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# *A Comparative Study of Provision made in Recurrent Education for Workers, with Special Reference to the '150 hours' in Italy*

ANGELA NEWPORT

The twentieth century has so far been characterised by remarkable developments in the world of science and technology. Radical changes promoted by the economists of industrialised countries have necessitated a review of the relationship between educational policies and the requirements of the labour market. State schools, especially in France and Italy, often use traditional curricula that fail to prepare future citizens for the demands of the modern world: people forced to look for new jobs discover that their previous training no longer equips them for posts available; with greater participation in trade unions and the general running of places of work, employees increasingly seek guidance to clarify their collective interests and responsibilities. The question of social justice has been raised: if reforms are carried out at school level, adults immediately become an educationally disadvantaged group. With these factors in mind, the theme of recurrent education has been discussed for over a decade by organisations such as UNESCO, OECD and the Council of Europe.

In Italy the need for innovations in the whole educational field has been reiterated. The 1968 student unrest in France was manifest to the same degree in Italy. Dissatisfaction with the traditional school system had been forcefully expressed one year before by the school of Barbiana in their *Letter to a Teacher* [1]. By law Italians should receive 8 years compulsory schooling, beginning at age 6. Five elementary years (*scuola elementare*) are followed by the intermediate years (*scuola media*). Post-compulsory education consists of four different types of upper school: (*liceo*) leading to university courses; teacher-training schools (*istituto magistrale* followed usually by *magistero*); various vocational schools (*istituti tecnici* or *professionali*). Schools operate Monday to Saturday. In 1967 (when *Letter to a Teacher* was published) classes were held in the mornings only; by 1975–76, 1547 schools were open all day in response to popular demand [2]. To be promoted to the next class one must pass examinations in every subject or else repeat the year's studies. The authors of the book *Letter to a Teacher*, eight teenage peasant boys, revealed how thousands of pupils, above all those of the working class, failed their end-of-year examinations each summer. They attributed this phenomenon to the attitudes of the staff concerned: teachers persist in using curricula of no practical use to pupils, but full of abstract concepts understood only by the middle-class child; teachers had expectations for students depending on the occupations of pupils'

parents; teachers also discriminated against use of dialect rather than standard Italian as a means of self-expression. These problems continue. Well-off parents pay for extra tuition for their children, which ensures the effortless progression of the middle-class child through the school system into university.

This cursory outline of *Letter to a Teacher* discloses fundamental and persistent problems in the Italian state schools. Having suffered injustices in the rather grim atmospheres of these establishments, it is not surprising that many children leave school before they are 14; that is, before attainment of the *licenza media*, a school-leaving certificate presented after successful completion of the *scuola media*. In the summer of 1974 only 66.4% children in the final year of the intermediate school passed their *licenza media* examination, not having repeated any years' studies nor abandoned classes at any time. Of the other 33.6%, some pupils were resitting the examination, with or without success, while the remainder were taking it for the first time with negative results [3].

Although the *licenza media* is useful as a job qualification, many lower-class youngsters leave school early. Even if under age, they manage to find work to eke out the family income. Other pupils, disheartened by continual examination failure, drop out of the system or are even told by staff that their presence is not welcome because they have no 'academic future'. Some few Italians never go to school since they and/or their parents see hours spent with an unsympathetic teacher as wasted time; especially in rural districts, practical jobs can be found for very small children.

Lack of communications between staff and students is one more reason why Italian school-leaving ages are lower than elsewhere. As well as class discrimination, the barriers of regional background often prevent mutual understanding between citizens. In Italy antagonism is particularly marked between Northerners and Southerners [4], a problem that can partly be traced back to the unification of the peninsula from 1861 onwards. Piedmont, first administrative centre for the Kingdom, was anxious to benefit from economic developments. Capital collected as taxes from the whole country was invested predominantly in the North. The 'backward' agricultural South still resents having insufficient infrastructures, irrigation schemes and industry. Lack of schools and universities has produced the image of the 'uneducated' and therefore 'socially inferior' Southerner. Social tension is highest in the northern industrial zones to which *meridionali* still flock every year to find work [5]. Hundreds of different regional dialects create further complications at schools where lessons are taught in Italian. Children consequently learn new concepts while struggling with a foreign idiom.

