

Introduction

by Michele Barbato

I am not an economic historian, but for many years I worked with Luigi De Rosa: over the years that collaboration grew into a friendship which ceased only with De Rosa's death on 14 October 2004 in Burgos, Spain, where he had gone to give a lecture at the invitation of Burgos University. And there is no need to quote Gustav Jung and the subconscious motivations which are at the source of "synchronicity", a concept he developed and defined, in contrast with "synchronism", as the "temporal coincidence of events which cannot be correlated causatively". However, I confess that I was deeply moved when I received a postcard with affectionate greetings from De Rosa, posted in Burgos on 13 October, the day before he died, almost as though it were a subconscious farewell. I am similarly moved when, in all humility, I believe I am in some way qualified to portray his character and outline the origins and the nature of Luigi De Rosa's work published in this special edition of the *Journal of European Economic History*.

It was in 1972 that De Rosa began an undertaking that was to last more than thirty years: that was the year in which he founded the *Journal*. At that time I was responsible for the *Servizio Studi* of the Bank of Rome, the bank which sponsored the initiative and assigned it to the aforementioned office. I realised at once how important the *Journal* was. It came into being with the aim, as De Rosa saw it, to "attain a better knowledge of European economic history and to discover a common thread in the history of the European economy". He went on to specify: "this is not only the first review to deal with European economic history, (it is also) the first review to deal with European history *tout court*".

At first my collaboration was of a bureaucratic and organisational nature. Later, in the early 1980s, it became more demanding and involved more direct participation in the life of the *Journal*: I became, in fact, its assistant editor. Although De Rosa was very jealous of his own work and did not like to delegate, he perhaps wanted me to help him because of the constant presence, and not only physical presence, I provided (since he lived in Naples) during his continual trips to Rome where he carried out his job as editor "in the field", so to speak. But I do believe he wanted me as his assistant also because he appreciated the work I had been doing for some years, first as co-editor and then as managing editor of the *Review of Economic Conditions in Italy*, the other international journal founded by the Bank of Rome in 1947, and of its "twin" published in Italian, *Economia Italiana*. From 1979 onwards, the editor of these periodicals was the economist Mario Arcelli, and he continued in this position as an authoritative, competent and perspicacious editor until his death in 2004.

Nowadays all these periodicals of which Paolo Savona is editor, are published by *UniCredit Group*.

Of course, it was not an area in which I managed to move with great freedom of action. Nor could it have been otherwise. Though overburdened with work, De Rosa used to attend personally to every detail (there was no real editorial staff), following every stage of the editorial *route* of a review: from the (scrupulously thorough) assessment of the texts sent for publication, which he examined rigorously, to the (just as thorough) correction of the proofs, once the texts had been sent back, often largely rewritten, by authors urged to accept his observations. But he was not deaf to suggestions: the fact is he could listen. He could listen to those, like me, who were physically beside him; and even more, he could listen to someone like Peter Mathias, the illustrious Cambridge economic historian and authoritative member of the Board, whose authority was felt despite his being far away physically.

As Editor, De Rosa had forged a fruitful relationship, not only with the scholars from whom he systematically received requests to publish their writings in the review, but also with the university presses and with publishing houses worldwide, particularly those specialising in social sciences. This enabled him to have a precious source of up-to-date information. In this task it was strange to see him fill in the printed cards to request books that had been published, the titles of which he extracted from the many catalogues he used to receive and examine carefully – I would say with the greed of the researcher who is curious to seize new books. When, breaking down his resistance, I tried to develop the relationship with these publishing houses, I realised that over the years De Rosa had set up an archive of information on some eight hundred publishing houses scattered throughout the entire world. In this way the *Journal* received a considerable flow of books which were duly reviewed or listed in the *Journal*, producing a wealth of documentation and up dated bibliography which is unique of its kind.

