.000 in 1960 and finally to 442.000 in 1966. (Margotti 2003, 116-117).

This trend led us to think that, as soon as food availability increased, the spur to do the best one can, rather than trying to get a good service at workplace, prevailed. This was the most common situation in Turin:

At the end of 1940s the problem of food supply had been solved, and most Turin workers chose to supplement or replace their factory meals with hme-brought food. Everyday labourers put in thier bags bread, a bottle of wine and the *baracchino*, a metal mess-tin with two sections in which warm pasta or soup and sometimes also meat or entrails. Before starting his daily work, every worker left his *baracchino* in a food warmer (sometimes it was just a tank bottom filled with water) turned on before launchbreak by a labourer. This way the contents was warmed and, during the break, workers ate in a workroom corner or in rooms suitable with tables and benches arranged by the company. Foremen instead ate often on a separate ladder, as a clear image of the aloofness and the constrasts inside the factory. (Margotti 2003, 122).

The use of *baracchino* arose a hygienic matter, and the unsuited diet was a problem as well:

The lunchbreak was short (30 or 45 minutes). Once finished, workers had just time left for a cigarette and toilet. Few attention was paid to food quality and hygienic conditions in which workers ate. Food was not refrigerated and it became soon stinky, above all in summer. Some food were difficult to digest, and the abuse of wine slowed labourers down after lunch. The diet was unbalanced because of poor income and bad habits: full off carbohydrates (pasta and bread) and fats (lard above all), proteins lacked. Companies not always had a refectory in which employees could eat, and workers often ate in a corner of the workroom, among dust and production smells, without changing overalls nor washing their hands, to quicken.

As clear, we are trying to expose with order a quite heterogeneous set up. As an example, most Turin companies dealt out a ration of hot vegetables soup, legumes, pasta or rice. In some factories, a second course and wine were given as well, and in few companies meals were free. At Olivetti in Ivrea, the canteen had two courses, wine and fruits, and workers contributed with 200 lire per day, chemists eat for free first and second courses at Sio canteen, otherwhere they paid 100 lire.

³³ Isec of Milan, Breda fund, f. *Mensa aziendale corrispondenza (Correspondance of company canteen)*, Lucio Mussini to management, November 24th 1959.

³⁴ Isec of Milan, Breda fund, f. *Mensa aziendale corrispondenza (Correspondance of company canteen)*, Lucio Mussini to management, April 18th 1957.

In Montecatini first and second courses were free. The canteen allowance correspondence in the national Cgil archives gives us a picture of the Italian survey. We can not reconstruct exactly the importance of the phenomenon on the whole productive set up, but we can undoubtedly state that company canteens were a spread set up everywhere both as meal (for free or paying) and as a allowance. However variables were endless. Some companies, as Breda, let workers free to decide between canteen and allowance, while other companies awarded allowance only to workers unable to go to the canteen due to illness. At the end of 1955, Cgil asked its branches offices a reconnaissance on the allowances total amount³⁵. We discover this way that in the same province and in the same town the meal value, totally untied from any tangible data, was fixed only by the ability of labour bargaining, originating completely different treatment. In Venice as example up to 183 lire per day were corresponded, while in lots of set ups an older 1947 agreement was still in use, that fixed at 20 lire the minimum for allowances. In Florence allowances passed from 20 to 200 lire, in Savona from 52 to 172 lire in most important factories, elsewhere the provincial agreement of 26 lire per day was applied. The Ansaldo group in Genova had canteen in some plants and gave allowance for various causes: 40 lire to workers with a health certificate, 191 lire to workers and employees of management who were not served by any canteen. In the small workshops in Genova allowance was 30 lire per day. In other set ups it ranged from 15 to 198 lire. Moreover, sometimes there were differences between regions: inside the same company itself, Ilva as example paid 36 lire per day in some plants, while in Cagliari closed the canteen at the end of World War II without allowances. In plants without a canteen, Burgo paid from 8 to 20 lire per day. The payment was particularly low in some sectors like clothing (25 lire), furnishing (12 lire), feeding (from 8 to 140 lire). There were also national differences in the same sectors: chemists, as example, had canteen allowances from 30 to 140 lire paid by monopolist groups. Textile workers were still loyal to the 1947 agreements and received 20 lire per day allowance (Vicenza, Turin, Como, Bergamo, Varese) with a maximum of 30 lire (Milan and Biella) and a minimum of 10 lire (Brescia and the South). According to later agreements, the average allowance was 45 lire per day in bigger companies, against the national one of 25 lire. In Bologna, after additions obtained following the 1956 strikes, canteen allowance ranged from 50 to 150 lire. But in Emilia Romagna there were also important set ups, like Nuove Reggiane of Reggio Emilia, funded in 1951 without a canteen nor an allowance. In this context, the only common trend in the 1950s seems to be the hard campaign carried out by the trade unions to have an economic compensation, rather than a good canteen service.

