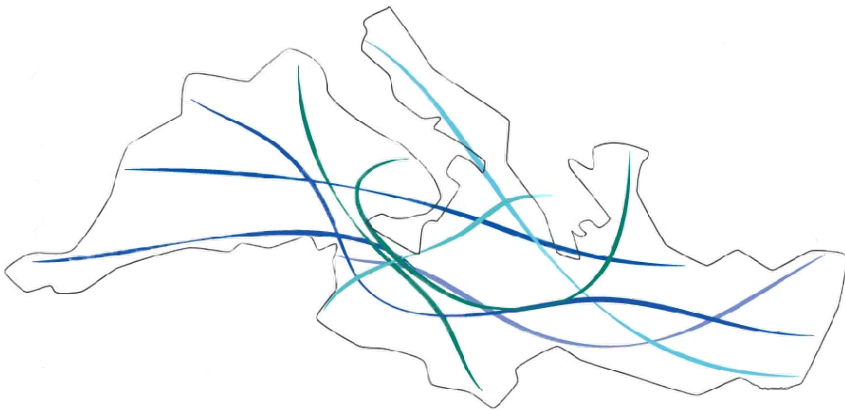


# JOURNAL OF MEDITERRANEAN KNOWLEDGE

Editor in Chief, Giuseppe D'Angelo

CHIARA MARIA PULVIRENTI

## *The myth of planning. The Allied Control Commission and the UNRRA in the Italian laboratory*



ISSN: 2499-930X



---

**MEDITERRANEAN KNOWLEDGE**  
International Centre for Studies & Research  
[www.mediterraneanknowledge.org](http://www.mediterraneanknowledge.org)

Pulvirenti, C.M. (2021). The myth of planning. The Allied Control Commission and the UNRRA in the Italian laboratory. *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge*, 6(1), 35-58  
DOI: 10.26409/2021JMK6.1.02  
Retrieved from  
<http://www.mediterraneanknowledge.org/publications/index.php/journal/issue/archive>

Author: Chiara Maria Pulvirenti, University of Catania  
chiara.pulvirenti@unict.it

Article received: 8 January 2021  
Accepted: 17 May 2021

On the cover: *Routes* by ISIA Roma Design

© ICSR Mediterranean Knowledge 2019  
Via Giovanni Paolo II n. 132, 84084 Fisciano, Italy



 - Peer Reviewed Journal

INDEXED IN  
DOAJ

*The myth of planning. The Allied Control Commission and the UNRRA in the Italian laboratory*

Abstract

The article, through the study of sources from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the Allied Control Commission archives analyses, in a transnational perspective the use of the American myths of planning and technical expertise during the second world war. Allied military authorities and the UNRRA agents, using Italy as a laboratory of experimentation of their policies, played an essential role in integration of the Mediterranean area, building infrastructural, social, economic and cultural premises for a new geopolitical order, and giving their contribution to the rise of an anti-party attitudes in some Republican Italian élites.

Keywords: UNRRA, Planning, Mediterranean, Anti-party attitudes

*El mito de la planificación. El Consejo de Control Aliado y la UNRRA en el laboratorio italiano*

Resumen

El artículo analiza, en perspectiva transnacional, el uso de los mitos norteamericanos de la planificación y de la competencia técnica durante la segunda guerra mundial, por medio de las fuentes de la Administración de las Naciones Unidas para el Auxilio y la Rehabilitación (UNRRA) y del Consejo de Control Aliado. Las autoridades militares aliadas y los equipos de la UNRRA utilizaron a Italia como un laboratorio para experimentar sus políticas, desempeñaron un papel fundamental para la integración del área del Mediterráneo, construyeron las premisas infraestructurales, sociales, económicas y culturales de un nuevo orden geopolítico y ofrecieron su contribución para el nacimiento de una actitud antipartido en algunas de las élites de la Italia republicana.

Palabras clave: UNRRA; planificación; Mediterráneo; antipolítica.

*I mito della pianificazione. La Commissione Alleata di Controllo e l'UNRRA nel laboratorio italiano*

Sinossi

L'articolo, basato su fonti della United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration e della Commissione alleata di controllo, analizza in prospettiva transnazionale l'uso del mito americano della pianificazione e delle competenze tecniche durante la seconda guerra mondiale. Le autorità militari alleate e il personale dell'UNRRA, usando l'Italia come un laboratorio sperimentale delle loro

politiche, giocarono un ruolo essenziale nell'integrazione dell'area mediterranea, costruendo le premesse infrastrutturali, sociali, economiche e culturali per un nuovo ordine geopolitico e contribuendo a far sorgere un atteggiamento antipartitico in alcune élite della Repubblica italiana.

Parole chiave: UNRRA, pianificazione, Mediterraneo, antipolitica

# *The myth of planning. The Allied Control Commission and the UNRRA in the Italian laboratory*

CHIARA MARIA PULVIRENTI  
University of Catania

## *Introduction*

In 1944 in the July issue of the *Reader Digest*, there was an article about the civilian conditions in Southern Italy during the Allied Military Government's occupation. Kwang Yuan Chen, head of the Far East Division of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, asked the UNRRA Division officers in Europe and in the Far Eastern countries to read it, to "avoid the mistakes of the officers of AMG".