To carry out the job of editor, and to be physically present in the editor's office, De Rosa used to travel on an early morning train from Naples, and, although most of his time was spent on the *Journal*, he was also very involved in the numerous cultural activities which brought him to Rome. Often he would set off from Rome on his trips abroad for conferences, lectures and appointments. I would tell him at what stage the current issue of the *Journal* was at, and together we would examine the publishing plan to be arranged with the printers. De Rosa would quickly assess all the questions of the day and would move on to deal with the correspondence, always and only with hand-written letters, and to plan new projects and to attend to other writings. As well as dealing with the contents of every issue of the *Journal*, he made sure that he publicised it, developing it as a vehicle to disseminate economic culture, sometimes through conferences. I fondly remember how enthusiastically De Rosa accepted a research project I suggested to him as a

joint venture with the Bank of Italy's Historical Research Office. It lasted for many months and in March 2001 was the subject of an international conference on *Banking Systems and Financial Systems*. On that occasion, Luigi De Rosa made a valuable contribution to increasing our knowledge and understanding of economic issues and, in particular, of the financial and banking history of European countries in the twentieth century.

We shared the same office and, since we dealt with the questions connected with the *Journal's* publication and planned new projects, we ended up by spending whole days in each other's company, each of us getting on with his own job, with breaks that allowed us to reflect in particular on what was happening in Italy. And I miss the keen observations he would make, commenting on the day's news: political decisions, social conflicts and economic events. All his comments showed a rare level-headed judgement and a healthy optimism, the result of a long-pondered belief that the forces of evil prevail only when reason slumbers. And it seemed to De Rosa that a historian's work could help to keep reason awake. His last book, *La provincia subordinata* (Rome, 2004), bears testimony to this belief: it deals with the consequences for Southern Italy of painfully becoming part of a unified state: an exposure, he confided to me, "written in the hope that southern Italians wake up". That is what he was confidently waiting for. Although he seemed a calm person, he was a bellicose intellectual.

I was very struck by his conversation, both because of how clearly and concisely he presented an issue and because of the solutions he would suggest. As an economic historian, he would explain how the economy had behaved in the past, but, with just as much expertise, he would also illustrate and interpret present-day situations. This gift of his was evident not only in his reporting of events but also in his ability to establish relationships between institutions and economic events and between these latter and social, political and cultural events. And so he did not merely recount economic facts but also the history of men and institutions. This approach to economic history is very obvious in the volume which follows this brief Introduction of mine.

As far as the contents of this book are concerned, I should like to recall how the project came into being and how it was carried out: I can do this with full knowledge of the facts in that the book, which I actually proposed, grew day by day beneath my very eyes.

And I say the idea was mine because, in view of the fiftieth anniversary of the aforementioned *Review of Economic Conditions in Italy* which would soon be upon us, I suggested to De Rosa that he should reconstruct the "history of Italian economic development" from the end of the second world war to 1997, the year of the fiftieth anniversary, and that he should reconstruct that history by using the material published in the *Review* over the same period. I am amazed now that he did not hesitate, even for a moment, to accept. In fact, in the room that the Bank of Rome made available to him for the project

there were no books, balance-sheets, reports or statutes, but only “fifty fat volumes”: the volumes which contained the annual collections of the issues of the review. However, De Rosa’s sensitivity in archival matters proved important for the reconstruction of the facts contained in the volumes of the *Review of Economic Conditions in Italy*, a sort of “living archive”. And it gives me pleasure to recall that this characteristic of De Rosa’s was a great help when I was called on to reorganise the historical archive of the new Bank of Rome which in 1993 inherited four collections of documentary material from banks founded over a long period of time: *Monte di Pietà*, 1539; *Banco di Santo Spirito*, 1605; *Cassa di Risparmio*, 1836; *Banco di Roma*, 1880. As an influential member of the scientific committee set up to reorganise the new archive, Luigi De Rosa made a significant contribution to solving the knotty problems which arose from the contrasts between the archivists’ arguments and the economic historians’ arguments. Hence his proposal to carry out research on the historical-institutional evolution of these four banks, knowledge which future researcher-users of the archive must have for a better understanding of the documents available. De Rosa himself produced an interesting study on the Roman *Cassa di Risparmio*.

For a historian who was used to working in prestigious and rich archives, it was highly unusual to reconstruct an economic history based on this particular kind of document: the annual volumes of the *Review*. In fact, the only documentation De Rosa had was a wide-ranging, detailed collection of papers by eminent economists, authoritative scholars, important politicians, entrepreneurs and trade unionists, all busy analysing and discussing the complex issues which, over the years, had demanded the country’s attention. It must be pointed out that he could, however, count on a rich crop of information and statistical data, methodically collected in special sections of the *Review*, dealing with different production sectors. This was data that concerned the entire period to be analysed, made up of first-hand documentation which was often not to be found in other sources.