The years of the boom: they don't eat at canteen because...

Things changed during the 1960s, with the passage from "subsistence society" to "welfare society". The interest shifted from food quantity to food quality, because new matters as plenty, hypernutrition and related illness arose. Adulterations of foodstuff started to spread as well, and it was difficult to the final customer to find them out.

Back to the Breda case, in 1962 workers asked for a healthier meal, other than a sufficient one. In 1964 the canteens' contractor changed, in 1968 the special meal was abolished and the allowance was increased to 150 lire and the cold meal for shift workers has been introduced. In the same year, canteen users increased³⁶. At that moment, better eating conditions inside the factory and the establishment of a canteen service were the main requests. Trade unions claimed that the distribution of drink and prepacked food and refectories ordering were no more enough. The payment of canteen allowance did not satisfy most workers as well because inflation decreased its value. They would have preferred to eat a warm and less expensive meal in the factory.

³⁵ For these informations see Historical archives of Cgil of Rome, f. 203a-2031.

³⁶ See Isec of Milan, Breda fund, Internal Commission (IV section), b. 3, f. 2.

At Fiat “a semblance of canteen that distributed only one meal”³⁷ remained, even if the Rivalta plant, one of the most recent all over Europe, opened in 1967, was designed without spaces for dining rooms. A Fiom of Turin publication in summer of 1969 said:

At Fiat the establishment of a canteen has always been subject of discussion. But the strenght to really get it always lacked. (...) A referendum showed that most workers wanted it, and they were ready to fight for it. Fiat (...) immediatly tried to find (...) a wage solution (...). It is clear that the highest price Fiat should have paid would have been lower than the costs of a canteen establishment in all departements, *Mirafiori* included, with 50.000 labourers. As a second solution, Fiat could offer a differentiated solution (...). Yet trade unions position is very steady: the canteen is not on sale, in no departement. All Fiat delaying plans break against this strict and joint position. Fiat rapidly yields to trade union claims: the promise to establish a canteen in all the departements and the guarantee on service quality³⁸.

Once rejected the idea of a traditional kitchen to prepare fresh meals, the use of precooked and frozen food in sealed aluminium tubs to warm in electric ovens before the self-service was adopted. Their price was 420 lire, 248 of which paid by worker (Margotti 2003, 138-140). Yet, once again, the habits to eat in the canteen hardly took root and, two years after the beginning of this service, the number of users drastically decreased. The lunchbreak was short, and the quality was poor and not varied, above all for southern immigrants, used to other tastes.

At the beginning of the 1980s a conference on company catering was organized in Milan. The shop steward of Ire (ex Ignis) of Varese said: “Walking around in departements you can see workers seated on workplace eating their sandwiches for the canteen meal is really uninviting, and it’s clear how this daily phase has become distorted because of discontent, that makes workers prefer a sandwich to a warm meal all together. Then you understand we cannot delay a solution to this problem anymore, because we cannot afford keeping ignoring our health and our duty to protect it”. (Somaglia 1981a, 74).

The disliking of company canteens kept coming up, and it pointed out symbolic and cultural resistance that I found and that I’m going to mention briefly, because it would deserve an in-depth research.

Woman’s new public role, aquired during the postwar thanks to the work, clashed against the tradition of the woman as a mother and a wife devoted only to attending her children and her husband. And the diet was the main element of this attending. In 1954 a manager of catholic female organizations wrote:

We, being catholic, are extremely firm in two aspects: the freedom to bring up our children and the indissoluble unity of our family. Children, stolen away from their mother while infants, cannot be brought up by her. Canteens that take away the happiness of preparing lunch from woman, also take away her position as the queen that attends to her loved ones, even with sacrifices. In this way the family crumbles off³⁹.

