

## **“From Farm to Factory”.**

### **Interdependence between Agribusiness and Industrial Catering in Italy, 1960-1980.**

Due to the country's impressive economic and industrial development, during 1960s and 1970s Italian population experienced a momentous shift in material living standard and consumption patterns. In this phase, the rise of industrial catering business was driven by social and technological changes, and especially by the increasing demand of consumers, i.e. unionized factory workers. Providing a full meal to industrial workforce represented a major chance for catering enterprises, but it would be infeasible without a simultaneous development of agribusiness in food production, processing and distribution.

Connecting production's sphere to the arenas of consumption, the aim of the paper is to investigate the specific relations and interdependencies established between industrial catering and agribusiness during these decades, describing social actors' interactions in shaping a modern industrial catering culture.

Rather than merely analyzing changes in rural Italy between the 1960s and 1970s, I will adopt an interpretative perspective based on the connections between urban and rural domains, focusing on the reformulation of relationships and the flows of goods, information, capital, and people between these two spheres. Examining the complex relationships between rural and urban dimensions seems promising for various reasons, including the specific features of Italy's historical modernization and industrialization patterns, as well as the multiple social, cultural and symbolic meanings of rurality as an interpretative category.

This study is part of a doctoral research currently in progress, aiming to analyze industrial workers' diet and factory canteens in Lombardy between the 1950s and 1980s by using various primary sources: archival records from industrial enterprises and workers' unions, published sources, magazines, photographs, and video footage. To draft this paper, I made an extensive use of some professional magazines on industrial catering hitherto little examined by scholars concerned with agribusiness history and foodways in Italy.

## *Food consumption in Italy during the Golden Age*

From the second half of the 1950s, Italy went through a phase of strong economic growth, raising of living standards and profound social changes, the so-called “economic miracle”. These momentous processes resulted from the favorable historical backgrounds and were made possible by a combination of various geopolitical, economic and social factors like the ongoing integration into European and global trade institutions, the active role played by the government, the presence of a large and cheap stock of labor force, and the strategic position within the Western Bloc.

In less than two decades, Italy completed its transformation from a largely agrarian, relatively poor country into one of the most dynamic and advanced industrial nations in the world. Nevertheless, this process was also marked by profound socio-economic imbalances and contradictions, as shown by the statistics on income distribution and economic performance in different areas of the country. Since the Nineteenth century, the industrial development was largely concentrated in Northern Italy, especially into the “industrial triangle”, the region placed between the major manufacturing centers of Milano, Torino and Genova; in the postwar decades this situation did not change, triggering a rapid and further expansion of urban agglomerations fueled by massive migration movements from rural areas.

Not surprisingly, these epochal demographic processes were closely linked to fundamental transformations in agriculture. During this phase, Italian agriculture became increasingly market-oriented, as the ongoing mechanization and motorization ensured significant growth in output and labor productivity, triggering the rural flight. Agriculture was still the dominant sector in 1950, whereas by the early 1960s it had been overtaken by industry and services in terms of employment and value added<sup>1</sup>.

In this perspective, there is no doubt that foodways represents one of the most effective indicators to investigate these epochal socio-economic shifts, outlining Italy’s recovery from the Second World War starvation and destructions, and its landing – although with ambiguities and resistances – to a modern consumerist dimension.

Especially the 1960s and 1970s, set the stage for a «great transformation» of Italian population's food habits marked by the definitive overcoming of a centuries-old poor consumption pattern, characterized by rather slow improvement and recurring phases of crisis for working classes and rural populations.

Nutritional transition incorporates both qualitative and quantitative shifts. Per-capita food expenditure increased, while the ratio of food consumption in household budgets declined. Average calories provided by the diet rise to unprecedented levels – the threshold of 3000 average calories per-capita was reached in 1968 – as the caloric intake provided by animal fats and proteins growing.