In Britain, the creation of the first Education Department in 1839 laid the foundation of the existing British system of elementary education; but not until 1880 was schooling compulsory. In Italy, in theory only, the Casati law of 1859 established obligatory primary education in Italy. But for similar reasons 45 years later the State intervened for the first time in the sector of *adult* education: the Orlando law of 1904 made disposition for evening classes to combat widespread illiteracy in the peninsula, above all amongst adult *meridionali*. Concern for illiteracy has been manifest throughout this century [6].

The 1929 International Handbook of Adult Education revealed the necessity for more activities in expanding Italian towns. The influx of people working in newly established factories had destroyed the former community life. At that time, many vocational evening schools (some dependent on state aid), very few courses run by paternalistic factory-owners, and the abortive attempts of the People's Universities showed a need for a general policy concerning recurrent education for workers [7].

The important 1953 law which firmly instituted the 'people's school' (*scuola popolare*) into Italian society still saw courses for adults as compensatory measures after inadequate schooling [8]. However, from the *scuole popolari* have emerged several organisations concerned with broader visions of adult education. The most notable movement is 'Outreach and Cultural Refresher Courses and Secondary Education Courses' [9]. From 1968-78, they recorded a 400% increase in enrolled students. Dating from 1967, the Social Centres for Recurrent Education [10] slowly

got off the ground after an initial period of administrative chaos. Cultural Service Centres [11] were founded in 1965 and have a tradition of success in the South where, until 1972, they collaborated with state-financed projects for the development of the *Mezzogiorno* [12].

Until 1971, provision for adult education in France was systematic only in large cities and even then rare. In Germany, on the other hand, by the 1970s some 1150 People's Colleges [13] were firmly established, affording non-vocational courses for 2.8 million adults in 1972 alone. During this century Britain has striven to establish equality of opportunity for those desiring access to post-compulsory education. Exploitation of radio and television networks has proved fruitful with the Open University. Alternatives to continuation in state schools or further education colleges were introduced after the 1944 Education Act: for example, day-release courses for young workers. It was in the 1970s that other West European countries brought in regional and national legislation for *paid* educational leave [14].

As in France, powerful conservative elements in Italy make any reforms difficult to achieve. For centuries the Vatican has fought to maintain the *status quo* by filtering political ideologies down through the hierarchy of priests to the people. Even now some parishioners are encouraged to be content with an education incapable of bettering their life-styles. The Church is instrumental in confining women to the role of mother and wife with little or no right to a decent education. Representing the Catholic establishment in today's political sphere is the wealthy Christian Democrat Party. It has, significantly, been in power since the 1940s. When, therefore, in 1973 the Metalworkers' Union [15] obtained for its members the right to paid educational leave, left-wing citizens claimed to have scored a major victory.

The student demonstrations of 1968 were strongly supported by Italian workers. On shop floors as well as in educational circles demands for more autonomy were made. The Constitution clearly expects citizens to participate fully in the organisational aspects of Italian life [16]. This fact, coupled with the obvious need for reforms in the educational system, directed the efforts of trade unions towards obtaining rights for student-workers.

Law no. 71-575 in 1971 prescribed the basic right of French employees to educational leave and the financial means to use that claim. In Italy in 1973 the Metalworkers' Union (FLM) was the first to negotiate satisfactory terms for workers' paid study leave. (West Germany's I.G.Metall was in a similar position.) The Italian National Collective Work Contract produced an agreement between the union and private firms, stipulating to each member over 16 a maximum of 150 hours paid educational leave in the space of 3 years [17]. Hence the so-called *scuola delle 150 ore* (school of 150 hours.) Lessons must take place on public or legally recognised premises. To calculate the maximum duration of a worker's course, he must multiply 10 hours (for every year) by 3 (for 3 years) by the total number of employees in his firm at that time. Finally, the course he attends must be at least double the length of time he requests for paid leave. Study-leave cannot be granted to more than 2% of the company's work force, as calculated each year on September 1st. Other unions have hastened to settle arrangements concerning recurrent education [18]. Nowadays some such opportunities are afforded by contracts regarding the vast majority of Italian unions.