There were no such strong images to contrast the set up to have lunch with family, at the point that Rita Montagnana ([1954] 5) answered to the article with practical reasons that supported the lunch in company canteens:

We know very well that during lunch workers can’t enjoy their family. First because, mainly in large towns, workers do not eat often at home. Those reach enough eat at the restaurant, those who cannot afford it, like women, eat bread and butter at workplace. The few workers that go home have to fight on bus to arrive

³⁷ Historical archives of Cgil of Rome, Circ. N. 169 bis, March 23rd 1947.

³⁸ Archives of Trade Union Headquarters of Bologna, Fiom fund, b. 13, f. 4, *La lotta alla Fiat. Un documento della Fiom di Torino, il testo degli accordi (The struggle against Fiat. A documento of Fiom of Turin. The agreement's text)*, supplement to n.7/8 of “Sindacato Moderno. Rivista della Fiom” (Modern trade union. Fiom review), July-August 1969.

³⁹ Anna Vittoria Rossi, *La vogliamo la famiglia? (Do we want the family?)*, supplement to “Quotidiano”, July 31st 1954, mentioned by Montagnana [1954], 4.

there; they eat in a hurry without talking a bit with their wives and children. In canteens instead they at least have a warm meal without getting tired. They will come back home more cheerful and peaceful, being kind and tender with their beloved ones.

Lunch with family was a social habit hard to change for this symbolic value also. If the female work was socially accepted as an unhappy need, being housewives (that meant taking care of children without sending them to the asile and cooking for men) became a privilege that distinguished the working class from the middle one. Infact, the employees were unwilling to give up to their lunch at home, possible thanks to a different working hours organization. Yet also the *baracchino* had this symbolic value, especially for workers of the first generation:

The content of the *baracchino* expressed the family bond in a foreign town: the attention paid the preparation of the meal brought on workplace was often a sign of the presence of mothers, wives or sisters that worried about diet and that dedicate their time to this task. (Margotti 2003, 123).

Another reason of weariness toward canteen, was due to the technique used to prepare food, that were not familiar for most workers. Sepra of Bologna, as example, in a 1948 document warned:

We verified that in your canteen nature goods have been given out instead of wrapped meal. We remember you that orders of High commissariat of feeding prevent from nature goods distribution, and you are requested to distribute wrapped food⁴⁰.

This “wrapped food” probably came from America and had tastes to which hands were not used. More demanding workers were puzzled, 20 years later, by the Fiat choice to apply on large scale a menu with frozen food, and in the 1980s this was still a controversial issue.

Finally, the canteen manager was another reason of mistrust. We have seen how in the 1950s the main companies started to give the service out by contract because of high cost of canteen upkeep. In this period “A large number of pseudo-entrepreneurs appeared, all coming from little restaurant of family management” (Regione Emilia Romagna 1989, 12). This turned Italy into Europe’s tail ender, above all if compared to countries such Great Britain, where company catering was subject of consideration and scientific organization. In 1953 the earliest complaint regarding “outsourcing” of canteen service was presented:

I remember the ration I had as an employee of *Galtarossa* society in Domodossola. I shared it with my two sisters during the Second World War. We found it ‘very good’, and we ate it with a long stiff loaf, made by rice flour and chicken feed. (...) Yet, despite this food was ‘very good’, after some months we had difficulty in getting rid of scabies. (...) Which are the reasons that made manufacturers give canteens out by contract? It is clear: to get out a rise in costs. First, they don’t pay kitchen staff. Second, they don’t supply the canteen. Third, they take no more responsibility if the canteen works as intended or not. Substantially, they don’t give a damn about workforce diet and health. The fringe allowance, if enough consistent, can still suffices for workers that live by their workplace. But what about those who live far away and are forced to eat at the canteen?⁴¹

This letter was addressed to Giuseppe Di Vittorio, the Cgil Secretary, and it claimed that canteen service should have been included in “books of demand in every company”, because “if manufacturers care about production and exploitation, we care about our health and our aspect as human beings and not of as malnourished beasts, worn-out with tiredness”.

This document is significant to us for two reasons.

⁴⁰ Parri Archives Emilia-Romagna, Sepral fund, f. IX, *Lettera a Corradino Monti (Letter to Corradino Monti)*, March 10th 1948.

