

# “Aggregative” and “Deliberative” Decision-Making Procedures: A Comparison of Two Southern Italian Factories

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*By comparing developments in two southern Italian factories, this article contrasts “aggregative” (vote on alternative options) and “deliberative” (vote preceded by discussion) procedures in trade unions. In one of the plants, the preferences of some of the workers appear to have been changed by deliberation. The process of rational persuasion seems to have required, however, more than sheer circulation of information. Based on this evidence, the article argues that when a potential conflict of interests is involved, speakers need to provide evidence that they are animated by a “communicative” rather than “strategic” intent. This implies validating their implicit claim to sincerity of communication.*

This article is concerned with decision-making procedures within trade unions and, by extension, other secondary associations as well. Its primary goal is to contrast “aggregative” (vote on alternative options) and “deliberative” (vote preceded by discussion of alternative courses of action) procedures and determine what effects, if any, these procedures might have on collective choices and group behavior.

A growing stream of literature in political theory emphasizes the importance of deliberation in decision making.<sup>1</sup> Compared with other, more traditional mecha-

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nisms of collective choice, like voting, deliberation—it is argued—leads to collective choices that are both more equitable and more considerate.<sup>2</sup> An incipient literature exploring a variety of public policy projects in different countries (e.g., community decision making, participatory budgeting processes, policing and school reforms, environmental protection) provides some empirical support for these claims by showing that grassroots deliberation leads to collective outcomes that are not only normatively appealing but also often more efficient than those associated with alternative models.<sup>3</sup> Other, related literature suggests that the socially beneficial effects of deliberation may play themselves out not just in entire polities but in trade unions and other interest groups as well, even though these are “partial societies,” that is, societies in which only a few, and *not* all, of those affected by the group’s decisions have the opportunity to voice their concerns in the internal decision-making process.<sup>4</sup>

This literature tends to be rather vague, however, on the issue of causal mechanisms. It is often argued that deliberation or “arguing” does not just aggregate but changes preferences.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is unclear how exactly this change in preferences occurs and what causes it. Does deliberation favor a more thorough circulation of information and, hence, enable individuals to make more considerate (rational) choices?<sup>6</sup> Or does it cause an anthropological shift from self-centered to moral actors?<sup>7</sup> Perhaps more important, does deliberation always lead to a change in preferences? Can’t arguments just be discarded as irrelevant or simply ignored? What else, besides the semantic content of communication, is needed for arguments to affect preferences?

By comparing developments in Termoli and Modugno—two southern Italian factories faced with a trade-off between the workers’ short-term interests in higher compensation and their long-term interests in factory expansion and job creation—this article seeks to shed some light on these questions. In Termoli, workers simply voted (aggregation of preferences). In Modugno, instead, the vote itself was preceded by extensive debate within the factory (deliberation followed by aggregation). In the end, the majority of the Modugno workers opted for job creation while their colleagues in Termoli made the opposite choice. After several days of heated debate, the Termoli workers voted again and revised their initial choice.

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The comparison between Termoli and Modugno shows that workers did not have well-defined, let alone fixed, preferences about alternative policy options, even though these options directly affected their material interests. Their preferences appeared to be heavily influenced by what other people in similar circumstances, and particularly local union leaders, had to say (or not say) about some of these choices. In particular, some of the workers seemed to alter their initial preference ordering as a result of argument.

This comparison also shows, however, that the process of rational persuasion, which *does* take place, requires more than sheer circulation of information. Existing accounts of deliberation attribute an almost magical power of interest reconciliation and conflict resolution to discourse. Yet, in several circumstances, discourse *per se* may have no consequences for preferences. Particularly in situations in which a conflict of interest between speakers and hearers can be suspected, arguments may be discarded, no matter how truthful, as “cheap talk.”<sup>8</sup>

Where a potential conflict of interest is involved, speakers need to provide evidence that they are animated by a “communicative” as opposed to “strategic” intent, that is, that their goal is *not* advancing their own self-interests but rather reaching understanding on what they believe to be the best possible course of action for everybody.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly enough, this claim to sincerity of communication—a claim whose validation is a precondition for communication to be informative at all—is often impossible to redeem through argument only, because every argument can be suspected of strategic misrepresentation. To prove that their motives are pure, speakers need to go outside discourse and point to their past and/or present praxis. In Modugno, for example, union leaders had to provide concrete, tangible evidence that they did not stand to gain anything in material terms from the collective solution (job creation) they advocated. Because they felt they lacked the moral legitimacy needed to demand “sacrifices” from the workers, the Termoli union leaders refrained from engaging in persuasive communication at all.

The remainder of this article is organized in four parts. First, I provide an overview of developments in the two plants. Second, I examine a series of alternative explanations for why events unfolded differently in Termoli and Modugno. Third, I discuss the importance for participants in deliberative assemblies of being able to approximate the Habermasian model of “speaker with communicative intent” and, especially, validate their implicit claim to sincerity of communication. I conclude by considering the implications of this article for interest representation in general.

#### WORKING-TIME FLEXIBILITY IN THE TERMOLI AND MODUGNO PLANTS<sup>10</sup>

The events analyzed in this article take place in two auto component factories of the Fiat group, Termoli and Modugno. Termoli manufactured engines and transmissions and was located in the southern province of Campobasso, Molise.

Table 1  
*A Comparison of the Modugno and Termoli Plants*

	Modugno	Termoli
Outcome of the first referendum	60% approve	64% reject
Number of employees	2,750	650
Product	Fuel-injectors	Engines/transmissions
Work organization	Lean production	Lean production
Workforce composition	86% blue-collar	89% blue-collar
Unions	Multiple	Multiple
Most representative union	FIOM	FIOM
Unionization rate	35%	40%

*Source:* See Note 10.

Modugno produced fuel-injectors and was located in the southern province of Bari, Apulia. Both plants had been established in the early 1970s as part of their parent company's strategy of moving some of its production capacity to southern sites. With 2,750 employees versus 650 at the time of the facts (late 1994), Termoli was bigger than Modugno. Also, Modugno was formally affiliated with Magneti Marelli, a fully owned subsidiary of Fiat. Both plants used sophisticated technologies like numerically controlled machines and process automation. A high proportion of the workforce (86 percent in the case of Modugno, 89 percent in the case of Termoli) was blue-collar. Work organization was in both cases based on the "lean production" model<sup>11</sup> (see Table 1).

In 1994, the Italian auto industry experienced a sudden surge in demand, especially from abroad, related to the recent competitive devaluation of the lira.<sup>12</sup> At first, Fiat responded by increasing overtime work. By the fall of 1994, however, it made clear to its bargaining counterparts that it planned a structural reorganization of working-time schedules in the two plants.

In both factories, Fiat proposed new investments and jobs in exchange for greater capital utilization. In Termoli, it promised a new production line for the manufacturing of a new, state-of-the-art, sixteen-valve engine. In Modugno, it announced the introduction of a brand-new fuel-injector that (being both less costly and more reliable than available substitutes) promised to capture a substantial share of the world market. In exchange for these investments, the unions were asked to give their consent to a new working-time schedule organized on six as opposed to five working days. This new schedule extended the number of weekly shifts from fifteen to eighteen while leaving unchanged the total number of working hours per person. Saturday became a regular working day within the new schedule. Workers, however, would benefit from a sliding day off (Monday, Tuesday, etc.) in the course of the week.

The *quid pro quo* was clear. On one hand, the two proposed collective agreements curtailed the employees' ability to work during the weekends at premium,

overtime rates. On the other hand, by introducing new, state-of-the-art capital, both agreements improved the employees' prospect for continued job security. Perhaps more important, these agreements created new jobs in areas characterized by endemically high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. To strengthen its bargaining position, the company threatened to move the investments elsewhere in case the unions refused its proposal. In Termoli, management first mentioned the Polish plant of Tichi (where labor costs were much lower than in Italy), and later, the Turinese plant of Mirafiori—one of Italy's historic auto factories—as alternative locations. In Modugno, management threatened to move the investment to its French plant of Argentin.

In both Termoli and Modugno, the unions initially responded with a request for working-time reductions.<sup>13</sup> These initial requests were dropped, however, because it became clear quite soon that few workers in the two factories really cared about working-time cuts. The hot issue on the table was money. In the previous few months, the employees of Termoli, particularly the 1,000-odd employees working in the engine department, had been accumulating several hours of overtime work (which meant about 500,000 extra lira, or 30 percent of salary, in their monthly paychecks). Similarly, at least 300 employees worked regularly on Saturdays in Modugno and about 35 maintenance workers worked on Sundays as well. This allowed them to bring home up to 150,000 additional lira for each extra day worked.

