

Technocratic Consensus, Institutional Change and Questionable Ends. Remarks on Italy's Economic Policy

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to discuss the ends pursued by Italy's Monti Cabinet (2011-2012). Although the Cabinet dealt with the consequences of the crisis in a way that does not significantly differ from other Cabinets, its policies are worth investigating because it was supported by a large majority of parties on the grounds that its policies were the only appropriate ones. This situation allowed it to be particularly consistent and streamlined. The paper focuses less on efficacy, efficiency and equity than with the overall view of the economy - and of society - that Monti and his Cabinet aimed to set up. It begins by providing an outline of the most important economic policies enacted by the Cabinet, those related to the public debt and to the labor market. It then discusses the claimed inevitability of those policies. It suggests that alternative measures were (and are) possible and, sometimes, they didn't even require significant institutional or legal changes. The paper then points out some of the social implications of the Cabinet's policies. In particular, it points out that the Cabinet's economic ends clash with the social and economic ends outlined by the Italian Constitution and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The inconsistency between these two sets of ends is crucial not only on formal grounds - a Cabinet should enact the prescriptions of the Constitution rather than contradict them - but on substantial ones as well. The policies of the Cabinet reflect the neoliberal project of an economy where all agents - workers, consumers, etc. - must act as individuals. With minor exceptions, they forsake social solidarity, i.e. the depiction and enforcement of entitlements - as opposed to personal solidarity, i.e. charity. This approach undermines the capabilities that allow people to choose how to conduct their lives. It also undermines the social cohesion and the forms of deliberation that underlie democracy. Thus, the Monti Cabinet not only reflects a crisis in Italy's democratic institutions but it actually reinforces it. Following the above analysis, the paper discusses what an alternative approach to policy should look like. It basically focuses on the relevance of well specified ends and on the need not to confuse economic and social ends with specific goals or with the means to achieve them.

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