

SOME REFLECTIONS ON EINAUDI'S ACTIVITY IN THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD

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ABSTRACT

This note examines the different dimensions of Einaudi's journalistic activity: the local dimension of his city, Turin, shaped by a process of intense modernization; the national dimension of a country undergoing profound political, cultural, economic, and institutional transformations; and the international dimension, characterized by the evolution of communication tools and codes in the major industrialized countries.

Keywords: Einaudi as a Journalist, Turin, Italian Socio-economic Transformations, International Codes of Communication.

In this brief note, I will discuss three dimensions that illustrate how deeply Einaudi was embedded in the realities of his time: the local sphere, the national context, and the broader international arena. As regards the first dimension, Einaudi cannot be understood as a journalist and popularizer of science without taking into account the social, political and cultural context in which he was formed: Turin at the end of the century. This was a city undergoing profound processes of modernization and industrialization, where the world of printing and publishing appeared particularly vibrant. It should be recalled that, after 1848 and the end of the revolutionary interlude, the Kingdom of Savoy was the only polity on the Italian peninsula in which the rights granted by the sovereign were confirmed. This circumstance made that territory the epicenter of the free press in Italy, at least until the completion of process of national unification a decade later. If we take 1854 as a representative year of that crucial

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decade, no fewer than thirteen daily newspapers were published in the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia alone. Between the end of 1857 and the beginning of 1858, the total number of periodicals in the Savoy territories reached 117, fifty-three of which were published in Turin, where thirty-two printing shops were in operation. Moreover, two of the major Italian daily newspapers – the *Gazzetta del Popolo* and *La Gazzetta Piemontese* (renamed *La Stampa* in 1895) – were published in Turin. Turin was also home, at the academic level, to the *Laboratorio di Economia Politica* founded in 1893 by Salvatore Cognetti de Martiis, which played a fundamental role as an incubator of ideas and intellectual energies. It was precisely in this milieu that the decisive encounter between Einaudi and Luigi Albertini – future director of the *Corriere della Sera* and the principal architect of its success – took place, paving the way for a long and fruitful collaboration. At the end of the century, Turin likewise constituted a privileged observation point for assessing the transformations affecting one of the most economically developed areas of the Italian peninsula. It was a context that was becoming a cradle of the emerging workers' and trade-union movement, and thus an ideal setting for an editorial, cultural, and scientific enterprise such as *La Riforma Sociale*, founded in 1894 by Francesco Saverio Nitti and Luigi Roux and directed by Einaudi until 1935. *La Riforma Sociale* supported the activities of the *Laboratorio* both through the exchange of collaborators and through a shared community of scientific, cultural, and political ideals, inspired by the positivist principles “conoscere per amministrare” and “per riformare” (“to know in order to govern” and “to reform”) These principles would later be reformulated by Einaudi in the well-known maxim “prima conoscere, poi discutere, poi deliberare” (“first to know, then to discuss, then to deliberate”) which appeared in *Prediche inutili* in 1956.

As regards the national dimension, it should be recalled that Italy in the years spanning the turn of the century was itself undergoing profound transformations at a political, cultural, economic and institutional levels. These were years of marked demographic growth, a sharp decline in illiteracy, a and a significant increase in individual consumption – all factors that had far-reaching consequences for the relationship between broad segments of the population and the press. Newspapers increasingly became objects of mass consumption. Whereas in 1870 the best-selling Italian daily newspaper, Milan's *Il Secolo*, printed approximately 30,000 copies, by 1913 its main Milanese competitor, the *Corriere della Sera*, under the direction of Luigi Albertini, was printing ten times as many. This development increasingly turned the daily press into an instrument capable of exerting a powerful influence on public opinion, which was no longer composed only of narrow elites of notables but also of a wide range of new social actors. It is therefore no coincidence that in the years around