In both plants, the company did not concede to the unions' demands and only accorded minimal wage increases.<sup>14</sup> The unions, then, focused their energies on increasing the number of jobs. After a long and sometimes tense negotiation process, management agreed to hire 409 young workers in Termoli (the company's initial proposal had been 180 new hires) and 180 in Modugno (of these, 90 would be on fixed-term contracts).<sup>15</sup> These numbers are small (they represent 1.8 percent of total industrial employment in Modugno and 9 percent in Termoli)<sup>16</sup> but become more significant if one considers that youth unemployment rates in these two geographical areas were close to 50 percent. Also, Fiat received 6,700 applications for the 409 jobs advertised at Termoli,<sup>17</sup> some of which were from college graduates living as far as 200 miles away.

When the bargaining process came to an end and they felt they had reached a reasonable compromise, union leaders in Modugno called for a final assembly with the workers in which they explained the contents of the tentative agreement and asked for a show of hands. Approximately 60 percent of the workers gave their approval. The day after the vote, on 15 November 1994, they met with management and signed the agreement. In Termoli, union leaders consulted the workers through a secret ballot referendum. The referendum was held between 30 November and 1 December 1994: 2,502 employees out of 2,753 participated in the vote. Of these, 1,612 voted against (64 percent), 872 (35 percent) in favor, and the rest (1 percent) blank.

After the referendum, Termoli quickly became a national case. How was it possible—several people asked—to turn one's back to several hundred steady jobs in a region, Molise, in which there were 40,000 unemployed (17,000 of which were young people in search of their first jobs) out of a population of 300,000? This question spurred a heated debate in the whole country. The national press began an extensive coverage of the *affaire Termoli*. The day after the vote, Luciano Lama, one of the charismatic leaders of the Italian labor movement, former Secretary General of the CGIL, and Senator of the Italian Republic, argued that the Termoli vote was egoistic and blind, that the task of a union was that of defending the weakest, and that there was no doubt that in the case of Termoli, the unemployed were the weakest.<sup>18</sup>

The local political forces stood in support of the agreement as well. Several Molisani notables, the President of the Campobasso province, and the President of the Molise Region wrote a petition to the Termoli employees asking them to rethink their choice.<sup>19</sup> The Church was divided. The Bishop of Trivento (a nearby commune) took the side of the factory workers and declared publicly that the workers' families needed to reunite at least in the weekend.<sup>20</sup> Most of the local priests, however, including the Bishop of Termoli, condemned the workers' choice.<sup>21</sup>

After the result of the vote became public, various Termoli employees constituted the so-called Spontaneous Committee for the Development of the Fiat Plant in Termoli. The Committee met for the first time two days after the referendum at a local restaurant. This first rally saw the presence of approximately 500 people and several journalists reporting on the event. The vast majority of participants were employees of the Fiat plant, but there were also students and shopkeepers. Many people in this crowd recalled their experience as immigrants abroad and compared the toughness of their past lives with the small sacrifice now required from them. One of the speakers, for example, warned the audience that it was no longer possible for the participants' children to look for jobs in Germany or Switzerland as even in those countries the unemployment rate was quite high.<sup>22</sup>

All of the Committee members agreed that a new consultation should be held since the workers had not been thoroughly informed of the consequences of their choices. Now that everybody knew what was at stake, the result would certainly be different. The second referendum (a show of hands) was held on 16 December 1994. The result was this time favorable to the agreement. Compared with the first ballot, there were 617 additional votes in favor.

The Termoli and Modugno stories share many features. In both cases, two remarkably similar worker communities (composed of predominantly blue-collar metalworkers) were faced with what one of the managers referred to as a "purely social" exchange: working-time flexibility in exchange for new jobs.<sup>23</sup> In both cases, the company (a multinational corporation with production sites in several countries) sought to strengthen its bargaining stance by threatening to invest else-

where. Even the timing of the events was the same: November-December 1994. Yet, the Modugno workers approved the agreement while their colleagues at Termoli initially rejected it. Why? In the next section, before laying out my own argument, which focuses on different decision-making procedures in the two plants, aggregative in Termoli, deliberative in Modugno, I discuss a series of alternative explanations.

EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO PLANTS:  
A REVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE ARGUMENTS<sup>24</sup>

*Ideological Orientations*

Perhaps the different choices of the Termoli and Modugno workers reflected different ideological orientations of these workers and/or their unions.<sup>25</sup> Radical/militant unions tend to hinder reformist policy, whereas moderate/conciliatory unions favor it.<sup>26</sup> There are no direct data available on the ideological attitudes of workers. The evidence on unions suggests, however, that this argument may not hold in this particular case.

Interestingly enough, the plant with a tradition of militancy and opposition to management was Modugno, *not* Termoli. Industrial relations had never been a problem in the Termoli factory.<sup>27</sup> Participation in national strikes, for example, had never involved more than a small minority of the Termoli employees. Modugno, instead, had a history of highly conflictual labor relations. According to the division manager, labor relations in the Modugno plant were “impossible” when he began his job in the late 1980s and “everything was allowed.”<sup>28</sup>

Both plants had almost exactly the same unions. There were six different unions at Termoli: FIOM-CGIL, FIM-CISL, UILM-UIL, FISMIC, FAILM-CISAL, and CISNAL. With the exception of FAILM-CISAL, these same unions also were represented in the Modugno factory.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, the FIOM-CGIL was the majoritarian organization and the major player on the union side. Unionization rates were similar: 35 percent in Modugno and 40 percent in Termoli. The three confederal unions (FIOM-CGIL, FIM-CISL, and UILM-UIL) and FISMIC, a company union, were Fiat’s privileged bargaining counterparts, in the sense that the company negotiated with them first. When an agreement was reached with these major unions, the others were invited to the bargaining table. They generally signed a rubber-stamped copy of the agreement already signed by the others.

Differences in union bargaining policies are, in general, stable and predictable: FIM, UILM, and FISMIC usually adopt a more accommodating attitude toward management’s demands for flexibility. The FIOM, instead, tends to be less yielding. In particular, the FIOM’s policy toward working-time flexibility implies that such flexibility can only be conceded if it is counterbalanced by working-time reductions and/or monetary compensation for workers (to offset increased hard-

ship). Even FIOM, however, contemplates an important exception for developing areas: where, as in the south, unemployment rates are especially high, investments and jobs become absolute priorities and it is acceptable to forgo in their name working-time reductions and monetary compensation.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, an important faction within the FIOM-CGIL, *Essere Sindacato*, which rejects the legitimacy of this exception. This faction, which is politically tied to the neo-Communist Party *Rifondazione Comunista*, believes that all collective bargaining agreements should have costs for management, independent of circumstances. Yielding to management always leads, in this faction's opinion, to a weakened union front. In both the Termoli and Modugno plants, *Essere Sindacato* was against the two accords in question.

In both plants, CISNAL, an organization with political ties to the post-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), had a presence.<sup>31</sup> Like *Essere Sindacato*, CISNAL, too, believed that the only task of a "true" union was serving the interests of the workers. Every attempt at mediating between these interests and those of other social actors was branded as "politics" (in the pejorative sense) by members of this organization. In Termoli, CISNAL leaders accused the leadership of the FIOM of having received bribes from Fiat to "ease" implementation of the new working-time schedule.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the Modugno CISNAL sought to stir workers' opposition against the accord by discrediting the major confederal unions. It accused the unionists (in particular those of FIOM, FIM, and UILM) of having secretly negotiated with management a pact that exchanged union complacency toward working-time reform with the privileged hiring of the unionists' children, relatives, and/or protégés. Using its links with members of Parliament, the CISNAL even promoted a parliamentary interrogation on this issue. This interrogation, however, found no irregularities in the hiring process.

### *Socioeconomic Conditions*

Various literatures suggest that differences in social behavior, particularly differential capacities to engage in cooperative and/or solidaristic action, are linked with different levels of affluence and/or unequally dense social networks. For example, Edward Banfield argued that extreme poverty and precariousness of life conditions prevented the inhabitants of Montegrano—a small southern Italian village—from acting together for the common good and locked them in a low-trust equilibrium.<sup>33</sup> More recently, Robert Putnam has argued that individuals embedded in rich networks of cross-cutting associations are more likely to internalize the norms of cooperation with others than are individuals socialized in segregated and atomistic social environments.<sup>34</sup>

Table 2 presents selected socioeconomic indicators for the two locations. The data available are at the provincial level. This does not seem to be a problem, however, since the employees of both Termoli and Modugno commute to work from several communes in the provinces of Campobasso and Bari, respectively. Once