---

<sup>1</sup> ZAMAGNI, *The Economic History of Italy, 1860-1990. Recovery After Decline*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1993; TONIOLO, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Italian Economy Since Unification*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013; BEVILACQUA, ed., *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1989-1991; MARTIIN, PAN-MONTOJO, BRASSLEY, ed., *Agriculture in Capitalist Europe, 1945-1960. From Food Shortages to Food Surpluses*, New York-London, Routledge, 2016; LYAUTEY, HUMBERT, BONNEUIL, *Histoire des modernisations agricoles au XXe siècle*, Rennes, PUR, 2021.

Furthermore, a downward trend and then a stabilization of grain consumption takes place, with the collapse in corn consumption – the basic ingredient for preparing *polenta*, the most popular dish in poor rural areas – and the symbolic shift to a widespread consumption of wheat, namely white bread and pasta. At the same time, Italian population had the opportunity to supplement and expand its dietary regime, as shown by the growing consumption of meat, sugar, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as dairy products. At last, the diet became less monotonous and bounded to seasonal availability of goods, bringing foods previously reserved for feast days – like beef – into every-day menus, along with the decline and fading of many poor dishes that had (mal)nourished millions of people for a long time.

The general decline of food self-consumption set another tremendous change during this phase, as self-consumption was a characteristic feature of a long-term relationship between population, household economy and rural labor.

Indeed, for centuries popular households had been accustomed to largely rely on self-produced foodstuffs to satisfy their dietary needs: livestock barns and hen houses managed with meticulous care, provided a huge amount of animal proteins dietary intake; crafting of cured meat – pigs used to be a real economic asset for many rural households – was a sort of sacred ritual, intertwined with a range of ancient artisanal knowledge and customs that punctuated social rhythms and seasonal cycles. Several industrial workers also used to cultivate small gardens out of factory-work time, whose harvest was essential to supplement their poor family budgets.

At the turn of the 1950s and 1970s, multitudes of rural migrants flooded into urban areas and millions of people have been increasingly involved to market economy to meet their dietary needs, thus loosening and redefining their economic bonds with rural backgrounds. Grocery stores, markets and brand new American-style supermarkets became the most common food-supply sources, as income growth and the “invention” of modern leisure time make pluriactivity less and less appealing for new generations of industrial employees<sup>2</sup>.

While blue-collar laborers and their families could no longer rely on subsistence economy that marked rural life, factory work – with its own rhythms and organization constraints – shape manpower’s food intake during the workday and impose new eating patterns.

As factory canteens were still not widespread, blue-collar worker used to bring food from home in metal lunchbox – the so-called *barachin* or *schiscetta* – that rapidly became one with the image and self-representation of industrial working-class condition. Homemade meals packed in these lunch buckets was an indicator not only of each worker's economic level but also of his regional background; in this perspective, lunch break in manufacturing plants represented a public arena to display personal and collective identities, as well as discovering different cultures and customs.

Wine consumption was a distinctive feature of popular food patterns and played a crucial role as nourishment and refreshment for factory laborers. During this phase, wine also acted as a major identity trait accompanying the transition from rural society – in which a large part of Italian working class was born and raised – to the urban, industrial world. During the lunch break, it was

---

<sup>2</sup> SCARPELLINI, *Food and foodways in Italy from 1861 to the present*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; SCARPELLINI, *Material nation. A consumer's history of modern Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; CAPATTI, VARNI, DE BERNARDI, ed., *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. 13, *L'alimentazione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1998

not uncommon for a worker to bring its “own” wine – from his native region – sharing it with colleagues as a form of sociability, inclusion and personal exchange<sup>3</sup>.

*“Striking to eat better!”. The development of mass catering in Italian factories.*

In Italy, industrial canteens became popular on a national scale only throughout World War II, as a distinctive feature of wartime economy. Far from disappearing, during the following decades canteens were increasingly widespread and meal services for workers gradually became one of the most common social services in industry.

