

## Union Archives in Italy

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In the last few years many historical archives have been set up—almost spontaneously—by the regional sections of both main Italian unions (CGIL and CISL). In Spring 1981 two national meetings were called on the subject. They reported on the new phenomenon and discussed several ways of dealing with it. Some of the questions asked were: why did the phenomenon occur now? what were the inner needs prompting such an effort? Many answers may be given: new links between the university and the unions as a result of the implementation of the *150 ore* plan (150 yearly hours of paid study-time are now guaranteed to the workers by many national contracts); as a consequence, the physical presence of many union cadres among the University students; the growing interest for local history in academic circles; the unions' greater interest for local history in academic circles; the unions' greater concern for their cultural environment. Above and beyond all such reasons, the unions have discovered during the last, hard years a need for a deeper consideration of their past in order to reach a better understanding of their present problems.

Just such a need was the starting point for many of the newly founded union archives. We will report on one of the first of these archives: the *Fondazione V. Nocentini—Archivio storico sindacale* of Turin.<sup>1</sup>

The Foundation was created in 1978 by union officials, university scholars and politicians of different backgrounds with the purpose of preserving and making available the papers of the labor movement. The Foundation operates in two directions:

1. *Collection, filing and utilisation of documents*. There are two sections: (a) historical archives, (b) newspapers and magazines. As of now, the Foundation has collected CISL papers from the whole Turin area, originating from both the category unions (metal-mechanical, textile, chemical, electrical, food and restaurant, transportation, banking, school, hospital, etc.) and the central body of the union at the provincial level, both in Turin (*Unione*) and out of town (*Zone*). This represents about 150,000 papers covering the years 1948-1972. Private papers donated by union officials and militants (the latter belonging to both CISL and other organizations) are also collected and separately filed. The magazine section has nearly 130 periodicals, both expired and current.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Research and other forms of use of the documents.* The Foundation itself is carrying out a research program including a project for an oral history bank and studies of union leadership and statutes. Basically, however, the Foundation serves the needs of students, scholars, and union militants. The archives provide a rich source for university papers and theses; in addition to that, the Foundation is engaged in the organization of public seminars, lectures addressed to union audiences, exhibitions of old pictures, a magazine, and other opportunities to analyze and discuss the history of the labor movement.

To conclude, we can say that the Foundation (as well as the other, recently-created archives) is a first step towards preserving the labor movement's memory. Major problems are still to be solved if it is to become an instrument of everyday use for militants, union cadres, and professional historians. The most serious problem is connected with the initial option of placing archives *within* the union. Such a choice was a natural consequence of the project of creating an instrument that could really be used by workers in the Turin area; however it may be turned into a divisive issue, or into a source of conflict and jealousy in a phase of stronger competition among different unions. But this is just a part of a bigger problem which only the Italian labor movement as a whole can solve.

1. This archive is only one of many now functioning in Italy. For example, in Lombardy alone there are union archives in Milan, Brescia, Bergamo, Varese. A description of these archives is available from IRES-CGIL Lombardia, *Archivi e centri di documentazione sindacale* (Milano, 1981). For more information on Italian union archives, see section "Fonti," *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 1979, 1980, 1981.

2. For a description of the Foundation's papers, see E. Benenati and D. Marucco, "Una fonte per la storia del movimento sindacale: l'archivio della CISL di Torino," *Movimento operaio e socialista*, II, 2-3 (1979), 229-253.