By law French wage-earners have the right to paid educational leave, but in practice workers must overcome many obstacles before enrolment. After preliminary restrictions, one's course must be accepted by a Work Commission, half of whose members, being employers, prefer to release workers for in-training only [19]. If the employee's application for leave is accepted, his salary is maintained by his employer for the first 160 hours of the course (part-time) or the first four weeks (full-time).

No formal tradition of adult education existed in France before the law of 1971; therefore a whole administrative structure had to be invented to cope with the new legislation. As with other educational matters, paid study-leave comes under the jurisdiction of the Central Government. An Interministerial Committee was formed under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, with the Minister for National Education as Vice-Chairman and a Standing Body of Senior Civil Servants from other governmental departments. At regional level Committees for Vocational

Education, Social Advancement and Employment are responsible for coordination between employers and providers of recurrent education in the locality. Each of the 95 '*départements*' has a Committee which convenes administrators, providers and 10 representatives from trade unions concerned, constituting approximately one-quarter of this 'County' Committee. Involvement of employers' and employees' delegates at such decision-making levels is viewed as a breakthrough in changing the long-standing, rigid centralisation of French public administration.

Sweden has an impressive record of adult education. In 1970/71, out of a total population of about 8 million, some 2 million citizens attended varying types of adult courses. Most firms at that time had voluntary conventions with unions to allow workers paid study-leave; consequently the legislation of 1975 entailed little administrative upheaval, but gave official recognition to an existing, efficient system. This shows the importance that Swedes attach to the concept of social justice.

In Italy, existing organisations such as CRACIS [20], the Organisation for the Professional Training of Teachers [21], the Institute for the Development of Workers' Vocational Training [22], and experts involved in the *scuole popolari*, supplied the necessary experience to launch the *scuola delle 150 ore*. However, like France, Italy has suffered from years of centralised bureaucracy. Malfatti was the first Minister of Public Education to issue circulars concerning the new school [23] to the 20 regions which in turn set up committees responsible for organising courses and contacting all interested parties. Delays in negotiations at ministerial level prompted the Metalworkers' Union (FLM) of Lombardy directly to approach the regional Director of Education for financial aid to start preparing curricula for courses independent of, but similar to, those eventually established on a national basis. As a result, close collaboration has emerged between the organisers of the *corsi regionali* (FLM) and the *corsi ministeriali* (state-initiated) to provide a useful pool of ideas, information and comparative experiences. But in effect, two administrative teams are doing the work of one. Other bureaucratic difficulties still arise, especially between the autonomous regional branches of trade unions and the relatively powerless head teachers of schools and colleges whose classrooms are used for workers' lessons.

'150 hours' teachers work an average 39-hour week. Roughly one-third of their time is devoted to meetings with coordinators, shop stewards and representatives of other adult education schemes, to keep their own jobs in perspective and to keep abreast of events in the world of industry that affect their students. Coordinators maintain liaison between schools, trade unions and the regional committee. They also help to organise the 8-day introductory course that all teachers must attend, regardless of previous experience, given the dissimilarities between this school and traditional state schools.

In 1973 66% of Italy's working population did not possess their *licenza media*. Out of these over one-quarter were considered illiterate [24]. Completion of workers' 'compulsory' education is consequently a priority, although refresher and university courses are also offered by the '150 hours' [25]. During the academic year 1974-75 [26] the *corsi regionali* and *ministeriali* in Lombardy held a total of 297 courses for attainment of the *licenza media*, involving 4927 student-workers and 388 teachers. These pupils have bitter memories of the state *scuola media*. The '150 hours' school resembles few traditional establishments. It thus attracts many pupils and, like many *scuole popolari*, simultaneously demonstrates pedagogical innovations that could revolutionise the Italian state system.

The Ministry of Education stipulates four areas of study to be covered by candidates taking the *licenza media* examination: (a) mathematics, scientific studies; (b) geography, civic education, history; (c) Italian; (d) a foreign language. In state schools typical syllabi include analyses of Greek verse and medieval Italian literature, endless dates in ancient history, and the concentration on a foreign language's rare grammar and syntax.