The editorial, written by the American war correspondent Frederick Painton, had an evocative title *Naples: City of Panic and Famine*, and an even more explicit explanatory: "Can we do better for the rest of Europe than we have for the starving Italians?". The journalist described the discouraging story of people from Southern Italy rescued from Fascism by Anglo-American troops but hungry, ragged, bankrupt. Many promises had introduced and accompanied the Allies landing in Sicily: it was a redemptive occupation, and the USA was a friendly-enemy, engaged in a paternal mission of recomposing the community life<sup>1</sup>. However, the need for help in Southern Italy seemed to overwhelm them and compromise their control of the occupied territories:

The Allies have made a complete flop here. We said we came as liberators, but failure to meet obvious food shortages is not an act of a liberator. Here in Italy we

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosario Mangiameli talked about "recomposing the community life" as a goal of the American occupation in his pivotal essay on the Allies in Sicily (R. Mangiameli, 1987).

have a vicious circle in which nothing much gets done; and Communism rushes in here, as it did in France and North Africa, because it fills a vacuum left by our failure. We've got to do better. If we do elsewhere in Europe what we are doing now in Italy, then the peace is lost before the war is won<sup>2</sup>.

The article used a recurrent argument in the American debate about the second world war from 1941: establishing globally better living standards was the only way to win and guarantee enduring peace and social order. The military experience in Italy had an exemplary value and it corroborated that belief. As Andrew Buchanan pointed out (2008, p. 219), it "made an important contribution to the formation of the redemptive, muscular and interventionist ideologies that would coalesce in Cold War internationalism". Landing in Sicily, the Allies opened a breach in the Mediterranean<sup>3</sup>, which became a field of experimentation of the education to democracy. Relief programs and development projects were tools to instill democracy as the philosophical movement of the democratic activism by John Dewey had taught since the beginning of the century<sup>4</sup>. Many committees made by American, British and local scholars were created in those years to reorganize different aspects of the administration and reeducating occupied territories. In the Mediterranean, the Allies tested what Kurt Lewin in 1945 called "action research", boosted by the war:

Applying cultural anthropology to modern rather than primitive cultures – he said – experimentations with groups inside and outside the laboratory, the measurement of sociopsychological aspects of large social bodies, the combination of economic, cultural, and psychological fact-finding, all of these developments started before

---

<sup>2</sup> F. Painton, *Naples: City of Panic and Famine*, in Reader's Digest, July 1944, p. 28 in United Nations Archive (UNA), S-1242-0000-0107-00001, Missions, Italian-preliminary.

<sup>3</sup> In the last years the Allies occupation of Sicily and Southern Italy has been object of several studies with a social and political approach (S. Lupo & R. Mangiameli, 2015); (M. Patti, 2013); (I. Williams, 2013); (M. Porzio, 2011); (E. Di Nolfo & M. Serra, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey's strongly critical stance towards Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies is well known: the American philosopher criticized in particular the improvisation of social reforms and their inability to affect the conditions of the working classes. However, precisely during the war, there was a convergence on the president's positions on foreign policy issues: in the 1944 elections Dewey voted Roosevelt for the second term (H.W. Brands, 2008).

the war. But, by providing unprecedented facilities and by demanding realistic and workable solutions to scientific problems, the war has accelerated greatly the change of social sciences to new development level (K. Lewin, 1945, p. 5).

American and British scientists and activists arrived on the southern shores of Europe in the Army ranks or in the pay of international humanitarian organizations, to administer the occupied territories, to give assistance, and to start to figure out a transnational welfare system and a future of global cooperation.

After the great closure of the totalitarian age, the total war turned into a global integration process<sup>5</sup>. Violence, famine, poorness, and diseases leveled societies, equalized enemies and partners, and the observers from armies and humanitarian agencies pushed the Allies to plan solutions for peace and relief on a world scale. The Mediterranean area became that space of integration, crossed by people and ideas, as it has already happened during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the age of European revolutions. It is why a social history<sup>6</sup> of the total war needs a transnational approach, useful to highlight the intellectual and political contamination that involved both institutions and agents of the international community. Historians have been so focused on the Allies intervention and their imperialist attitude towards the Mediterranean that they have often ignored the allied planners' internationalist spirit. Looking at the correspondence from the war theatre is possible to grasp the cosmopolitan activism of technicians and the global perspectives of agents, dialoguing with local *élites* in the Italian transition to democracy

This article will consider that integrated context, focusing mainly on Sicily and Southern Italy, as a laboratory of education to democracy through first assistance and development plans projected both by the Allies Control Commission and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). In those regions, living their early post-war in the slow awakening of political parties after fascism, the military authorities and the UNRRA agents played an essential role in planning the future. They showed a paternalist

---

<sup>5</sup> Sheldon Garon recently pointed out that even if a growing number of historians analyze the globalization movement after the second world war, few of them “contributes to a more global understanding of total war” (S. Garon, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> A decisive historiographical turning point is the social history approach of Gabriella Gribaudi (G. Gribaudi, 2004).

attitude toward the local population, often refusing the political mediation<sup>7</sup> and teaching the primacy of pragmatism to establish democracy. This stance of refusal of the Italian political interlocutor resulted from the long-lived American stereotypes about Italian people and the *Italianess*, their backwardness and political immaturity, which had thrown them into the arms of fascism, and their affinity with anarchist and communist movements (M. Patti, 2013). Moreover, the inability to afford the wheat requisition demonstrated by the new local administrators, chosen according to principles of the indirect rule, worsen the American judgment on the indigenous ruling classes:

The Amg in Sicily devoted most of its energies to breaking this situation and getting more of this invisible wheat into the market. The most effective method was simply to take a squad of soldiers and some trucks and go from farm to farm making a search, and in this way in 4 days, 2 Amg officers succeeded in extracting 400 tons of wheat. For obvious reasons, and in addition because of lack of personnel, AMG could not pursue this method on a wide scale. Nor did in this situation any civilian group, organization or party in the Sicilian population to whom it could appeal as a responsible agency to persuade the wheat hoarders to disgorge<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, the category of *anti-politics*, the label that seems to reveal the sense of the whole Italian Republican history, shows transnational references. The American anti-party stance resulted from the fear of the growing influence of the Communist Party in Northern Italy and a paternalist intolerance towards the local ruling class in the Southern area of the Country. However, it was coherent too with anti-ideological democratic activism.