the turn of the century, several industrial groups chose to enter decisively into the ownership of major national newspapers. Confronted with the first crises of overproduction, growing workers' demands – including wage claims – and a political and social landscape profoundly altered by the gradual expansion of suffrage, these groups found it necessary, with the crucial support of the banking sector, to pursue initiatives aimed at safeguarding their interests. They also acted by exerting strong pressure through the press on national governments, whose role, as promoters of investments and public procurement, and as guarantors of trade and customs policies, was itself becoming increasingly significant. In other words, it was precisely in these years that large industrial, financial, banking and insurance groups felt the need to develop appropriate strategies and synergies in order to carve out spaces for conditioning a state that – following the introduction of universal male suffrage of 1913 and the subsequent crisis of the Giolitti system – was witnessing the emergence of new political parties and actors. Power was thus increasingly managed according to criteria based less on personal relationships or the prestige of individual opinion leaders, and more on the consensus mobilized at the level of public opinion. If the nineteenth century had been, for Italy, the century of the affirmation of a journalism that was overtly political – or directly at the service of politics –, the twentieth century opened with the traits of a journalism that, while still closely intertwined with politics, was increasingly oriented toward serving the interests of the country's emerging economic and financial forces. The intervention of large industrial groups was clearly defensive in nature, aimed at protecting their own interests; yet it also entailed substantial investments that enabled Italian journalism to make a significant qualitative leap, bringing it closer to the standards of Anglo-Saxon journalism. These were the years in which new and modern technologies – linotypes, the telegraph, the telephone, and large rotary presses – as well as new professional figures – chroniclers, reporters, correspondents, special envoys – entered newsrooms. They were also the years, it should be recalled, in which Luigi Albertini set himself the goal of making the *Corriere della Sera*, which in 1904 had inaugurated its new headquarters in Via Solferino, into the Italian equivalent of the *Times*. It was probably these profound transformations that also fueled Einaudi's interest in the "educational" function of the economist, whom he conceived as an analyst capable of providing the industrial world with correct information on actual conditions of the markets, recent technical and technological innovations, industrial dynamics, and labor conflicts. In my view, the same conviction underpinned Einaudi's journalistic activity: that only a form of journalism able to move beyond a semi-artisanal model and assume a fully industrial dimension could offer the level of

quality necessary to foster the fundamental cultural and civil development of society.

Finally, as regards the international dimension, there are several elements worthy of consideration. It is well known that between 1896 and 1902 Einaudi collaborated with *La Stampa* directed by Luigi Roux and Alfredo Frassati, for which he published about 400 articles. He subsequently distanced himself from the newspaper – also, though not exclusively, because of his growing aversion to its increasingly pro-Giolitti editorial line. He then moved to the *Corriere della Sera* of his friend and former colleague at the *Laboratorio di Economia Politica*, the aforementioned Luigi Albertini, with whom he shared stronger political affinities. Between 1903 and 1925, Einaudi published more than 1,700 articles in the *Corriere*.

It should be remembered that those very years were crucial for the evolution of the instruments and codes of communication in the major industrialized countries. This was certainly the case in Italy, where the expansion of suffrage, as noted earlier, had brought new political actors to the fore and created – for governments and for big business alike – the need to shape and manage a new public opinion. It is well known that the months preceding Italy's entry into the First World War witnessed the emergence of a new communicative rhetoric, driven by the interventionist front. It is equally well known that, in the end, the loud and insistent voice of a segment of public opinion prevailed – a minority, but one that was highly visible and well represented in the media – mobilized by militant political and cultural avant-gardes eager to celebrate a future of national glory capable of redeeming what they perceived as the frustrating years of Giolitti's "mediocrity". To that supposed mediocrity, the interventionists opposed a rhetoric of vitalism, centered on the vision of a purifying and regenerative bloodbath that would symbolically complete the *Risorgimento* through the conquest of the "unredeemed" lands and restore Italy's international prestige. By sweeping away the encrustations of older political languages, these messages rapidly inflamed active and vocal minorities who, in the streets and squares of Italy, made themselves heard with growing force. Through highly effective communication, they succeeded in clearly defining the goals to be pursued, the means to achieve them, and the enemies – both external and internal – to be fought, identifying the latter as emblems of betrayal and cowardice in contrast to the honest and "healthy" part of the nation. These were, after all, communicative codes marked by a striking violence of language, which were rapidly spreading at the international level as well, at a time when strong nationalist tendencies and new forms of national egoism were asserting themselves across Europe. Even Albertini and Einaudi were, to some extent, influenced by this climate. In 1915, Einaudi ultimately decided to endorse the position