Table 2

*Provinces of Bari (Modugno) and Campobasso (Termoli): Socioeconomic Indicators*

	Bari	Campobasso	Southern Italian Average	Italy's Average
1. Per capita income <sup>a</sup>	18,728.6	18,329.8	16,989.9	24,013.6
2. Agricultural income (%) <sup>b</sup>	5.3	5.8	5.9	3.7
3. Industrial income (%) <sup>b</sup>	21.4	24.3	21.7	29.8
4. Marketable services (%) <sup>b</sup>	52.8	50.4	51.6	52.1
5. Nonmarketable services (%) <sup>b</sup>	20.5	19.5	20.8	14.4
6. Labor market participation (%) <sup>c</sup>	34.5	38.0	35.0	40.1
7. Unemployment rates (%) <sup>c</sup>	14.3	16.7	21.7	12.5
8. Youth unemployment (%) <sup>d</sup>	46.1	50.0	55.4	33.9
9. Associational density <sup>e</sup>	1.34	2.07	~3	NA

Source: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5: Istituto Guglielmo Tagliacarne, "Il reddito prodotto nelle province nel 1992 e 1993" (Unpublished ms., August 1994); 6 and 7: *Informazioni Svimez*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1996); 8: Svimez, *Rapporto 1996 sull'economia del Mezzogiorno* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996); 9: Carlo Trigilia, ed., *Cultura e sviluppo. L'associazionismo nel Mezzogiorno* (Catanzaro: Meridiana Libri, 1995): Table 9, p. 35.

a. Per capita income was calculated as per capita value added in 1992 thousand lira.

b. Percentage of total provincial value added in 1992.

c. 1995 data.

d. Unemployment rates for youth between fifteen and twenty-four years of age (1995). Data are regional averages.

e. Number of associations every 10,000 inhabitants; 1991 census data.

again, the two cases stand out as remarkably similar. Both provinces have higher per capita incomes than the average for southern Italy as a whole and similar income composition. Unemployment rates (both overall and youth unemployment rates) are lower than southern Italian averages. The number of associations per unit of population, a proxy for Putnam's "social capital," is below the average for southern Italy in both provinces. Interestingly enough, the province of Campobasso seems to be more associationally "vibrant" than the province of Bari.<sup>35</sup>

### *Credibility of Management's Threat of Relocation*

The Termoli and Modugno plants differed in one important respect: Unlike Termoli, Modugno had gone through a process of industrial restructuring in the early 1990s. This process, which gradually changed the production mix in this plant from diesel-related components (a declining market) to gasoline-related components, had involved both structural redundancies and temporary layoffs. This reorganization had been completed in the early months of 1994. Faced with boiling demand, the company had at that point not only called all workers temporarily placed in *Cassa Integrazione* (unemployment insurance) back but had even signed with the unions an agreement involving "compulsory" overtime work on Saturday.<sup>36</sup> In this same period, Termoli had experienced cyclical fluctuations and short-term layoffs, but no major reorganization.

One might argue that Fiat's threat of relocation was perceived as more credible in Modugno than in Termoli because unlike Termoli, this threat resonated in Modugno with recent memories of insecurity and precariousness. This, in turn, could explain why the flexibility agreement was approved in Modugno and rejected in Termoli.<sup>37</sup>

In response to this plausible interpretation, two considerations can be made. First, Fiat's threat to move the sixteen-valve line from Termoli to Mirafiori was much more serious than the other threat. During my interviews at Termoli, both national and plant-level managers argued they had made very clear, through press and media announcements, that they were serious when they threatened to move the investment elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> Plant representatives said they were well aware that Fiat was ready to "turn the plant into a tiny shop."<sup>39</sup> The alternative to Modugno, that is, the French plant of Argentin, was, instead, a *ballon d'essai*: the company had not seriously considered this alternative location.<sup>40</sup>

Second, other cases of working-time reform show that there is no clear-cut correlation between credibility of the threat of relocation and approval of working-time reform. Between the end of 1994 and the beginning of 1995, another Fiat plant, this time located in Piedmont, was faced with a trade-off between working-time restructuring and new jobs. The Teksid plant of Carmagnola (near Turin)—a facility producing special iron cast for the automotive component industry—had been commissioned a large order from a foreign client and thus needed to increase capacity utilization. Here again, Fiat proposed the usual exchange between new investments and jobs (500) and a new working-time schedule based on 18 weekly shifts. Like their colleagues at Modugno, and different from those at Termoli, the employees of Teksid approved the deal. Yet, the credibility of the relocation threat was, in this case, close to zero because Fiat did not have an alternative facility to rely on. In fact, at the beginning of the collective bargaining process in Carmagnola, a newspaper announced that this negotiation would be very different from Termoli since this time Fiat would not be able to shift production to another facility in case the workers rejected the agreement.<sup>41</sup>

### *Type of Vote*

In Modugno, workers' preferences were determined through a show of hands; in Termoli, there was, instead, a secret referendum. Public vote is sometimes used by political parties and government coalitions to ensure leadership control over party members.<sup>42</sup> Can the difference in the way the vote was conducted (public vs. private) explain the difference in outcomes between the two plants?

It is obviously impossible to address this alternative explanation directly, that is, through evidence from the two cases. It is possible, however, to look at similar examples of worker consultations. As mentioned above, the Teksid plant of Carmagnola (near Turin) was faced with exactly the same trade-off between

working-time flexibility and jobs as the Modugno and Termoli plants. Different from Modugno, however, here the vote was secret, yet 58 percent of the workforce approved the agreement—a proportion that, incidentally, is very similar to that of Modugno (60 percent).<sup>43</sup>

Other evidence suggests that the difference in the type of vote between Termoli and Modugno may not have been so important. In 1993, Italy's major confederal unions organized a worker referendum on a proposed tripartite incomes policy agreement that abolished wage indexation and tied wage increase to government-established wage targets.<sup>44</sup> In the city of Brescia,<sup>45</sup> 422 metalworking plants of different size<sup>46</sup> voted on this agreement either publicly (64 percent) or secretly (36 percent). The average of favorable votes was 28.8 percent for plants that used a secret ballot and 29.2 percent for plants that used a show of hands, that is, very similar.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps public vote favors compliance only when organizations have effective ways (like expulsion) of disciplining defection. These punitive measures were absent in the Termoli and Modugno cases. In fact, workers could choose among multiple, competitive unions.

#### *Differences in Decision-Making Procedures*

What clearly differentiated the Termoli and Modugno cases was the process through which the agreement was discussed (or not discussed) among the workers. In Termoli, local union leaders failed to organize either general or department-specific assemblies. Consequently, the Termoli employees never had a chance to publicly debate (and hence, ponder) the consequences of alternative collective choices for both themselves and the local community, or even consider the seriousness of Fiat's threat of relocation. They were only called in at the last moment for a final "test," that is, the referendum, which registered and aggregated their "naked," and perhaps unreflected, preferences.

Lack of transparency favored the spreading of rumors about corruption and malfeasance in the Termoli plant. For example, a few days before the referendum, the CISNAL diffused a leaflet in which the confederal union activists were accused of having sold out and betrayed the workers.<sup>48</sup> Many people formed incorrect ideas about the collective bargaining negotiation underway. Many thought that their regular working week would become forty-eight as opposed to forty hours as a result of the agreement. Still others thought that they were going to lose their "shift allowance" (*indennita' di turno*), an important component of worker pay. Many people were not even aware of Fiat's threat of relocation. Among those who were, few seemed to believe that Fiat would seriously carry it through. After all, Termoli was one of the most automated and efficient engine plants in the world. Of course Fiat would want to invest there! These workers probably ignored or did not remember that in the past, Fiat had not hesitated to act

decisively when unions and workers had showed signs of standing in the way of industrial restructuring.<sup>49</sup>

Internal union processes were much more participatory in Modugno. Similar to Termoli, the proposed working-time rearrangement met initially with a lot of resistance and opposition. Not only was overtime widespread in this factory, many of the older workers in the plant also feared the arrival of younger, more educated colleagues. In fact, several workers had just returned from the *Cassa Integrazione* after spending most of their work careers on the diesel lines. These workers often did not have enough confidence that they could gain the skills required to operate the new, fuel-injection machines through the training schemes that management and unions had recently negotiated.<sup>50</sup> Their opposition to the agreement was based on this implicit (and sometimes explicit) line of thinking: "They'll bring the new ones in and then they'll get rid of us."<sup>51</sup>

Then there were specific workers who felt they were particularly penalized by the new working-time regime. Among these were the so-called bats (*pipistrelli*) who voluntarily worked only night shifts. In fact, based on most collective agreements in Italy, workers who work at night receive an additional allowance that sometimes exceeds regular pay by 60 percent. Among the bats were people in absolute need of money. Some had recently bought a house and needed to repay bank loans, others had children in college, and still others had accumulated debts over the course of the years. These workers had essentially two reasons to oppose the tentative accord on working-time restructuring: (1) they would no longer be allowed to only work night shifts since all employees would have to regularly rotate across morning, afternoon, and night shifts, and (2) they would have to forfeit one of only two days (Saturday and Sunday) they had at their disposal to live a normal life with their families.

Finally, there was an additional category of workers who did not care whether refusal of the accord brought about industrial decline. They figured the plant would not shut down right away. It would take a few years. Thus, they would have enough time to reach (early) retirement age, grab a state pension, and maybe embark on a full-time career in the "informal" economy as masons, carpenters, electricians, or mechanics.