It must be outlined that labor legislation didn’t require the establishment of a proper canteen for white-collar and factory workers, prescribing only the establishment of generic dining halls in medium and large plants. For this reason, the diffusion of factory canteens must be traced back to the agency of the main actors involved: industrial firms, trade unions and workers.

First, the diffusion of canteens must be seen in relation with the profound changes into production sphere: the evolution of personnel management along with the intense mechanization and rationalization of working methods, entailed industrial management’s effort to embed the lunch break into its sphere of authority. In this sense, the increasing automation and mechanization brought about creating a psycho-physical nexus of a new type, modifying the energetic needs for industrial labor and renewing the interest for medical and social aspects of workers’ food habits.

Corporate’s investments required an intensive use of industrial machinery: hence, worker’s meals had to be served quickly and continuously, without stopping production flow. At the same time, it should be underlined the general trend toward the reduction of both working day and lunch break, made possible by various technological and organizational solutions that profoundly changed factory canteens. In this perspective, the spread of self-service distribution system played a definitive role for the development of mass catering, transforming food preparation and consumption in terms of efficiency, flexibility and standardization, reshaping the layouts of kitchens and dining halls, and reducing operating costs through staff-cuts.

Alongside astonishing industrial development and the first stirrings of consumer society, the 1950s in the factories were marked by ongoing labor exploitation, low-wages and uncontested authority of industrial managements. A harsh situation that constitutes the flip side of the economic miracle’s coin, also explaining the significance and the intensity of industrial strikes flared up during the 1960s and the Seventies: the so-called *Autunno caldo*<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, it seems clear that labor mobilizations that shook up factories and industrial centers between the end of Sixties and 1970s also assume a periodizing significance for the development of

---

<sup>3</sup> PORPORATO, FASSINO, *Operai, fabbriche e cibo. Storie di gastronomie precarie*, «Comparative Studies in Modernism» 2017, 10; BRUEGEL, *Le repas à l’usine: industrialisation, nutrition et alimentation populaire*, in «Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine », 2004, 3; BOUCHET, GACON, JARRIGE, NÉRARD, VIGNA, ed., *La gamelle et l’outil. Manger au travail en France et en Europe de la fin du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, Nancy, Arbre Bleu Editions, 2016 ; SCHOLLIERS, ed., *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages*, Oxford-New York, Berg, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> MUSSO, *Storia del lavoro in Italia*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2011.

industrial catering, due to the increasing trade unions' political centrality and hegemonic power within the Italian society.

Indeed, a renewed workers' request for a decent meal service paid by the employer strongly emerged during this phase, also in small and medium enterprises: an ongoing social demand clearly demonstrated by sources – unions' platform and collective bargaining above all – data and other many indicators. For example, just over a decade the number of factory canteens doubled up, from 1500 to over 3000 in 1972, with a decisive leap during the *Autunno caldo*; a leap that provided the bedrock of industrial catering continuous growth throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Regarding workers' point of view, firstly it must be underlined that the provision of a meal largely or entirely paid by the employer constituted a major opportunity to protect wage's purchasing power, especially during a phase marked by a rising inflation like the 1970s. At the same time, sources repeatedly shed light on the highly symbolic and cultural meaning of food during the workday. In this sense, having a rich and nutritious meal provided by the employer – during a proper lunch break spent in hygienic and restful dining halls - was a substantial recognition of professional status and decency, claimed with ever increasing assertiveness.

Growing demand for an adequate meal service and labor's day-to-day control on the functioning of canteens, were pursued by the new worker's organisms – the *Consigli di Fabbrica* (factory councils) – and by specific committees – generally named *Commissioni Mensa* (canteen committee) – on a plant level.

Without suggesting a large - and maybe a little bit anachronistic – deep consciousness among manpower on the virtues of healthy dietary patterns, I would like to point out the salience of the link between diet and health in archival sources, surveys, comic strips and other visual or edited sources, stressing the importance of factory canteens as a mean to protect and improve employee's well-being.