This is why the *Lo sviluppo economico italiano dal dopoguerra a oggi* (*Italian Economic Development Since the Second World War*), published in 1997, the English edition of which we are presenting here, is a highly original work among De Rosa’s publications, and differs from all the rest. It is different for at least two reasons: for the source on which it is based and for the fact that the events dealt with are contemporary. Both these aspects are crucial and present a challenge for someone like De Rosa who, used to working expertly in archives in Italy and abroad, had to rely on those fifty volumes, or two hundred and fifty issues of the *Review* (for the first 32 years it was published every two months, and then from 1979 every four months) they contained and presented as a singular “source”. And this was not the entire “challenge”. It is a well-known fact that to narrate contemporary events is always a challenge for a historian in that the “detachment” necessary to aim at objectivity may be

lacking. Indeed, the editions of the *Review* that De Rosa examined confronted him, almost physically, with history which in many ways was still alive, history which had yet to “settle” and which did not offer that detachment required for the subject to be studied.

That challenge, however, was overcome. And De Rosa overcame it because he was not only a great historian, but also a great editor. He was very familiar with the “review as an object”; he had an intimate knowledge of it. And this knowledge led him to sense its huge potential as a historiographical source, a potential which was even greater if placed in a long-term perspective: that perspective which informs this book, as it informs other books of his. And so it is not in the least surprising that the *Review* is the only source found in the book’s bibliography. De Rosa is careful not to present a monotonous narration, because he is ready to step back, to hide behind the scenes, leaving on centre stage the authors of the articles which appeared in the *Review*; authors who are often the protagonists of Italian development: “economists (De Rosa writes), politicians, central bankers and other bankers, economic operators”.

In this way an account made up of many diverse elements that blend harmoniously takes shape, where De Rosa recounts other people’s opinions intelligently and objectively and where at the same time, without any apparent effort, he finds himself writing both the history of the *Review* from its origins and the history of post-war Italy. And yet from behind the scenes De Rosa remains the skilful director of that lively, continually changing stage action on which, starting with the very title – *Italian Economic Development Since the Second World War* – he imprints his sound, solid, historical and methodological approach. And I do not say this fortuitously: has not De Rosa been recognised as having a distinctive approach to economic history, the approach that leads to understanding economic history as the “history of economic development”?

As evidence of this approach we could quote many of De Rosa’s books which are all characterised by a dynamic view, probably the result of the influence of what he read as a young man, particularly Schumpeter. This transpires from Gaetano Sabatini’s Introduction to the other edition of the *Journal* commemorating De Rosa with a selection of his writings. De Rosa always noted the forces of change, the resistance which hampers change, the contradictions which accompany development considered globally and not merely as material growth. This approach strongly marks the treatment of a period which in that under study in this book saw a very important change, as De Rosa rightly emphasises: the transformation of the Italian economy from a mainly agricultural to a mainly industrial economy. There is the temptation to say that this work of De Rosa’s vaguely resembles Epicarmo Corbino’s

¹ Proceedings of the Conference on *Luigi De Rosa e la storia economica*, Naples, 2007.

Annali dell'economia italiana (1931). De Rosa happened to be a student of Corbino's during the difficult war years. And there is doubtless resemblance in the decision to write chapters on subjects, sectors or economic themes (infrastructures, energy, agriculture, the iron and steel industry, engineering), chapters which are, so to speak, "self-sufficient", from which the contribution that each individual sector made to the general economic development becomes clear.

De Rosa found himself examining and dissecting hundreds and hundreds of articles, papers, testimonies, pieces of research and statistics, and of course he did not merely put facts and accounts together superficially: other people's observations are "relocated" in a systematic plan of his own making which enables him to present an intelligent, coherent interpretation that makes for fascinating reading.

Italian Economic Development Since the Second World War is made up of nineteen chapters (with a wealth of bibliographical and explanatory notes), dealing with significant changes in Italy's economic life. The various phases examined are: the economic reconstruction and the so-called "economic miracle" (with a careful assessment of the impact international affairs had on development); the revolution in agriculture and the policy of supporting the economy of Southern Italy; the end of the "economic miracle" and the ups and downs which followed; the revolution in energy sources and in the iron and steel industry; the revolution in the mechanical engineering industry and the problems of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry; progress in the textile and clothing industries and the great changes in the food industry; the modernisation of physical infrastructures and the public finance crisis; the problems of stagnation and restructuring; and the changes in the financial markets and taxation policy. It should also be said that, although the analysis stops at the end of the 1990s, a long-term view emerges in the conclusions: "privatisations, liberalisations, a marked reduction in taxation, flexibility in public finance and globalisation are all different aspects of the same fundamental process: that process which, by means of a more efficient distribution of resources aims at a maximization of production and wealth in the pursuit of a peaceful *entente* among peoples".