In this perspective, the anti-party feeling found a political direction in technocracy. It was the "third road" of the operative critics' technical competence chosen by various intellectual *élites*

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Rosario Mangiameli "Più che sulla ricerca e l'apprezzamento di interlocutori politici locali, l'approccio americano si fonda sul tentativo di instaurare un rapporto diretto tra le forze di occupazione e la società: un rifiuto della mediazione politica che porta ad accentuare toni di crociata contro il vecchio mondo nel suo complesso e che offre suggestioni a chi in Europa spera in un rinnovamento radicale provocato dallo sconvolgimento bellico" (R. Mangiameli, 1987, p. 487).

<sup>8</sup> *Confidential. Excerpts from report of the Fea Survey mission to Italy of march 1, 1944*, in UNA, S-1253-0000-0553-00001, Missions, Italian-preliminary.



made by economists, anthropologists, architects, sociologists, and educationists looking for new political models outside ideologies. The goal was a global welfare, and the strategy to reach that result was planning any aspects of the future in cooperation.

Of course it is not just a matter of global social justice. As well as during the Cold War, international organizations for relief and economic development, included the UNRRA, had a strong "colonial pedigree" (D. Webster, 2011, p. 250). However, it is time to move over that kind of analysis. As Jessica Reinisch pointed out (2011, pp. 258-274), historians should consider as crucial in those years "internationalism itself", and adding an analysis of the democratic experimentalism could be useful too. It is evident in the variety of USA planners' perspectives and origins, in their frequent transition among different Government, military, humanitarian agencies, in the comparative analyses of their experiences. If we look at that contamination, we can better understand Italy's consolidation of some postwar debate's *topoi*, such as the glorification of planning as the only way to realize public action and reach the right development and modernization stage.

### *1. The century of the common man*

In Summer 1942, Hugo Gellner, Hungarian-American painter, muralist, illustrator, and antifascist activist in New York, received a letter from the Office of War Information. The agency asked his participation in a plan to enlarge the scope of government war posters "by new pictorial images which come from the free expression of the artist's creative talents"<sup>9</sup>. He agreed to illustrate with nineteen pop-like pictures the celebrative edition of an inspirational speech delivered by Vice-President Henry Wallace at a Free World Association's dinner, calling to a new egalitarian future. He chose to depict people of different cultures, genders, ages, all working, studying, discussing together. They were the "Common men" evoked by Wallace in his rousing lecture, where he appealed to avoid the mistakes of the first post-war:

---

<sup>9</sup> *Thomas D. Mabry to H. Gellert* in Archives of American Art (AAA), Hugo Gellert papers 1916-1986, Box 1, Folder 33, Correspondence, 1942, 9 July 1942.

After this war, we shall be in position to utilize our knowledge in building a world which is economically, politically and, I hope, spiritually sound. Modern science, which is by-product and an essential part of the people's revolution, has made it technologically possible to see that all the people of the world get enough to eat [...]. The peace must mean a better standard of living for the common man, not merely in the United States and England, but also in India, Russia, China and Latin America – not merely in the United Nations, but also in Germany and Italy and Japan. Some have spoken of the "American Century". I say that the century on which we are entering – the century which will come out of this war – can be and must be the century of the common man (H. Wallace, 1942).

Common men, educated in science and technologies will change the world. In this claim, the American Pragmatism resounds, and the primate of technics seems to be the only way to avoid totalitarianism's ideological tethers. It was the first launch of the plan for a World New Deal, based on what John Lamberton Harper defined "a basic article of faith", the belief that "communism and fascism would disappear in an environment of economic wellbeing and liberal democracy" (J. L. Harper, 1986, p. 10).

At the beginning of the war, both the British and the American Government engaged in initiatives to handle civilian populations' relief in wartime. In 1941 the British Government called at the St. James Palace in London a meeting where the Allies, including nine exiled governments, declared their commitment for the future peace:

The only true basis of enduring peace is the willing cooperation of free peoples in a world in which, relieved of the menace of aggression, all may enjoy economic and social security; It is our intention to work together, and with other free peoples, both in war and peace, to this end"(United Nations Documents 1941-45, 1946, p. 9).

In the same year in North Africa and Middle East, the British set up the MERRA, the British Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration, an agency administrating camps to rescue European refugees escaping from Iran, Russia, Syria, the Dodecanese Islands and the Dalmatian Coast into the Middle East.

The American Government gave even more attention to the humanitarian support during the war. The *Four freedoms speech*<sup>10</sup> President Roosevelt pronounced to Congress in 1941 had started designing the utopian vision of global wellbeing. A few months later, the Atlantic Conference with Churchill launched the Charter claiming for a "better future for the world" and "a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want"<sup>11</sup>. Step by step, the New Deal's rhetoric was reaching the international stage, and it was legitimizing an engagement in World War Two. The idea of welfare as the best policy to afford a crisis, applied on a national level during the Thirties, seemed applicable to the global context. Out of the rhetoric, it was a way to guarantee the social order on an international stage and avoid a postwar depression, saving the American goods market.

Moreover, a "human-centered approach" was useful to legitimize the military intervention, suggesting that "Americans fought the war for righteous, compassionate ends" (J. Bodnar, 2010, p. 6). With this awareness, in 1942 President Roosevelt established inside the State Department the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRO) and called Herbert Lehman, governor of New York, to lead it. The main task was to carry on a relief program in French North Africa, making plans simultaneously for large-scale post-war rehabilitation. The relief plan was the other face of the military march in the American propaganda, and it soon became a strategic issue in Italy's military occupation. The high cost of living, the famine, the condemnation of the war had been the main causes of the fall of the fascism and the hope for a change would make crossing Italy easier. For this reason, the rhetoric of the redemptive

---

<sup>10</sup> The *Four freedom speech* delivered on January 6, 1941 called for an American effort producing armaments for European democracies and it evoked a better global future founded on freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear for the citizens of every nations. The freedom from want implied a stable economic life

<sup>11</sup> "For delivery to Press and Radio at 0,900 EST on Thursday August, 14" in Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum (FDR), Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), Series 1: Safe File, Box 1, *Atlantic Charter (1)*.

target of the Allied mission had an even more intensive tactic value in Sicily, the first step to reach Europe.

