



PRESS RELEASE

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'Italia dei Valori' and Sogefi workers demonstrate outside the room

MASS MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: THERE IS PLURALISM, OR PERHAPS NOT

Fedele Confalonieri: what counts is the professionalism of the journalist

Massimo Mucchetti: cultural conformism among editorial staff

Mass media and democracy: namely external pluralism, in terms of market structures and the existence of different competing newspapers, more or less guaranteed by antitrust regulations, and pluralism within each individual organisation, in its turn dependent – among other things – on ownership. This was the scenario outlined this afternoon by Michele Polo, Lecturer in Political Economy at the Bocconi University, when introducing the forum dedicated to the media, democracy and the changing relationships between the two. The guests of honour were Fedele Confalonieri, Chairman of Mediaset Spa, Massimo Mucchetti, Deputy Editor of the Corriere della Sera and John Lloyd, leader writer for the Financial Times.

Outside the room a protest was staged – this too “democratic” – by two separate groups, the ‘Italia del Valori’ party in relation to the Rete 4 affair, which concluded today with a sentence of the Council of State in favour of the broadcasting station, and the workers of Sogefi in Mantua (owned by De Benedetti, who however did not participate at the forum) who risk losing their jobs.

The debate, chaired by the journalist Luisella Costamagna, touched on more or less all the key issues of the moment, including the Internet, for some a probable future guarantee of media pluralism thanks to its accessibility and pervasiveness, for others not yet ready, in business terms, to worry the information giants.

The positions defined during the speeches were predictable, with Polo declaring that “the disease is serious”, both in the context of television (despite the new competitors, Sky above all) and the press (above all at local level, where newspaper sales continue to fall, but evidently the case of Trentino is an exception), Confalonieri replied that the market is present and operational, its main force being the professionalism of journalists. As regards the question of Rete 4 and the recourse presented by Europa 7, “for three days they made a song and dance about it, but as even in the PD there are intelligent people they then pulled

back. At all events, if a broadcast is popular it can allow itself to attack whoever it wants and as Montanelli used to say: my master is the reader.”

There was some grumbling in the room when the Chairman of Mediaset, talking about the conflict of interests, affirmed that “Berlusconi only owns one third of the company”, immediately clarifying: “The other two thirds are owned by foreign funds, which would certainly not invest if our TV channels, for reasons linked to ownership, were not appreciated by the public. Then again one may not agree that a television owner should also be involved in politics, but this is the situation in Italy and at all events the Italians have voted for Berlusconi three times.”

Mucchetti shifted the debate on to editorial aspects. “We all present the news in one way or another, but it is necessary to see in what way. The truth is that there is also cultural conformism among editorial staff. This interests me, I cannot get excited about the debate on Rete 4. The problem is having a state TV system which must run after audience and advertising, putting itself in competition with the private sector, perhaps giving up investigations. In the USA a free-trade oriented former banker has started up a company which has set itself the target of becoming the leading world newspaper in the field of investigative journalism, simply he realised that something was lacking, despite the fact that the USA is the homeland of investigative journalism. We do not have these bankers, we have state television. If we didn’t have to compete for audience, perhaps we could have not one but ten journalists like Gabanelli.”

According to Lloyd the ownership factor remains decisive. In a democratic system, one of the pillars being the media, the owner must share the same values and “mission” as journalists. As regards the Internet, the truth is that blogs are increasingly important, one need only think of Beppe Grillo.

“It’s true, the Internet is important” – replied Mucchetti – “because it guarantees access to information at a very low cost. However it does not substitute newspapers. The web inundates us with information that we are then unable to analyse.”

Polo also returned to the question of ownership: “It is important, it is not true that only the journalists count. To use a football metaphor: the players count, but the trainer and the owners who took him on also count. The point is that the market, as always, tends to move towards concentration if it is not regulated in any other way. But if the number of newspapers reduces or the peripheral branches close, as a citizen I nevertheless have to get an idea of what is happening and I do so with what is left, even with a single newspaper.”