At the same time, the analysis of factory menus and other various sources indicate a suggestive overlapping between the idea of a proper meal – described as healthy or nutritious – and the recurrence of “traditional” dietary patterns. In this sense, during the Sixties and the Seventies, Italian industrial workers claimed a lunch cooked on the spot based on the gastronomic scheme main course (especially *pastasciutta*)-second course-side dish, quite abundant in terms of calories and nutrients.

Many scholars have underlined that - during the economic boom - the definitive rupture of a secular poor food regime determined a tumultuous acquisition of affluent dietary standards for the working and middle classes, setting food consumption as a true status symbol: a long desired and powerful vehicle of socio-cultural integration, into a modern consumers' republic<sup>5</sup>. In this perspective, at the peak of laborers' centrality and social activism, “struggles to eat better” at the factories assert the agency of consumer-worker as a fully integrated citizen, craving for a social status along with abundant – and somehow “traditional” – dietary standards.

Workers' mobilizations were a significant driving force for industrial catering cultures and practices in Italian context; in fact, this emerging, conflictual demand was met by the ongoing outsourcing of

---

<sup>5</sup> SCARPELLINI, *Food and foodways in Italy*, cit. and CAPATTI, VARNI, DE BERNARDI, *L'alimentazione*, cit.

factory canteen services to professional mass catering firms. Encouraged by the increasing request of standardization and professional expertise in catering sector, this shift must also be explained with industrial firms aim to reorient budgets, focusing on primary productive mission and pulling back from a highly contested terrain.

This transition gradually puts an end to industrial management's direct intervention on employee's dietary habits – undermining the paternalistic vision of factory canteens – by the establishment of a well-grounded industrial relations system based on three main actors: industrial management, catering firms and workers' councils, whose prerogatives were set in outsourcing agreements. Such changes seem to reflect very well-known trends in modern economic systems, marked by the striking emergence of service sectors and the ongoing multilevel interweave between industry and service sector.

### *Interdependences between Agribusiness and Industrial Catering*

"Great transformation", "economic miracle" and many others are interpretative categories, definitions targeted to describe and investigate a bundle of social, political, demographic and cultural changes in postwar Italy.

Adopting an analytical perspective placed on the ridge between the spheres of production and consumption, analyzing the links between dietary habits, industrial work and agribusiness development, seems an useful and fertile perspective to address several issues. Indeed, it allows us to investigate the interdependencies between urban and rural dimension, focusing on the new interrelationships – social, cultural, environmental and so on – and flows of goods, information, capital, workers and people between these two spheres, as well as the reshaping of symbolic representations, perceptions and values during a phase marked by epochal changes<sup>6</sup>.

Throughout the 1960s and the Seventies, as we have seen, the complex and dialectical interaction between various social actors shaped patterns of industrial catering culture with peculiar characteristics. Mass catering sector was a quite emerging and promising market, with the shift to factory canteens' outsourced management and the increasing role of catering firms pursuing profits by high volumes-low margin business strategy. The industrial relations system was shaped by the growing hegemony of workers' unions, whose organism had the power to influence meal services functioning: in this sense, factory worker is no longer the beneficiary of a paternalistic service provided by the employer but acquires an active role as a consumer of a food service.

Furthermore, mass catering stands as a rising urban market absorbing tremendous volumes of targeted foodstuffs with peculiar features, determined by logics, rhythms and constraints of factory canteens. Within this framework, the rise of industrial catering sector would be infeasible without a simultaneous development of agribusiness in food production, processing and distribution; these intertwined trends clearly show how the "great transformation" of dietary regimes was not related

---

<sup>6</sup> HAMILTON, *Revisiting the History of Agribusiness*, "Business History Review", 2016, 90; HAMILTON, *Supermarket USA. Food and Power in the Cold War Farms Race*, Yale University Press, 2018.

solely to domestic consumptions, stressing the centrality of extra-domestic consumptions and eating-out culture as a distinctive feature of modern life<sup>7</sup>.