On 10 July 1943 a British-American force of 160.000 men arrived in the island. They established Amgot, the Allied Military Government of occupied territories, led by an English aristocrat, Lord Francis Rennell of Rodd, an expert of colonial matters. Since the appointment of Rennell as Chief Civil Affairs the distance between Roosevelt universalism and the classic British doctrine of the indirect rule had been clear. They shared some stereotypes about local backwardness and the underestimation of Southern society's level politicization.

That condescending was mixed with an experimental attitude in the case of the Americans, more inclined to catch the local community consent to protect their military operations<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, in the USA, the democratic Government had started using the old xenophobic code of the Italianess in a friendly manner, designing a friend-enemy picture, too weak to resist fascism and unable to establish a democratic self-government. This grammar let the USA reach a double result: hold the Italian American community's consent, indispensable in a total war's collective effort<sup>13</sup>, and make negotiable Italy's enemy status in the international community. This last aim made the first moments of their expedition a pretty "negative" mission, focused on removing all fascists from public or semi-public office and accepting the British project of choosing administrative managers from the local prefascist *notabilato*.

On 11 November 1943 the Allied Control Commission was established to implement the Armistice and it became the right place for experimenting with new policies towards the occupied territories. General Alexander, Commander in chief of the Allied Armies in Italy, called it the "Third Army", explaining that the ACC was first and mainly a military organization and that the Allied

---

<sup>12</sup> According to Rosario Mangiameli Americans looked for a direct relation between military forces and the local community (R. Mangiameli, 1987, p. 487).

<sup>13</sup> Historians have extensively studied the American narrative of the "good war" in the World War II and the rhetoric of the occupation-liberation addressed to the Italian American community (M. Patti, 2015); (A. Buchanan, 2008); (D. Ellwood, 1977).

liberation did not mean the end of the war<sup>14</sup>. The Headquarters' staff was divided in twenty-six sub-commissions covering such questions as Public Health, Public Safety, Legal, Food, Monuments and fine arts, Labor, Public Works and Utilities, Education. The peninsula was partitioned in different regions (Sicily was Region I, Sardinia Region VI, Calabria Region VII). Each region was supervised by a commissioner responsible to the chief-commissioner who carried a staff of expert advisers drawn from the Sub-Commissions at Headquarters. The issue of the experience was crucial in an organization that always claimed its experimental approach.

What has the ACC accomplished in Italy? – asked rhetorically an ACC press release in 1944 – It must be remembered that its organization and activity have been, and to some extent must be empirical. The attempt to restore democracy and freedom to a conquered people while the war still continues in their Country is a new experiment in history [...]. The Allied Control Commission was established to make that opportunity possible. Part of its job therefore is to allow the freest play consistent with the war effort to public opinion in Italy – through the Press, through free assembly, through the formation of labor unions, and through the untrammelled evolution of an Italian Government based on the most representative elements of the population<sup>15</sup>.

The experimental attitude needed the strongest logistic effort and the organization of intense trainings. The meetings of the Post Husky Planning Committee were in Algeria, where the Allied had established a training and planning centre for Civil Affairs Officers in Tizi Ouzu. The activities of military agents on the field, the ones of the Committee and the ones of the Planning center should be strongly intertwined according to the Military Government Section. Every project elaborated by the Centre should be submitted to the Committee, and every plan should be "amended from time to time in the light of experience"<sup>16</sup>. The importance of flexibility in planning

---

<sup>14</sup> Even today the American rhetoric of the World New Deal and the label of the "other postwar", or "early postwar", talking about Southern Italy, causes reductionist attitude towards the war in the Southern Italy, hiding the violence experienced by the local population during the total war.

<sup>15</sup> *Italy Developments dating from Armistice Negotiations, 12 June 1944* in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41, p. 56b.

<sup>16</sup> *Minutes of P.H. Planning Committee, meeting No.2, 16 August 1943, Part II, Planning* in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Allied Control Commission (ACC),

and the value of the direct experience were highlighted by the military authorities, as well as the necessity of trained civil staff in the regions of the occupation.

Major Rowell reported that lectures which were being given by personnel who had experience in the field were proving most valuable. Major Rowell urged that in order to give new personnel the proper background and general working knowledge, they had to be turned over completely to the Director of Studies for intensive training for one week after arrival. The points were raised as certain regions needing men most urgently and as to special cases but it was agreed in principle that new arrivals should wherever practicable be completed such training under the Director of Studies<sup>17</sup>.

Planning and educating were the keywords, according to the Allies, to take real control of Italy and its population. As the historian Stephen White pointed out (1991, pos. 118), "the Allied Control Commission's Education Subcommittee was among the most energetic agencies operating in liberated territory". Purging the Italian State from Fascist started from the renewal of schooling and this aim addressed the action of American and British Allies since their arrival in Sicily. However, this process was deeply conditioned by the usual bias about that land as a backward and pre-political territory. Moreover, both American and British Allies held a diffident attitude toward the antifascist parties that should contribute to the school system's reconstruction. This distrust pushed them to a haphazard organization of the Italian people re-education, taking sometimes questionable decisions, like when they called George Robert Gayre to manage Sicily's educational matters.