In the '150 hours' schools all activities stem from personal contributions of pupils. Whereas traditional teaching staff saturate indifferent students with worthless facts, here teachers act as sympathetic *animatori*, as a stimulus to enable workers to participate fully in lessons by talking

about the realities around them. Their experiences are vast—on the shop floor, at home, in the neighbourhood, and formerly in state schools. Teachers adapt curricula as the specific interests of their pupils develop. Each region outlines topics relevant to the needs of workers, for instance: assessment of pay packets; civil rights; occupational diseases; evaluation of the local environment through press cuttings; the North/South question; fascism; familiarity with basic structures in a foreign language. However, each class in each school is unique in character because students themselves determine focal points of study and the means with which to examine them.

Research in group-work is a popular method. Hypotheses and generally acknowledged views are compared with official data [27]. Experiences of pupils in their daily lives are very significant in forming an accurate picture of current society. Discussions are encouraged above all. In state schools children are repressed from an early age; here pupils are urged to express themselves to the utmost since fluency in public speaking is a powerful tool and will assist individuals for life.

Facts no longer 'belong' to the Italian teacher or to the scientific expert, but are shown to relate across all disciplines. No contribution is therefore irrelevant and teachers can also benefit from all that students have to offer. The former declare that the '150 hours' school is invaluable in affording a growth in awareness of social injustices to *all* participants.

Reactions from pupils are equally positive. As well as learning the 'three Rs', this school gives an understanding of modern society and indicates ways of resolving its problems. Furthermore, each individual is respected and made to feel an important part of mankind's history, not an unhappy accident in world events. It is this type of education that workers now struggle to obtain for their children [28], for the intrigues of the state school perpetuate a social structure detrimental to the working class.

Italy experienced Mussolini's régime. Hitler has left his mark on Germany: the Federal Republic views paid educational leave as a necessary initiation into civic education and the responsibilities of citizens towards their country. This is also emphasised in Italy's '150 hours' school, but the desire to create a more just social order is implicit too. The danger of constantly indulging in politics has been recognised (and feared by the Italian ruling classes.) The development of the scheme to include agricultural workers, unemployed people and housewives means that not all pupils want fierce debates about the roles of trade unions and political parties. '150 hours' curricular policy therefore changes in accordance with the requirements of its students.

What should be the rôle of recurrent education for workers? Different countries have produced different answers to suit the needs of their citizens. The introduction of study-leave partly financed by employers has undoubtedly helped many to realise a long-awaited dream. The hectic pace of the twentieth century has resulted in leisure hours being more sacred than ever and evening classes a consequent impossibility. Fees also prevent the average worker from attending such courses. Britain's paid day-release projects are normally an extension of subjects studied in further education; there has been little incentive towards bettering the situations of pupils outside their place of work. Regarding this point, the United Kingdom, and many other countries, would surely benefit from the example recently set by Italy: while compensating thousands of educationally deprived citizens, the *scuola delle 150 ore* aims to develop insight into tackling the perplexing and problematic jungle of our modern life.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] *Lettera a una Professoressa*, School of Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher*, English translation (Harmondsworth, Penguin Education Specials, 1970).
- [2] Data recorded by CENSIS (Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali—Centre for Studies and Social Enquiries) from figures provided by the Italian Ministry of Public Education.
- [3] Data recorded by CENSIS from figures provided by ISTAT (Istituto Centrale di Statistiche—Central Institute of Statistics).
- [4] Although Italians constantly argue over borderlines, the South is usually thought of as all regions south of Rome, and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