Focusing on strictly economic interrelationships between rural and urban areas, the rise of mass catering as social demand and market played an important role for various reasons:

- It constitutes an additional development opportunity for Italian food industry, which for decades had been severely undermined by domestic population's low consumption levels.
- Reorienting the gaze from the final consumption stage to the entire food supply chain, industrial canteens – like supermarkets – emerged as machines for both serving meals and reforming agricultural production.
- Promoting an ongoing integration between agriculture, food industry and distribution networks, mass catering fostered the rise of modern agribusiness: vertically integrated, based on added value, industrialized processes and technological systems of unprecedented scale and complexity, with its own biological and environmental features.

Producing goods for mass catering fostered profound changes in agriculture: during this phase, Italian farming became increasingly market oriented and highly specialized, adopting various technologies to increase outputs and pursuing biological simplification and standardization.

For example, as beef prices were too high, supplying mass catering firms with different types of meat at affordable costs and assuring proper quality standards was a crucial concern for canteens' management and agribusiness.

A viable solution could have been the supply of poultry meat that can combine nutritional values with high production levels, as shown by the case of Società Italiana Dressing from Brescia – a vertically integrated poultry industry established in 1959 – which became one of the business leaders in supplying for mass catering. The firm had built a fully automated plant for incubating eggs from selected breeds to avoid seasonal fluctuations in production. Through biological simplification, Dressing had selected breeds with a larger percentage of breast meat than the other species, and the animals were raised on the ground and fed with in-house produced chicken feed. Chickens were slaughtered in a specific plant – "one of the most modern and rational in all the world" – to be packed and distributed as "ready-to-cook" chickens, thus eliminating most of pre-cooking operations<sup>8</sup>.

Innovations and interdependences are also particularly interesting analyzing the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables to food industry, to produce tomato sauce, bouillon cubes and canned foods like legumes or ready-made soups.

Typically, raw material supply could be provided in different ways: some food companies invested in agriculture running farms or contracting them out, while the establishment of cooperative businesses formed by direct farmers was very widespread. Several food industries also used to sign advanced purchases agreements with farmers, or alternatively supplying fresh goods through wholesalers or free-market purchases.

---

<sup>7</sup> JACOBS, SCHOLLIERS, ed., *Eating Out in Europe. Picnics, Gourmet Dining and Snacks Since the Late Eighteenth Century*, Oxford-New York, Berg, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See also GODLEY, *The Emergence of Agribusiness in Europe and the Development of the Western European Broiler Chicken Industry, 1945 to 1973*, «The Agricultural History Review», 2014.

For example, signing contracts with local farmers was the strategy pursued by Massalombarda and De Rica – two of the largest firms in catering supply market – both based in highly specialized and intensive agricultural districts of Emilia-Romagna. These agreements ensured regular supplies of quality-standard crops at fixed prices, including various forms of agricultural assistance for farmers like soil analysis and provisions of seeds and fertilizer<sup>9</sup>.

Furthermore, the role of cooperative associations in furnishing canteens with butter, cheese and other targeted foodstuffs was relevant, as shown by the case of cooperative dairy industry Latteria Soresina, whose plants were situated in the Po Valley<sup>10</sup>.

The ongoing interdependence between intensive farming and food industry fostered local specialization through the formation of agro-industrial districts, for example in horticulture (Emilia-Romagna), dairy sector (Lombardia) and cured meats production (Milan and Brianza)<sup>11</sup>.