Gayre was a Scottish anthropologist, an Army Educational Corps officer, surely anti-communist, just maybe antifascist. He arrived in Sicily as Educational Adviser in 1943, and in 1944 he became director of Education in the ACC, despite his troubling past as a supporter of racist theories. Already in 1939, the War Office had collected a file about him under the heading "Personnel suspected of

---

10000/100/302, Headquarters Allied Commission-AMG (includes Allied Information service), Conferences and Planning Committees (P.H. Post Husky).

<sup>17</sup> *Minutes of P.H. Planning Committee, meeting No. 7*, 15 September 1943, *Training in ACS, ACC*, 10000/100/302, Headquarters Allied Commission-AMG (includes Allied Information service)<sup>1</sup>, Conferences and Planning Committees (P.H. Post Husky).

Espionage" because he was "in touch with Dr. Dieckhoff of Ribbentrop's Bureau" and he received "correspondence from Germany"<sup>18</sup>. In Sicily, he pretended to be an Oxford Professor and started a dialogue with local *élites*, who sought to be credited in his eyes by offering him honorary degrees. He spent his time on the island evaluating university professors' profiles and deciding whether they were fascist or not. In the meantime, his personal file continued to swell up with letters describing him as a fanatic more hostile to the Soviets than the Nazis.

AMG has come under a good deal of criticism – an agent of the British Secret Service wrote about him - most of it no doubt unjustified, for being "fascist". I think that if we had been consulted on the case, we should not have approved of GAIR's employment by AMG, having regard to the facts that he holds some of the views usually associated with fascism is at the same time boastful and indiscreet. He is the kind of man I should imagine will make trouble for AMG in the future<sup>19</sup>.

However, Gayre, who was recalled in London after eight months to plan a re-education program for Germany (D. R. P. Weiner, 2020, pp. 121-145), was one of the few British men in the Subcommittee staff. The eighty percent was American, as well as all the successors of Gayre. They were exponents of the Deweyan movement, promoting progressive education as an agency of democratization.

Among them, Carleton Washburne, an American active educationist who had traveled during the Twenties in Europe to discover and learn from "the New School in the Old World" (Washburne, 1926). Moreover, as Superintendent of Schools in Winnetka, he had "transformed the school into an educational laboratory, working on and applying new ideas and advanced methods with gratifying success"(New York Times, 1926, p. 50). He perfectly embodied projects of democratic universalism and pragmatism in the didactic field, and he was one of the founding members of the John Dewey Society. He had adhered to Francis Parker's inclusive school model as a democratic educative community and a space of active and experimental learning. Another

---

<sup>18</sup> *Register No. PF47408* in The National Archives, Kew (TNA), KV 2/2472, Minute Sheet No. 9, 26 April 1939.

<sup>19</sup> *Register No. PF47408* in TNA, KV 2/2472, Minute Sheet No. 78, 31 January 1944.

supporter of the John Dewey pedagogy was Major Robert Koopman, responsible for the Education in Sicily, who collaborated with Washburne to establish a dialogue with Sicilian intellectuals, including militant antifascists. Among them, Gino Ferretti, socialist, Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Palermo, director of the Literature and Philosophy Faculty, called by Koopman in the Commission for school work. In a Commission meeting report, the Dewey's active school seemed to meet socialist principles. The reconstruction should start from children after twenty years of fascism:

La scuola d'ogni ordine e grado debba organizzarsi come una società di ricerca e di attività integrale e produttiva in un passaggio spontaneo individuale e collettivo dell'interesse, dal giuoco ad un lavoro considerato e che si svolge come libera esplicazione e come educazione concreta e libera<sup>20</sup>.

Nevertheless, education was just a part of a rebuilding project in a Mediterranean region devastated by war, famine and diseases. Planning the future in that area could not ignore Italy's wellbeing, the first step towards the liberation of Europe. But focusing on innocents was the only way to afford the opposition of those refusing that the global reconstruction plan could include the first totalitarian Country. Between August and September 1944 a press campaign, favored by the ACC itself, clamored for an Italy's Relief scheme. Anne O'Hare McCormick, a correspondent of the New York Times, was a voice of that chorus, and she wrote from Rome:

The gravity of the food and health situation in Italy convinces many of the Allies officials here that a revision in the program and administration of relief is urgently necessary. They argue that if large-scale rioting and social disintegration occur in the first Country placed under Anglo-American control, the blow to the democracies' prestige would have repercussions throughout Europe (A. O'Hare McCormick, 1944).

It was time for UNRRA to arrive.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Relazione della seduta della Commissione per il lavoro nella Scuola*, 12 gennaio 1944, ACS, ACC, 10000/144/496, Education, Reconstruction January 1944, p. 3



## 2. *A new Deal for Italy*

In September 1944 Franklin Delano Roosevelt received a letter from Rome. It was signed by Myron Charles Taylor, the President "personal envoy" to Pope Pius XII. The American diplomat had visited Caserta, and there he had had a conversation with General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, who had succeeded General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean. They discussed the opportunity that "some single agency should be in control of the whole field of relief, simplifying procedures and accomplishing objectives with a minimum of overlapping"<sup>21</sup>. The lack of personnel suffered by the ACC and the underestimation of Italy's political and social complexity by the allied military authorities made evident the need for a coordinated recovery plan for Italy entrusted to a specialized agency. All the observers thought that the UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, should be the most suitable organization for the purpose, but there were some points in its statute which prevented his intervention in enemy-occupied territories. The agency was founded in November 1943 by forty-four allied governments in Washington

to plan, coordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services (Agreement for UNRRA, 1946)

and its original scope was the relief of invaded friendly nations. Even if there were no prohibitions against its intervention in occupied enemy territories, the Country's new national authority should request assistance, with the local Allied Military Government's approval and the Government receiving aid should assume the operation's cost.