advocated by Albertini in favor of Italian intervention on the side of the Triple Entente. He did so for a variety of reasons – patriotic motives, concerns for Italy's international prestige, and opposition to the militarism of the Central Empires – but also because of his clear perception of the new atmosphere of ferment that was taking shape both within the country and at the international level. This stance once again placed him in opposition to Giolitti and to his former newspaper, Alfredo Frassati's *La Stampa*, which instead maintained a neutralist position until the very end. Frassati did so out of the conviction that Italy's future should continue to rest on the protection offered by a strong international alliance – one that, in his view at the time, was best secured alongside Austria, a power from which Italy was divided in many respects but which he nonetheless regarded as, on balance, less dangerous than France. Such an alignment, he believed, would preserve a system of agreements capable of containing France and of preventing Italy from one day confronting it without counting on the support of powerful allies. It is well known that the First World War would become an extraordinary training ground – from the perspective of communication and propaganda – for many future dictators, but also for many advertising professionals, whose techniques grew increasingly effective and sophisticated during those years. In the United States in particular, new academic fields such as *political communication* and *communication research* began to take shape and develop. Shortly after the end of the war, in 1922, Walter Lippmann published *Public Opinion*, a work of considerable importance that would long remain a fundamental point of reference in the study of communication history. In this book, Lippmann argued that the war had definitively shattered the traditional equilibria of elite society, opening the way to a mass society in which media power became decisive and in which the principle of rationality gave way to new relational and behavioral mechanisms of an identificatory and symbolic nature. It should be recalled that Einaudi was highly attentive to these dynamics as well. We also know that fascism, above all, would prove capable of learning from this lesson and exploiting it to its advantage. It should be added that the fascist movement was one toward which Einaudi himself – once again in full agreement with Luigi Albertini – initially looked with interest, identifying in it a political force capable of providing the country with the strength needed to overcome a period of profound uncertainty. It was the elections of 1924 and the murder of Giacomo Matteotti that revealed to Einaudi the tragic misunderstanding into which both he and large segments of the Italian ruling class had fallen. This misunderstanding was shared by those who, like Einaudi, had long criticized Giolitti's *Italietta* (that is a little, insignificant Italy), not only – and not primarily – for its inability to pursue ambitious international goals, but also for its failure

to follow coherent political strategies, emancipating itself from what he regarded as a sterile pragmatism that ultimately resulted in laxity and a form of principle-free empiricism. It should therefore come as no surprise the fact that Einaudi initially also looked with interest at the policies pursued by the Minister of Finance, Alberto De' Stefani. He appreciated, in particular, De' Stefani's fiscal rigor and his liberal economic orientation, which in its early phase enjoyed the support of Mussolini himself, before the latter quickly yielded to the logic of protectionism and the rhetoric of corporatism. It is perhaps worth recalling that De' Stefani would later become Einaudi's successor as economics commentator for the *Corriere della Sera*, beginning this collaboration in 1926, not without considerable apprehension, fully aware of the challenge of replacing a figure of such stature. These fears proved far from unfounded: for some time, many of the newspaper's regular readers, accustomed to Einaudi's clear, direct, and precise prose, expressed dissatisfaction with the change – an aspect that can still be easily documented today through the correspondence preserved in the *Corriere's* historical archive.