From its very inception, I have learned a lot from seeing how this book was planned and then written chapter by chapter, respecting the prearranged editorial schedule: in this I found confirmation, not only of the serious-mindedness, rigour and wisdom De Rosa showed in the way he handled the available documentation, but also of his exceptional ability to link events under a "unifying idea" which, with uncommon discernment, he sought in the narration of facts, without being prey to misleading preconceived theories.

The results of De Rosa's study, methodically built day by day through the perusal of hundreds and hundreds of texts collected in the fifty large volumes described at the beginning of this Introduction, are apparent to everyone. The

book, written only ten years ago, is already a classic and has met with great success in China (a Chinese translation has been published, sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), a fact which is owed certainly to its contents and not only because it was the first book on Italian economic development to be available in Chinese and accessible in the ancient Chinese Empire. The book was presented in 1999 during a fascinating conference in Beijing, at the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences, and the following day there was a debate on the different aspects analysed in the book which lasted all afternoon and which was open only to the students of the Academy. Luigi De Rosa spoke to those present, who all wanted to learn from the Italian experience, and he answered their many questions; he was pleased to see that his account of the Italian experience helped to reflect on problems of economic development which, despite differences in period, place and context, share a common basis and give rise to several analogies; problems relating to urbanisation, internal migration, disparities between different areas, the redistribution of wealth and centres of industrial development. These subjects of reciprocal interest have given rise to an initiative of cultural cooperation between the *Review of Economic Conditions in Italy* and the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences. This cooperation has proved fruitful on several scores, and has led to the printing of joint publications (in Italian, Chinese and English) which have been presented to a public of experts and discussed at special conferences in Beijing at the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences.

For this reason, too, we should remember that it was De Rosa who first began contacts with China, contacts which have been developed beyond all description, giving rise to increasingly intense forms of collaboration. The tenth anniversary of that cooperation, which will fall in 2009, will be an excellent opportunity to commemorate Luigi De Rosa and his farsightedness in starting up contacts which have proved extremely fruitful. And it will be highly beneficial that, together with the Chinese, who can read De Rosa's text in their own language, a much wider public consisting of those who read English as a lingua franca can have access to De Rosa's work. Hence this volume.

By way of conclusion, I should like to stress that this volume was written by De Rosa with unusual passion, the passion of someone who lived through the events about which he is writing. But it was also written with objectivity. This is seen in his efforts to give the events he narrates an appropriate historical perspective. I am therefore tempted to say that in this book De Rosa unconsciously followed the suggestions of Pierre Hadot, a French philosopher: "the writing of history, probably as with every human activity, must be a *coincidentia oppositorum* that seeks to respond to two contrary needs, both of which are impelling: to understand and evaluate historical events, a person must commit himself consciously and totally, but at the same time he must be totally detached, remaining intentionally objective and impartial. I believe that

it is only the scientific precision, the self-detachment that imposes impartial and objective judgement, which gives us the right to involve ourselves in history and to give it an existential significance²². It seems to me that De Rosa's writings prove eloquently that such a goal can be achieved.

²² «L'écriture de l'histoire, comme probablement d'ailleurs toute activité humaine, devra être une *coincidentia oppositorum* en s'efforçant de répondre à deux exigences, aussi urgentes l'une que l'autre: pour percevoir et évaluer la réalité historique, il faudra d'une part un engagement conscient et total du moi, et d'autre part un détachement total du moi, une objectivité et une impartialité volées. A mes yeux c'est seulement l'ascèse de la rigueur scientifique, ce détachement de soi qu'exige un jugement objectif et impartial, qui pourra nous donner de la droit de nous impliquer nous-mêmes dans l'histoire, de lui donner un sens existentiel». P. HADOT, Preface à E. BERTRAM, NIETZSCHE. *Essai de mythologie*, Paris, 1990, p. 34, quoted in P. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, (Albin Michel: Paris 2001), pp. 113-114.

Foreword
by Luigi De Rosa