Different from Termoli, the Modugno union leaders kept their constituents constantly informed of the evolution of the negotiation process. Also, they laid out very clearly what the options were and why they thought it was important to give up short-term pay increases (related to overtime pay) in exchange for employment growth. This process of internal discussion lasted three months—a period in which the local unions held numerous assemblies (one per shift every week), both general and department-specific. Plant representatives also engaged in informal discussions with the workers.

In the course of this process of internal deliberation, union leaders used a combination of ethical and pragmatic discourse to persuade their constituents.<sup>52</sup> They

sought to show that acceptance of the new working-time schedule was justified by both adherence to the ethical value of solidarity and pursuit of the workers' "best" (i.e., long-term) interests. One of the arguments that resonated most frequently in these assemblies had to do with plant survival. Union representatives argued that only a factory that was capable of attracting new, state-of-the-art investments had reasonable prospects of surviving in the long term. Given the rapid obsolescence of technology in the auto component industry, lack of investments meant slow but sure death. Another argument touched on the workers' identities as parents. Union representatives argued that the Modugno workers should not miss a golden opportunity to create new jobs since so many of their children were unemployed. This argument had a deep impact on the workers. Workers demanded, however, that in exchange for their "sacrifices," their children be favored in the hiring process, something that the Modugno management, just like the Termoli management, was willing to concede. Finally, union leaders pointed out that it was unfair for many workers who had just returned from the *Cassa Integrazione* to be struggling to keep their jobs while other workers (whose only "merit" was that of being employed in production lines whose markets were growing) were working overtime. The new working-time schedule would equalize working conditions for everybody.

Although loss of overtime pay was clearly the most important source of resistance, very few workers said it explicitly in public.<sup>53</sup> Many more preferred to justify their opposition through appeal to something that resonated with larger themes. Some, for example, argued that the "Saturday off" had been one of the historic conquests of the Italian workers' movement in the late 1960s—a conquest that the unions now wanted to give up to please management. Union representatives responded to this objection by pointing out that the "Saturday off" had, in practice, already been given up since most employees in the plant were systematically working on Saturdays. This "sacrifice" could be used for a nobler cause, namely, creating job opportunities for the youth. Only very rarely did the Modugno employees come up with totally self-interested arguments. During a night-shift assembly, one of the workers said, "I don't give a shit about my son. He's unemployed. So was I! I had to cope; he'll have to cope as well."<sup>54</sup> This statement met with widespread moral condemnation by both union leaders and other workers and probably had opposite effects from its intended goals.

These discussions not only provided union leaders with an opportunity to dialectically mollify some of the worker resistance but also allowed them to distinguish between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" claims. Many workers, for example, pointed out in these assemblies that public transportation was off during the weekends. Thus, they would need to use their cars to reach the factory and this would result in net income losses for them. The unions brought this point to the bargaining table and managed to persuade management to pay an additional

allowance of 37,500 lira for each Saturday worked—a figure way below what workers were earning through overtime work but enough to offset increased transportation costs.

Finally, some union representatives perceived that a critical factor in the internal process of decision making was the timing of the vote. They never asked for a vote at the beginning or even in the course of the deliberative process, when workers' attitudes were still "raw," that is, unrefined by public discussion. They knew that whatever the outcome of the vote, workers would have interpreted it as a moral commitment on the part of the unions to carry along the "workers' will" and would have perceived any deviation from such outcome as a form of "betrayal." Local union leaders allowed instead enough time for workers to reflect and discuss the options with plant delegates, their colleagues at work, or even with family members at home. Only when they felt the workers were "ready" did they ask for a vote. The results of the vote (show of hands) were not overwhelmingly positive: as mentioned above, approximately 40 percent of the workers voted against. However, since a clear majority had emerged, they did not bother to organize a formal, secret ballot. In the end, at least some of the Modugno workers appeared to have perfectly internalized their leaders' reasons. Interviewed by a local newspaper, one of the employees in the plant, for example, declared that the workers had willingly accepted some sacrifices in order to not only create new job opportunities for the youth but also translate into practice the old union motto: "Work less, work for all."<sup>55</sup>

Why didn't union leaders in Termoli act just like their colleagues in Modugno? Why didn't they organize assemblies and use principled argument to persuade their constituents? Why was there "deliberation" in Modugno and simple "aggregation" of preferences in Termoli? The answer lies, I argue, in the constraints that the implicit rules regulating public discussion impose in particular on the moral credibility of the speakers.

#### STRATEGIC AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

If we believe the local union leaders' own account and, more important, believe that they did not just waste three months of their time trying to persuade workers who were for the most part already persuaded, a phenomenon of "preference change" seems to have occurred in the Modugno factory. Initially, most workers appeared to prefer overtime pay to job creation. Later, some workers altered their initial preference ordering and came to prefer job creation to the alternative option. Since, as argued above, unions could not impose compliance through coercive means, such preference change was brought about by the union leaders' persuasive arguments. Other elements in the Modugno story, however, lead us to infer (counterfactually) that the leaders' persuasive attempts could have very well been in vain had these leaders not been able to prove the sincerity of their intent.

According to Jürgen Habermas, people exchange arguments for either “communicative” or “strategic” purposes.<sup>56</sup> In other words, they can be genuinely convinced that what they propose is best for everybody (and be ready to change their mind in case better arguments are advanced) or they can have a hidden agenda and use arguments rhetorically to advance their own self-interests. For strategic manipulation to be possible at all, one has to assume that at least some people in a deliberative assembly are motivated by reasons and not just self-interest.<sup>57</sup> In fact, if everybody were motivated by pure self-interest (and this were common knowledge), people would simply refrain from using principled arguments since this would have no consequence for individual choices.

Although Habermas is not especially interested in exploring the empirical implications of his distinction between strategic and communicative action, it is entirely possible (and perhaps even probable) that in real as opposed to ideal debates people pursuing strategic goals might try to present themselves as animated by communicative intents to increase their persuasiveness.<sup>58</sup>

Habermas argues that a person engaging in communicative action implicitly declares himself or herself ready to redeem three validity claims: (1) a claim to the propositional truth of the argument, (2) a claim to its normative validity, and (3) a claim to the sincerity of communication. “Redeeming validity claims” means that the speaker is prepared to offer reasons in support of his or her claims in case he or she is asked to do so. If the hearer accepts the validity claims proposed (i.e., does not challenge them with counterarguments or requests of further clarifications), this means he or she has recognized the truth, rightness, and sincerity of those claims and is ready to be *motivated* by them, or, in other words, ready to coordinate his or her actions with those of the speaker.

The claim to sincerity of communication plays an ancillary role in Habermas’s theory of communicative action. Habermas seems to think that this claim is especially relevant in the realm of artistic expression.<sup>59</sup> This is probably a consequence of the fact that in building his theory, he assumes that people are motivated by communicative intents and then elaborates on the consequences of this assumption. However, in real as opposed to ideal communication, I surmise, the speaker’s claim to sincerity (“I really mean what I say”) is the fundamental validity claim that allows the hearer to distinguish between communicative and strategic intents.

In fact, in debates like the ones taking place in Modugno (and perhaps in most real-world debates), being able to redeem the first two types of validity claims does not necessarily imply being able to motivate others. The hearer still cannot tell whether the speaker has the hearer’s best interests at heart or is using knowledge and information selectively to deceit and manipulate him or her. Therefore, he or she might simply ignore the speaker’s speech acts as “cheap talk.”

The Modugno leaders used, as argued above, both pragmatic and ethical arguments. For example, they argued that it was in the workers’ best interests to vote in favor of the flexibility agreement because otherwise Fiat would stop investing in

the plant and sooner or later their own jobs would be at risk. Implicit in this pragmatic argument was a fairly complicated probabilistic model of what the company would do in case of rejection (and how other events would unfold in the future). Surely this argument could be critically appraised based on past experience and/or factual evidence (although I doubt that the controversy could be unambiguously resolved). However, workers with limited knowledge and also limited time to gather independent information might be unable to critically assess these claims. In other words, workers would have no clear way of finding out whether leaders were “making things up” or expressing probabilistically accurate forecasts they had better take into account. Lacking independent criteria of validation, they might just as well ignore the leaders’ claims.