Food preparation in factory canteens was increasingly oriented toward the use of processed foodstuffs, thus simplifying and shortening cooking operations and reducing kitchen staffs. Besides incorporating a high added value, industrial foods also offered reliable guarantees regarding quality and hygienic standards. For these reasons, during the 1960s and 1970s the use of branded foodstuffs by catering companies became generalized: dairies by Polenghi-Lombardo, Invernizzi or Galbani, canned beef produced by Simmenthal or Montana, Star's bouillon cubes, Robo's processed foods; and cured meats by Negroni and Citterio<sup>12</sup>.

All these leaders of Italian agribusiness provided targeted foodstuffs for the blooming market of industrial catering. An essential factor of their success lay in reputation and trust among consumers achieved through various marketing strategies, including those workers – members of canteen committees – supervising the running of meal services, who had familiarized themselves with these brands in the domestic life or through advertising campaigns.

Urban factory canteens required steady, huge volumes of targeted foodstuffs, so their functioning rested on highly complex technological systems, supply chains and distribution networks, connecting industrial farming with workers dining tables. In this perspective, energy networks and infrastructures for transportation and storage (e.g. the cold chain) were crucial as they enabled deferred and de-territorialized patterns of consumption.

In addition to small and medium sized businesses specialized in transporting fresh goods from rural areas to urban consumption's arenas, large food enterprises like Ferrero were also in place with a wide range of services. Besides the manufacturing of Nutella and Kinder chocolate bars, the Piedmontese firm stands as a national leader in catering furnishing, taking advantage of its efficient distribution system based on a large vehicle fleet and a widespread network of salesmen.

From the second half of 1960s, food packaging industry became increasingly important, since packaging improved transport and storage efficiency, guaranteeing hygiene and making possible

---

<sup>9</sup> See also *Massalombarda: la storia di un mondo dolce come la frutta*, Federconsorzi, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> BATTILANI, BIGATTI, ed., *Oro bianco. Il settore lattiero-caseario in Val Padana tra Otto e Novecento*, Lodi-Milano, Giona, 2002; BESANA, D'ERRICO, GHEZZI, *Cheese manufacturing in the twentieth century. The Italian experience in an international context*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> BERTELE', BRIOSCHI, *L'economia agro-alimentare italiana*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1981.

<sup>12</sup> See also for example CIMORELLI, *Tutto il sapore di casa mia: Star 1948-1995*, Milano, Pizzi, 1996.

relevant savings by standardizing volumes and costs. In addition, some distinctive features of industrial catering, like the simplification of meal preparation and the self-service distribution system, bolstered the development of packaging sector.

For these reasons, factory canteens operations rely more and more on huge tins of pre-cooked meat – roasted or brased beef and pork sausages – produced by Simmenthal or individual portions of butter and cheese for self-service. Another major innovation was the popularization of small-sized wine bottles that quickly replaced bulk wine, satisfying both the workers – ensuring quality and preventing adulterations – and industrial managements, concerned about excessive alcoholic consumption by the workforce.

Finally, the appeal and reception of industrial foodstuffs among catering users are also very fascinating and complex issues. While it should be underlined that summarizing workers' attitudes toward canteen services is quite difficult, providing some schematic and general hypothesis based on the socio-cultural relationship between rural and urban dimensions could be promising and somewhat revealing.

As pointed out by various scholars, the multiple connections between industrial working class and the rural world emerge as a central interpretative issue to investigate patterns of economic development in Italy, with regard to labor markets, pluri-activity and household economy, ideologies and cultural values<sup>13</sup>.

During the economic boom, industrial workers' relationship with rural world profoundly changed, but it is still very rooted and far from disintegrating: for these reasons, it is possible to assume the centrality of this spatial and cultural connection, using it to analyze the culture of industrial catering. As we have seen, in this phase rural areas underwent a momentous transformation of its social, economic and cultural structures, while the relationship between population and rural worlds is increasingly redefined. Within this scenario, foodways emerged as an element of identity and a powerful vehicle for social integration, while population's rising incomes determined a growing demand for protein-rich foods such as meat and dairy products.

