Alessandro Rossi e le origini dell'Italia industriale. By Lucio Avagliano. Naples: Libreria Scientifica Editrice, 1970. Pp. 554. L. 6000.

This is a difficult book to categorize. The protagonist is the nineteenth century Italian industrialist and senator Alessandro Rossi, but this is not a business biography. And while many of the major problems of political economy in post-risorgimento Italy come under Lucio Avagliano's scrutiny, the book is no general economic history either. The issues of protectionism, the growth of workers' organization, and the political tensions created by early modernization all receive attention, but only to the extent that Rossi is attentive to them in his discussions with other leaders. What then can we call this book? It is a diffuse, rather unsystematic look at the political economy of early industrialization in Italy as reflected in the career and writings of an influential participant. The approach has its merits, but as economic history it is less than satisfying.

Alessandro Rossi is certainly a worthy subject: a fuller description of his entrepreneurial life and the fortunes of his firm would have been welcome. He was, at the outset, an Italian version of the English species "Enlightened Proprietor," brought up on a diet of Adam Smith, Robert Owen, and the Manchesterians. Rossi built schools, nurseries, a mutual aid society, and a new workers' quarter at the site of his Veneto textile factory to keep his employees loyal and contented, and under his direction the Rossi enterprise grew to the point where is employed five thousand and produced twenty million lire worth of woolens annually.

Regrettably, Avagliano offers only a scant sixty pages on the Lanificio Rossi and its proprietor. The balance of the book deals largely with the politics of early Italian modernization. On social issues, unionization, and the growth of the political left, Rossi's posture as an author and senator is almost entirely predictable. A paternalist with an avowed horror of emerging socialism, he argues for Italian modernism based upon English and American models. Most comfortable in the conservative political atmosphere of Crispi's ministry, Rossi's prose assumes a nationalistic tone which Avagliano finds reminiscent of fascist doctrinal writing thirty years later.

Avagliano's best chapter examines the variety of agricultural, commercial, and industrial interests that came to form a swelling protectionist tide in the late 1870's and 1880's. Dissatisfied with the view of the tariff war with France that presupposes unity of interests in the protectionist camp, Avagliano demonstrates that, except for a few months, no bloc of northern industrialists and southern latifondisti was ever operative as political influence. A temporary alliance of such interests arose with the advent of Crispi to power in 1887 but it dissolved well before the retreat from Protectionist extremes in 1890. Agrarian interests lobbied on but the industrialists, with Rossi at the forefront, were diffident and untrusting of the oligarchy of land and banking interests who
ultimately represented an obstacle to Italy’s continued modernization and industrial well-being.

There is much of interest for the economic history of modern Italy in this book. The difficulty is faulty organization. Conclusions do not present themselves readily to the reader; they must be mined out of long quotations from parliamentary debates and epistolary sources. In keeping with this style, 170 pages of Alessandro Rossi’s correspondence have been appended to the text of the book. Only the singularly devoted admirers of the pensiero of Alessandro Rossi need approach them.

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Alienation of Church Wealth in Mexico: Social and Economic Aspects of the Liberal Revolution, 1856-1875 by Jan Bazant, Michael P. Costeloe (ed. and tr.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971. Pp. 286. $17.50.

This is a study of the disposition of Catholic Church wealth as capital and property during the nineteenth century in Mexico. The author has explored in considerable detail, “local archival materials” relating to the manner in which hacendados and capitalists of various enterprises in such places as the Federal District, Puebla, Veracruz, Jolisco and San Luis Potosi purchased church real estate.

From 1857 to 1867 the proper disposition of church wealth was a major factor in the civil war between the traditional forces of colonial Spain and the Liberal Party led by Benito Juarez. Specifically, the latter group hoped to create a large middle class and at the same time enrich the national government with church revenue. This fine treatise reveals through its extensive use of statistics—sales records—that those who purchased church lands had in fact already acquired considerable wealth, thereby limiting the chances for the creation of a larger, more broad based bourgeoisie.

The author concludes that, by 1875, enlarged private fortunes remained immobilized in real estate. Regrettably, the Liberal Government’s effort to change the spectrum of Mexico’s economy was hampered by a bitterly contested civil war and the French intervention in the 1860’s. Domestic strife and foreign invasion really crippled Mexico’s chances for enlarging her landowning class, mainly because various administrations eagerly sought buyers for confiscated church lands at any price in order to meet wartime expenses. The church’s vast property was never actually nationalized but was quickly deposited into the hands of the “already rich,” thereby setting the stage for “economic development” in the Diaz era.

The author relates in a somewhat dry, yet revealing account the plight of the Catholic Church—namely a desirable prey for both Liberal and Conservative forces. Investors and new professionals aspired to become landowners and hacendados were eager to redeem their debts to the church at favorable rates if ecclesiastical lands were confiscated.

Professor Bazant carefully and clearly divides this most complex period (1856-