The Modugno leaders also argued that voting in favor of the flexibility agreement was ethically appropriate because it created new job opportunities for several unemployed youth, including the workers’ own children. However, the choice to vote against the agreement also could be constructed as ethically appropriate (i.e., generalizable). For example, one could argue (and some workers did argue) that it reflected the need for workers to stand up to management’s requests and perhaps also the need to counter management’s attempt at pitting employed and unemployed against one another. I do not think there was a clear way of deciding which of these two arguments was more ethically appropriate.<sup>60</sup>

The litmus test for the Modugno union leaders was their claim to sincerity of communication, that is, that they did not pursue some hidden, self-interested agenda. In both Termoli and Modugno, rumors of corruption and malfeasance had spread quickly. In Termoli, union leaders were accused of having received bribes from Fiat to “ease” implementation of the new working-time schedule; in Modugno, union leaders were accused of having secretly negotiated with Fiat a pact that exchanged union complacency with the privileged hiring of the unionists’ relatives. Union leaders needed to redeem their claim to sincerity of communication for their pragmatic and ethical arguments to be effective at all. This type of claim, however, cannot be redeemed through argument only since every argument can be suspected of strategic misrepresentation.<sup>61</sup> It requires consistency between words and acts. The employees of Modugno explicitly asked for such “proofs of consistency.”

For example, many workers said publicly (i.e., in assembly) to the plant delegates: “We’ll see whether we’ll really see you here on Saturdays.” Due to special medical or family conditions, in fact, some employees can be exempted from the most physically taxing shifts. Thanks to their familiarity with management, plant delegates sometimes fake these conditions and obtain exemption. As a result of this public challenge, all of the union delegates in the Modugno plant, except those with serious problems, rotated on six days per week just like regular employees.<sup>62</sup> In another case, the union leaders themselves felt the need to send a



clear signal to the workers that they did not stand to gain anything from the proposed working-time rearrangement. Plant delegates of the FIOM-CGIL, the majoritarian union, set up a meeting and openly discussed the issue of hiring family members. With “death in their hearts,” since many of them had unemployed children, they decided that their family members would not submit their applications.<sup>63</sup>

On this issue of moral credibility, the local union leaderships of the Termoli and Modugno plants diverged considerably. In the course of my interviews with local union leaders and plant delegates in Termoli, I was surprised to find out that the reason they never organized worker assemblies was not, as I had originally hypothesized, that they secretly opposed the agreement for ideological or other reasons. Most of them, just like their colleagues in Modugno, had a clear intellectual grasp of the long-term consequences of refusing to sign the agreement. They knew that management would “write off” the plant as unreliable and stop investing in it.<sup>64</sup> With the exception of those affiliated to *Essere Sindacato* and CISNAL, all the others believed that working-time flexibility was tough but necessary. However, different from their Modugno colleagues, the Termoli unionists just did not know how to tell the workers since they lacked the moral credibility needed to validate their claim to sincerity of communication.

Local unions in Termoli were, as one of my interviewees self-critically put it, the “unions of petty favors.” Apparently, each unionist had a cohort of *clientes* behind him and perceived his role as one of intermediation between these individual workers and plant management. This was confirmed by one of the plant’s managers:

When a worker fails to reach his production target, the company “warns” him. In such situation a “normal” union delegate (for example, a union delegate in Turin) asks to verify workloads (maybe they are too tough), or the workers’ health conditions, or whether there have been jams. The delegate of Termoli ignores all of this and goes straight to the foreman or the HRM manager. He says: “Come on, turn a blind eye, I’ll talk with him. You’ll see, tomorrow I’ll have him make up for lost production.” He tries to reproduce in the factory a kind of familial management.<sup>65</sup>

Most of the Termoli delegates did not rotate on shifts. They should have, but thanks to management acquiescence, they had all come up with different justifications (medical conditions, family problems, etc.) and got exemptions. These people probably lacked the moral legitimation needed to demand sacrifices from the workers in the name of solidarity with the unemployed. The workers would have reacted by arguing that the only ones who actually did the sacrifices were the workers, while union leaders always managed to avoid them. This probably explains why the Termoli leaders refrained from organizing assemblies and simply asked workers to vote on the proposed agreements.

Had such assemblies been organized, it is unclear whether they would have had any persuasive effect. In fact, other evidence from the Italian labor movement suggests that sheer transmission of information often fails to alter workers' preferences unless the source of information is perceived as morally credible and can be trusted to "really mean what she says."<sup>66</sup> In May 1995, for example, the Italian workers were asked to vote on a proposed pension agreement (negotiated by the national union confederations and government).<sup>67</sup> Similar to the Modugno and Termoli agreements, this pension agreement involved short-term losses for workers because it reduced pension benefits and/or increased retirement age. At the same time, by improving the financial situation of the state pension fund, it also increased the likelihood that workers (and especially the future generations) would continue to receive a public pension in the future.

A slight majority of active workers in Italy (58 percent) approved the proposed reform through a secret-ballot referendum. Several industrial factories, however, particularly in the northwestern regions of the country, turned it down, sometimes by overwhelming proportions. In all factories the vote was preceded by worker assemblies in which confederal union leaders sought to persuade the workers to vote in favor of the agreement by using essentially the same combination of pragmatic and ethical arguments. In fact, they argued that pension reform was necessary because the state pension system was on the verge of financial collapse; that it was equitable because the previous system was too onerous for the younger generations; and that if the workers rejected the proposed agreement, government might in the future intervene unilaterally and impose measures that could be expected to be much less favorable for the workers than those the unions had presently managed to secure.<sup>68</sup>

Various confederal union leaders whom I interviewed, who personally conducted several pension assemblies, argued that their arguments often had no impact whatsoever on workers.<sup>69</sup> These did not change their deeply negative attitudes vis-à-vis pension reform and in the end voted against it. There were other cases, however, in which rank-and-file workers, even in large northern factories, appeared to be more responsive. These cases had little to do with the charisma and communication skills of particular national/regional leaders and more with whether plant representatives supported the persuasive effort of the national leaders, particularly by taking the floor in the public debates preceding the vote to defend the pension agreement. Similar to Modugno, the persuasive capacity of these local leaders appeared to be strictly linked to validation of the claim to sincerity of communication. In other words, when the rank-and-file workers knew that the local leaders were themselves negatively affected by the reform and yet supported it for principle-based reasons, workers were likely to be swayed.

Consider the cases of two large plants in Lombardy: Pirelli Bicocca (rubber cables) and Dalmine (steel).<sup>70</sup> These two plants had many features in common. During the 1980s, both went through radical, sometimes painful, pro-

cesses of industrial restructuring and downsizing. Local unions supported management's attempts at rationalization. As a result of hiring freezes in both plants, both workforces were "old" by industry standards, that is, more likely than other plants to experience the short-term negative consequences of pension reform—postponement of retirement age. Based on information reported by plant representatives in the two plants, the average age of workers was 47 to 48 in the Pirelli factory and 44 to 46 in the Dalmine factory. Many of these workers, who had begun working at the age of 14 or 15, feared that they would lose their jobs before they were able to retire.

Notwithstanding these similarities, 62 percent of 1,472 Pirelli workers approved the pension reform, while 72 percent of 1,858 Dalmine workers turned it down. Yet, confederal union leaders held assemblies in both plants. In these assemblies, they provided workers with virtually the same kind of information (reported above). The behavior of the local representatives made the difference. In both factories, several of these local leaders would have been forced to postpone their own retirement if the agreement had passed. While the Dalmine representatives did not openly endorse (nor openly oppose) the accord, their Pirelli colleagues actively supported the confederal leaders not only by defending the agreement in the general worker assemblies but also by engaging in department-specific assemblies and small-group discussions. Whereas the information transmitted by the national leaders was ignored by the Dalmine workers—after all, they could have other, self-interested reasons for seeking approval—the same information, endorsed by the Pirelli plant representatives (i.e., people who workers knew had nothing to gain from the agreement at issue, and often something to lose), appeared to influence the Pirelli workers. One of the Pirelli representatives had been forced to work two years longer due to the 1995 agreement. Yet, he argued, pension reform was necessary and could no longer be postponed. Also, since the reform was fairly gradual, the "sacrifices" imposed on workers were not unbearable, especially when compared with alternative reform schemes.

Even in Termoli, workers eventually altered their initial choice. Worker assemblies were finally organized. At the end of these, workers voted again and this time approved the working-time agreement. While it is possible that public debate caused this reversal, it is unclear whether this was the only factor at stake. The "affaire Termoli" created a great deal of embarrassment within Italy's major union confederations. These had just concluded a victorious battle against the government's attempt at cutting state pensions. In the course of this battle, they had mobilized millions of workers throughout the country and forced government to scrap its reform plans. Now, just a few days after this victory, these same unions found themselves under the fire of several opinion makers who put together the fight against pension reform and the Termoli workers' rejection of working-time reform and interpreted both episodes as two manifestations of the same conflict between "insiders" and "outsiders."