Since the 1970s, Italian agribusiness has been unable to keep up with this rising demand, a circumstance that results in a chronic deficit of commercial balance<sup>14</sup>. Italian consumers' "obsession" with beef steak – a true status symbol, coveted during decades of poor food regimes – turned into a political economy issue. In this perspective, factory canteens offered an interesting testing ground for their educational and reformatory potential, as industrial managements, economists and catering experts advocated the diffusion of poultry meat to reduce beef consumption, correcting commercial imbalances and promoting healthier dietary patterns.

The rise of industrial farming along with the development of food processing and mass catering, resulted in an ongoing standardization of taste and dietary cultures in factory canteens. However, a trend toward segmentation of consumption practices already emerged as well as an increasing

---

<sup>13</sup> MUSSO, *Storia del lavoro in Italia*, cit.

<sup>14</sup> FANFANI, GATTI, LANINI, *Un breve profilo dell'evoluzione del sistema agroalimentare italiano* in MALASSIS, GHERSI, ed., *Introduzione all'economia agroalimentare*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1995; SICCA, *L'industria alimentare in Italia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1977; BERTELE', BRIOSCHI, *L'economia agro-alimentare italiana*, cit.

individualization of menus, both distinctive phenomena of “food modernity” to be seen in historical perspective and in close relationship with rural dimension.

Consumptions’ segmentation is shaped around notions of typicality – that in many cases stemmed from a real “invention of tradition”<sup>15</sup> – and reinterpreted regional tastes, findings in mass catering a major terrain of application: for example, the drafting of specific regional menus by catering firms to satisfy increasingly sophisticated consumers throughout the whole country, or the widespread demand by migrant workers for “classic” southern recipes in northern canteens’ menus.

I would like to conclude my presentation with one of the most interesting aspects emerging from the study of various sources, namely the contradictory relationship between canteens’ users and the food industrial processing methods and cooking techniques. From the second half of 1960s, factory workers’ demand for *natural* or *traditional* meals could take various forms, including the continuous request to replace centralized kitchen systems with canteens equipped with full kitchens, to solve immediate problems – like a cold soup, an overcooked pasta or a rubbery steak - but also to avoid intermediate handling and bringing together cooking and eating practices.

It must be underlined that this attitude was common not only among industrial employees, rather representing a specific feature of the “Italian way” to affluent dietary regimes<sup>16</sup>, also explaining the well-established dislike of frozen meals: of course, very practical for mass catering but frequently regarded with unwavering suspicion despite dietary assurance and moral suasion by nutritionists and managements.

For example, in 1970 the entire Fiat’s mass catering service has been outsourced and set up on frozen meals produced by John Farm; during the following decade, labor unions harshly criticized frozen meal service for its poor quality and lack of *authenticity*, expressing the discontent of a large part of consumers who massively escaped factory canteens, opting for a sandwich luncheon or the old lunchbox system<sup>17</sup>.

A suspicious attitude toward industrial methods in food processing and cooking – and the mass catering was an eminently industrialized activated, as we have seen– that may have had different reasons, but which is also intimately related to the widespread rural background shared by the most part of Italian workers-consumers during the economic boom. A very close rural background that provided a source of habits, rhythms and food values that could not be overnight abandoned, thus shaping population’s consumption patterns and posing a series of challenges to agribusiness and industrial catering sector for decades to come.

---

<sup>15</sup> CECCARELLI, GRANDI, MAGAGNOLI, *Typicality in History. Tradition, Innovation, and Terroir*, Peter Lang, 2014; GRANDI, *La tipicità è industriale. Il paradosso dell’agroalimentare italiano* in RITROVATO, GREGORINI, ed., *Il settore agroalimentare nella storia dell’economia europea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> SCARPELLINI, *Food and Foodways*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> ADORNI, MAGAGNOLI, *Mangiare in Fiat. Le mense aziendali tra sociabilità e confronto politico*, «Ricerche di storia economica e sociale», 2015, 1-2.