⁴¹ Historical archives of Cgil of Rome, *Atti e corrispondenze, Spacci e mense aziendali (Acts and correspondance, Stores and company canteens)*, f. 265, Italia Carminati, *Migliorare le mense in appalto (Improving canteens out by contract)*, Domodossola, August 14th 1953.

On one side the author pointed out the main problem in management out by contract: the absence of a clear and responsible referent. It is said that in Bologna the meat sauce of Minganti canteen should obtain daily the *placet* of the owner, before being distributed to the workers. This is still and indelible memory for hands⁴². In 1981, the success of Alfa Romeo canteen, used by the whole staff, was ascribed to the direct management by the company. A delegate of canteen council said:

There has been a period in which the “accident” of the precooked food happened (...). It did not last for the disgust (rather than for our intervention), because here we have a direct management and an immediate bargaining. Here things work because we complain with the manager, who is always here. We bring the tray straight to the manager saying: “Look! You can eat all that rubbish!”. This is why that period didn’t last long⁴³.

On the other side the author of the letter to Di Vittorio complained of the company unconcern, and rebuked it because workers needed the feeding, that was a motherly symbol. An *Enquiry on joint catering* in the end of the 1980s underlined this aspect as well, and it claimed that the satisfaction of the users of company canteens was determined not only by a sensory component, but also by an emotional satisfaction, as the need of reassurance. “Food evaluations not made through the service only, but also through the analysis of its variety, its presentation and the way in which it is eaten”. A good food is required (that is to say nourishing, healthy, good-tasting, genuine, etc.) and adequate to individual needs. Though personalized and varied food is requested as well, to avoid a growing standardization (Regione Emilia Romagna 1989, 12-13).

And then...

The real company canteen boom, tied to the work organization in the tertiary sector and to the need of spaces, came out after the 1970s. At that time, this kind of catering gained a scientific aspect, that had already marked the catering sector abroad for decades. Catering companies began showing their interest in a sector with evident development outlook. Camst of Bologna, as example, has been operative on the market since 1945, but started thinking about company canteen management in 1962, and only in the end of the decade Camst filtered into the local market, with canteen management and distribution of packed lunch to city center employees (Zamagni 2002). Areas like Emilia Romagna were marked by industrial districts rather than large factories. Here company canteens gained different features, looking for instruments to build economy of scale necessary to its working. Particularly, with the birth of industrial zones in 1975 trade union and associations insisted on establishing intercompany canteens, located in rural buildings. A witness remembers the one in Santa Viola of Bologna, built temporarily in a farmhouse with makeshifts⁴⁴. Companies able to offer an adequate service in that moment conquered permanently a slice of the market, for the distinctiveness of economic development of Emilia Romagna, that need a specific catering. In 1973, Camst board of directors started to think about huge request of meals for new industrial areas of the province. After 1975 they concentrated on territorial expansion, taring the service on users’ demands (i.e. a better ratio between price, quantity and differentiation). Ten years later, this sector became significant in the total economy of the company. The success of another large Emilian catering company is also linked to this productive set up. In this peiod, in fact, three cooperatives were born in Reggio Emilia (Reggiana catering cooperative, 1973), Modena (Social

⁴² I had this information speaking about this research with a colleague. She studied history of trade unions in Bologna. I could not verify its truth, but I mention it anyway because, even if it was a “tale”, it would confirm the value that hands gave to the owner’s interest in the canteen management.

⁴³ *Consiglio mensa del consiglio di fabbrica Alfa Romeo – Arese (Canteen Committee of Alfa Romeo – Arese Works Committee)*, in Aa.Vv 1981a, 101.

⁴⁴ Account of Alessandro Maestrali, union representative, picked by Giuliana Bertagnoni in September 2006.

catering cooperative, 1973) and Ferrara (Ferrarese catering cooperative, 1979); in the 1990s their joint created the Italian catering cooperative, today the Cir-food. Both Cir-food and Camst, as cooperatives, added a value to the service: they could give commensals those “reassurances” so important for food appreciation, as we said above, because of their closeness and sympathy to the labour movement⁴⁵.

