

Report from Rome by Galliano Maria Speri

The IMF's 'new cuisine'

Unless we recover adequate standards of economic growth, hamburgers and French fries will become the nightmare of every Italian.

The economic boom of the 1960s, thanks to the expansion of the productive base carried out by the state sector oil entrepreneur Enrico Mattei, bore some external marks demonstrating how Italy had finally embarked on the path of industrial growth. Families, just emerging from a peasant mentality, started to allow themselves to have refrigerators, home appliances, and, in a growing number of cases, a Fiat "600" car for Sunday outings.

But the real conquest of that period was on the tables: With almost daily frequency there was meat on the table, of good cut and quality, whereas previously this was a delicacy reserved for the rich. The Labor Code did not stipulate this, but to be able to eat meat every day was the tangible sign of a rise in living standards of the working class, a conquest worthy of pride.

Today, with food production concentrated in the hands of a few, this is all called into question, and the social conditions are being created in which, as in the Middle Ages, a small group of magnates controls food and uses it as a weapon against a population which cannot otherwise feed itself. Independent food producers are disappearing while the big international cartels are growing far out of proportion.

Even the Italian farmers' organization Coldiretti—with dozens of elected members of Parliament, the country's most ineffective lobby—became aware of this and sent up a cry of alarm. In Italy, the bulk of farm

production is now controlled by the Ferruzzi multinational and the Red co-operatives, which have spread into the insurance, construction, banking, and services sectors.

To eat meat every day is no status symbol, but just means the possibility of absorbing on a daily basis a high quantity of good protein as the basis for adequate nutrition. The attack on "traditional cuisine" by the young turks of the fast-food industry is no generational conflict between two ways of viewing food; it is a thinly disguised attempt to depress nutrition levels and to undermine protein intake, with the cover of moving to a more "modern" diet.

It is well known that Italian cuisine is among the finest in the world, not only because it is exceptionally varied and tasty, but also because it is nutritionally complete, representing a just proportion of proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, and vitamins. The protein content of a fast-food meal is almost negligible, as its only function is to fill the stomach. The basis of the traditional Italian meal is the second course of fish or meat (protein) accompanied by vegetables (vitamins and minerals), while the mainstay of fast food is potatoes, the basis of the diet of a poor farmer 50 years ago!

Fast food chains are spreading rapidly over the Italian peninsula, going from a few units in 1982, to 139 in 1986, with a massive increase (73%) in 1985 over the previous year. The

bulk of these places are concentrated in the north, and Milan is the city with the greatest number. The sociological justification given is that with 12 million people forced to eat out for work reasons, it is necessary to supply a quick, cheap meal, for which the traditional restaurant is too slow and too costly. Some have even been so brazen as to write that fast food joints are more democratic and egalitarian than the old restaurants, frequented by rich paunchy gentlemen, because the proletarians can afford them. Reality is unfortunately quite different.

Almost all restaurants of this type belong to big chains, which are run by political cronies; these places are supplied by major businesses. In Italy, a single concern, Cremonini, supplies 80% of the fast-food stores. Given that Italy is forced to import 50% of its meat needs and that this operation is in the hands of a few importers, it becomes obvious how food can be used as a weapon.

Socially marginal youth who go to fast-food places are not the flagbearers of a new social egalitarianism but fools exploited by a multinational apparatus which intends to permanently instill a philosophy of zero growth. This is the result of decades of austerity imposed on the world by the International Monetary Fund and the Swiss gnomes—who happen to own the main world food cartels.

Fast food has a destructive social effect because it tends to break up family units, which lose the custom of sitting around a table not only to eat, but to exchange ideas, proposals, solutions, and so forth. It is certainly no accident that the suppers of Renaissance humanists took place around richly laden tables. The basis of good cooking is not just simplicity, but economic development and the richest possible trade interchange.

REALITY CATCHES UP WITH THE MYTH- MAKERS



- **“One-third of a nation,”** to use FDR’s famous phrase, “is ill-clothed, ill-housed, and ill-fed” again today, as in the 1930s. The good news about the “Reagan recovery” is that the official unemployment rate is way down. The bad news is that the figures are faked, and represent displacement of the workforce into low-pay, low-benefit jobs, or involuntary part-time jobs. It represents personal credit-card debt, jobless workers without unemployment benefits, hungry persons without food stamps, underemployed or unemployed workers seeking food charity, homeless persons, and rapidly growing poverty.

- **One year ago,** *EIR* warned that the U.S. physical economy would begin a 15-25% annual rate of decline sometime in 1986. We argued that such a decline could be slowed, by available political means, but even if slowed, would not be held back beyond the last quarter of the year. In June, the first evidence came in confirming our prediction. In December, again, we were right on the button.

- **The political climate** in which the administration has been able to peddle the lies that underpinned the recovery myth has itself changed. November’s mid-term elections were a crushing defeat for candidates, especially Republican Party senatorial candidates, who were identified by the electorate as supporters of the administration’s economic policies.

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