These criticisms induced the Secretaries General of the FIOM-CGIL, FIM-CISL, and UILM-UIL (the national metalworking unions) to deal personally with the Termoli agreement. They decided to go to Termoli, organize assemblies with the factory workers, and then ask the workers to vote again on the content of the agreement. The assemblies were held on 14 December 1994. The secretaries' main argument was that Fiat had a credible alternative investment plan and that the Termoli plant seriously risked long-term decline. The secretaries also told the workers that the unions would respect their final decision, whatever it turned out to be, so if the workers rejected once again, they would void the agreement. Before doing that, however, they wanted to make sure that the workers were fully aware of the consequences of their choices.<sup>71</sup>

Almost all of the Termoli employees participated in these assemblies. The national secretaries had the impression that the workers began to gradually change their minds. New assemblies were called for 16 December 1994. These were followed by a show of hands on a slightly revised version of the working-time agreement. This time, far fewer workers participated in the vote. The result was 1,489 votes in favor (97 percent of the voters, 54 percent of the workforce), 27 against, and 12 abstentions. While it is possible that the 617 additional "yes" voters were solely persuaded by debate, it is also possible that other factors played a role. In fact, because so much was at stake for both the plant and their own future, middle managers (i.e., supervisors and white-collar workers), who generally did not get involved in union affairs, participated in the assemblies and exercised their right to vote. Since non-blue-collar employees only represented a total 11 percent of the workforce in Termoli, the vote of these workers did not determine the final outcome. The presence of these employees in the assemblies and at the show of hands could, however, influence the vote (as well as the debate) in other ways.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has contrasted "aggregative" and "deliberative" decision-making procedures within trade unions. The employees of two auto plants in southern Italy, Termoli and Modugno, were faced with a similar trade-off between job creation and overtime pay. While the Modugno employees opted for job creation, their colleagues at Termoli (at least initially) preferred short-term pay increases. The article has argued that different decision-making processes explain the difference in outcome between the two plants. In Termoli, the employees simply voted on the two alternatives; in Modugno, the vote was preceded by extensive debate and discussion.

The empirical evidence presented in this article appears to confirm various insights in the literature on deliberative democracy. Preferences appeared to be malleable to persuasive arguments. In both plants, there was initially considerable resistance to the proposed collective agreement. In Modugno, however (differently from Termoli), the preferences of some workers were changed by discus-

sion. Although we do not know exactly through what mechanisms discussion affected preferences, we can hypothesize that it contributed to overcome various problems related to incomplete/imperfect information and/or bounded rationality. Perhaps discussion also changed the “self” to whom interests inhaled and from whose perspective issues were considered—from atomistic self to parent to member of a community.

At the same time, this article has shown that the effects of public discourse on preferences are far from being automatic. Particularly when a potential conflict of interests between speakers and hearers is present or can be suspected, arguments may simply be ignored and have no impact whatsoever on preferences. For pragmatic and ethical arguments to be informative at all, speakers need to pass a preliminary “consistency test” and provide evidence that they do not use arguments in a purely rhetorical fashion to “dupe” the audience but “really mean what they say.” This test involves not only consistency between past and present words but also, and more important, between words and actions. If speakers are able to provide such evidence, they stand a good chance of being able to change the hearers’ preferences, as the example of union leaders in the Modugno assemblies shows.

It may be objected that the decision-making process described in this article does not fully correspond to the normative ideal of deliberation. While participants in deliberative assemblies (as they are depicted by normative political theory) actively engage in discussion and criticism, the Modugno workers were for the most part passive recipients of arguments.<sup>72</sup> This objection has some validity. However, it is important to point out, with Jon Elster, that the model of all deliberative assemblies, the Athenian *agorá*, was not very different:

The assembly typically included several thousand citizens. In assemblies of this size, “deliberation” can at best mean discussion among a small number of speakers before an audience rather than discussion among all members of the assembly. The speakers, typically, try to persuade the audience rather than each other.<sup>73</sup>

Another risk inherent in Modugno-like decision-making processes is “ideological domination,” that is, that some people may use their authority or superior technical knowledge to induce others to entertain beliefs that are not in their best interests.<sup>74</sup> While acknowledging this risk, both the Modugno case and the pension assemblies show that even poorly educated blue-collar workers are not easily “duped” and can, on the contrary, be quite exigent in terms of moral credibility before they allow others to influence their choices.

Some people might wonder why decision-making procedures matter at all if, at the end of the day, working-time regimes were altered in both the Modugno and Termoli factories and structured in both cases according to managerial preferences. The difference, I would argue, is that while the Modugno workers ultimately perceived the decision to change to have been their own—though yet carefully pondered—the Termoli workers had the impression of having been

arm-twisted into something they would not voluntarily subscribe to. This had important consequences particularly for unions. The Modugno unions had no trouble with their constituents. They even began recruiting new members among the new hires. Also, workers grew to appreciate having a day off in the middle of the week.<sup>75</sup> The Termoli unions, instead, were hit by a major crisis of representation. Unionization suddenly fell from 40 to 32 percent in the few days following the events of December 1994, with several workers spectacularly tearing up their membership cards in front of plant leaders. The FIOM-CGIL was the organization that lost the most: 21 percent of membership. Even CISNAL lost 5 percent of its members.<sup>76</sup> In 1997, when plant representatives were renewed, the COBAS (a new union that had been formed to contest the working-time agreement) became the most representative union.

The findings of this article seem to apply not just to unions and their internal structures but to interest representation in general. One of the key problems in the literature on interest representation is, in fact, the tendency of groups to pursue "private gains" at the expense of the "common good" (and national treasury).<sup>77</sup> A famous solution to the "mischiefs of faction" problem<sup>78</sup> is that of Rousseau. To protect the general will from the seductions of private wills, Rousseau proposed that all forms of pre-political, spontaneous associations among citizens be eliminated. In case this was impossible, he proposed a typically pluralistic solution, namely, multiplication and equalization of associations so that differences of interest "cancel each other out and what remains as the sum of the differences is the general will."<sup>79</sup>

From a pragmatic point of view, elimination of secondary associations, even if it were possible, may do more harm than good. In fact, participation in nongovernmental associations helps develop a host of skills (e.g., competence, confidence, sense of efficacy) that, in turn, favor responsible and effective participation in political institutions as well.<sup>80</sup> Multiplication and equalization of secondary associations also may be undesirable. In fact, as the literature on neo-corporatism has shown, in countries characterized by "pluralistic" systems of interest representation, a myriad of craft- or company-based labor organizations escalate their wage demands and spark inflationary spirals.<sup>81</sup> European neo-corporatist theorists (together with American industrial relations scholars) have produced a distinct approach to the potential conflict between "group" interests and "general" interests.<sup>82</sup> This sort of conflict arises every time the collective decisions of group members have, like in Termoli and Modugno, important consequences for third parties that are not represented in the internal decision-making process. These theorists proposed to limit the democratic process within these groups and concentrate the decision-making power in the hands of a few, "responsible" leaders.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast with these views, this article has shown that democratic decision-making procedures are not only compatible with but might even be conducive to group internalization of third party interests—even in cases like Termoli and Modugno, in which group members seem to initially have systematically more “extreme” preferences than their leaders. Perhaps the cure to the ills of democracy is not less but *more* democracy, intended not just as voting but as public discussion about alternative courses of action, not just *within* but also *across* associations.<sup>84</sup> In some cases, like Modugno, deliberation within associations is sufficient for the organization to internalize the legitimate interests of outsiders. In fact, union leaders in Modugno effectively voiced the interests of the unemployed. In other cases, however, deliberation within associations may not be enough. Participants in the deliberative process may lack the skills, the moral credibility (like at Termoli), or simply the desire to be attentive to the legitimate interests and rights of third parties. In similar circumstances, deliberation across associations may be helpful. We do not know what the choice of the Termoli workers could have been had they engaged in public discussion with representatives of the unemployed and the students prior to the first vote. They could have voted differently. Even one voice can produce significant results in a deliberative assembly. The cure to “partial societies” can perhaps be found in expanding, rather than restricting, the democratic process within secondary associations so that representatives of other affected parties have a chance to participate and voice their views in the internal debate.

## NOTES

1. In this article, the terms “deliberation” and “deliberative” are used more loosely than in most normative literature—where they generally designate discourse and discussion taking place in a strictly public setting (see, e.g., Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” in Alan Hamlin and Philip Pettit, eds., *The Good Polity* [Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989], 17-34). In the two plants examined here it is not clear whether all discourse was public (see *infra*). Yet, public discourse (i.e., in union assemblies) seemed to play an important role. For an analysis of the consequences of discussion (either private or public) prior to voting, see James Fearon, “Deliberation as Discussion,” in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 44-68.

2. See Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy”; Joshua Cohen, “Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy,” in Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 95-119; Joshua Cohen, “Democracy and Liberty,” in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 185-231; James Bohman, *Public Deliberation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1996); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1996).