To conclude, we can study in depth the trend of company canteens in Emilia Romagna in the last decade thanks to an observatory on bargaining, established by the regional Cgil and in the forefront in Europe. The database (in which school, energy and public authority are not included) consists of 14.497 contracts stipulated between 1991 and 2006. 1.840 of these (about 13%) referred to canteens. It is not much, if you consider that in the 1970s according to Bologna Trade Union Headquarters 21% of 517 contracts were about canteen establishment, 22% dealt with its “political price” and 13% dealt with the decrease of its “political price”⁴⁶.

I analyzed 761 contracts of these 1.840 (between 1994 and 2003), and they still give a differentiated picture of the situation, just like fifty years ago. There are some recurrent matters on contracts concerning canteens.

First, they fix the contribution of the company to canteen costs. Very few times this contribution is completely in charge of the employer and these cases are a kind of allowance for uneasiness like shifts incompatible with lunchbreak or a hard reaching canteen, and so on. The principle itself that meals should be an employer’s worry was not so granted, and someone still limits the canteen’s right to the distance between a worker’s home and his workplace. Only in one of the studied situations, a company leave the previous pattern, claiming a canteen free for all as a choice, rather than as result of a union bargaining: “The company policy states to pay 100% of the meal’s cost to canteen users”⁴⁷. In all other cases company pay an average of more than 65%⁴⁸.

Secondly, contracts usually refer to canteen allowance as a negative element, and they recognize it only in unusual occasions (as shifts in incompatible hours or overtime work during non-working days, etc..) ⁴⁹, while in all analyzed documents, except for one⁵⁰, it is clearly claimed that this allowance is not considered in any contract, severance pay included.

Moreover, as for meal compositions, in the Nineties we have an uniformation, and only in the first part of the decade there are clear contradictions. In fact some said “the company undertakes to give workers one warm meal”⁵¹, others “give workers the choice between first and second course, both with a side dish, bread, half liter of water”⁵², and others “the company has on the 3rd floor a

⁴⁵ The topic is extremely interesting. It deals with the ability of cooperative ideals to turn into economic value. This ability has been identified during the case study of Granarolo group (cfr. Bertagnoni 2004). In the reconstruction of that business history it emerged clearly how the political ideal (that is to say the project of social emancipation pursued both by farmers and the local association of milk producers) improved the product at consumer’s eyes, if the consumer shared the same ideal. In this way the milk seemed better to the consumer, and this feeling helped the company’s success on competitors, because the company acted in a favourable political set up. From here the ideal value turns on economic value. Can we assume the same process for the beginning success of the three cooperatives that formed the Cir-food, linked as well to workers’ movement and to its feeding? Did the sharing of the project by users improved the quality of the service?

⁴⁶ Historical archives of Trade Union Headquarters of Bologna, Ccdl Bo fund, b. 9.4, f. *Lotte, contrattazione (Struggles, bargaining)*, 1978.

⁴⁷ See Casoni fabbricazione liquori Spa of Modena, grocers sector, supplementary agreement of November 13th 2003.

⁴⁸ Here you are the average shared per year of company contribution to meals: 67% in 1994 (out of 43 contracts), 72% in 1995 (out of 43 contracts), 69% in 1996 (out of 55 contracts), and in 1997 (out of 24 contracts), 65% in 1998 (out of 34 contracts), 66% in 1999 (out of 18 contracts), 71% in 2000 (out of 34 contracts) 69% in 2001 (out of only 7 contracts) 66% in 2002 (out of 17 contracts).

⁴⁹ The choose between the canteen and the allowance is given only by Butler Engineering & Marketing Srl of Modena and Reggio Emilia, engineering sector, in the supplementary agreement of January 26th 1998.

⁵⁰ It is the Annoni Srl of Parma, grocers sector, supplementary agreement of June 25th 1998.

⁵¹ It is the Ortolani Cofri united cooperatives of Imola, agricultural sector, supplementary agreement of June 25th 1998.

⁵² Asa Srl of Bologna, engineering sector, supplementary agreement of November 13th 1995.

free catering with first and second course, fresh or boiled vegetables, bread, fresh fruit, wine, water. There is also the possibility to reheat food brought from home⁵³. Anyway, the sensitiveness for quality of food was growing. Some contracts establish committees to solve problems of organization and to control the running of the catering service. Other contracts ask mainly the improvement of the service quality, and in some cases they allow workers to pay a little more for a better service⁵⁴.

