

THE MILAN OF "IL SOLE"

Salvatore Carrubba

*la***Rinascence**
[prima della Rinascence]

1865 - 1915

The Milan of 1865 can be seen as capable of an initiative that still had few precedents in Europe, that is the birth of a financial newspaper: 'Il Sole' which started up on 1st August 1865. Evidently in those days Milan was not wholly snoozing in August. To underline the importance of the innovative Milanese project, one need only recall that the London 'Financial Times' would be established nearly 20 years late and that in France only specialized

journals covering a particular sector of finance or industry were in circulation; while in Germany the 'Frankfurter Geschäftsbericht', on which the Milanese daily partly modelled itself, had been published for nearly 10 years. The header itself, for a paper being published in the mist and fog, did not represent meteorological wishful thinking but the scholarly reference to a verse by Petronio: *Sol omnibus lucet*. The mis-

sion of the new daily was to make the illumination derived from the knowledge of financial matters available to all. This was explained in the paper itself, only a few days after its foundation, when a collaborator from Paris, Don Marzio wrote: "'Il Sole' is a paper that must illuminate and cast its warming rays on liberty. It is for this reason that it has as part of the header the old French proverb: 'Le soleil luit pour tout le mond' to indicate that in a modern society there are advantages that every individual

has the right to draw on".

The insistent references to illumination and progress were not at all casual in a city that at that time was firmly on the path to industrialisation and widespread innovation and the French Consul especially appreciated the attention given by the city to street lighting and noted: "Milano ne laisse rien à désirer. Il peut rivaliser avec (les) plus grandes capitales".

This detailed attention would culminate in the Industrial Exhibition of 1881 followed by the International Exhibition in 1906 through which Milan claimed the role as the driving force behind both industrial and social innovation at a national level. The scheme also led to the opening, in 1884, of the first power station in via Santa Radegonda only a few feet away from the *Magazzini Bocconi*, which were founded in 1865

and represented another huge innovative force in the commercial sector.

The paper 'Il Sole' was started by a group of silk entrepreneurs gathered around Gaetano Semenza and the publisher Francesco Vallardi. They all had, right from the start, the very modern and Milanese awareness that economics and politics could not go their separate ways: "Il Sole" would be instrumental in "uniting in a daily publication the development affairs and the news regarding



"Il Sole" political and commercial newspaper, 1866

both political and social matters as well as issues concerning tangible assets mainly producers in the field of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry” (anonymous). That was not all: right from the beginning the new daily paper took a particular interest in cultural events to confirm how wide and articulated a vision the paper had of the society it was operating in.

The paper embraced a decisively liberal line; its purpose was “to speak out loudly against every shameful monopoly, and by encouraging extensive discussion, hurry along those reforms that progress inevitably leads to: Freedom of the Banks – Abolition of customs duties and excise duties levied by cities [*dazi murati*] – free cultivation of tobacco. These are the principles that we ardently and purposefully write on our flags”. The radicalism of the paper (that gradually faded in the following years) was immediately expressed by supporting, amongst others, the candidature of Carlo Cattaneo for the political elections of 1867. His election (which in fact was not accepted by the candidate himself) prompted the newspaper to lead with a heading that was practically an authentic manifesto: “Viva Milano!” Even in this way, ‘Il Sole’ clearly stood out from the majority of the Milanese press, which tended to follow a rather more moderate line that was ex-



Milanese building, beginning XX Century

pressed in particular by ‘La Perseveranza’. The new daily paper, however, firmly established itself within a process meant to really strengthen the communication system in Milan, a system by far the most influential in Italy with over twenty-four thousand copies sold in 1865 of the papers mentioned as well as by ‘La Gazzetta di Milano’, ‘Il Pungolo’, ‘La Lombardia’. Confirming this vibrancy, shortly after the founding of the financial daily, the two papers that would go on to decisively and radically modify the

Milanese news media were set up: ‘Il Secolo’ (1866) and ‘Corriere della Sera’ (1876). Another trait of ‘Il Sole’ which would make it so typically the voice of Milan was to uphold the social worth of the middle-class businessmen, “the lower and middle classes, industrious and enlightened bourgeoisie [that] is in no way inferior to the English or French middle class and is full

of life, fire and initiative”, as was written 30 years after the foundation.

The founding of a financial daily, therefore, did not represent an isolated phenomenon, but took place within a process of profound innovation of the economic, social and political models in a Milan that was on the verge of taking the path that was soon to make it in the place that in words of Giovanni Verga was “la città più città d’Italia” [the ‘citiest’ city in Italy].