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INTRODUCTION



## The Italian welfare state in a supranational perspective: history and debates

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The articles in this issue of the *JMIS* address the building of the Italian welfare state over the first two decades of the Italian Republic. In their articles, the authors attempt to provide answers to a number of questions. How did Italy's welfare experience compare to other countries' experiences from the 1940s to the 1960s at an international as well as a European level? How did international bodies condition institutions? How did the Nordic welfare models influence Italian welfare? How did the political, governmental and opposition parties interpret the need to build a universal social protection system?

The majority of the studies that have so far examined the history of the welfare state have been carried out by political scientists and sociologists and have attributed the various welfare systems that have existed throughout history to two major models: one organized according to professional category, and the 'universal' model. By studying the Italian situation, these articles compare this interpretation with concrete historical processes, using the sources and methods generally used in historiographical research. The authors analyse the Italian welfare system in dynamic and evolutionary rather than static terms, highlighting the political, social and economic processes that led to the introduction of new rights and new forms of social protection. Although each article deals with a specific aspect of the Italian welfare system, they all come together to provide a unified interpretation of the phenomenon, taking into account three methodological criteria.

The first is to apply a comparative and supranational approach. The evolution of the Italian welfare system is situated within the broader European scenario, and each article creates its own, unique comparison at the national and the international levels. The aim is to identify how the Italian welfare system is similar to and different from other European systems. The second is to highlight the interaction of bottom-up social demands and theoretical reflections with top-down political and institutional dynamics. Therefore, both the social and

economic changes as well as the choices of political and institutional figures are examined. The third and final requirement is to exploit the specific tools used in the historiographical approach by using, when possible, the archival documents that have recently become available to scholars. The aim is both to point out how these studies are substantially different from those carried out by political scientists and legal analysts, often based on the study of theoretical arguments, and to reconstruct the decision-making processes that led to the most important landmarks in the building of the Italian welfare state.

Based upon these premises, each of the articles focuses on specific topics. Ilaria Pavan addresses the theoretical debate on Italian welfare. In fact, at the end of World War II the Italian welfare system, which had taken shape under fascism, was in need of a radical overhaul. Nevertheless, the wait for organic, structural reform dragged on for over two decades without ever arriving, even in the 1960s, at an efficient framework for the welfare state capable of dismantling the corporatist, familist framework inherited from fascism and bringing Italy into line with the approaches used elsewhere in Western Europe. Pavan reconstructs both the debate and the legislative initiatives connected to the development of the welfare state after World War II, beginning with the interest that was sparked, even in Italy, by the Beveridge Report, and moving all the way to its official implementation by the first centre-left administrations, when cross-party consensus seemed to coalesce for the first time around the need for a modern, comprehensive social security system. Information from published sources (such as the periodicals of the various social security agencies, parliamentary investigations into poverty and the condition of workers in the 1950s, the proceedings of party conventions and labour union meetings) are combined with archival sources (such as the archives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, CISL and CGIL). The analysis covers both the contributions of technocrats and bureaucrats concretely involved in managing social insurance programmes, and the contributions of the various political worlds of the time, with a particular focus on Catholic, Communist, Socialist and Social Democratic spheres.

In his article, Manfredi Alberti concentrates on the International Labour Organization (ILO), which since its founding has been an important forum for the supranational development of labour and social protection policies. However, the relationship between the history of the ILO and the history of welfare has so far warranted little attention from historiographers, especially as regards Italy. Therefore, Alberti focuses on the evolution of Italian welfare from the post-World War II era to the 1960s from a vantage point outside Italy. The debates and analyses capable of grasping the specificity of the Italian welfare state are examined in particular, while at the same time attempting to evaluate the extent to which the ILO's indications were applied at the national level. From a supranational perspective, the article lingers both on the ILO's role in fostering the development of a modern social security system and the adoption

of specific welfare measures and on the form and assessments created by the ILO regarding the actual development of the Italian welfare state. In order to achieve this aim, the article is based both on the historical and comparative studies thus far published on the ILO and on Italian welfare, as well as on some of the ILO's published publications, in particular the studies that appeared in the *International Labour Review*. Some of the documents stored in the state archive of the Ministry of Labour relating to the international aspects of welfare have also been examined.