Finally, as a canteen feature, contracts report the evolution in this decade, during which home organization⁵⁵, or at least an agreement with restaurant, are replaced by intercompanies facilities. These facilities enable small realities to start a service from favourable prices and arriving to voucher. At the beginning voucher spread as an alternative to traditional canteens in case of shift or travelling. Our long-period analysis led us to believe that they took root rapidly because they offer some advantages. First, vouchers standardize the same treatment for all workers – i.e. for shiftworkers, who were forced to be satisfied with packed meal – putting an unic and equalitarian system, with consequential managing benefits. Secondly, vouchers can have the service referred. As a matter of fact, the principle of the deferment is not introduced with vouchers. At the beginning vouchers had a very strict use: they could be used only during the very workday, with a lot of limitations:

The use of voucher is regulated as follows: it can not be given, it can not be accumulated, it can not be traded, it can not be converted into money. It can be used only once a workday. The use of voucher during absence for illness or accident, rest, holiday, leave and anytime the employee is not at workplace is forbidden. If voucher is accidentally used not according to what specified above, the meal will be totally credited to the worker⁵⁶.

Afterwards voucher substituted the fringe allowance, solving a problem existing since the end of World War II, and this is the third advantage⁵⁷. It also acquired much more flexible features:

A ticket restaurant will be established (...) as alternative to the fringe allowance (...) for all the employees and only for effective workdays of three or more hours. (...) Vouchers can be used until february, 28th of the year following the year of issue. Vouchers not used before the due date (...) will be refunded (...) or substituted with the same number of vouchers, without additional costs, if returned before June, 30th. (4 pages-list of room that have arrangement follow the text)⁵⁸

In this way workers – and we think this is the fourth advantage of vouchers – have lots of choices and more control over what he eats and how he eats (from a speedy sandwich to a traditional meal). Thanks to this evolution in the 1990s, in Europe, commercial caterings overtook the collective ones. Italy has been on the front line in this (Benelli, Bassoli 1998, 1011), making up for the lost time.

Yet this is not the end of the meal at the workplace, also because the squeeze of working hours, to which union claims aim, do not allow workers to leave their workplace. So alternatives are experimented:

⁵³ Sorma Spa, engineering sector, supplementary agreement of March 8th 1994.

⁵⁴ “As for the actual canteen service, and in front of the union claims of a better quality, parties undertake in searching solutions, management change included. At the same time food cost for workers may improve”, Sitia Yomo of Bologna, Ferrara, Forl’, Rimini, grocers sector, supplementary agreement of April 28th, 1994.

⁵⁵ Even Famar Srl of Ferrara, textile sector, in the managerial agreement of March 31st 1995 suggested “the establishment of a canteen service managed by workers”.

⁵⁶ Jet Spa of Reggio Emilia, engineering sector, supplementary agreement of February, 26th 1998.

⁵⁷ Voucher “is not a payment, so it does not have effects on contracts” as well. Nuova Azzimondi & Friggeri of Reggio Emilia, engineering sector, supplementary agreement of July, 29th 2003.

⁵⁸ Lazzari Spa of Rimini, engineering sector, supplementary agreement of October, 16th 2002.

Premix: after buying the new shed, Better restructured the whole company, and it decided to use some rooms to improve the quality of life (with a more compressed workinghours, that makes the lunch impossible both in canteen and at home). A ricreative room has then been built and accessorized, to make it as functional as possible. In th same way they tried to answer to freetime needs, not less importan, such as a physic wellness, as preamble to a better general wellness⁵⁹.

Nowadays we have an excess of paternalistic memory in the textile company Bruno Cuccinelli Spa in Solomeo (Perugia). It is located in a medieval site. After a restauration on purpose, it houses textile laboratories, the workers' home and an "unusual company canteen" made out of an old farm, "that looks like the restaurant of a refined farm holidays"⁶⁰. Without reaching such excesses, it is possible that the push to codes of conduct has cultural positive effects in the long-period. And they succeed in conciliating food and work in a more balanced way.

⁵⁹ Better Srl of Modena, engineering sector, supplementary agreement of April, 28th 1998.

⁶⁰ Sofia Catalano, *Il teatro di Brunello (The theatre of Brunello)*, www.dellamoda.it/focus_1.asp?idfocus=12030 .
Valentina Riccardi, *Luoghi antichi, Nuove realtà (Old places, new realities)*, www.tafter.it/dettaglio.asp?id=49 .

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