3. See Jack M. Bilmes, “The Evolution of Decisions in a Thai Village: A Quasi-Experimental Study,” *Human Organization* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 169-78; Rebecca Abers, “Learning Democratic Practice: Distributing Government Resources through Popular Participation in Porto Alegre, Brazil,” in Michael Douglass and John Friedmann, eds.,

*Cities for Citizens: Planning and the Rise of Civil Society in a Global Age* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1996), 39-65; Rebecca Abers, "From Clientelism to Cooperation: Local Government, Participatory Policy, and Civic Organizing in Porto Alegre, Brazil," *Politics & Society* 26, no. 4 (December 1998): 511-37; Archon Fung, "Street Level Democracy: A Theory of Popular Pragmatic Deliberation and Its Practice in Chicago School Governance and Community Policing, 1988-97" (Ph.D. diss., MIT, Department of Political Science, 1998); and Charles Sabel, Archon Fung, and Bradley Karkkainen, "After the Backyard Revolution: Toward a Performance-Based Regime of Environmental Regulation" (Paper presented at the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences, Atlanta, Georgia, 2-5 September 1999).

4. Jane Mansbridge, "A Deliberative Theory of Interest Representation," in Mark Petracca, ed., *The Politics of Interests* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992); Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, "Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance," *Politics & Society* 20, no. 4 (December 1992): 393-472.

5. In addition to the literature cited above, see also Thomas Risse, "International Norms and Domestic Change: Arguing and Communicative Behavior in the Human Rights Area," *Politics & Society* 27, no. 4 (December 1999): 529-99; Thomas Risse, "'Let's Argue!' Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1-39.

6. See Fearon, "Deliberation as Discussion."

7. See Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," in Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995): 43-115; Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*; Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy."

8. See Joseph Farrell and Matthew Rabin, "Cheap Talk," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 103-18. For a discussion of the complementarity between the theory of communicative action and the theory of "cheap talk" games, see James Johnson, "Is Talk Really Cheap? Prompting Conversation between Critical Theory and Rational Choice," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1 (March 1993): 74-86.

9. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon, 1984), especially pp. 273-337.

10. Unless otherwise indicated, the information reported in this article is based on forty-five field interviews with a total of seventy among unionists, managers, and rank-and-file workers. The interviews were conducted between October 1996 and June 1997. To protect confidentiality of my sources (especially when I consider the information to be of delicate nature), I often avoid attributing specific statements to precise sources and use more generic identifiers like "plant representative," "union leader," etc. The list of interviewees is available from the author on request.

11. See James Womack et al., *The Machine that Changed the World* (New York: Rawson Associates, 1990).

12. In August 1994, exports grew 131.05 percent compared with the same month of the previous year. (Data reported in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 1994.)

13. In Termoli, the unions requested a reduction of working time from forty to thirty-five hours per week. In Modugno, the unions proposed an alternative organization of shifts (the so-called "six-by-six") based on thirty-six hours per week.

14. In Termoli, management agreed to pay a lump-sum bonus of 500,000 lira; in Modugno, management agreed to a special allowance of 37,500 lira for each Saturday worked. The Fiat-wide collective bargaining agreement of 1996 introduced an allowance of 24,000 lira for the Termoli workers as well.



15. See the collective agreement between Fiat Auto and FIM, FIOM, and UILM dated 25 November 1994 and the collective agreement between Magneti Marelli and FIM, FIOM, and UILM dated 15 November 1994.

16. See ISTAT, *Settimo Censimento Generale dell'Industria e dei Servizi* (Rome: ISTAT, 1992): Table 6, pp. 102, 110.

17. See *L'Unita'*, 4 December 1994.

18. See *La Repubblica*, 4 December 1994.

19. See *Il Tempo/Molise*, 13 December 1994.

20. See *L'Unita'*, 4 December 1994.

21. See *Il Tempo/Molise*, 4 December 1994.

22. *La Stampa*, 5 December 1995.

23. Interview with Paolo Gasca, IR manager of Fiat Auto (Turin: 3 December 1996).

24. The comparison between the Termoli and Modugno plants was based on John Stuart Mill's "method of difference." (John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946], book 3, chap. 8.) In other words, the two Fiat plants of Termoli and Modugno were selected for in-depth field research from a larger pool of cases of both agreement and nonagreement because they appeared to maximize the number of circumstances in common (e.g., same ownership and management, similar products, technologies, and composition of the workforce) while presenting a stark difference in outcomes. Also, the location of both plants in southern Italy—an area that has often been depicted as one of the most unlikely places for long-term oriented and/or other-regarding behavior—appeared to endow the study with the methodological advantage of "least likely cases": If you can prove that your independent variable worked there, you have some reason to believe that it may work elsewhere, too. (See Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 1 [Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975].) The pool of cases of agreement and nonagreement was based on Aris Accornero and Patrizio Di Nicola, "La flessibilita' e l'orario," in Gianpaolo Galli, ed., *La mobilita' della societa' italiana: le persone, le imprese, le istituzioni*, vol. 1 (Rome: Sipì, 1996), and on interviews with union leaders at the national level as well as review of various national newspapers.

25. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Radicalism or Reformism: The Sources of Working-Class Politics," *American Political Science Review* 77, no. 1 (March 1983): 1-18.

26. With reference to the Italian case, see Miriam Golden, *Labor Divided: Austerity and Working-Class Politics in Contemporary Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

27. Interviews with Susanna Camusso, National Secretary of the FIOM-CGIL (Rome: 10 October 1996); Pier Paolo Baretta, National Secretary of the FIM-CISL (Rome: 11 October 1996); and Roberto Di Maulo, National Secretary of the UILM-UIL (Rome: 21 October 1996).

28. Interview with Roberto Biglieri, IR/HR manager of Magneti Marelli (Milan: 5 December 1996).

29. FAILM-CISAL played a peripheral role in the Termoli story. *Failm* was established after an internal split within the FIM-CISL. The person who founded *Failm* had previously been one of the leaders of the local FIM. He was accused of "improper" use of union funds and expelled. In retaliation, this person established his own, competitive organization.

30. Interview with Claudio Sabattini, General Secretary of the FIOM-CGIL (Rome: 11 April 1997).

31. Both CISNAL and MSI have recently changed their names into UGL and AN, respectively.

32. This episode spurred a criminal trial for slander promoted by the FIOM against the CISNAL.

33. Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Chicago: Free Press, 1958).

34. Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

35. Electoral behavior is also very similar in these two areas. Both have for a long time been "white" (i.e., Christian Democratic) strongholds. Between 1946 and 1989, the Christian Democratic Party obtained an average of 52 percent of the votes in lower-chamber elections in the Campobasso-Isernia electoral district and 40 percent in the Bari-Foggia electoral district. See Istat, *45 anni di elezioni in Italia* (Rome: Istat, 1990): Table 1.4.

36. See the agreement between Magneti Marelli Modugno and FIM, FIOM, and UILM, dated 4 May 1994.

37. A game theorist would probably model the individual worker's decision to accept or reject the agreement as a two-stage game with incomplete information. In this game, the worker moves first and decides whether to accept or reject the agreement. In the second stage, the firm sees the worker's choice and responds by investing in the plant or moving the investment elsewhere. When the worker moves, he or she does not know whether the firm is "move-prone" (i.e., prefers a state of the world in which the worker rejects and the firm moves elsewhere to a state of the world in which the worker rejects and the firm invests anyway) or "move-averse" (i.e., vice versa). This model, here expressed verbally, predicts approval if two conditions hold. First, the worker has relatively "enlightened" preferences in the sense that his or her preference ranking is (at least) as follows: (1) a state of the world in which he or she rejects and the company still invests in the plant is his or her first choice; (2) a state of the world in which he or she accepts and the firm invests is his or her second choice; and (3) a state of the world in which he or she rejects and the firm moves the investment elsewhere is his or her third choice. Second, the probability that the firm is "move-prone" is high enough (i.e., higher than an algebraically determined threshold formula). If not, the worker will reject the agreement. For more on this class of games, see Robert Gibbons, *Game Theory for Applied Economists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992): chap. 4. See Miriam Golden, *Heroic Defeats: The Politics of Job Loss* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially chap. 2, for an application to labor union politics.

38. Interview with Paolo Gasca, IR Manager; interview with Mr. Ronchi, HRM Manager, Fiat Termoli (Termoli: 11 December 1996).

39. Interview with a local union leader, Termoli.

40. Interview with Giuseppe Ritondale, HR/IR Manager, Magneti Marelli Modugno (Modugno: 30 October 1996).

41. "Teksid: la piattaforma e' pronta. E da domani parte il negoziato," *L'Unita'*, 18 December 1994.

42. See, for example, Lee C. Fennell, "Reasons for Roll Calls: An Exploratory Analysis with Argentine Data," *American Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 2 (May 1974): 395-403.

43. There were 725 favorable votes (58.1 percent), 504 unfavorable votes (40.3 percent), and 19 blanks (1.6 percent); 1,248 employees (97 percent of the entire workforce) participated in the vote. See *L'Unita'*, 26 January 1995.

44. See Lucio Baccaro, "Centralized Collective Bargaining and the Problem of 'Compliance': Lessons from the Italian Experience," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 53, no. 4 (July 2000): 579-601.

