

BUSINESS REPRESENTATION

Represented by whom?

Why I left Confindustria Vicenza, and what we really pay for with our membership fee.

OPEN LETTER

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On 18 September I sent Orange1 Electric Motors' notice of withdrawal from Confindustria Vicenza. One certified email, a few lines, written in the evening. It was not a fit of anger: it is a decision that matured over time, and I feel a duty to explain it. Not out of controversy, but because I believe it concerns many fellow entrepreneurs who ask themselves the same questions without saying them out loud.

I begin with a simple premise. We entrepreneurs, by the very nature of our role, decide. We take positions, we create, we fight. Every day we choose where to invest, whom to hire, which risk to take, and if we get it wrong, we pay. Ours is a trade that is entirely about doing. And that is exactly why I expect the same from those who represent us: concrete support, made of real actions and not of words.

An association of industrialists should be a place where companies' needs become proposals, proposals become pressure, and pressure becomes results. What I see today is something else. It has become a place for meetings, debate, politics.

The second point is a direct consequence of the first. At meetings, slogans are never in short supply. Competitiveness, sustainability, supply chain, young people, energy: the right words, which I share and which we have heard repeated for years. What is missing are the concrete actions that should follow them. And when an action does exist, it is rarely reported to members clearly: what we asked for, from whom, what we obtained, what we did not obtain and why. A company that reported to its shareholders in this way

would not last a financial year. We account every year to banks, customers, employees and the local community. It seems legitimate to me to ask the same of those who collect our fee to represent us.

A question then arises naturally, one that every entrepreneur should ask when renewing membership: what does being in the association actually bring today? What added value does it really give us? On the website the services are carefully listed: tax, labour and social security, environment,



safety, credit, foreign trade, incentives, European funding, relations with schools. But how many of us really know them? How many times has the association reached out to propose them to us, to explain how to use them, to encourage us to do so? A service that nobody knows is a service that does not exist. And yet these are useful services, especially for small companies, and those who provide them often do so with competence. But they are also services that a structured company already has in-house, or finds on the market from professionals who answer directly for the result.

The real added value of an association, the one no consultant can sell, is another: collective weight. The ability to bring the voice of hundreds of companies before the institutions, to defend a sector when it is in difficulty, to turn the problem of the many into the battle of all. This is why we pay the fee. And this is precisely what is missing today.

This is where the role of the local President becomes decisive. It is not an honorary position, nor a stepping stone: it is the person who must take on the needs of their own industry. And to do so, they must know it. They must go into companies, talk about it, listen, engage, even when what they hear is not to their liking.

In April we did something that, as far as I know, had never been seen before. We entrepreneurs stopped our factories, together with our employees, to defend an industry that is fundamental not only for Europe, but in particular for the Veneto region. A choice that had a cost, economic and personal, and that we made because the situation demanded it. From there began a battle that we are still fighting today, in Italian and European forums.

And so: nobody from the association asked us why. Nobody called to understand. Nobody said "we are with you", but nobody said "we disagree, and here is why" either. Nothing at all. I would have respected a contrary opinion: debate, even tough debate, is the salt of representation. Silence, no.

"Silence says only one thing: that those who should represent us do not know, or do not consider important, what happens in our factories."

And here I come to the most uncomfortable point, which I address not to the association but to us industrialists. Because it is easy to blame those who represent us; it is harder to look in the mirror.

Let us start with a question: why do we stay? For the services? For the representation? Or because, for many of us, being a member has become a status: the membership card, the front-row seat at the assembly, the chance to be seen? If so, the problem is not only with those who lead us. It is ours too. An association that lives on visibility ends up offering visibility, not results.

So: what are we doing to send our Presidents home — my predecessor included — who over time have become politicians? The answer is: nothing. Complaints at the bar, venting at the end of meetings, a few jokes among colleagues. Nothing concrete. We complain about politicians who do not decide, who talk and do not act, who think about the next election instead of the next decade. And when they do not perform, we rightly ask for them to be sent home. We should show the same consistency with those who represent us. We must set the example first: we cannot demand from politics a seriousness that we do not demand from our own organisations.

And we have a lever far simpler than we think: the membership fee. It is the sum that keeps structures, offices and events running. So let us step away. Let us leave. Let us stop funding what does not represent us. You will see that, once the income is gone, they will understand that we are fundamental. Not as a list of members to show off, but for their own survival.

I know some will judge this position too harsh. I will be told that things are changed from within, that leaving means losing one's voice. For a long time I thought so too.

“One loses one's voice when one speaks without being heard, not when one stops paying to do so.”

And those who stay inside waiting for something to change on its own, without ever questioning those who lead, are changing nothing: they are only financing the status quo.

I do want to be clear on one point, though. This is not a battle against representation. I deeply believe that companies need to stand together and speak with one voice: I see it every day in the work we are doing in Europe to defend manufac-

turing. Precisely for this reason, representation must go back to doing what it was created for: standing on the side of those who produce, knowing those who produce, fighting for those who produce. With facts, not with slogans.

Until this happens, those resources will remain where they are truly needed: in our factories, with our employees, in the battle we are fighting for European industry.

To my fellow entrepreneurs I leave a question, the same one I asked myself before signing that certified email: does your association truly represent you? If the answer is no, you already hold in your hands the tool to change things.

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