In March 1944 the Marshall Badoglio addressed a letter<sup>22</sup> to the General Director of the UNRRA, Herbert Lehman to ask for an

---

<sup>21</sup> *Vatican – Taylor, Myron C., September October 1944, Myron C. Taylor to the Presidente*, 1 September 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Badoglio to Lehman*, 15 March 1944 in ACS, ACC, 10000/132/74, Political, UNRRA, March-November 1944.

intervention of the agency in Italy, but the possibility of Italian inclusion in Western nations' great family came closer only in summer 1944, after the advent of Ivanoe Bonomi's Government. The new President of the Ministers Council wrote to Roosevelt immediately after the inauguration of his government, asking for the easing of Allies control over the Country:

The Italian people have undergone indescribable sufferings and will continue to suffer. However, they are a sane, honest and solid people to whom credit can be given. Their activity and industriousness will be necessary to the reconstruction of Europe. Every aid and assistance which will be given them in this dark hour will certainly be a constructive deed towards the free world of tomorrow<sup>23</sup>.

The implementation of a softer policy toward Italy in the following months (M.M. Aterrano, 2020, pos. 1946) made the UNRRA mission in Italy more likely. The USA, the agency's major lender, had been at the forefront of promoting the possibility of a UNRRA mission in Italy. In July 1944 an UNRRA Observer mission, led by Spurgeon M. Keeny together with Guido Nadzo and Antonio Sorieri, had landed in Naples in order to collect information about the Italian background and with the official aim of giving support just to displaced people in the Country (S. Salvatici 2011, p. 84). In their reports, they described a devastated territory, crowded by starving barefoot people and malnourished children, but at the same time, as Silvia Salvatici pointed out, they tried to use a critical approach towards the stereotypes about Italianness, making prevail the rational language of planning against the pietism that had been the milestone of traditional caritative attitude.

While the United Nations' observers were dialoguing with the local ruling classes to discover the most urgent needs of the territory, the American Government's lobbying activities for a global responsibility for Italy's future continued. On 1 August, the USA's Foreign Economic Administration took over from the Army financial responsibility for essential civilian supplies to be furnished to Italy, thanks to lend-lease funds available upon Army Certification. In a

---

<sup>23</sup> *Italy, August 1944-1945, Ivanoe Bonomi to President Roosevelt, 2 July 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41.*

confidential report, analysts from FEA described with these words the meaning of the mission in Italy and its experimental value:

The only safe assumption is that the factors of devastation, hunger, inflation, confusion and demoralization of economy and administration which have characterized Italy will be found in varying degrees behind the retraining German armies throughout Europe. Food and civil order will be the first requirement, but beyond this limited military objective there are other goals [...]. Delivery of adequate civilian supply on schedule in our future military operations is not merely a notion of altruists; it is basic to our economic and political objectives<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, in September 1944, the UNRRA second council meeting in Montreal accepted the requests for an intervention of the agency in Italy and made available 50 million dollars for specific relief categories. The pressure of the American representatives in the agency, and the "surrender" of the British ones, had been decisive. On 15 September, Roosevelt had released a memorandum for the Press. He had announced the travel to Italy of one of the most famous Italian Americans: the mayor of New York, Fiorello La Guardia, to "make a quick survey of the relief situation in the area south of the combat line"<sup>25</sup>. A few days after, Roosevelt and Churchill lastly signed at Hyde Park a common statement that marked "the advancing political and diplomatic rehabilitation of the Italian government under Allied tutelage, but it also marked the unambiguous ascendancy of Washington's approach to the key political and economic questions in Italy" (A. Buchanan, 2014, p. 195):

The Italian people freed of their Fascist and Nazi overlordship have in these last twelve months demonstrated their will to be free to fight on the side of the democracies and to take a place among the United Nations devoted to principles of justice and peace<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>24</sup> *Confidential. Excerpts from report of the Fea Survey mission to Italy of march 1, 1944* in UNA, S-1253-0000-0553-00001, Italy, Background.

<sup>25</sup> *Italy August 1944-45, Memorandum for the press*, September 15, 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41.

<sup>26</sup> *Comunicazione del testo della dichiarazione di Hyde Park* in Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *Documenti diplomatici italiani. Decima serie: 1943-48*, Vol. I (9 settembre 1943 - 11 dicembre 1944), doc. 439, p. 527

The UNRRA resolution established that the millionaire fund could finance the provision of medical and sanitary aid and supplies, assistance in protecting and returning to their homes of displaced persons, and welfare services for children and expectant mothers. The UNRRA would also provide further special welfare services for homeless, orphans, and children with physical or emotional disabilities. The UNRRA agents had prepared the missions through careful observation of the Italian society, and they decided to use the "considerable experience"<sup>27</sup> existing there collaborating with indigenous agencies and institutions, like the Onmi (Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia), the Ente Comunale Assistenza, and the Italian Government. Cooperating with local institutions was a fundamental part of the agency idea of rehabilitation: the relief program served to provide competencies and skills to the welfare administration workers and introduce "scientific methods and standard procedures for the recognition of needs" (S. Salvatici, 2015, pos. 3401).

The novelty of the UNRRA arrival in Italy was welcomed with enthusiasm by Myron Taylor. In the meantime, he was attempting to create an over-all Italian procurement and supply agency: the National Agency for distribution of relief in Italy (ENDSI) which was "intended to cooperate and correlate all distribution of donated material and supplies in Italy"<sup>28</sup>.

Myron Taylor's idea of assistance seemed to be too far from the UN's agency's aims, which pursued the myth of plan and technics to "help people help themselves" (Silvia Salvatici 2015, pos. 3355). They were in fact, quite critical toward the ENDSI in a report addressed to Fiorello La Guardia, general director of the UNRRA in 1946:

ENDSI is not an official Italian Government agency. According to observations of the Mission, the church and members of the Italian aristocracy seem to play a dominant role in the organization, and the agency cannot be said to be truly representative of the Italian people either on its national board or local committees. Active participation by the persons receiving ENDSI contributions is not encouraged, and ENDSI operations seem to be characterized by the old line philosophy of private

---

<sup>27</sup> *Limited Child Welfare Program for Italy, Statement of program*, 6 October 1944 in UNA, S-1254-0000-0553-0099-000001, Italy, Child Welfare Program.