No international analysis would be complete without including a comparison with the Scandinavian social democratic model. In fact, political scientists consider the Swedish social democratic model one of the cardinal points in modern systems of 'universal' welfare. Moreover, it was long indicated as the principal point of reference for every draft reform in the Italian social protection system. However, did Italian experts really know what the features of this system were? And to what extent did the Italian political parties of the 1940s and 1950s share their theoretical framework? In order to provide an answer to these questions, in his article Paolo Borioni first looks at the features of the Scandinavian welfare system. This system, more than any other, has historically been the result of dynamic compromise, as political and social conflict has always been a fundamental feature of Nordic societies. *Folkhem* (or the People's Home) was originally a conservative, reactionary concept. It was not until the 1930s that this concept underwent deep change, making it the cornerstone of one of the most ambitious welfare systems in Europe. After addressing these issues, the article analyses Italian welfare theorists' effective degree of knowledge of the Scandinavian system. It thoroughly examines the ideological and social factors that often kept the leaders of the main mass parties from correctly understanding the dynamics and objectives of Nordic social democratic and 'universal' welfare.

The comparison between France and Italy makes an interesting case study in the history of welfare systems. In the 1940s, in both countries, Laroque's *Ordonnances* and the D'Aragona commission had to tackle respectively a very similar dilemma: whether to reform correctively their own, existing welfare systems (based on insurance and organized according to professional category) or introduce structural reforms in line with the 'universal' model, based on the systems in Great Britain and Sweden. This was a crucial turning point, laden with future consequences. Understanding the dynamics of this critical point in time entails grasping the significance of one of the most important moments in the history of the welfare state in Europe. In fact, in both cases, the proposed reforms, oriented towards the creation of 'universal' welfare, were ultimately rejected following thorough discussion. Why? The aim of the article written by Paolo Mattera is to try to provide an answer to this question. His article examines the issue at various levels. First, it highlights the interaction between theoretical reflection and the political decisions of the parties, between bureaucratic

dynamics and bottom-up social demands. In fact, many of the studies carried out on welfare by law scholars, sociologists and political scientists tend to focus on theoretical debate. The main turning points in the history of welfare are, however, the result of a combination of factors, which are all closely interconnected. Both in France and Italy, social rifts and political divisions became more pronounced and, along with the resistance posed by bureaucratic institutions, gave rise to fronts of opposition to the reforms put forward by intellectuals. Secondly, the article aims to illustrate the decision-making process that, within a complex network of conflicting forces, led to the final outcome. For this purpose – and this is the third level of analysis – the essay is based largely on documents, often unpublished, from both French and Italian archives.

Finally, Alexander Höbel provides an analysis of the relationship between the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the 'structural reform' strategy and the roads to reform pursued in Italy during the first legislatures of the Italian Republic. In fact, starting from the beginning of the history of the Italian Republic, the Communist Party urged the government majority on by putting forward a large number of proposals. This phenomenon intensified in the 1960s, when, in reaction to the centre-left, the PCI brought a 'particular kind' (according to Togliatti) of opposition into play, putting pressure on the majority regarding reforms and the democratic agenda of the economy. Communist MPs advanced bills to create a national healthcare system organized into local healthcare units, to bring together the various different social insurance institutions and to create a national employment service. The bills of the Communist MPs differed from the government bills on one crucial point: the role of workers and their representatives (i.e. the unions) in the management of these structures. The struggles in 1968–69 changed this scenario. In the following years the numerous proposals drawn up during the 1960s (on healthcare, education, housing and so on) developed into unified projects approved by parliament.

The articles that have been written for this issue of the *JMIS* aim to offer a fresh perspective in the debate on the origins and development of the welfare state in Italy. The interdisciplinary approach on which the articles are based embraces very different analyses and interpretations. Precisely because of their diversity, we believe that these will help to enrich readers' knowledge of this topic and that the multi-faceted portrayal that emerges will serve to offer suggestions for further research and new areas of study.