45. I thank Dino Greco, of the Brescia Labor Chamber, for making these data available to me.

46. Average plant size was 98 employees; the range was 6 to 3,534 employees.

47. A simple ANOVA does not allow us to reject the null hypothesis that these two means are equal ( $F_{1, 420} = 1.02622, p = .31162$ ).

48. Excerpts from the leaflet are reported in *La Repubblica*, 5 December 1994.

49. The obvious example was the fall of 1980, when union resistance to reorganization was swept away by management after a 35-day strike (see Richard Locke, *Remaking the Italian Economy* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995], chap. 4). There were, however, more recent examples as well: the Arese plant near Milan (which Fiat had bought from Alfa Romeo in 1986) had been de facto let die because the local unions had sought to meddle with company reorganization. (Interview with Marco Marras, FIOM Lombardia, Sesto S. Giovanni, 3 June 1997).

50. In fact, these numerically controlled machines had tolerances in the order of 1/1000 of a millimeter; that is, at least 10 times lower than the tolerances of previous, diesel-related machines. Moreover, they required employees with the capacity to read mechanical design, maintenance skills, and familiarity with statistical process control techniques—skills difficult to acquire for senior workers often with only elementary school diplomas. (Interview with Giuseppe Ritondale, HR/IR manager.)

51. Interviews with Modugno union representatives.

52. For more on this distinction, see Jürgen Habermas, “On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments of Practical Reason,” in Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1993): 1-17.

53. This resonates with one of the central themes in the literature on “deliberative democracy.” One of the implicit rules regulating a public deliberation is that no one is allowed to argue in the name of self-interest only. No one can credibly say: “I don’t want this collective choice to be pursued because it’s against my personal interests.” Everybody has to back his or her stance with reference to principles and/or generalizable interests. Theorists of deliberation argue that this rule of argumentation contributes to “filter out” the more idiosyncratic positions that cannot be justified or made acceptable to others in the course of a public discussion. (See Jon Elster, “Argumenter et négociier dans deux Assemblées constituantes,” *Revue Française de Science Politique* 44, no. 2 [April 1994]; Jon Elster, “Strategic Uses of Argument,” in Kenneth J. Arrow et al., eds., *Barriers to Dispute Resolution* [New York: Norton & Company, 1995]: 236-57; and Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*.)

54. Interviews with union leaders and plant representatives.

55. See *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 7 December 1994.

56. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Elster, “Argumenter et négociier” and “Strategic Uses of Argument.”

59. See, for example, Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, pp. 85-6.

60. The Modugno workers’ preference change is compatible both with communication leading to more informed rational choice (perhaps maximizing the joint utility of the family as opposed to single individuals)—in which case the pragmatic argument would be the most effective—and with an anthropological shift from “self-centered” to “ethical” choice—in which case the “ethical” argument would be the most effective. The workers’ request that their own children be privileged in the hiring process is clearly incompatible with a strictly “moral” choice, that is, the choice that a representative of humanity as a

whole would make, but could still be compatible with an “ethical” (*sittlich*) choice, that is, the choice that all southern Italian fathers in similar circumstances would make. Underlining this choice would be the ethical norm that all parents need to give up something to benefit their offspring (but not others) in times of duress. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive. It is possible, in fact, that different workers were persuaded by different reasons. One of the local leaders argued that the combination of (pragmatic and ethical) arguments was very important (interview with a local union leader). On the difference between “morality” and “ethicality” (*Sittlichkeit*), contrast Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

61. “The sincerity of expressions cannot be grounded but only shown; insincerity can be revealed by the lack of consistency between an utterance and the past or future actions internally connected with it” (Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*), 41.

62. Interview with a plant representative.

63. Interview with a plant representative.

64. Interviews with union leaders and plant representatives.

65. Interview with a plant Industrial Relations manager, Fiat Termoli.

66. Both game theory and social psychology, not just the theory of communicative action, emphasize the importance of credibility in communication. According to game theory, signals must generally be costly to be informative (see the seminal article by Michael Spence, “Job Market Signaling,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 87, no. 3 [August 1973]: 355-74). However, even noncostly (i.e., “cheap talk”) signals like verbal utterances can, in certain circumstances, be informative. For this to happen, the preferences of the sender (who has private information and tries to communicate it) and those of the receiver (who selects an action from a feasible set after listening to the message) do not have to be too discordant. In other words, the structure of pay-offs has to be such that sender and receiver must to a large extent want the same thing so that the sender does not have too big an incentive to misrepresent his or her private information—in which case the receiver will ignore his or her message. (See Vincent P. Crawford and Joel Sobel, “Strategic Information Transmission,” *Econometrica* 50: 1431-51; see also Gerry Mackie, “All Men Are Liars: Is Democracy Meaningless?” in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998]: 69-96.) As to social psychology, both scholars and practitioners of marketing have long known that to be persuasive, the semantic content of a message has to be complemented by a source that is perceived as credible either because of its particular qualities (e.g., technical knowledge, authority) or because it can be perceived as arguing against its own self-interests (see Carl I. Hovland et al., *Communication and Persuasion* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953]; Germaine de Montmollin, “Le changement d’attitude,” in Serge Moscovici, ed., *Psychologie Sociale* [Paris: PUF, 1984]). Interestingly enough, the persuasive effect of a highly credible source (compared with a source of moderate credibility) appears to be stronger when (like in the case of Modugno) the receivers have initially negative attitudes about the matter at issue than when they have initially positive attitudes (see Brian Sternthal et al., “The Persuasive Effect of Source Credibility: Tests of Cognitive Response,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 4 [March 1978]: 252-60; see also Robert R. Harmon and Kenneth A. Coney, “The Persuasive Effects of Source Credibility in Buy and Lease Situations,” *Journal of Marketing Research* 19 [May 1982]: 255-60. I thank Detelina Marinova for directing my attention to this literature).

67. For more on this, see Lucio Baccaro, “Negotiating Pension Reform with the Unions: The Italian Experience in European Perspective” (Paper presented at the 12th International Conference of Europeanists, Chicago, 30 March-2 April 2000).

68. See Baccaro, "Negotiating Pension Reform with the Unions."

69. See, for example, the interviews with Mario Agostinelli, Secretary General of the CGIL Lombardy (Milan: 6 December 1996); Edoardo Bano, Labor Chamber of Bergamo (Bergamo: 5 June 1997); and Enrico Zanzottera, Regional Secretary of the FILTEA-CGIL (Milan: 6 June 1997).

70. This is based on interviews with two plant representatives of Pirelli Bicocca and seven plant representatives of Dalmine.

71. This is based on interviews with Claudio Sabattini, Secretary General of the FIOM-CGIL; Gianni Italia, Secretary General of the FIM-CISL (Rome: 24 April 1997); and Luigi Angeletti, Secretary General of the UILM-UIL (Rome: 23 April 1997).

72. See, for example, the discussion in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1989), chaps. 5, 6.

73. See Elster, "Introduction," in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

74. See Adam Przeworski, "Deliberation and Ideological Domination," in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140-60.

75. For example, this helped them when they had to deal with the public administration (interviews with local union representatives).

76. These data were kindly provided by Roberto Di Maulo, National Secretary of the UILM-UIL.

77. See Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1969); and James M. Buchanan, "Rent Seeking and Profit Seeking," in James M. Buchanan et al., eds., *Towards a Theory of the Rent-Seeking Society* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980).

78. For a classic statement of the problem of "mischief of faction," see James Madison, "Federalist Paper No. 10," in *The Federalist* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1907), 51-60.

79. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract," in *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett), bk. 2, chap. 3, 156.

80. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969); Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1965).

81. See Colin Crouch, "Conditions for Trade Union Wage Restraint," in Leon N. Lindberg and Charles S. Maier, eds., *The Politics of Inflation and Economic Stagnation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985); Ezio Tarantelli, *Economia Politica del Lavoro* (Turin: Utet, 1986); and Wolfgang Streeck, "Staat und Verbände: Neue Fragen. Neue Antworten?" *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, Yearly Monograph 25 (1994).

82. For more on this, see Lucio Baccaro, "Union Democracy Revisited: Decision-Making Procedures in the Italian Labor Movement," in *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 22 (May 2001): 183-210.

83. See, for example, Philippe Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" in Philippe Schmitter and Gerhart Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends towards Corporatist Intermediation* (London: Sage, 1979): 7-49; Joel D. Wolfe, "Corporatism and Union Democracy: The British Miners and Incomes Policies, 1973-74," *Comparative Politics* 17, no. 4 (July 1985); and Wolfgang Streeck, "Editorial Introduction to Special Issue on Organizational Democracy in Trade Unions," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 9, no. 3 (August 1988).

84. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, "Solidarity, Democracy, Association," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, Yearly Monograph 25 (1994): 136-59.