<sup>28</sup> *Italy August 1944-45, incoming telegram received in UNRRA*, 27 September 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41.

philanthropy in which a few privileged persons "do good" for a large number of underprivileged<sup>29</sup>.

UNRRA instead was devoted to more profound and long-term aims. To pursue them, it needed a carefully selected staff of welfare specialists. According to the Montreal resolution, small teamwork would be enough: a few executives and some technicians, like the medical personnel. They started reaching the original group of Keeney, Nadzo and Sorieri in December 1944. Keeney recounted their arrival with precision and profusion of details, and he was able to restore in his letters the internationalist spirit of the reconstruction in the worst time of history. On 30 December, he wrote grateful words:

The Friends Units from our Yugoslav mission are tackling their job in the refugee camps near here. Tony, Guido and I had dinner with them the other night in company with the representatives of the Italian Government. The rooms were chilly, the light had failed, and the little temporary stoves smoked away like mad, but the spirit of the group was perfect. The Italians are delighted with them although they have been working only a few days together. We need more people like this<sup>30</sup>.

As Jessica Reinisch stated, the relief work was "testing ground of cooperation after the demise of the League" (J. Reinisch, 2011, p. 263). The agents looked at different work styles, production traditions, economic behaviors in the different regions of their camps, and their reflections turned the mission into a laboratory of technics and development strategies in the agricultural and industrial fields. Moreover, most UNRRA staff had past experiences in different areas of the world, pushing them to put in practice a notion "of cultural relativism as it radiated out from academic anthropology" (J. Reinisch 2013, p. 77). The international standing of the UNRRA employee was one of the reasons for the pride of the agency. In a final balance of the UNRRA activity in 1947, Keeney brought to the fore that had been performed "with about 400 imported United Nations personnel plus about ten times the number of Italian

---

<sup>29</sup> *Comment on the American Relief for Italy* in UNA, S-1253-0000-0553-00001, Italy, Background.

<sup>30</sup> *Keeney to Menshikov*, 30 December 1944 in UNA, S-1242-0000-0104-00002, Italy, Keeney Letters.

employees. About one imported employee for every twenty-five thousand tonnes of imported supplied". In the midst of the war the humanitarian organization was an accelerator of goods and men flows in the Mediterranean. Even if its focus was on traditional caritative issues, like children, mothers and displaced persons, the operations became an occasion to think about the postwar recovery. Relief and recovery were two sides of the same coin, and during the two years of the UNRRA's program, Italy became an attractor of planners who crossed the peninsula looking for resources and needs. The country's democratization and its inclusion among the United Nation had to pass through the economy recovery. For this reason, from 1946 the program was enlarged to enhance the recovery of industrial and agricultural production. According to the Keeny final balance, "contribution of supplies from the United Nations had helped Italian industry recover from 28% of 1938 production in January 1946 to 70% in may 1947"<sup>31</sup>.

The agents' observative stance produced a bulk of documents and reports about the devastated Italian society, full of human resources, but in need of reinforcing the link between science and social progress. Looking at agents' letters in continuity, the war disappears in the background and the desire to rebuild emerges strongly. Moreover, the connection between the war and the post-war seems more robust, and it compels historians to look at the Italian transition to democracy considering the whole period of the long European Civil War. In that period in fact plan-based thought developed, "challenging the di-vision between economics and politics, rethinking the position of individuals in society, the connection between science and social progress, and consequently the political meaning of freedom and equality" (R. Ferrari 2019, p. 10).

The UNRRA's correspondence represents the portrait of a country that, in the tragic experience of the years of the crisis, found the decisive reason for reaching democracy. It is the story of the Italian collective trauma that marks a part of the Republican ruling class's political formation. It is the story of the maturation of a national intelligentsia with a robust global inspiration, but somewhat sceptical of mass parties, which will make the myth of the plan the hallmark of

---

<sup>31</sup> Una, S-1259-0000-0035-00001 – *Information Interviews S. M. Keeny*, June 24, 1947

the third road to democracy. The UNRRA held a deep antipolitical attitude during its permanence in Italy. "Our success – wrote Keeney to Lehman – depend on our acceptance by the Italians of us as a civilian organization with as few military and political connections as possible"<sup>32</sup>.

### 3. *The third road*

During the third meeting of the UNRRA in London, the council approved the USA's proposal of a new plan of aid for Italy of 450.000.000 dollars a year, which was no longer limited to medical and food provisions. Some months later, on 19 January 1946 the Italian Government signed a supplementary agreement "to undertake a program of relief and rehabilitation assistance adequate to meet the urgent needs of the Italian population" and without "the limitation previously imposed"<sup>33</sup>. The main consequence of that new course was the institution of the Casas (Comitato Amministrativo Soccorso ai Senzatetto), an executive program of housing of the Italian government, strongly wanted by Guido Nazdo.

The new plan, better known as UNRRA-Casas, is the meeting point between the Italian American technicians, who had lead the Italian relief during the war, and a group of antifascist intellectuals ,architects, economists, sociologists, educationists, involved in enquiries about the Italian society and looking for a third road between liberalism and communism for the development in the next thirty years. Among them were Adriano Olivetti, commissioner of the UNRRA-Casas from 1947, Gustavo Colonnetti, director of the agency's technical sector, and several scholars and urbanists involved in recovery programs until the 1970s, transforming Italy in a laboratory of welfare. It was the third force gathering a various liberal democratic world, including figures of different political origins, usually belonging to the actionist movement, contraposing

---

<sup>32</sup> Una, S-1242-0000-0104-00002 - *Italy - Keeney Letters, Keeney to Lehman*, December 2, 1944

<sup>33</sup> Una, S-1479-0000-0001-00001, *Displaced Persons Operations - Italy*, Supplementary Agreement between the Italian government and the UNRRA, Rome, January 19, 1946.

the idea of the "Planning-party" against the one of the "Apparatus-party" (Lupo 2004, p. 136).

