

Small entrepreneurs give up on politics

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There is a great turmoil in the world of small firms. The worst crisis in the manufacturing industry since the Second World War has brought everything up for discussion again: the representation of associations, political identity, the relationship with information, and even the style of language. In MalpensaFiere, what came out of the round-table discussion entitled “Piccoli. La pancia del paese” (“Small. The belly of the country”), after the book by the journalist, Dario Di Vico, which was organised by Confartigianato and CNA, was a Pollock-like picture, that is, one that was complex.

Nowadays, there is no sure path for micro and small entrepreneurs. Not even the sympathetic words of the Northern League, the first political force to respond to their requests, have managed to prevent the closure of 2891 handicraft businesses near Varese, over the last two years.

The journalist, Marco Alfieri, who writes for the Italian financial newspaper “Il Sole 24ore”, who chaired the meeting, urged Giorgio Merletti, the President of the Craftsmen’s Association, to declare immediately that “there is no crisis over representation, the number of members has increased and the membership systems have held up well to the knock.” Of course, the only agreement that exists is the “Capranica Pact”, which involves five craft and trade associations, who signed a new alliance in order to have more say at the decision table. Throughout the rest of the country, common projects are being tried with associations similar to the CNA. “We are discussing the mechanical sector, which is slowly starting up again,” said Merletti. “We are trying to unite companies to make them work together. Meanwhile, we are waiting for answers from the government, I may be a pessimist, but I don’t think we’ll get any.”

The limited faith small entrepreneurs have in the political system is also indicated by the associations’ desire to be “set free” from the parties themselves. Fausto Cacciatori, regional President of the CNA, is not offended if people call him “a red entrepreneur”. The Capranica Pact has put the interests of the small entrepreneurs, not their identities, at the heart of the matter, and Cacciatori dropped political cooperation a long time ago. Cacciatori added, “The more independent we are from politics, the greater the success this federation we’re about to create (Rome, 10 May, ed.) will have. We must break away from the categories of the past.”

And the old question of the south, which cannot be ignored in this process of change, is also of the past. “The ruling class must tell the south how to escape from the trap it has been in for the last 150 years, because the people there will never manage on their own.” Paolo Feltrin, a lecturer in the Science of Politics at the University of

Trieste, realises the effect his provocation will have in the Lombard heartland. The bellies of the north will immediately start rumbling, “Let the south sort themselves out.” As Feltrin would say, Di Vico’s book “Piccoli, la pancia del Paese” (Marsilio Editore) is only “North, north, north and north again.” The journalist knows that his story is incomplete, that his book only describes part of the country. “I’m from the south, and I refused to present my book there, because it would be meaningless.”

Di Vico’s merit is that he has begun to describe the world of small firms in the pages of a great national newspaper, and he has done it, thus far, with only anonymous characters.

Maybe, after 10 May, Di Vico will begin to tell a different story.

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