- [5] Since the beginning of the twentieth century, millions of Southerners have left their native towns and villages. From 1958–69 2,639,351 people left the *Mezzogiorno*, as it is called. Of these, 1,660,186 settled in North Italy; the rest had to emigrate. Exploitation of the Southerners in northern towns is vicious, in all situations but particularly in factories.
- [6] In 1907 Fabietti founded the Italian Federation of People's Libraries (Federazione Italiana delle Biblioteche Popolari) which enabled people to procure and read books at low cost. In 1921 Corbino, Minister of Public Education, singled out certain private organisations to deal with the specific issues of illiteracy and adult education. With the persistence of this problem, the National Union for the Struggle against Illiteracy was founded in 1947 (Unione Nazionale per la Lotta contro l'Analfabetismo (UNLA)). This body operated in conjunction with council-sponsored courses and Centres of People's Culture (Centri di Cultura Popolare). The academic year 1968–69, 143,390 people attended *corsi ABC*; by 1976–77 the number had dropped to 52,234 (CENSIS from Ministry of Public Education).
- [7] The People's Universities aimed to give public lectures to the proletariat on subjects explained clearly and simply; but attendance rates by the working class were so negligible that after some years these institutions joined the Italian Society for General Culture. From the start, the People's Universities had been criticised for their pedagogic methods: culture is acquired personally and is not a commodity to be charitably handed over to people on a plate.
- [8] 1947 Decreto Legge no. 1599, art. 1 (translation): "the people's school, (established) to combat illiteracy, to complete elementary education and to point the way towards intermediate and vocational education". The *scuole popolari* can enter candidates for the *licenza media* examination, providing the syllabus conforms to the fairly flexible regulations of the Ministry of Public Education.
- [9] Corsi di Richiamo e Aggiornamento Culturale e di Istruzione Secondaria (CRACIS).
- [10] Centri Sociali di Educazione Permanente.
- [11] Centri di Servizi Culturali.  
Other organisations stemming from the *scuole popolari* include: reading centres (Centri di lettura); centres for listening to educational broadcasts (posti di ascolto per le trasmissioni scolastiche); intermediate school evening courses (corsi serali di scuola media).
- [12] The Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Fund for South Italy) was started in 1950 to resolve the many problems of that area. The Centri di Servizi Culturali were administered by the Cassa. They worked in consultation with the Training and Study Centre of the Fund for South Italy (Centro Formazione e Studi della Cassa del Mezzogiorno (FORMEZ)).
- [13] Volkshochschulen.
- [14] France: 1971; W. Germany, Berlin: 1970, Hamburg: 1974; Italy: 1973; Sweden: 1973 and 1975. These are the main laws in Western Europe.
- [15] Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici (FLM).
- [16] Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana, art. 3 (translation): "It is the duty of the Republic to remove all the obstacles of an economic and social nature that, thereby limiting the freedom and equality of the citizens, prevent the complete development of human beings and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economical and social organisation of the Country."
- [17] Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro (CCNL) art. 26, 4.4.73 and art. 28, 19.4.73.
- [18] In the same year, textile workers gained access to courses lasting 120 hours, 40 of which would be remunerated, (CCNL art. 21, 20.7.73). In 1974 agricultural workers were allocated 60 hours of paid leave, but only for the completion of compulsory education (CCNL art. 19, 11.10.74).
- [19] The Commissions Paritaires de l'Emploi were formed after a National Agreement of 10.2.69. They function at national and regional level amongst industrial concerns with attention focused on the educational needs of workers. Each committee is composed of an equal number of employers' and employees' representatives, and is therefore 'paritaire'. Employers are not always keen to release workers for general education courses. As they control the company's finance, their decisions are crucial to the whole scheme.
- [20] See note [9].
- [21] Organizzazione per la Preparazione Professionale degli Insegnanti (OPPI).
- [22] Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori (ISFOL).
- [23] Circolare ministeriale istitutiva dei corsi, Roma, 4.1.74.
- [24] From CENSIS.
- [25] Vocational courses in one subject include the following: technical design, car assembly, work cycles, casting, welding, electrotechnics, accountancy and business studies, English. In Milan, in 1974–75, 13 such courses were given by 13 experts for 169 student-workers.  
During the academic year 1974–75, Milan, Bergamo, Brescia and Como ran a total of 16 courses at university level, involving 715 student-workers, 28 lecturers and eight establishments of further education. Courses included: political economics, the Italian economic situation, history of economics, company management, working conditions, rights of work, local architecture, school and the labour market, preventive medicine, metallurgy, electrochemistry and corrosion.

Centres of recurrent education have been established in some French universities. In 1971–72, Lille and Nancy ran mainly vocational courses for some 6,000 adult student-workers.

- [26] This date is assumed from an examination of the information accompanying these statistics, which give no precise indication as to the time of the enquiry. This assumption also refers to dates in note [25].
- [27] From the original research of student-workers of the '150 hours', periodicals have been published from 1974 onwards in conjunction with various research centres looking into the labour market and modes of production in Italy.
- [28] One headmaster complained that the '150 hours' classes held in the afternoon at his school were having a bad influence on his own pupils: when accused of lacking enthusiasm and effort, they replied that they expected to leave the state school soon and attend '150 hours' schools in the future!

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