A political group unable to share its proposal outside the Italian elites, but which is representative of a great long-lived anti-party attitude. It was a group that had received from years of the Roosevelt planners the legacy of this stance, but also the myth of plan, the universalist idea of wellbeing, the experimental attitude, the enhancement of technical skills against professionalism in politics, the preference towards the rational language of economy rather than the irrational grammar of ideology. Reconnecting the history of the Italian republic to the decade of the crisis, avoiding rigid periodizing compartments, like Fascism, War, Cold war, lets historians put in evidence this inheritance and to realize the global integration of the whole Twentieth Century and the international dimension of the Italian transition to democracy.

## References

- Agreement for United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 9 November 1943. (1946). *Pillars of peace [pamphlet]*. Book department, Army information school.
- Aterrano M. M. (2020). *A new deal for Italy: Rethinking Britain's punitive attitude and the making of the Allied policy in occupied Italy, 1944* in Aterrano M. M. & Varley K. (eds.) *A fascist decade of war. 1935-1945 in international perspective* (pos 1946). Routledge. London & New York.
- Bodnar J. (2010). *The "Good war" in American memory*. Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore.
- Brands H. W. (2008). *Traitor to his class: The privileged life and radical presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*. Doubleday. New York.
- Buchanan A. (2008). Good morning, pupil! American representations of italianness and the occupation of Italy, 1943-1945. *Journal of contemporary history*, 2, 219.
- Buchanan A. (2014). *America's grand strategy in the Mediterranean during World war II*. Cambridge University Press. New York.
- Di Nolfo E. & Serra M. (2010). *La gabbia infranta. Gli Alleati e l'Italia dal 1943 al 1945*. Laterza. Roma-Bari.
- Ekladh D. (2010). Meeting the challenge from totalitarianism: the Tennessee Valley Authority as a global model for liberal development, 1933-1945. *The international history review*, 32(1), 47-67.
- Ellwood D. (1977). *L'alleato nemico. La politica dell'occupazione Anglo-Americana in Italia*. Feltrinelli. Milano.



- Ferrari R. (2019). Plan-based Thought. From the New Civilisation to the Global System of Power. *Scienza & Politica per una storia delle dottrine*, vol. 23, no. 62, pp. 5-15.
- Garon S. (2020). On the transnational destruction of cities: What Japan and the United States learned from bombing of Britain and Germany in the Second World War. *Past & Present*, 247(1), 235-271.
- Gribaudo G. (2004). *Guerra totale, tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste. Napoli e il fronte meridionale*. Bollati Boringhieri. Torino.
- Harper J. L. (1986). *America and the reconstruction of Italy, 1945-1948*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Lewin K. (1945). Frontiers in group dynamics. *Human relations*, 1, 5.
- Lupo S. (2004). *Partito e antipartito. Una storia politica della prima Repubblica (1946-78)*. Donzelli. Roma.
- Lupo S. & Mangiameli R. (eds.) (2015) Sicilia 1943,. *Meridiana*, 82.
- Mangiameli R. (1987). *La regione in guerra (1943-1950)* in Aymard M. & Giarrizzo G. (eds.), *Le regioni dall'Unità ad oggi, V, la Sicilia* (pp. 486-600). Einaudi. Torino.
- O'Hare McCormick A. (1944). New relief scheme for Italy is urged. *New York Times*, 7 September, 7.
- Painton F. (1944). Naples: City of panic and famine. *Reader's digest*, July, 28.
- Patti M. (2013). *La Sicilia e gli Alleati. Tra occupazione e liberazione*. Donzelli. Roma.
- Patti M. (2015). Governare il Mezzogiorno. Gli Alleati e l'occupazione/liberazione del Sud (1943-1945). *Meridiana*, 82, 109-133
- Porzio M. (2011). *Arrivano gli Alleati! Amori e violenze nell'Italia liberata*. Laterza. Roma-Bari.
- Reinisch J. (2011). Internationalism in relief: The birth (and death) of UNRRA. *Past and present, supplement 6*, 258-274.
- Reinisch J. (2013). Auntie UNRRA at the crossroad. *Past & Present, supplement 8*, 70-97.
- Salvatici S. (2011). "Not enough food to feed the people". L'UNRRA in Italia (1944-1945). *Contemporanea*, XIV(1), 83-99.
- Salvatici S. (2015). *Nel nome degli altri. Storia dell'umanitarismo internazionale*. Il Mulino. Bologna.
- United Nation Documents 1941-1945 (1946). Royal Institute of International Affairs. London & New York.
- Wallace H. (1942) Retrieved from <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/henrywallacefreeworldassoc.htm>
- Washburne C. & Stearns M. (1926). *New school in the old world*. John Day Co. New York.
- Webster D. (2011). Development advisors in time of Cold War and decolonization: The United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, 1950-59. *Journal of global history*, 6, 250.
- Weiner D. R. P. (2020). American and British effort to democratize schoolbooks in occupied Italy and Germany from 1943 to 1949. *Journal of educational media, memory and society*, 12(1), 121-145.
- White S. (1991). *Progressive renaissance. America and the reconstruction of Italian education, 1943-1962*. Garland publishing inc. New York & London.

CHIARA MARIA PULVIRENTI

Williams I. (2013). *Allies and Italians under occupation. Sicily and Southern Italy 1943-1945*. Palgrave Macmillan. Basingstone.